

In This Issue:

<i>IP Spotlight:</i> <i>Chiara Cipriano</i>	1, 2
<i>WCC Alumni:</i> <i>Tess Amen</i>	3, 6
<i>Love Spreads like</i> <i>Wildfire</i>	4
<i>Louisiana Disaster</i> <i>Update</i>	5
<i>WCC Snapshots</i>	7
<i>WCC Activities Corner</i>	8

Fourth-graders take their first footsteps through the forest

By Chiara Cipriano, WCC Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest IP AmeriCorps Member

Have you ever paused to wonder about the stories told in winter wildlife tracks, while bounding across an open meadow or striding through a snow-laden forest? If you learn to read this winter language, you may uncover not only who lurked there and what they did, but whether or not they stopped to eat, or if they became a snack themselves.

As the Youth and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, I get to spend my winter days engaging these winter mysteries with fourth graders. This winter, I worked with nine schools from Enumclaw to Mt. Vernon, to get over 600 students out to explore the many facets of winter ecology. We examine everything from the tracks in the snow to the unique textures and colors of the lichens and mosses that characterize the enchantment of the Pacific Northwest.

For many students, this was the first time they had ventured onto their public lands. Some students participated in eagle watching at the Howard Miller Steelhead Park, while others snowshoed along the Pacific Crest Trail between Stevens and Snoqualmie passes or beside the Stillaguamish River in Verlot. These trips are part of former President Barack Obama's Every Kid in the Park initiative, which gives each fourth grader in the United States a pass that will allow them and their family free access onto federal lands and waters for an entire year.

Eminent environmental educator David Sobel reminds us that we need to give students the space to connect and love nature before we can ask them to save it. Too often students can



"I have a better appreciation for what handling 50-100 pairs of snowshoes feels like. I also know this means anywhere between 400-800 straps will need to be secured before we can voyage out". Photo submitted by Chiara Cipriano.

be inundated with the threats to our ecosystems before they are armed with the knowledge and passion necessary to take critical action. In my role I get to provide open space for this initial connection. Students learn about the flora and fauna of the forest during our programs, but more importantly they are given the time to listen to the sounds of snowflakes falling upon their jackets in the silent woods, stare up the long wide trunks of the old growth cedars and touch the long spindly strands of the celeste Methuselah's Beard Lichen (*Usnea longissima*).

Continued on page 2

SEND US MATERIAL TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

Please send your stories (800 words or less), photos, and updates for publishing to Brendan at

Brendan.Dwyer@ecy.wa.gov



Fourth-graders take their first footsteps through the forest

Continued from pg. 1

Recently, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest wrote a grant and received funding to start a spring program in response to teachers' requests to expand the seasonality of our programming. This new chapter will focus on watersheds and take place on the floodplains of the Stillaguamish River. Here, students will have the space to turn over rocks in search of benthic macroinvertebrates, such as mayflies, caddisflies and stoneflies. Just as winter tracks can tell the story of who has passed through a snow drift, these freshwater macro-benthos species can reveal the story of the watershed's health. Our hope is to impress upon students that the river they are standing beside is part of a larger watershed that connects neighboring communities. We will have succeeded if they come to the same realization as Aldo Leopold— "the way we treat our river reflects the way we treat each other."

As the year progresses, I will be in a unique position to watch the fruition of these budding connections to nature as they blossom in the form of stewardship. My role will allow me to serve beside youth from the Student Conservation Association, Seattle Parks and Recreation, InterIM WILD, Mountain to Sounds Greenway, and Ryther, who have dedicated a piece of their summer to stewarding and caring for public lands. I look forward to the deep discussions and connections that serving in nature gives way to, as well as listening to their stories and witnessing how their experience on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest shapes their values and relationship with nature.

The USDA Forest Service's first chief, Gifford Pinchot, believed that each generation must find a new way to "revitalize" and "reinvigorate" conservation. Many of the students we work with would not normally have the opportunity to get out onto their public lands. Learning better strategies to ensure greater access to experiencing the intangible value of intact forests, healthy rivers and other ecosystems is key to our generation reinvigorating conservation efforts and protecting the future of public lands. Perhaps a decade from now, the students who left their first tracks on the forest this winter will be the ones restoring floodplains to protect our communities from flooding, and push us just a little closer towards a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.

"Having experiences that are not mediated by technology makes such a huge difference for student interest. For some of these students, this was the first time they had seen fish outdoors, the first time they had snow fall on their heads, the first time they had used binoculars, the first time they had seen buffleheads, etc. Imagine how much more interesting reading is after you have actually seen an animal, a forest, etc. Imagine how difficult it is for us to teach about ecology for students who only understand predator-prey relationships through books, teacher talk, or electronic communication."

-Petter Nordal, teacher at Madison Elementary, Mt. Vernon, WA.



