

Refuge intern has best summer by far

by William Moore III



Second and third grade participants in this summer's Critter Camp learn how salmon transform as they migrate from saltwater to freshwater enroute to their birth stream.

I didn't know what to expect when I accepted the visitor services internship at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. I'm from Oklahoma, also known as the Sooner State. I grew up in a fairly large city so I can't help that I'm a city kid. My supervisor also did a really good job of preparing me for what to expect. I did a little bit of research so I would know what to expect, but research on the internet is so different from when you see things in person and that's definitely the case here.

When I landed in Anchorage, "surprised" isn't quite the word that described how I felt. Coming all the way from Oklahoma, Alaska was a drastic change. The difference in temperature is the first thing that stuck out to me. Living in the south, I'm very used to temperatures over 85 degrees so I was flabbergasted when I landed here in May and it was 50 degrees outside. I've never worn a sweater in the summertime in my life. Secondly, the constant sunlight was quite a shock. It was after 11 p.m. when my flight landed and

it was still bright outside.

Just a quick sidebar, I had to remind myself that some people are just accustomed to cold temperatures because I thought that all the people here surely were crazy—they had on shorts and t-shirts while I had on a hoodie and stocking cap.

After traveling to my duty station at the Kenai Refuge and seeing all of the breathtaking views along the way, I had a sense of what kind of summer was in store for me. I had no idea that Alaska had volcanoes! I saw them on the way to Soldotna and the view was phenomenal. And seeing the mountains in person was a very exciting experience for me.

Working this summer for the Refuge was a way better experience than I ever could've imagined. I worked with Environmental Education Specialist Michelle Ostrowski and fellow intern Jacob Heslop to help conduct summer camps for children. The curriculum focused on the different plants, mammals, insects, fish and birds that are found on the Refuge.



William Moore III, with a handful of morels found during a nature walk, worked as a Student Conservation Association volunteer at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

We conducted two camps, Critter Camp and Get Out & Get Dirty Camp. Critter Camp was aimed towards 2nd and 3rd graders and was based more on arts and crafts. Get Out & Get Dirty Camp was more skill based and was aimed towards 4th and 5th graders. It was very refreshing to see things from their perspective. Our main goal was to show these kids the natural wonders of the Kenai Peninsula and nature in general. With the programs and activities and all of the hands on experiences, students were able to connect with the curriculum on a personal level. Being able to connect with nature through teaching was an experi-

ence I won't soon forget.

In addition to working with children, I also got to spend some time in the field. Fieldwork included but wasn't limited to cleaning trailheads, restocking toilet paper, cleaning up campgrounds, and patrolling the river and backcountry. Doing these tasks allowed me to explore the Refuge. There are lakes and rivers for swimming and fishing, campsites for camping trips, plenty of trails to hike and the views from many of them are simply beautiful.

Being a second-year intern with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), this refuge is so different from my first refuge. Last year, I interned at the [Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Texas and I spent my summer on the Gulf of Mexico, which is drastically different from the Kenai Peninsula. I spent that summer surrounded by snakes and alligators, while this summer I was surrounded by moose and bears. It was very hot and humid on the Gulf coast while it's way cooler in temperature here on the peninsula. Needless to say, I've had some great experiences from both places.

Just to share some information with you, the SCA (<http://www.thesca.org>) works hand-in-hand with different government agencies, such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service, to provide internships to students like myself and Jacob.

As part of my internship, I was able to go on orientation trips that highlighted a lot of special places on the Kenai Peninsula. In Homer, I sampled the cuisine and unique shops along the Spit. I got to visit the Soldotna Visitor Center and learned some cool facts. On the orientation trip to Seward, we went on a Kenai Fjords Tour and I was also able to visit the [Kenai Fjords National Park](#) Visitor's Center. In Anchor Point, I was able to look out and see the different volcanoes—that was quite an experience!

All in all, this has thus far been the best summer of my life. It was part vacation and part work. I'm so grateful to have had this opportunity. I hope to return to Alaska sooner than later.

William Moore was a volunteer with the Student Conservation Association from May to August. After his internship was completed with the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, he returned to Oklahoma to continue his education at Langston University. Find more information at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/> or <http://www.facebook.com/kenainationalwildliferefuge>.