

Student Reflection

Matt Brewer

Matt Brewer is currently an Undergraduate Wildlife Ecology student at The University of Maine. He spent the summer interning with the Frenchman Bay Conservancy in Hancock, Maine.



Throughout my summer working with Maine Coast Heritage Trust and Frenchman Bay Conservancy, I have been able to experience (almost) all the inner workings of a land trust. These experiences range from community to landscape scale conservation, community outreach events, trail stewardship, and event planning. My summer experience was enhanced greatly by attending the first ALPINE Summer Institute. Through ALPINE, I have been able to make numerous connections in the field of land conservation that I would otherwise not have. I was also able to enhance my understanding of land conservation while being surrounded by similar peers. Although there were many moments of self-awareness in which I determined that this was an extremely formative and important time in my career as a young conservationist, one of them stood out from the rest.

As part of my internship at Frenchman Bay Conservancy, I would plan, coordinate, and occasionally lead weekly volunteer trail work days. This summer we had a recurring group of younger volunteers from a summer camp that has an environmental focus. On a particularly hot, humid, and foggy day brushing trails on the top of Baker Hill, the campers made it clear that they weren't exactly loving volunteering at this exact moment. As I continued with our work of brushing, raking, and clearing overgrown trails, one of the campers very candidly asked me: "So what made you want to do all this yard work anyways?" Now this question caught me off guard for some reason because I wasn't doing measly yard work, this was trail stewardship! A much more honorable and worthwhile task in my mind than pruning grandma's rose bushes or putting out the sprinklers so the lawn is greener than a golf course. However, once I looked past the naivety of the question and its phrasing I found it more meaningful than at first glance.

Why *am* I doing this? As I thought of an answer I realized that this was the perfect teaching moment in which I could attempt to share my passion for conservation with another person. Ultimately, my answer was that I witnessed many environmental issues that needed to be addressed, so I decided to enter the field of conservation leading to a job working with Frenchman Bay Conservancy. This led to an elongated discussion about the work that Frenchman Bay Conservancy was doing, not only this "yard work" to ensure open access to trails and waterways; but also, larger landscape conservation goals that would be worked on relentlessly; far after my ten-week internship came to its end. Now I am not sure if this had any impact at all on these campers, whether they realized the importance of the work that they were doing and decided to take it more seriously, or if they continued to think about how miserable they were and how far away 11 o'clock was. Nevertheless, it reminded me of why I was doing what I was and my motivating forces behind it.





Throughout the summer I learned many lessons at my first job in the field of conservation. Admittedly, when I took the position of a summer intern doing mostly stewardship work, I was excited to be out in the woods by myself for most of the day. However, over the course of the summer it became evident to me that people and relationships are an extremely important asset in conservation. While I am sure many others have learned this lesson as well, it was new to me. From witnessing the love and connection to place by community members at weekly free concerts on our breathtaking Tidal Falls preserve to seeing extraordinary effort put in by volunteers to a wide range of projects, or even explaining why I was “doing all this yard work”, people were always the common denominator. Certainly, Frenchman Bay Conservancy and many other groups could not function to the caliber that they do without these people and community relationships.

This summer, this internship, and the ALPINE Summer Institute have been very formative for me as a young conservationist with little experience in the field. Being passionate about a broad number of topics ranging from wildlife, forestry, fisheries, environmental sciences, and ethics, I was confused as to how I could incorporate as many of these related fields into my career. This summer I discovered that land conservation has the ability to address a majority of the issues that I am passionate about. Being early on in my career as I am, I still wish to explore other options but I have certainly enjoyed being involved with a land trust and working in the land conservation field for the summer. ALPINE specifically enhanced my summer internship by encouraging me to think critically about myself, my experiences, and how they relate to my future as a young conservationist. Without ALPINE, I would not have thought so deeply about these things, or considered such issues. One quote that seems to resonate with me from this summer and effectively describe my experiences, is simply put by Aldo Leopold in *A Sand County Almanac*: “Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.”