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Fallin' and Haulin' a Fight against Extinction

By Nathan Indresano, WCC Port Angeles Crew AmeriCorps Member

Coming from the farmland of the Midwest, I pictured Northwest Washington as rugged snow-capped mountains, featuring towering old-growth trees and rocky coastal tide pools. I never envisioned prairies or meadows. At first, I connected this to my own ignorance of the region, but I quickly discovered the real reason was that nearly all of the Northwest's prairies and meadows have been altered. Whether blossoming population centers or misguided management practices were to blame, the familiar habitats common to my native lands were all but eradicated in my new home.

The loss of these areas also resulted in the decline of its inhabitants. One well-known example is the Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, *Euphydryas editha taylori*. I am not sure who this Taylor character is, but they should be honored to have such a beautiful animal named after them. The orange and—you guessed it—checker-spotted creature is one of a number of subspecies belonging to the Edith's checkerspot butterfly, *Eurphydryas editha*, but our region (Coastal Oregon to Vancouver Island) is graced by only Taylor's subspecies. This butterfly utilizes a variety of plants as hosts for its young, including both native and non-native plantain species, Indian paintbrush, and purple owl's clover to name a few. These plants have historically been found in open prairie systems, coastal bluffs, and hillside balds. With these habitats disappearing, the butterfly has been restricted to seven isolated populations. The species is now listed under the Endangered Species Act.

While this insect faces extinction, its fate is not set in stone. It has determined allies, one of which is our very own WCC. I am lucky enough to find myself on one of Port Angeles' DNR crews, fearlessly led by the powerful Chelsea Krimme. Alongside the other DNR crew, led by the relentless Pete Allen, we have been undertaking a rather peculiar task.



Kayla Williams hones her saw skills. Photo submitted by Chelsea Krimme.



Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, *Euphydryas editha taylori*. Photo by Ted Thomas/USFWS.

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Brendan.Dwyer@ecy.wa.gov



Preserving the Special Places in Puget Sound

By Emily Cain, WCC DNR Aquatics IP AmeriCorps Member

Hello from Olympia! I'm Emily Cain, representing the Department of Natural Resources Aquatics Division Puget SoundCorps IP crew along with my colleagues Nathan Boyer-Rechlin, Hillary Foster, Matthew Morassutti, Galen Richards and Katarina Wells. Although we come from a variety of backgrounds, we all find ourselves based in the capital of Washington and serving throughout Puget Sound this year. Our projects carry us from the shores of Nisqually Reach in Thurston County to Cherry Point near Bellingham. Some of us are from Washington state originally, while others have come from New York or Florida to serve in this amazing position.

I first learned of this WCC AmeriCorps position last April during an internship at the local environmental nonprofit The Nisqually Reach Nature Center. Serving on this crew became my next career goal. After spending three years earning my Bachelor of Science degree from The Evergreen State College, I was eager to use my education to benefit the local environment. This position looked like a perfect fit.

As a Puget SoundCorps member, my colleagues and I conduct baseline monitoring projects at the eight DNR-designated aquatic reserves. The focus of the Aquatic Reserves Program is to conserve high-quality native ecosystems in both freshwater and marine environments. This effort promotes the preservation, restoration and enhancement of state-owned aquatic lands that are of special educational, scientific or environmental interest. The inherent stewardship that comes with serving on the aquatic reserves team helps motivate me throughout my service.

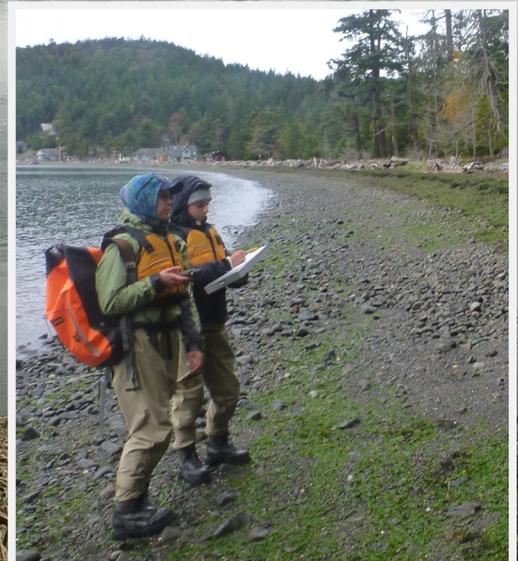
Our team spends about 40 percent of our time conducting field work, 40 percent on lab work and 20 percent on office work, in addition to participating in special outreach events and attending Citizen Stewardship Committee meetings. We support numerous projects, including intertidal forage fish spawning surveys, SeagrassNet surveys, marine debris removal, amphibian egg mass surveys, a kelp study, water quality surveys and more. Some projects, like forage fish and water quality, are conducted monthly, while others, like SeagrassNet, are seasonal. Our schedule is largely based around tides in order to ensure each survey is conducted effectively. Some projects involve a lot of post-field lab work, while others focus on recorded observations in the field that are later entered into databases. Volunteer citizen scientists from Citizen Stewardship Committees assist us with some projects, but most are done independently. Whew!

