



Southwest Region

Fish and Aquatic Conservation

Daniel Gallegos: Summer Job Leads to Change in Long Term Career Plans

I recently sat down with Daniel Gallegos, a current Biological Science Aid Intern at Mora National Fish Hatchery (NFH) in Mora, New Mexico, to talk with him about how he came to choose a career in fish and wildlife.

Gallegos said it all started with a visit to his high school counselor at the end of his senior year in 2012 to find a job for the summer; little did he know how much his future would change after that visit. His ambition was to find a summer job before starting at Luna Community College in Las Vegas, New Mexico in the fall of 2013 to work on a degree in Special Education. His counselor told him about two programs for the summer, one for the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps (RMYC), and one for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Service) Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) program.

Having an enjoyment of fishing, the choice between working for RMYC on building and maintaining trails and working with fish at the hatchery was easy for Gallegos. On the other hand, getting into the program was not, it came down to the luck of the draw. When the Mora NFH Administrative Assistant threw all the names of YCC candidates in a cup he became nervous, and exhaled a sigh of relief when his name was drawn.

Gallegos also recalls the first day on the job. When he showed up for work Service Fisheries Biologist Jeffrey Powell, the Project Leader at the time, assigned him and his fellow YCC the task of washing rocks. Gallegos smiled as he recalled shrugging with skepticism that it was a worthwhile activity. Coming from farming



USFWS Biological Science Aid, Daniel Gallegos, from Mora National Fish Hatchery pauses for a photo while working on removing dead eggs from the incubation trays in the 2015 spawning season. Credit: USFWS.



Gallegos tagging Gila trout while working as an emergency hire in December 2012. Credit: USFWS.



Gallegos seals a bag of Gila trout eggs during the 2013 spawning season. Credit: USFWS.

and ranching backgrounds he did not understand the purpose or usefulness in washing rocks, but he gave it his full attention and thoroughly washed the rocks. He describes the rest of his summer as being a fountain of curiosity, feeling that he made a nuisance of himself by constantly asking the staff questions and learning about things like bio-security. Which brings us back to his first day and why washing those rocks was so important. Bio-security is a protocol to ensure no contaminants or diseases are brought into the facility from the outside, or spread between existing tanks on the hatchery. Consequently, the rocks must be thoroughly washed before they can be placed into, or moved between the tanks.

By the end of his YCC term Gallegos had decided to change the course of his career, instead of signing up for classes to work on a teaching degree, he signed up to work on an Associates in General Science. He said his luck in continuing to work at the hatchery held out as well. As his

YCC term was ending a biologist left the hatchery leaving them in need of another pair of hands to fill the void. That is when Gallegos was offered the opportunity to extend his YCC employment. The next several months saw Gallegos switching from YCC to volunteer, to emergency hire, and back to volunteer again before finally being hired into the position of Biological Science Aid in March 2013, which he was excited to be awarded.

This summer Gallegos will get his first taste of what it takes to set up and run a clinical trial. He will be working alongside the Directorate Resource Assistant Fellows Program candidate that will be performing a clinical trial on Gila trout growth at Mora NFH. Since its inception the hatchery has expanded from housing 1 lineage to the 5 distinct lineages of Gila trout that are currently held there, with some of those being completely extirpated from the wild. The addition of these lineages now requires the hatchery to redesign the tank settings and layout to accommodate all of the families and year classes

that must be kept separate. The growth study will involve using various tank settings to determine which method produces the most growth. The rate of growth will be compared between round vs. square tanks, and brown natural toned tanks vs. standard blue tanks.

Gallegos completed his Associates in General Science in May. In the fall of 2015 he will be moving on to Eastern New Mexico University to complete a Bachelor's program; he plans to study both fish and wildlife should he decide to expand his career to include National Wildlife Refuges. While completing his studies, Gallegos will continue to support the hatchery as an intern.

As for his passion for teaching, which was born through his assisting and sponsoring of a special needs student at his high school, there is still plenty of opportunity. When I asked him if he could see himself planning and leading outreach events in the future he replied in the affirmative. He enjoys assisting with outreach events and feels that with experience and training he can definitely see himself leading them in the future.

Gallegos hopes his luck holds out and that he will enjoy a long future with the Service. Nate Wiese, current Project leader at Mora NFH, believes Gallegos will be a great leader with the Service and said, "Gallegos is an exemplary study of how the YCC can bring individuals into Natural Resources Careers." Jeffrey Powell, former Project Leader of the Mora NFH, agrees and says, "the positive attitude Gallegos carries radiates onto those around him. The pride in his work, continual efforts to improve aspects of the program, dedication to the resource, and ability to help wherever whenever is highly commendable." ♦ *Jessie Jobs*



Gallegos and a Boyscout work on logging information on Gila trout during tagging in 2014. Credit: Craig Springer.



Gallegos assists with the external plumbing at the hatchery. Credit: USFWS.