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Summer 2023

## Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association Camp Educator

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*Western Washington University*

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# COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



**Internship Title:** Camp Educator Internship

**Organization Worked For:** Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA)

**Student Name:** Mae Brenneman

**Internship Dates:** 06/05/2023 – 08/25/2023

**Faculty Advisor Name:** Erika McPhee-Shaw, Ed Weber

**Department:** Environmental Science

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STUDENT SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ *Mae Brenneman* \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ 08/26/2023 \_\_\_\_\_

Summer 2023 Camp Educator Internship at Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association

Mae Brenneman

College of the Environment

Western Washington University

This summer quarter of 2023 I was employed at the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association as a Camp Educator Intern. This internship ran from June 5, 2023 to August 25, 2023 and varied as a part-time and full-time position. I was an educator at NSEA's summer camp for children: Camp Keystone, which ran for ten weeks. I was scheduled to teach at both the half-day camp, from 8:00 – 1:30, and full-day camp, from 8:00 – 4:30, for children ages 3-6. I taught full-day campers for four weeks and half-day campers for five weeks. In addition to orientation for this position, this leaves me with a total of roughly 340 hours worked.

Some of my main objectives from the start of this position were to gain leadership skills in environmental education, learn more about salmon ecology, and apply the knowledge gained in my WWU Environmental Science courses to this internship. In addition to these, I wanted to speak effectively to students about ecology and conservation and gain more knowledge on local environmental issues by working with an organization that strives to support the restoration of salmon habitats in Washington. This position allowed me to meet my learning objectives by giving me an opportunity to lead lessons and develop curriculum in environmental education, allowing me to further my knowledge on local environmental systems and salmon habitat and ecology, and giving me the chance to supplement the daily curriculum with information I had learned from the classes I've taken.

Being a camp educator this summer was an incredibly rewarding experience. I have had aspirations to pursue a career in environmental education or conservation science, so NSEA was the perfect place to complete my internship. They are a very passionate organization that strives to engage their employees and community members in their goals. I learned a lot about local environmental processes while working here, such as the structure of the Whatcom watershed and why Pacific salmon are considered a keystone species. As I learned, I got the opportunity to share my knowledge with the kids through fun and educational lessons, activities, and crafts. I was also able to utilize information I had learned in courses at WWU and work this into my curriculum as well. For instance, during one of our ocean themed weeks, we took the campers to Birch Bay State Park, where we got to walk on the beach and look for marine organisms. I had taken Marine Invertebrates and their Environment (ESCI 426) this Spring quarter and got the opportunity to teach the campers about the different crabs I had learned about in this class, and about the process of molting as we found different species of crabs' molts along the waterline. I was also especially excited to talk to the campers about specific organisms we would find during exploration time- like frogs, salamanders, snakes, or crayfish. I had taken Field Methods in Wildlife Ecology (ESCI 408) and was able to apply the knowledge I learned in this class about these organisms to the activities I was leading. For example, when I found a Northwestern salamander with my group of campers, I taught them about salamander metamorphosis and tied this back into our theme for the week, insects, by teaching a bit more about the concept of metamorphosis and what that means for insects! Being able to teach about the things I had learned in the classes I loved so much was such a fun and valuable experience. This position taught me that I have a passion for educating and find it extremely enjoyable. In addition to this, getting to learn more about topics I only knew a bit about prior to this was very fun, and teaching on those topics made me feel confident in my ability to pick up new information and relay it in a concise manner. Overall, I feel that this internship has left me with beneficial skills in educating, confidence, communication and teamwork, professionalism, and leadership. I am very grateful to have had this opportunity!



Me holding a garter snake at a property on Tenmile Creek, where we would take the kids to hike and explore! We found a lot of garter snakes during exploration time with the campers.



Two rodent skulls found by campers during free time in NSEA's forest. We would often talk about "nature moments" at camp- this was a cool one!





During free time in the forest, we would give the campers bug boxes to take a closer look at insects they'd find. One camper found this cool rugose stag beetle!



One of our activities with the campers was looking at macroinvertebrates, like dragonfly nymphs or backswimmers from NSEA's ponds. While trying to catch aquatic insects, I found this salamander which hadn't metamorphosed yet! The campers were really excited about it.