Wishtyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program Internship

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Internship Time Frame: December 2012 – May 2013

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program, for giving me the opportunity to take part in this internship. I would also like to express my gratitude to Jason Weiner, the general counsel and water initiative director, for giving me an amazing experience and for instilling knowledge in me. I would also like to thank Dr. Donald Rodriguez for telling me about this wonderful opportunity and for giving me the information, to apply for the WRPI watershed management internship program. There are no words to express the immense gratitude I have for Dr. Donald Rodriguez, Jason Weiner, the Water Resource Institute, and the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture for this learning experience. This project was supported by the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grant no. 2011-38422-31204 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.
Executive Summary

During my work with the Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program, as their California State University Channel Islands watershed monitoring intern, I concentrated on water issues and quality. I conducted my work on water analysis, in the lab that the foundation operates at California State University Channel Islands, from the impaired waterways they monitored. The mission of this organization “is to protect, preserve, and restore the ecological integrity and water quality of Ventura County's inland waterbodies, coastal waters, and watersheds, which are vital natural resources for the citizens and all inhabitants of Ventura County, and are the lifeblood of Chumash Native American culture (Ventura Coastkeeper Program).” I worked diligently at achieving these goals and the mission to protect the watersheds in Ventura County, by accompanying my advisor Jason Weiner to get water samples and testing them for contamination if any.

I collected water quality data from the water samples we collected, from the water sources chosen on the particular day, that we went out to test and I reported all my findings to Jason Wiener. The skills that I gained from this internship were reading scientific instruments, detecting high or low levels of a contaminant that were in the waterbodies that can pose harm to the environment. I learned to test the pH of a body of water with a pH meter and to test for bacteria in the water samples collected, and how to perform nitrate and phosphate testing, on the water samples collected in the field, that were bought back to the lab. I also learned how to collect the information from the various testing, in an organized matter, so that I could give the information collected to my supervisor without any trouble.

Project Objectives

While setting out to find internships that would help me find my niche in the field, I
looked into many areas; forestry, ocean and education of environmental science. I sought out to find an organization that would let me learn new things and also let me outreach to the community. Thus, I found the Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program, which has a vision to preserve the integrity of their communities and their community’s quality of life. They do this by, “strives to maintain clean and ecologically healthy waters for all living beings in our diverse community through advocacy, education, legal enforcement, restoration projects, and citizen action (Ventura Coastkeeper Program).” The original goals that I had for the internship, were to learned how to “measure and record river flows, algae, trash, pH, air and water temperature, turbidity, conductivity, water color, water odor, and dissolved oxygen (Ventura Coastkeeper Stream Team Volunteer Opportunities).” The primary purpose of the internship was to equip me with professional field and laboratory water quality analysis and watershed management skills. I had a chance to get a certificate as a stream team leader, and a chance to lead a stream team by myself before my internship ended with the program. Although, I did not get a certificate, due to my time with the foundation was too short, I still gained so much. In the times that I did get hands on experience, with these techniques, it was wonderful and I hope to use them in the future. I also did an outreach work about the use of the Santa Clara River, I did this by going into classrooms of my fellow university mates and asked them to take a survey, and then I recorded their responses into a excel spreadsheet.

With all this knowledge that I have gained from my internship, I will be setting out to find jobs in United States Department of Agriculture in agencies that deal with water issues. This internship has given me more of a focus on different employment types and it has helped me make a better connection with my field. It has also put me a step up from other applicants, based
on the hands-on experience. That is why I see myself working and looking for jobs in National Resource Conservation Service.

**Project Approach**

When doing work throughout the course of my internship with the Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program, the supervisor that I worked closely with was Jason Weiner, he is the general counsel and water initiative director for the foundation. In the course of my internship that involved water quality monitoring, which was conducted by Jason, who would send out an email before the month began with dates that he was available to go out for monitoring, or asked for dates from me that I was available to work. I sent back an email with the answer to his question and we confirmed the dates that we were going out to monitor.

When the day of the monitoring came we and whoever was coming along, such as other interns or volunteers, would partake in the monitoring. The monitoring usually started around 9 to 9:30am, when we would arrive to the lab, we collected the instruments that we were going to use in the field, we would also get the ice that we needed to keep the water samples cool and calibrated the instruments before heading out to the site. When we returned around 4 to 4:30, the first thing we would do is clean the weighters that we used, so there would not be any cross contamination from one site to another. Then we started to do the testing of the water samples.

The first time we went out, I only did basic tasks and saw how to do the other tasks and learned how to do them for the following times that I went out to monitor.

**Project Outcomes**

This internship taught me a lot of things that, I will be using in my professional career, in a water quality agency or business that works with water issues. Although I learned a lot in my
internship, I know that I must practice the skills I learned and develop them more so, that I can sharpen them and get the best use out of them when working in my professional career.

One thing that I learned while working on this internship, was the ability to improve my speaking skills, for example when I administered a survey on the use of the Santa Clara River, to fellow students. Before I asked them to take the survey, I gave them information on why I was doing it, how their responses were going to be used and presented. This project also helped me sharpen my data entry skills, as a result of my survey duties. After I did the surveying, I would enter the responses into an excel spreadsheet, so the data could be organized and presented in an organized matter. It is my hope that is internship has helped me prepare for a possible USDA career in the National Resource Conservation Service agency. I have learned that non-profit environmental organizations, have worked to protect what is left of the Earth’s natural resources. Like this organization, that preserves the waterways for the community that it is located in.

**Conclusion**

The opportunity that was given to me by the Wishtoyo Foundation's Ventura Coastkeeper Program, allowed me to grow professionally and personally. The hands on experience that I have gained from doing field work and surveying has given me greater gratitude for the organization, and for the others that are doing the same type of work to preserve the natural world that is on this planet.

This internship has given me the passion to be a part of the solution of preserving the natural world that is for us and that I should strive to join agency like National Resource Conservation Service. I have been exposed to local water issues that were only known to me before in small detail, but after starting this internship I have gained a greater understanding and knowledge of water issues that plague our local waters. For my future, it is my hope that the
beneficial skills that I have learned throughout the course of my work, will be applied to the career field that I will enter and become one of the many people trying to preserve our natural world.

References


Appendices

**Figure 1** This picture shows me testing the waters conductivity.

**Figure 2** This picture shows me collecting a water sample from one of the sites, to take back to the lab for analysis.