



Blumenstein Reflection

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Silver Creek Preserve is one of those places where magic happens every day. No matter where you are on the preserve, you will see something or experience something that will reinforce your connection to nature, reminding you why conservation exists. This summer, I was fortunate enough to spend 12 weeks on the preserve, during which I had numerous experiences that made me appreciate the work of conservationists. The very first night I spent at the preserve was magical. I arrived just before sunset in late May. The other intern, Marcia, and I drove along the dirt road that surrounds the preserve. Almost immediately after entering the preserve boundaries, we passed an enormous bull moose that was feeding in the nearby alfalfa field. Just after seeing the moose, we came upon a herd of majestic elk

wandering into the riparian zone of the creek. We were both at peace as we witnessed the sagebrush glowing in the last light of the day, the silver water rippling under a gentle breeze, and the snow-capped mountains fading away in the distance. I knew from that moment that it was going to be a dreamlike summer.

Sunny Healey, the preserve manager, was both a good friend and knowledgeable boss this summer. She helped me become familiar with the Idaho landscape and wildlife—identifying birds, plants, and rock types for me whenever she could. By the end of the summer, I was familiar with sandhill cranes, nighthawks, magpies, and kestrels. To learn about the spring fed creek from Sunny was also fascinating. As the Big Wood River flows south through the town of Bellevue, the water seeps into the ground and flows underground for about 15 miles. It then springs up in 12 different spots, which all flow together to form Silver Creek. Because the water percolates through the ground, it is crystal clear when it springs out of the aquifer, a perfect habitat for aquatic plants and animals. I remember late nights with Sunny, watching the full moon rise from behind the Picabo Hills or jumping off Martin Bridge into the creek. She had a vibrant, youthful energy about her that made even the dullest projects exciting.

The summer of 2016 was an important one for Silver Creek Preserve. This summer was special because it was the first good water year in 5 or so years. The snowpack on the mountains from last winter was enough to provide a steady flow of water throughout the summer, keeping the creek at just above 100 cubic feet per second for basically the whole summer. A steady water flow is important for aquatic ecosystems that rely on cold water to function. Furthermore, two large projects in

particular happened this summer, which only happen every 3 or 4 summers. An extensive fish survey was conducted by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and an aquatic insect study was completed by USGS. These two projects immersed me in the world of conservation, teaching me conventional methods to monitor stream health.

In the fish survey, we electro-fished, using anodes attached to the ends of long poles that emit a small amount of current in the water—enough to stun the fish so we could net them. We then identified, measured, and weighed all of the fish to get an accurate estimate of how many fish were in the creek this summer. We spent many late nights in our headlamps and waders trying to catch as many fish as possible, both big and small. After two weeks of fish surveying, I was familiar with rainbow trout, brown trout, red sided shiners, bridge lipped suckers, and fat head minnows. In addition to the academic advances I made during this project, I also had revelations that cannot be had in a classroom. I realized what it was like to be a part of a team all working passionately toward the same goal. There was great camaraderie among the employees at Fish and Game. I also realized how enjoyable it is to work outside. This realization was especially strong when I was floating down a glasslike creek under the full moon.

We also helped USGS conduct an aquatic insect study in which we collected previously installed artificial substrates from the bottom of the creek and scraped bugs off of them. This was an important study because the aquatic insects are directly correlated with fish populations, as they are a main food source for trout. Once again the camaraderie among USGS was bold. There was always lots of good

