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How I Learned to Love Forage Fish (And Stop Worrying About Becoming an Egghead)

By Keith Bradley-Hewitt, WCC Olympia Forage Fish Crew AmeriCorps Member

In 2014, I was hired on to one of the four WCC Department of Natural Resources and Parks restoration crews in Renton. Coming from a fairly comfortable, but often monotonous office job at a technology company the previous two years, I was excited at the promise of a change in day-to-day tasks, new challenges, and the opportunity to serve outdoors. I also looked forward to projects aimed toward causes that I felt were truly important.

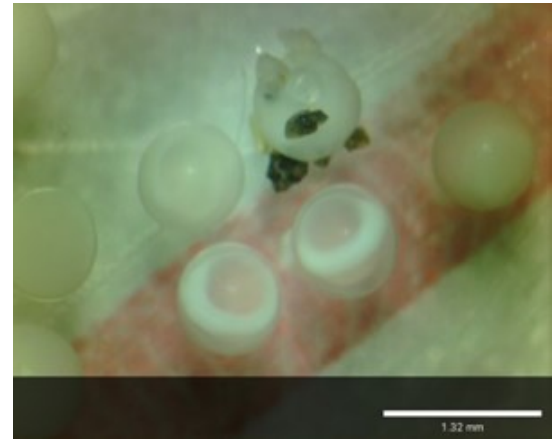
To say the least, I was not disappointed by this career shift. As a WCC AmeriCorps member, I learned a lot about Washington's natural environment, met some inspiring people, and I always went home at the end of the day feeling as though I had gotten a good workout (I even suspended my gym membership for a while). By the end of the year, it was the greatest experience I'd had up to that point in my short career.

As the 2014-2015 crew year wrapped up, I started to contemplate the next steps I would take. I knew that I wanted to do a second year with the WCC. I also knew that I enjoyed restoration projects, and would be satisfied doing another year of the similar tasks. Chatting with various advisers within the program, they were supportive of my intentions to reapply to the WCC, but also urged me to get the most out of the program by seeking out a position different from what I had just done. This is how I came to apply for the Forage Fish crew in Olympia.

Interviewing for these two crews, it was apparent that being on one of these crews would be a completely different endeavor than any I had previously undertaken. For better or worse, there would be no blackberry removal on this crew, no planting projects, knotweed spraying, trail maintenance, or fence building. Instead, there would be lab-based science.

Personally, I do not have a background in science. Because of this, I was hesitant to accept the position, not sure how much I could help this specific program, nor how much it could help me in building long-term career goal skills. I also worried that long days spent behind a microscope would lead to the deterioration of the hunky muscles I had built up over the past year as a restoration technician.

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Forage fish eggs as seen under a microscope.
Photos submitted by Keith Bradley-Hewitt.

Volunteer Opportunity: Paddle to Nisqually, Canoe Journey 2016

By Kevin Farrell, WCC Project Coordinator



NISQUALLY INDIAN TRIBE

The Washington Conservation Corps is honored to have been asked to assist with the Canoe Journey 2016, Paddle to Nisqually (<http://www.paddletonisqually.com>). This event continues an inter-tribal celebration and annual gathering of Northwest indigenous nations. The annual tribal journey in the Pacific Northwest region was sparked by the Paddle to Seattle event in 1989 as part of Washington State's Centennial celebration. Over 20 Canoe Journeys have taken place since 1993, when pullers (the preferred term because of the pulling motion on the paddle) from Canada, Alaska and Washington voyaged from their home communities to Bella Bella, B.C.

The Canoe Journey has grown to include over 100 canoes and the participation of Canoe Families from other native canoe cultures, including Native American tribes, First Nations peoples, Alaska Natives, Inuit, Maori, Native Hawaiians, and other indigenous peoples from across the world.

Canoe Journey gatherings are rich in meaning and cultural significance. Canoe Families travel great distances just as their ancestors did, and participating in the journey requires physical and spiritual discipline. At each stop, Canoe Families follow certain protocols such as asking for permission to come ashore, often in their native languages. At night in longhouses there is gifting, honoring and the sharing of traditional prayers, drumming, songs and dances. Host nations provide meals, including evening dinners of traditional foods.

