

Student Reflection

Amanda Bunce

Amanda Bunce is a research assistant and lab technician at the University of Connecticut. Her undergraduate degree is in studio art, and she holds a Connecticut State Master Gardener certification and a certification in Environmental Management and Planning. Amanda is interested in forest ecology and conservation and is currently focused on the challenges of those fields in the densely populated northeastern U.S.



I knew I wanted to get into conservation as a career before coming to the ALPINE program, but I think my ideas about what that really meant were vague.

Through this program I have met people and heard stories about people: people that care. They care about panthers, birds, bats, timber, history, other people and environmental health and justice even outside of the U.S. I have a clearer picture of what conservationists are, and we are not all crazy people tied to trees, or research scientists trapped in labs. We are not just a few dedicated souls facing off against big greedy pollution machines, and we are not a couple of hikers and bike-riders trying to tell you about the healing vibes we've found in nature. The truth is that conservationists are so many people! And we are everywhere. I feel like people all have SOME reason to conserve SOMETHING!

But we do not always move together towards our goals. We are fractured, often contradictory and competitive. And there's probably no single solution that's right for everyone.

But working together is truly the way forward. Operating from the perspective that there is not just a single solution gives you flexibility, which is a strength. And if people are being flexible, listening to one another, and making efforts to see that everyone meets their goals, so very much can be done! This program has been series of lessons about how if you paste all your little conservation efforts together, you can achieve and exceed your goals! When you put reserves together, you can create habitat for bonus animals that need larger spaces or deeper forests. And if you string together enough green sapce to make a trail, you can attract bonus conservationists, who will help you to protect even more land! A positive feed-back loop!

It is my intent to take this theory, these lessons, the connections I've made here and the help I've gotten, back to southern New England and use it all in the forest management outreach and research that is my work. In southern New England there is a need to pull people together. The forest is stressed and physically fragmented, and the people are often of different minds when it comes to conservation and land use. I think of it as a goal of mine to foster community and conversation, and to bring people together with all their different perspectives and goals: farmers and hikers, hunters and kindergarteners, birders and snow-mobilers, loggers and artists.

My work is on a forest-management solution to a problem normally handled by arborists: Trees falling on power lines. The ecosystem services and aesthetics of southern New England's tree-lined roads are undeniable, and tree trimming, one tree at a time by arborists in bucket trucks, is currently the only solution to the utility troubles. Our initiative proposes that if we *manage* the forest – basically gardening, but with trees instead of tomatoes, and foresters instead of gardeners– we could grow trees that would be less likely to fail in storms. Forest management is not a concept familiar to people who



don't grow trees for their wood, but it is an ancient and fine-tuned practice that could be leveraged to grow trees for strength in storms, for maple sugar, for animal habitat, for trails, for everything! But the challenge is to get folks on board, because these are their trees. Most of the forest of southern New England is privately owned, and sense of ownership is strong. And we can't just get a few people on-board. If this is going to work, entire communities full of these private landowners that each own a few hundred feet of the roadside forest need to buy into the idea.

We have lots of tools with which to bring people together: public education programs, years of research on trees, wind and forest management, a multitude of land conservation organizations, experts with best management practices for logging, or for dealing with invasive species, and maps... so many maps. We can use these things to piece together private landowners, by making them see what objectives they have in common, how they can help each other achieve goals, and how they are part of a larger picture even if their primary objective is to be a hermit in the woods.

ALPINE has asked us to get very introspective, which is something I'm not always comfortable with. However, by examining what's important to me and what are my own strengths and weaknesses, I have figured out how I can do the best work that I can, how I can urge this initiative forward, and (most importantly) that I truly feel that this is important work.