A Madison Elementary 4th grade student tracks a long-tailed weasel through the snow at Howard Miller Steelhead Park in Rockport, WA. Photo Submitted by Chiara Cipriano.



Students from Horizon Elementary in Everett explore the Red Bridge for different textured natural objects in Verlot, WA. Photo submitted by Chiara Cipriano.

Alumni Profile: Tess Amen

By Tess Amen, WCC Alumni and Ecological Technician



**Tess Amen sporting her WCC gear.
Photo submitted by Tess Amen.**



**Favorite WCC experience? Learning to
drive a Marsh Master!
Photo submitted by Tess Amen.**

When you are looking for a job, you'll hear a lot about networking. It sounds intimidating, but networking is just getting to know someone in a professional context. My experience with Washington Conservation Corps taught me just how important it is to see and act upon networking opportunities.

When I graduated from the University of Washington in spring 2015, I felt lost and exhausted. I had spent the past four years competing with kids who were so smart, so motivated and so sure of where they wanted to go. I, on the other hand, knew I wanted to be a voice for the natural environment- but could I accomplish this? That, I wasn't so sure of.

With this vague notion in mind, I started asking environmental professionals for informational interviews. Everyone I spoke with told me the same thing—that if I wanted to do environmental work, first I would have to get my hands dirty. One woman mentioned her time with the WCC, and it seemed like the perfect fit.

In June 2016, I joined the Arlington Urban Forestry Crew led by Paul Argites. On my first day, I was nervous and feeling self-conscious of my brand-new and painfully clean boots. Thankfully, I had joined a wonderfully diverse and welcoming crew, led by an equally capable supervisor.

We spent that summer on the shores of Snohomish County, surveying tidelands for an invasive seagrass. If you know anything about WCC, you know it is strenuous. I certainly had my share of mentally and physically trying moments, but when the going got tough, I would remind myself that I would soon miss the experience. And it's true! I am grateful to have had the chance to spend that summer outside, doing something meaningful for the environment, all the while learning a great deal about myself and my team.

My primary motivation for joining WCC was to get hands-on fieldwork experience, particularly because I was planning on applying for the University of Washington's Wetland Science and Management certificate program, scheduled to begin in the fall of 2016. I got accepted into the program, and, looking back, I have no doubt my WCC credentials enhanced my application.

One of the best parts of WCC is that you receive a paid job shadow day (networking alert!). When WCC Regional Coordinator Nick Saling reached out regarding one particular job shadow, I was stunned. Three former WCC members were offering job shadows at Wetland Resources, Inc. in Everett, and all three of them had completed the wetland program I would soon begin! I quickly emailed Nick back, eager to take advantage of the opportunity.

I spent my job shadow day with Senior Ecologist Meryl Kamowski at Wetland Resources, Inc. We visited Meryl's monitoring sites where she explained the basics of wetland delineation and how regulation occurs when development has the potential to impact wetlands. It was informative to see how Meryl's job balanced time in the office and the field. As Meryl patiently answered my questions, I could see a future for myself in the wetland science field.

Continued on page 6

Love Spreads Like Wildfire

By Steven Quick, WCC Pierce County Crew AmeriCorps Member



WCC crew members on disaster deployment gather around and share the love in honor of Valentine's day. Photo submitted by Steven Quick

Before our deployment, my crew and I were eager for the opportunity to respond to a disaster. We emailed coordinators – begged them even – to send us on a response; and then they did. We were given 48 hours notice, finished our local service for the week, and then took a day off before making the four-day, 2700-mile drive across the country to Tennessee.

Since living accommodations are unpredictable and often minimal on deployments, we were told to expect and prepare for the worst conditions possible: sleeping in cots with little to no personal space, limited access to laundry facilities and travel opportunities, and a topsy-turvy operation when we arrived. This disaster response turned out to be none of these things. We arrived to a cabin in the hills of Sevierville, just 20 minutes north of Gatlinburg and surrounded by other cabins fitted with pool tables, Jacuzzis, a heated community pool, and California king size beds. It was far from what we expected, much like everything else.

As our projects began, we were reminded to remain flexible and be prepared to adapt to change. On disaster response, you're never guaranteed to be doing what you showed up that day expecting to do. Situations evolve, your services might be better utilized elsewhere, and sometimes, there might not be suitable projects for you to do on site at all.

We performed erosion control with hay matting; we bucked piles of hardwood debris; we surveyed damaged homes to record their danger/difficulty factor for the rebuild phase; we felled a few trees (some of us our first ever); and we made a lot of new friends. Personally, it wasn't difficult to keep up, but I can see where frustration can stem from on disaster

response. Luckily, I was able to request the opportunity to cycle through several different positions as a chance to learn about operations. It wasn't always the easiest to deal with every day, and some days were definitely better than others.