It's a lot to keep our heads wrapped around, but under the guidance of our awesome supervisor and former WCC AmeriCorps IP, Jaime Liljegren, and the assistance from the other wonderful Aquatic Reserves staff members, we stay organized while tackling our many areas of focus.

It's hard to pin down my favorite part of this position, especially since we haven't begun some of the surveys that occur in warmer months. So far, the best part of my service has been the variety the position offers from day to day. We spend days walking the beaches, collecting forage fish samples in rain or shine, or exploring remote locations like the Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge.



The DNR IP crew conducts baseline monitoring projects at the eight DNR-designated aquatic



Emily Cain and Katerina Wells conduct a forage fish survey on Cypress Island. Photo submitted by Emily Cain.

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WCC Alumni: Assistant Fire Chief Noel Monin

Interview by Brendan Dwyer, WCC Outreach Assistant & Food Bank Garden Coordinator IP AmeriCorps Member



Assistant Fire Chief Noel Monin.
Photo submitted by Noel Monin.



Another month, another WCC alumni! This month I had the pleasure of speaking with Assistant Chief of the San Juan Island Fire Department Noel Monin about his experience in the WCC and the path that led him to his current position.

Noel first found out about the WCC back in 1995 on a visit to Washington State Park Northwest Regional Office in Burlington, when he was looking for work. He was coming off of a few years in a labor position after taking a break from college. On his visit, he saw a posting for the WCC:

"I saw a little posting," he said [The poster stated,] "Want to earn something, but also want to have fun and learn?" I was at the point where I was kind of transitioning...I had always been outdoors, and I had heard about the park being built north of Hamilton, and I was like yeah, I'll try it out."

Shortly after, Noel began a six-month term on one of several WCC crews sponsored by Washington State Parks. This would turn out to be a pivotal decision in his life.

Noel and the rest of his WCC crew spent the first half of 1996 in Skagit County helping with then-ongoing construction of Rasar State Park. The experience introduced him to a new culture and a new way of getting things done.

"In that sort of culture, there was a lot responsibility," he said. "We were given some supervision, but it really was very goal oriented. This is what we want to accomplish. This is what we want to get done. We had to self-start, and initiate a lot of problem solving."

It was an atmosphere he came to really appreciate.

After a successful initial six-month term in the WCC, Noel found himself standing at another crossroads. He had been offered a WCC crew supervisor position in Olympia as well as a WCC crew member position serving in the San Juan Islands. As current Assistant Chief of the San Juan Island Fire Department, you can probably guess which position he took.

"That's sort of really what changed my whole life, because I moved out here to the Islands, started working at Lime Kilm State park with the park rangers...It was a little more freeform and final frontier kind of atmosphere," he said.

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Fallin' and Haulin' a Fight against Extinction

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Clearing patches of tree canopy to recreate former hillside balds.
Photo submitted by Chelsea Krimme.

Over the last month, we have found ourselves in the magnificent Eden and Indian Creek Valleys. With the smell of chainsaw exhaust and sweaty body odor in the air, we have been clearing patches of tree canopy to recreate the hillside balds of old. The Indian Creek Valley area is covered with alders, madrones, and Douglas firs towering over a thick understory populated by ocean spray, Trailing blackberry and Bald Hip Rose. These steep and rocky areas used to be a favorite of the Taylor's checkerspot, until efforts to reforest our areas gobbled up these overlooked areas. The experience is not only strengthening our bodies (carrying a tree round up a steep slope to a slash pile beats anything a gym provides), but allowing us the opportunity to hone our saw skills, sharpen our plant identification skills and most importantly play a part in the restoration of our state's historic biomes.