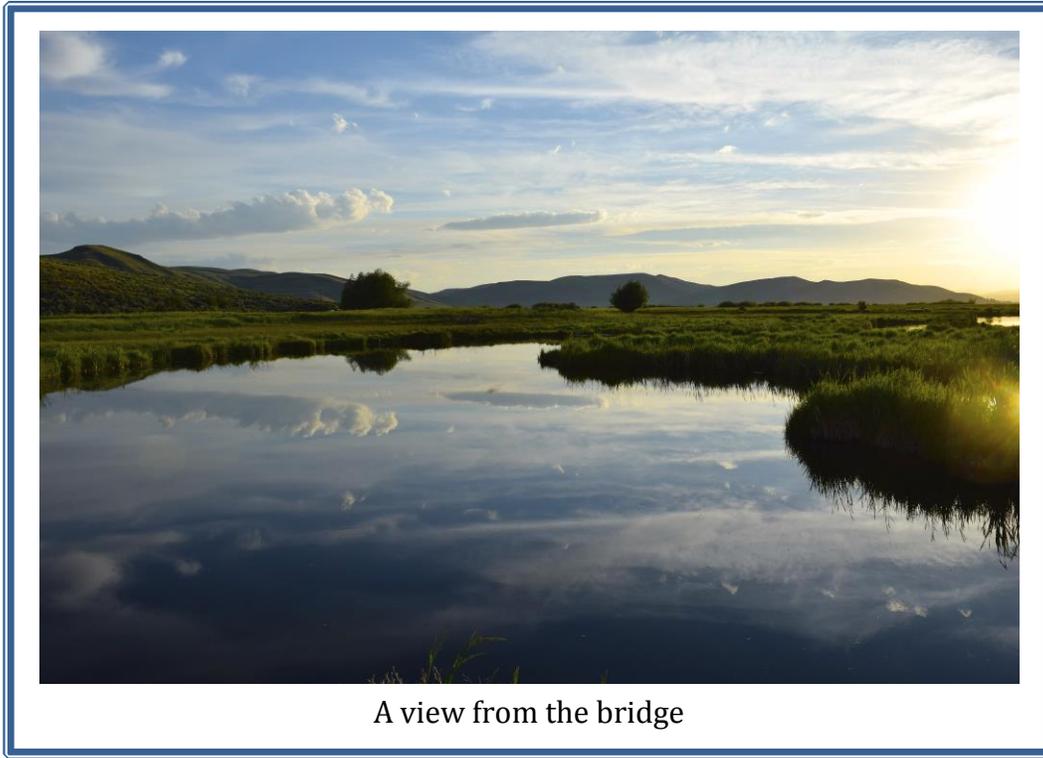
happy energy as we were tediously scraping bugs, simply because we were in a beautiful spot.

But my favorite part of the summer was getting to know the LEAF (Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future) interns. LEAF interns are inner city kids from Los Angeles who do not have much experience in the natural world. They come to Silver Creek for two weeks and help us with projects to give them a chance to work outside the city. Some projects we worked on included staining the office exterior and repairing fences. Working with the LEAF interns was especially influential because I was able to befriend high school seniors who had a very different upbringing than I did. Despite our different backgrounds, Alfredo, Armando, Danny, Justin and I got along very well. It was especially nice to show them my favorite spots in the area, such as the swimming hole near Carey, which has a diving board bolted into a rocky outcrop about twenty feet above the water. I realized that sharing my fondness for Picabo with someone else makes my love for the area even more real. The LEAF interns' mentor, Mike Pack, and I also formed a special bond because of our mutual love for the Grateful Dead. The LEAF experience culminated in downtown Hailey where we saw a Dead cover band at a local bar and all the interns danced to music they had never heard before coming to Idaho. I absolutely loved going to work for the two weeks the LEAF interns were here, and I was very sad when they had to fly back to California.

Another amazing part of Silver Creek is the amount of people that willingly donate their time to make it such a special place. The Preserve would not function without the many volunteers that help out at the visitor center and help with the

spraying invasive weeds on spray days. Bob and Vicki were only a few of the many friendly faces to welcome any visitors to Silver Creek.

One of the most magical nights I had was out at Stalker Cabin with Sunny, Doreen, and other USGS interns. We had just finished dinner and we decided to take a walk out to the bridge that gaps the creek.



A view from the bridge

In addition to the amazing reflection of clouds in the water, we saw an incredible sunset, and a beaver that swam to perch on a rock about 10 feet from us. Everybody was silently in awe as we observed our aquatic friend. At that moment, I felt like instead of being an observer of nature, I was a part of it. The barrier between the wild and me had disappeared and I felt connected in all meanings of the word: spiritually, physically, and mentally.

As a final point of reflection, my summer on Silver Creek Preserve taught me that everyone can appreciate the beauty of the natural world. It is a topic that people from all walks of life can connect on. Everything in nature works together to sustain life, and this is its way of telling us humans that we need to work together to sustain its natural beauty and utility.

This internship has solidified my love for the natural world, and it has inspired me to be a conservationist in the future. I drastically improved my work ethic this summer working as a part of a small team. I learned how to be more efficient, making use of the available tools and workers, and I also learned how to be more receptive to the ideas of others. I also now have a set of skills that I can use toward future conservation endeavors. Skills such as being able to calculate stream flow and use various water monitoring instruments. I also have connections in Idaho that I previously did not. I hope that Sunny Healey will remain one of my good friends and I hope I can work with her in the future. I would like to thank Mrs. Sarah Blumenstein and the Blumenstein Family for this wonderful experience—perhaps the best summer of my life thus far.