Natural Resource Conservation Service
Watershed Management Internship
Final Report

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My parents, Jimmie Martin and Rita Martin, who would often times assist with the care of my children at last minute notice so I could stay at visited sites longer then anticipated and get the most out of this project.
Executive Summary

The project I was assigned to was documented as watershed management. I was assigned to conduct my internship with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), which is a department within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). I gained a lot of first hand in-the-field experience, because I was granted opportunities to assist the field representatives in the various destinations they were conducting business at. I was able to go to several ranches, a flower garden, a monarch butterfly garden, and attend an informational meeting at a San Diego Native Indian Tribe, just to name a few. Although the places differ in their business ventures, their objective to gain financial assistance to use water conservatively was similar. Even though, I was fortunate enough to go on several outings, my main contribution was organizing the office. It had been several years since anyone had attempted to do some major in-house cleaning and sorting. Other then make copies, mail-out updated packets to clients, and bring specific client folders and informational documents to the staff; I organized the entire conference room: Loose materials, the library, both current and expired client folders in the cabinets, and informational pamphlets.
Project Objective

This project dealt with watershed management and soil conservation endeavors that were to be introduced to farmers within the San Diego County region. It is an effort to educate farmers on the most efficient techniques to conduct their farms in a conservative manner, which will be beneficial to them as well as the environment. My objective was to get familiar with the various watershed management techniques San Diego uses as methods to use water in the most efficient ways possible by witnessing procedures out in the field. My goal was to accompany the field representatives on their excursions to various land regions to gain first hand experience working on site at farms and various terrain that dealt with agriculture which required adequate watersheds as a resource. I am triple majored at San Diego State University (SDSU) and was determined to apply all my majors during the internship and guide me on my career path.

Being a Geography major, I am very interested in the terrain and understanding how the watershed effects the land in which the USDA had been contracted to monitor. I not only was able to read about the various regions and analyze their issues and solutions, but was able to go and visually witness the dried up riverbeds that had become desolate and cracked, and grass fields that had once flourished with endangered crops and lush vegetation that had become barren and withered desperate for water. I was able to take notes on what I seen and discuss the possibilities of solutions to revive what used to thrive.

Being a Sociology major also played a keen role to my internship on several levels. One would be the fact that people are a huge reason why the environment has either been destroyed or been restored. The clients at NRCS that had contracts were not necessarily huge corporations;
they were farmers or private businesses that dealt with some form of vegetation. I learned how when an entity damages an area by taking over for whatever reason, they must restore another.

I believe restoration is a vital necessity within our laws, because without monitoring and consequences various habitats would severely suffer in assisting the survival of certain animals and plants. This leads into my third Major, Political Science. Although, I have a passion within Geography and Sociology because I have a deep concern for the environment, people, and how the interaction between them results in the world we currently live in; I also want to find solutions to problems and concerns I find within my research and not just talk about solutions, but create laws to mandate them.

I know I will be going to graduate school to receive my PhD in Environmental Policy, and I would love to contribute my research in the USDA career pathway as an advocate on what changes can be made lawfully to better assist those who desire to seek assistance from organizations such as NRCS, and also create laws to prevent misusage and hopefully diminish certain detrimental problems that are affecting the environment and our water resources. Water is more precious then gold and I plan on defending and protecting the water we are so fortunate to have.
Project Approach

Although I had assumed I would be out in the field gaining experience, I only was able to accompany field representatives from the office on a dozen occasions. I would volunteer to come in early on field days or stay late, but there was a lot of staff changes since one had been moved to another state and it was the time when every single staffer was taking a vacation at one time for several weeks during my internship. Since the majority of my time was spent within the office, I was able to gain information through the books I came across as I organized the offices library, as well as gain in-depth information about different cases and solutions to their problems by organizing the entire stock of current and past files and informational pamphlets on various topics.
Project Outcomes

Even though I was not able to be in the field as often as I had hoped, when I did get the opportunity I would always learn something new. One that stood out the most is learning how to use the tools in the field that would provide useful data to create conclusions once we returned to the office. My favorite was a GPS finder that would map out the regions we need focus on, and I got to see how my occasional clicks here and there at the site would create a digitized map for the staff to work with. However, since most of my time was in the office I took advantage of the tasks assigned to me as a learning opportunity.

My first task was to organize a pile of posters so I would have room to work: Since the office was bare on wall art, I creatively put up posters to liven the office and add appealing visuals to clients when they visited. I also organized the posters in categories that would be appealing to certain staff individuals depending on their job specifications and personality, and donated the leftovers to schools.

My second office task was to organize the library. I was allowed to be creative and everyone was thrilled with the outcome. I am an individual who loves puzzles and organizing so this was a task I enjoyed. It was actually a very beneficial task, because it allowed me the opportunity to gain knowledge on various topics. I had to actually do a little bit of research within the text to decide where to place it. I was able to learn about tribes, farmlands, animals, plants, endangered species, watersheds, emergency procedures, and so many more topics I will be able to use as research inspirations.

One of the bigger tasks was organizing all of the client folders; removing old files, inserting new ones, merging duplicate files to make room, as well as desperately needed
alphabetizing. I learned the system of how they are numbered and protocols, and what various forms of assistance are require to create successful projects.

My last inside office task was to organize the massive amount of pamphlets that were placed in various places within the office into a set of assigned cabinets. This task was also beneficial as it allowed me to learn new things in the process of doing my job. The only way to decide where something should be placed is by reading and then deciding what category it belongs to.
Conclusion

Everyone in the office was very nice and seemed to enjoy the work they do; being in that type of environment helped me want to come to work and learn something new from them everyday. I went on an excursion with every staffed individual at least once and will cherish each experience. Although there wasn’t that many outings I got to go on, I appreciated each one I was fortunate enough to attend as well as the magnitude of information I was able to learn by simply being in the office surrounded by so much data.

If I could leave one form of advice it would be for the interns to have immediate access to a computer and link within their office system. There were so many tasks I missed out on contributing to, because I didn’t have clearance to obtain an account and password to be linked to everyone else. I unfortunately also couldn’t see the schedules of anyone else and missed out on conversations where I could share my opinion or gain perspectives and outings because of it.

My next educational step is to achieve my PhD in Environmental Policy. After working with the NRCS, I am confident in my decision to continue researching water and environmental issues and creating safety barriers through lawful introductions on behalf of the USDA. My desire is to work within the USDA Policy Department and secure the future of a healthy environment beyond the need for the human species. Many creatures share this land, both animals and plants, and one thing in common that is mandatory for survival is water. Interning at NRCS has proven that often times people do care, they just need some assistance in producing beneficial projects to create a more bountiful and healthy environment. I plan on contributing research that will support laws that will benefit the USDA, its client’s well intentions, and the staffs’ opportunity to reach their set goals.