The canoe culture, as practiced by the Native American tribes of the Pacific Northwest, had all but disappeared after colonization, until the Canoe Journey events began to grow in the 90's. Techniques of canoe making and use had largely vanished and fewer and fewer tribal members knew how to pull a traditional canoe. Numerous tribes participated in the 1994 "Youth Paddle," held in Olympia, as well as the subsequent Puget Sound "Full Circle Youth Paddles" of 1995 and 1996. By the time the tribes of the Pacific Northwest responded to an invitation in La Push in 1997, a new tradition was well into the making and a cultural resurgence was underway.

WCC members have been requested to assist during two timeframes when help will be needed the most. Crews and/or individual members serving during both timeframes will have opportunities to see ceremonial events take place. Both of them include weekend times. Volunteer shifts can range from a full day to a few hours, whenever you have time to volunteer.

Dates volunteers are needed for the Canoe Journey:

July 29-August 2 (possibly through the 3rd)

Preparations for landing, the landing day itself, set up of protocol site and the first couple days of the event. These will be the highest visitation days of the event.

August 4- August 7 (possibly through the 8th)

Final big presentation in the protocol tent, as well as clean up the day after the big event.

Members interested in volunteering at this event should email their desired volunteer date(s) to WCC Project Coordinator Kevin Farrell at kevin.farrell@ecy.wa.gov. Please put "Paddle to Nisqually" in the subject line of the email. Volunteer hours will count towards your AmeriCorps Education Award (but are unpaid) and will get you closer to the Presidential Service Award!

Newt Encounter on Vashon

By Colleen Braun, King County DNRP Crew AmeriCorps Member



The Rough Skinned Newt! Photos submitted by Colleen Braun.

“What creature is this?” That is what our crew pondered when we happened upon a critter that appeared to be some sort of salamander.

Our project for the day had us venturing within the depths of Vashon Island in search of the invasive weed English Ivy. It was there amidst the leaf litter that we encountered this creature. My research revealed it to be *Taricha granulosa*, or the Rough-Skinned Newt.

The Rough Skinned Newt is one of few newts that are active during the day. It is able to do so in spite of predators because it is poisonous enough to kill a grown person, or at least a very hungry person. The newt is only deadly when its toxins are consumed. It is safe to handle with bare hands so long as you don't plan on touching your mouth later. As a general rule, it is always a good idea to wash your hands after handling any wildlife.

Mother Nature usually has a way of telling us if a critter is poisonous by its vibrant colors. The Rough Skinned Newt is the perfect example- it's belly is a beautiful bright orange. Interestingly enough, it uses a tactic of flashing its bright underside when threatened to warn predators of the danger they are facing. This action is known as the “unken reflex.”

Rough Skinned Newts are very common in the Pacific Northwest region and are often seen crossing roads as they travel to their breeding pools during the spring. This, unfortunately, often results in their deaths. This critter is not endangered, but increasing habitat destruction and death-by-automobiles could certainly change that.

Since our service and projects have us outdoors, encountering critters happens often. As someone who really enjoys critter encounters I am always tempted to pick them up, but I am also an advocate of safety and respect. Always wear gloves and handle with care!

Want to learn more?

Department of Natural Resources Reference:

<http://www1.dnr.wa.gov/nhp/refdesk/herp/html/4tagr.html>

Seattle Times article on the Rough Skinned Newt:

<http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/archive/?date=20030224&slug=newt24m>

National Geographic Video on the Rough Skinned Newt:

<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/weirdest-newt>



How I learned to Love Forage Fish (Continued)



Anchors away! One of the boats used to go around the Puget Sound looking for samples.

After a few weeks on the projects, I realized that serving with the Forage Fish crew is a pretty cool opportunity.

If you are not familiar with this crew– or even what a forage fish is –allow me to enlighten you.

A forage fish is a small fish that larger fish, such as salmon and other marine life, prey upon. They are important staples to many animals, and if they disappear from the food chain, there could be detrimental effects for many species. Some popular forage fish include herring and anchovy. For our project, the primary concern is surf smelt, and, to a lesser extent, sand lance and rock sole.

So what does the WCC do with these fish? First, we have to find them by cruising the Puget Sound on our fleet of WDFW boats. We then stop at a sample of beaches in order to collect a bagful of

sediment. We also take notes on the environmental characteristics of the beach including the sediment type, shade provided by foliage, and many other attributes.

In our collected sediment samples, we hope to find a nice collection of forage fish eggs. The eggs are pretty small, and most people can't see them with their naked eye, which means we use a microscope.

