

The Adventures of a Young Scientist in the North Cascades

By Russell Sprouse

Fun summer education programs for younger children held by the North Cascades Basecamp, combined with post-graduate internship training by Pacific Biodiversity Institute, have bloomed into a month-long science adventure for college undergrads and graduates. Pacific Biodiversity Institute, for the first time, has offered a conservation and leadership course for the summer. The program provides a month packed with inspirational experiences, diving headfirst into education of North Cascades ecology, and a fantastic chance to explore the North Cascades. With the chance to practically connect with nature, explore the culture of the area, and further my education. I can honestly say that I will treasure these moments for the rest of my life.

Visiting conserved natural habitats and landscapes of Washington is extremely refreshing. Originally, I am from Richmond, Virginia. Richmond is a big city neighboring the James River, and even though it has some nice views and natural habitats, it is not even close to being in the same league as the Cascades. I am in constant awe of the surrounding area and, waking up to the glorious view of Goat Wall, I question if such glistening beauty exists elsewhere in the world.

Within the first week of the course, we were educated on observation and data collection methods in order to grasp some techniques that the local scientists use within the Cascades. Gaining some real-life experience from elders that have spent decades in the field of science is very enlightening.

In the second week, we learned about fire ecology and how fire has affected Washington's forests. Growing up on the East Coast, I have seen news reports of fires that have plagued the West Coast of the United States, with climate change increasing atmospheric temperature and volatility. However, receiving the events and aftermath of the devastating wildfires through media, and viewing the devastation the fires caused, are two different viewpoints. Not having more information about the West Coast's fire epidemic made me feel upset about not knowing the full effects of the fire's destructive qualities to communities, thus not being able to experience the full effects of rightfully deserved sympathy for the families.

During the third week of the program, we visited Winthrop National Fish Hatchery (WNFH) and learned about the hatchery's attempt to mitigate the endangered salmon species' decrease in population. The main cause for the salmon's endangerment is due to the salmon's habitat being destroyed by construction of dams in the Columbia River. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service attempts to stop the net loss of the salmon species by using these fish hatcheries. In addition to rearing salmon, WNFH has a program that collects native beavers to mate and then relocate pairs of beavers for ecological habitat reconstruction, and to also help mitigate hydropower dam habitat destruction. The ecological habitat reconstruction by beavers is done by the construction of natural dams that have benefits for other species, such as salmon.

From PBI's program, I have learned so much about the local environment, tribal culture and history, and about Washington's fire crisis due to climate change. I am so glad I was able to visit the Methow Valley and meet the kind locals of Mazama, as well as see the beauty of the North Cascades. With the experience and education received from my time in PBI's program, I will pass on my knowledge of the North Cascades' beauty, and innovation for conservation.