Once our saws have silenced, the project will not be over. In the coming years, future WCC AmeriCorps members will be hiking in the butterfly's host plants and replanting the hillsides. I know that if we continue to persevere, the WCC and other concerned agencies will ensure that this magnificent creature will have a fighting chance!

Preserving the Special Places in Puget Sound

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I flip-flop between asking myself how I got so lucky as to have a large part of my position involve serving outdoors, to gritting my teeth as my hands ache from the cold while we process samples in near-freezing water. Just when I get to a point of exhaustion, we have a few days in the lab and office to cozy up to the computer and enter data and organize photos or set up our microscopes and search for ever-important forage fish eggs.

Another highlight for me is collaborating with the group of six IPs and our support staff. With six different skill sets, strengths and interests, someone is always willing to discuss project improvements, help out when you can't wrap your head around a concept, or just lend an interesting viewpoint. Serving with a group of young adults pushes me to be more collaborative, patient and open-minded to new ideas.

The staff of the Aquatic Reserves Program at DNR are incredibly approachable—it's evident they want us to succeed and grow within our unique positions as WCC IPs. For example, during a span of December weeks in the office, our program manager gave us the task of coming up with new project ideas that could be implemented to expand and further strengthen the Aquatic Reserves Program. Some people created brand new monitoring projects and started writing protocols, while others, like myself, focused on outreach events or volunteer recruitment. Allowing the chance to think outside the box, and participate in the expansion of the Aquatic Reserves Program while serving collaboratively with the staff, makes the challenge of being a WCC AmeriCorps IP member so fulfilling.

So far, serving as a WCC IP with the Department of Natural Resources' Aquatic Reserves Program has been exciting, challenging, and eye-opening. I'm looking forward to the rest of the year as I continue to wrap my head around the incredible effort that goes into preserving the special places in Puget Sound. As someone passionate about conservation and environmental stewardship, I couldn't ask for a better place to be.



The DNR Aquatics IP Crew: Hillary Foster, Emily Cain, Matthew Morassutti, Nathan Boyer-Rechlin, Galen Richards and Katarina Wells (L to R).
Photo submitted by Emily Cain.

The Great Battle of Grass Lake Nature Park

Renee Ackerman, WCC City of Olympia Crew AmeriCorps Member

This past December, the Olympia crew waged war against the merciless and bloodthirsty Himalayan blackberry, in a heroic attempt to rid the land of its menace at Grass Lake Nature Park in Olympia. The culprit, *Rubus armeniacus*, left to its devices, will spread its roots and decimate everything in its path. Our task was to rid the realm of this beast once and for all. Taking up arms against this invasive and relentless foe was no easy task.

The battle raged on as the temperature dropped deep into the 20's and the fragile soil froze and became covered with snow. The root-balls dug deep and the thorns tore through gloves and clothing with no remorse. Skin was scratched, and shovels and adze hoes were stopped dead in their tracks. Even today thorns remain in the hands of the brave warriors who refused to back down. Roughly two acres of land were grubbed of the blackberry roots, and many truckloads of the fallen enemy purged from the land.

Alas, the blackberry was not acting alone. It had formed allegiances with the ruthless hawthorne, holly, and Scot's broom. To destroy these aggressive foes, wood chippers and chainsaws were called in as reinforcements—the invasive plants did not stand a chance against the sharp, metal teeth of these oil-blooded machines. Trees that had once been smothered and bound to the earth by the deadly vine-shackles, now stood free and upright.

Victory is near, but the power of the blackberry is not so easily undone by us mere mortals. Students from The Evergreen State College joined the fight this winter to place a protective barrier of native plants where the blackberry once stood. Even when this barren land is once again bursting with new healthy plant life, the shadowy stain of *Rubus armeniacus* will remain. Year after year, conservation crews and volunteers must come back to this land, destroy the blackberries, re-form their army and reclaim this site!



Mighty warriors clear the battlefield of fallen enemies. Photo submitted by Renee Ackerman.



City of Olympia crew enjoys a foggy day in the field. Photo submitted Renee Ackerman.

Horses and More: Black River Restoration

Renee Ackerman, WCC City of Olympia Crew AmeriCorps Member

As the autumn days faded and the cold winds of winter crept in, the Olympia WCC crew completed a planting project in the small town of Littlerock. Sponsored by Capitol Land Trust, the project's restoration tasks took place on a quaint and scenic farm nestled right in-between a meander of the Black River. We shared space with some curious horses (who tried eating all of our plants), and the occasional happy farm dog. Between the views of the golden hills of Capitol Forest surrounding us and our daily quad ride across a beautiful and open field, it was hard to do much complaining about the 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. grind.

