

Silver Creek Preserve Summer 2017

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Imagine something unforgettable. A glassy stream is reflecting peach hues glancing off the high desert hills in the soft evening light. An elegant moose disturbs the water, leaving a wake of shivering ripples in her path, followed closely by two gangly calves. Coyotes are yipping as the strawberry moon sneaks into the periwinkle sky far to the east. This is but a hint of the beauty of Silver Creek that captivated me. Some say a picture is worth a thousand words, but I say an experience is worth infinite images. What cannot be portrayed or given a simplified explanation is the value of an experience.

The Charlie Blumenstein internship gave me a chance to be a part of something much larger than myself. When I arrived and saw the sun glittering on the serene waters



and, akin to a pinnacle scene from *The Lion King*, I felt that everywhere the light touched was some sacred kingdom; a biological kingdom of which I hoped to become a part of. My passion for biology brought me to Silver Creek, but what I was able to share in, teach, and learn from is what I took with me when I said farewell.

The most rewarding of experiences involved me using knowledge I had attained from my studies at Colorado College and further distributing it. When Silver Creek teamed up with the fish hatchery to educate school-aged kids about the importance of conservation, I blossomed. On two separate occasions, I was able to lead bird walks, one for middle schoolers and the other for students with disabilities. In my 8th block before the summer began, I had taken ornithology and I was bursting with information which I shared excitedly to giddy children. The students were intrigued with how to identify bird songs and recognize silhouettes of the local species. Spreading information about fragile and important ecosystems, like Silver Creek, particularly with young generations within a community, will help ensure its conservation in the future.



Conserving land is not just about a segregation of natural areas and anthropological developments, it's about a coexistence. Scientific exploration and research is the other aspect to good conservation practice and can help people determine how land use and ecosystems can complement each other without being destroyed. In a rangeland study with researchers from the University of Idaho, we teamed up to collect data on various plant species. By taking line-point transects, species can be identified and GIS layers can be developed to demonstrate several patterns like species richness, density and

elevational gradients. This data will be analyzed to determine the compatibility and risk associated with particular local geographical regions in relation to cattle grazing. This intersection of biological systems and land use is a prime example of cooperation for positive conservation outcomes. In contrast of this area's original development plan for suburbanization, it can be protected and utilized simultaneously by ecologists and ranchers.

As an aspiring ecologist, leaving a positive mark and producing my own research project was one of the great takeaways of the internship. I tried to tackle a demanding idea and did not complete the intended project. Originally, I planned to create a sound inventory and audio file application for avid birders visiting the preserve; however, my lack of experience in computer programming proved to be a hindrance in this undertaking. I did learn many lessons in research and project design however and still managed to use my artistic skills to my advantage in creating something to benefit the Nature Conservancy. I turned my focus from the app creation to revamping the 'suggestions' and 'donations' boxes at the visitor center. I researched species I thought represented Silver Creek and were positively viewed in the community such as moose and native trout. Instead of taking a direct scientific focus, I used this information for public outreach and improved upon the donation outcomes for the Nature Conservancy.



Having the opportunity to educate school-aged students, participate in an established scientific study, and boost public relations and community engagement are highlights that anyone could look forward to having. However, with these moving experiences comes the day-to-day activities that are required to keep any organization running. Realizing the necessity of these tasks was challenging. Every experience has both positives and negatives. As a social butterfly, I found the isolation of rural Idaho somewhat limiting to my total happiness. It was challenging in a way that wasn't physically taxing, but mentally so. Though some of the time at the preserve was set aside for educational events, data collection, and personal projects, the majority of time was spent maintaining the property the Nature Conservancy owns. Daily work included mowing lawns, weed whacking trails, and cleaning outhouses. This isn't what I expected coming in. My passion for research and creative outlets that I had to offer the Silver Creek Preserve was not utilized in the ways I hoped. It was still good honest work, yet the impacts of the internship were not the ones I wanted to leave on this irreplaceable natural treasure.



I know my experience is not kin to everyone else's and that every individual finds a different path to follow. For me the summer experience at Silver Creek taught me many things about myself and about the world I know. These are invaluable lessons that I can refer back to and improve my abilities as a conservationist and leader in scientific study. The time I did enjoy was well worth some of my personal struggles. Many of the people I met will be forever friends and colleagues and the moments I spent in wonderment of the natural world around me will be memories I recall fondly.