However, before we get the samples under the microscope, there is an important process called "sieving" to complete. I won't fully elaborate on sieving, as by now I could write an entire article on the subject, but this process is crucial in order to get the sediment down to a reasonable level where it can be viewed under the microscope. After all, you can't just look at a whole bag of sediment under a microscope. That would be ludicrous!

I can't overemphasize how crucial a good sieving system is to our operation. Sieving is constantly scrutinized – rightly so! Over the multiple-decade span of this project, the sieving process has evolved so much that there are scientific studies on the sieving process itself. This process has also been very eye opening by showing me the routine hurdles of a scientist.

Back in the lab, with our sediment nicely sieved, we look at all the samples from each beach that we visited in our voyages on the Sound. We are looking for the presence of forage fish eggs. They are easy to identify, as they are mostly white, and usually collect along the top of the surface of sediment. When we find eggs, we then identify the species of forage fish they are, and what developmental stage the eggs are in. These data are catalogued and reviewed by quality control team members.

Now we have all the data that we need, from both the field and lab. We enter the data into a database where it is accessible to WDFW biologists who are conducting an ongoing study about the spawning patterns of forage fish throughout Puget Sound.

I feel like this project is very worthwhile because if scientists can figure out what causes forage fish to thrive, we may be able to provide them better habitats. This would then mean more forage fish, leading to a greater food source for other (more delicious) fish like salmon. This could then bring about a greater salmon population around the Puget Sound and as a consumer of salmon, which sounds pretty good to me.

For all of you first-year WCC members, if all of this information has not been enough to persuade you to apply to this crew for a second term, I have a few more things to say. Being on a Forage Fish crew affords many unique opportunities. For example, we are often stationed in an office at the Natural Resources building. This means that you will find yourself around a wide array of experienced professionals with the Department of Fish and Wildlife. There are many occasions to explore potential positions after the WCC, and many friendly people who would be happy to enlighten you on what they do in the department, and how they got to where they are today.

Continued on pg. 5.

WCC AmeriCorps Member Recognition Awards

WCC is announcing AmeriCorps Member Recognition Awards in the following categories: Community Service, Environmental Stewardship, and Disaster Response. Nominations will be accepted **through July 31 2016** with award presentations at WCC regional debriefs. Sponsor, supervisor, peer, and self-nominations are accepted. Email Peter.Nevin@ecy.wa.gov for more details. The nomination form is available on the WCC website [forms page](#).

Leslie Schiesswohl Community Service Award

The *Leslie Schiesswohl* Community Service Award is presented annually to a WCC AmeriCorps member who exemplifies civic engagement through external service. Leslie Schiesswohl served as an AmeriCorps member in WCC from October 2010 until she passed away suddenly in December 2011. In addition to her dedication to day-to-day service and fellow crew mates, Leslie was also very enthusiastic about volunteerism and community engagement beyond AmeriCorps, earning the Gold Presidential Service Award in her first term. The Leslie Schiesswohl Community Service Award honors the spirit of service by recognizing members that demonstrate an ongoing commitment to their community and leading in external service hours.

Exemplary Environmental Stewardship Award

The WCC Environmental Stewardship Award is presented annually to a WCC AmeriCorps member who demonstrates a commitment to environmental stewardship throughout the service term. The award recipient will demonstrate their dedication to improving the natural world through consistent volunteerism, a sustained commitment to environmental service (within WCC and in their daily lives), and positive leadership in inspiring others to adopt improved environmental practices.

Disaster Response Award

The WCC Disaster Response Award recognizes an individual who has completed service on a disaster response deployment within Washington or nationwide during their term. The recipient of this award will demonstrate the resilience, dedication, perseverance, and patience required to successfully serve on a disaster response mission assignment. They will embody the AmeriCorps spirit, embrace WCC excellence, and exceed expectations in the role of leader, community builder, or unsung hero who behind-the-scenes; improves morale through humor, compassion and creation of a positive atmosphere.

Forage Fish (Continued)

You may be tasked to help with other teams on their projects, gaining more valuable experience in the process. I've personally been involved in beach seining efforts, eulachon surveys, and a research project with professionals devoted towards "herpetology" (this ended up being a particularly fun day trekking around the woods looking for salamanders).

With less than four short months to go on my WCC contract, I am happy to look back on my involvement in the Forage Fish crew as time well spent. It has been educational and fun. I have found that my initial fears of regressing into the soft, little jellyfish I was before the Renton restoration crew whipped me into shape were unfounded. Our office is located on the top floor of the Natural Resources building providing many opportunities to walk up and down the stairs throughout the day to burn some calories you may have gained from the, not one but two, stellar cafes located nearby. My legs have never been stronger!