The goal for this planting project was to create a buffer along the perimeter of the farm where the property met the Black River. Installing native species will help prevent manure and other fertilizers from running off into the river and negatively impacting the water quality or damaging salmon habitat. In total, we planted 1,305 potted plants and 5,970 live-stakes. Some of the species we planted included:

- Sitka Willow
- Scouler's Willow
- Pacific Willow
- Black Cottonwood
- Red Osier Dogwood
- Shore Pine
- Douglas Fir
- Bigleaf Maple

The live-stakes that we planted were four feet tall, making them too long and awkward to fit into our regular planting bags. We had to get creative and modified old pairs of rain pants by tying each of the legs closed and then attaching straps to carry them—like a backpack for our shoulders. We dubbed this earthshattering invention the “Panting-Bag” (don't worry, we plan to patent the “Panting-Bags” and split the profits). This allowed us to carry bundles of live-stakes on our backs, similar to quivers of really heavy and awkwardly shaped arrows. This transfer method made planting the acreage much quicker and more efficient. I look forward to returning to the farm later this summer to see how the plants are adapting to their new environment and seeing how many more of the live-stakes were munched by the local beavers.



Crew members carefully haul all of their gear through the gates without the horses escaping. Photo submitted by Renee Ackerman.



WCC member Jordan Moffett sorts through bundles of live-stakes and loads them into a Panting-Bag. Photo submitted by Renee Ackerman.



A horse friend saunters over to peep all the WCC restoration action. Photo submitted by Renee Ackerman.

WCC Alumni Profile: Assistant Fire Chief Noel

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One of the rangers that helped manage Noel's new crew also happened to volunteer with the local fire department. He encouraged Noel to do the same. Some of his fellow crew members followed suit, and enlisted themselves. Whenever an emergency call came in, Noel and the team would take off in a hurry to help out the department however they could.

Noel continued to volunteer with the fire department in the San Juan Islands, eventually landing a position as a firefighter on a U.S. Forest Service hotshot crew. His current role as Assistant Chief includes the responsibilities of training officer, health and safety officer, and operations chief. Somehow, he even finds the time to serve on his local town council.

Noel encourages current members to take full advantage of the opportunities that WCC provides. He is particularly enthusiastic about members taking advantage of wildland firefighting opportunities that WCC offers, which have expanded since his time with the WCC.

Noel credits the WCC with lending direction to his life at a time when he did not know where he was going. He attributes his time serving alongside likeminded, self-starters with can-do, will-do attitudes to his choice to walk the path towards public and civil service that led to his current position as Assistant Fire Chief.

"It got me to a place where I could respect uniformity, team work, and common goals and working with others I wouldn't normally hang out with," he said. "[WCC] really sparked that interest in my life, and I took the program as far as I could take it."

Thank you, Noel, for taking the time to share your story with the WCC community!

WCC Snapshots



1. WCC AmeriCorps members on disaster deployment in Tennessee gather to snap a WCC Valentine's photo. Photo submitted by Steven Quick.
 2. WCC AmeriCorps member Mitchell Metcalf installs Sitka spruce at the Lake Whatcom Watershed. Photo by Paul Argites.
 3. King County DNRP crew plants in the Sammamish River Transition Zone. Photo by Cynthia Saleh.
 4. The Port Angeles crew takes a moment to soak up the scenery. Photo submitted by Chelsea Krimme.



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WCC Activities Corner

ID Quiz: Washington's Invasive Fauna



The critters above are all designated priority invasive species in Washington State . Be the first crew member or IP to correctly email their names (common or scientific) to brendan.dwyer@ecy.wa.gov and you'll receive some WCC swag!

Answers to last month's ID quiz: 1. Violet-Green Swallow 2. Cinnamon Teal 3. American Goldfinch 4. Northern Shrike 5. Swainson's Thrush 6. Belted Kingfisher

About the WCC

The Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) was established in 1983 as a service program for young adults between the ages of 18-25. The WCC is offered through the Washington Department of Ecology and continues the legacy started by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The WCC has been an AmeriCorps program since 1994. Today, the WCC has around 300 members serving on projects in every part of the state. Our partners include Federal, State, Local, and Tribal organizations. For more information please visit our website: www.ecy.wa.gov/wcc.