

Ecological Restoration Brief

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To Be An Intern

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Think back on how you got started in your career. Did you have an internship or a mentor? Was it easy to gain the experience you needed to become the expert you are today? Natural resource internships are not always easy to come by, especially paid ones. I remember my



FWNCR Intern cutting mesquite for a prairie restoration project.

unpaid internship with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. I didn't have a lot of disposable income and I had to drive thirty miles to get to my work site. Although I was not paid a wage, I still gained immense value through the experience and increased knowledge.

Passing the knowledge on to younger generations of 'ologists' is what we enjoy doing at Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge (FWNCR). Every summer, we hire student interns to work full time and assist in land management projects at the park. The park is a 3,621 acre natural area, managed by City of Fort Worth staff, which encompasses all the ecosystems that can be found in North Central Texas. From wetlands, riparian forests, prairie uplands and Cross Timbers savanna, interns are exposed to every aspect of managing the land for the benefit of wildlife and visitors.

Depending upon the prior knowledge and experience of the intern, we formulate a special area of emphasis. Past interns have studied the grazing patterns and forage preference of bison, feral hog detection and control, grassland avian studies, alligator territory and tracking, and native plant greenhouse management. If an intern comes to us



Interns and staff restrain an alligator to tag for research on tracking alligators and their territory at the FWNCR.

with a more basic background in natural resources, we provide them with a broader base to build upon.



FWNCR Intern preparing to load soil into the skid steer bucket.

All interns assist in the daily operations of running a park. With over twenty miles of trails, maintenance becomes a top priority during the growing season. Interns receive extensive training on operation of hand tools and heavy equipment. Anything from using chainsaws to driving a tractor to operating a skid steer to pulling non-native invasive privet is fair game. Even construction projects like building bridges, building rock retaining walls, and welding!

One special experience that several of our interns have had the privilege to participate in is a summer prescribed burn. Prior to burn day, they scouted the location, helped cut the fire line, learned about the fuel load and potential fire behavior, and collected fuel moisture samples. On the

day of the burn, they were on the fire line with hand tools. After the burn, we went back to the site to discuss fire behavior and its effect on the fuel. Although one burn is not enough to claim expertise, it does provide a better understanding of fire and its role in the ecosystem.

We are proud of each intern that has worked at our park. Each one has expanded their knowledge in a diverse range of subjects. Each one has helped existing staff grow; and in fact, has taught us new things about our world. New perspectives encourage new perspectives. No intern leaves the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge without increased confidence in their ability to do many of the activities that are involved in land management. We are training tomorrow's natural resource managers. And that's something of which we are proud!



Interns and staff at FWNCR pour concrete for an access ramp for a floating dock.

The Society for Ecological Restoration, Texas Chapter promotes ecological restoration as a means of sustaining the diversity of life on Earth and re-establishing an ecologically healthy relationship between nature and culture.

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