If all of this sounds good to you, and you are not prone to seasickness, I would encourage you to look into this crew further when it comes time to seek your next steps. It could be an excellent opportunity.



It's "just another day at the beach" for the WCC members collecting forage fish samples.

Supervisor's Corner: *James van der Voort*



James van der Voort in his "natural habitat" according to his crew. Photo submitted by James van der Voort.

What is a favorite moment or memory of being a WCC supervisor?

Island spikes! Last summer I did one week on Orcas Island with the Snohomish County crew, and one week on Jones Island with the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA) crew. The islands are a beautiful place to kill trees in the name of other trees.

Which hand tool is your favorite, and why?

I'd say the Pulaski, which is more of a two-hand tool, but it just does so much. Edward Pulaski, who is generally credited for the name, was a boss. He saved most of a 45-man crew in the Great Idaho Fire, I think, in 1910, by leading them to a mine.

Briefly describe your path to WCC?

I had a friend on a Sedro Woolley DNR crew who recommended WCC to me, so I got on a four-month DNR crew that I used as my internship to graduate from Western Washington University. After that I was on Rob Crawford's Skagit Spike crew for a one year term and then a 6-month term, and now I'm here.

Where is your hometown?

Born in Honolulu, Hawaii and grew up in Bothell, Washington.

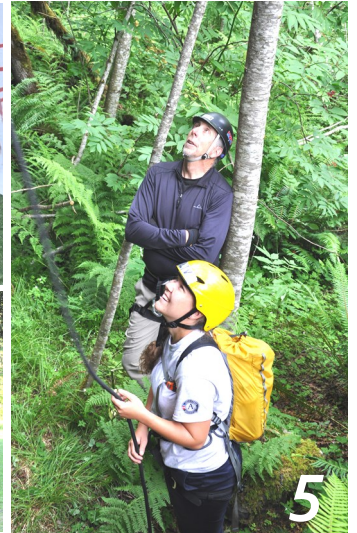
If you could have a superpower what would it be?

My superpower would be like that bad guy in Heroes, where I can collect other people's superpowers, but in a nice way. Maybe they just share powers with me through a high five and I don't kill them - that would be preferable.

Number of years as a supervisor?

1 year (plus a few months).

June Training Snapshots



WCC Snapshots



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1. Crew members celebrate a fast time at "truck tetris" during the WCC Olympics*.
2. Brian Frankowski's crew, from Redmond, during the opening ceremony of the WCC Olympics.
3. Several WCC members look at soil composition during the Wetland and Watershed training course. Photo by Alex Mesick.
4. Dave Coffey being honored for 25 years as a WCC Supervisor during the WCC Olympics.
5. IP Liv Froehlich practices using ropes during the Swiftwater Rescue course at elective training.
6. WCC members weave baskets during the Ethnobotany course at training.
7. The annual tug of war competition during the WCC Olympics was a close match between the eastside and westside competition.
8. The Snohomish County DNR crews take a lunch break at San Juan Island. Photo submitted by Taylor Schmuki.
9. Sedro Woolley Skagit DNR crew members with the new fiberglass bridge they built. Photo submitted by Nick Saling.
10. WCC member Zoe Loutos sprays Garlic Mustard in a ravine near Discovery Park. Photo submitted by Rebekah Graham.
- 11, 14. The Mount Vernon Skagit Spike crew on Waldron Island for the San Juan Preservation Trust. Photo submitted by Nick Saling.
12. A curious fox during a butterfly release project on San Juan Island. Photo submitted by Taylor Schmuki.
13. A WCC member releasing an Island Marble butterfly on San Juan Island. Photo submitted by Taylor Schmuki.
15. Alex Phillips with a moth a King Country DNRP restoration crew found while on a project. Photo submitted by Rebekah Graham.

*All WCC June training photos by Laura Schlabach.



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www.facebook.com/washingtonconservationcorps

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WCC Word Search Key

(May Newsletter)

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- blackberry
- springtime
- pnw
- americorps
- crew
- ecology
- newsletter
- conservation
- corps
- restoration
- individualplacement
- cispus
- saws
- spike
- disasterresponse

Solve This Riddle!

It cannot be seen, cannot be felt
Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt
It lays behind the stars and under hills
And empty holes it fills.

What is it?

First person or crew to email Sadie the correct answer gets a prize!



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 working 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.