

Conservation Science Internship at the World Wildlife Fund, Summer 2013

Working for the World Wildlife Fund this summer was a unique and inspiring experience. As the world's largest independent conservation organization (5 million supporters worldwide), WWF employs 500 people in their Washington, DC headquarters. WWF believes that "effective conservation requires rigorous science" and since their conservation efforts range from tropical rainforests in Sumatra to the Arctic tundra in the Bering Strait, effective international communication is vital. My boss and the Conservation Science Network team worked tirelessly to ensure scientists and WWF staff from across the globe could do just that. Their goal: to connect, support, and grow the worldwide WWF community of conservationists. This summer was a very interesting time for the Conservation Science Network because they launched a website called "LENS" (Learning Exchange for Network Scientists) in May.

My specific job responsibilities included compiling and summarizing the latest academic journal articles relating to WWF's missions around the world. This particular job strengthened my understanding of scientific literature and of the conservation science field in general. It was incredibly interesting for me to read and the share this cutting-edge research with WWF scientists around the world. I really felt that I was helping further the mission for strong science-based conservation.

Other projects included website design, Network management, data analyses and data visualization. The new LENS website required a lot of maintenance with content and member services. Along with contributing this content to the LENS website (literature reviews, department biographies, various other relevant information), one big project of mine was to welcome and set-up new members with their accounts and site services. These members were

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exclusively WWF staff and affiliated scientists. Interacting with conservationists from different corners of the world was very interesting for me. I learned a lot about cultural differences and handling these differences in a business setting.

Since the LENS website was recently launched, I conducted an analysis of the 800+ current members for my boss's annual report. After compiling the members' areas of expertise and location, I organized the data in aesthetical pleasing graphs, infographics, maps, and other forms of data visualization that I learned from the WWF marketing department. I later learned that the infographics were well accepted and sent to the members of the Conservation Science Network to inform them of their international colleagues' interests and locations. It was great to see how I could collaborate with other departments like the Marketing department to strengthen the Network. On the note of graphic design, I also navigated a new email system that the Network will start using. The Network update emails I sent out this summer will have a new look and this system will increase member engagement with the website through design and ease.

At the headquarters, networking opportunities were always happening throughout the workweek. The very first week I was in DC, the Conservation Science Department hosted a senior meteorologist from the Weather Channel and a prominent Arctic conservation scientist for a symposium on climate change. While it was not technically in my job description to help with these symposiums, I enjoyed learning the dos and don'ts of event management from my fellow event intern. I sat in on meetings with each of these prominent conservation scientists and helped plan for guests, adapt to changes in attendance, and tend to the needs of both the speakers and the audience at the symposium. It was both rewarding and welcoming to play a role in one of the big events of the summer at WWF.

Spending time with driven, like-minded conservationists really made the experience unlike any other. Inspiring me each step of the way, my fellow interns shared their stories of far-off adventures and advice for a young conservationist. Most of the interns were older than I, but this only made their advice more valuable. They not only gave guidance, but also resources for jobs, study opportunities, and internships with conservation organizations both abroad and close to home.

The interns were an impressive bunch of twenty-somethings, but the scientists on staff were remarkable. Working alongside these leaders in the conservation field -social scientists, biologists of all kinds, Geographic Information Systems experts- was a great experience. It was evident every morning in the office that these people were driven, intelligent, and fully capable of making the world a truly better place.

Working in the WWF headquarters was also an eye-opening experience in itself. I learned how such a huge organization works through meeting people from the Marketing, Finance, and even the Policy and Markets Department. WWF is interesting in that they have a whole department dedicated to influencing domestic and international markets for palm oil and other environmentally destructive crops. These leaders work through the supply chains- from big corporations like Coca-Cola to ground level work with farmers. I found this to be a very pragmatic response to so many of the world's conservation issues.

After working a significant amount with communications and design, I decided I want to pair my deep interest for photography and conservation to work with WWF's Marketing Department. I have always thought that inspiring people to care the planet is one of the most powerful tools we have in the environmental movement and WWF has, in my opinion, one of the best platforms for reaching that goal. I look forward to pursuing this in the years to come.