Meeting people was likely my favorite part of the experience. I enjoyed hearing about the different AmeriCorps programs. It was also humbling to hear people's stories about why they chose this line of service or ended up there and how they've discovered a passion for it. One thing that I didn't expect to change was the dynamic within my own crew. Although we were already surprisingly close, we underwent a new set of trials through the experience.

Some were leaving behind a piece of themselves in Washington; some were in their last few months of the program; some had left children at home. It wasn't easy dealing with each other while remaining considerate, humble and empathetic for thirty days, and I would be a liar if I said I was the same person now as before I left.

My own lesson over the last month was tolerance. I learned to tolerate the 'home lives' of others, to meditate away the stresses that I had no control over and to endure the new as well as the monotonous. I had trials overcoming my own anger and anxiety, and like our supervisor Junior Fuimaono told us at the beginning of the term, "Disaster will change you."

I have changed.

The WCC's Louisiana Disaster Response: Accomplishments

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

**QUANTIFIABLES
AS OF
2/28/2017**

**92
HOMES GUTTED
& MUCKED**



**46
HOMES SPRAYED FOR
MOLD SUPPRESSION**



**880
CUBIC YARDS OF
DEBRIS REMOVED
FROM HOMES**



**1,132
PHONECALLS MADE
TO HOMEOWNERS**



**177
HOME ASSESSMENTS
COMPLETED**



A WCC AmeriCorps member checks the walls of a house's moisture levels. Photo by J. T. Blatty/FEMA.



WCC AmeriCorps members remove debris from a home during a muck and gut operation. Photo submitted by James Gudgeon.

Alumni Profile: Tess Amen

The job shadow day flew by and was an entirely motivating experience. I left feeling eager to finish out my WCC term and continue my environmental education.

Come September 2016, I graduated from the program to begin life as a WCC alum. I departed with new connections, field experience and the education award! I put the AmeriCorps education award towards tuition for the wetland certificate program, and my four short months with the WCC paid for one-fifth of my dues.

After WCC, I began an internship with Washington Conservation Voters and began the Wetland Science and Management certificate program with the University of Washington. As the leaves began to fall and that internship reached its close, I started to think about my next move.

I didn't have to wait long for the power of networking to reveal itself. In the midst of my job search, I got a call from Meryl at Wetland Resources.

She informed me that her team was looking for an Ecological Technician to aid in data collection and input, with the flexibility to fill in wherever needed. The next thing I knew I was interviewing with the owners of Wetland Resources, Inc., John Laufenberg and Scott Brainard.

Now, I'm a proud Ecological Technician at Wetland Resources, Inc., and I can genuinely say that I love my job! Everyday I'm learning something new, while applying and building upon what I previously learned in class. I get to assist with fieldwork, enter data, aid in the preparation of reports, and to top it all off, my coworkers are open-minded, funny and all share an appreciation for nature.

My sincere thanks to WCC for providing me with field training and incredible networking opportunities. Keep an eye out, active members. You never know where a connection could lead!



**Installing and monitoring hydrowells is part of Tess's current job at Wetland Resources.
Photo by Tess Amen.**

1. A WCC AmeriCorps crew member learns the finer points of self-starting a fire in Wilderness Survival class. 2. AmeriCorps WCC members earn their Red Card certification during Wildland Fire class. 3. WCC AmeriCorps member Camila Matemala-Ost serenades the rest of the Corps at March training's open mic event. 4. WCC crew supervisor Ashlie Arthur poses with her newly won autographed copy of WCC crew supervisor David Coffey via the supervisor tools auction.

WCC Group Photo Contest is Now Open

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

Hello everybody! I know that your WCC March training classes last month crammed an incredible amount of valuable information into your head spaces in a short span of time. If you really concentrate, you may recall an announcement about a WCC group photo contest.

The WCC group photo contest has begun! Submitting a WCC group photo to Brendan.Dwyer@ecy.wa.gov or Laura.Schlabach.ecy.wa.gov not only earns you the chance to represent the WCC as an integral part of the outreach team's promotional materials, but could score you a secret prize.

Here are a couple of pointers to make your submission stand out:

- 4-6 WCC members in the photo (does not have to be a single crew or include your entire crew)
- Feature WCC and AmeriCorps logos!
- Proper safety etiquette and proper protective equipment is being used in the photo
- Smiles!

The winner of the contest will be announced at the end of May. Good Luck!

WCC Snapshots—March Training Edition





Learn more on Facebook!

www.facebook.com/washingtonconservationcorps

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State of Washington

WCC Activities Corner

Flowers of Washington State



Can you name (common or scientific) these flowers native to Washington state? Be the first to send a correct set of answers to brendan.dwyer@ecy.wa.gov and you'll receive some WCC swag!

Answers to February's Activities Corner:
1. European Green Crab 2. Nutria 3. New Zealand Mud Snail 4. Bullfrog 5. Mediterranean snail

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.