An Interview with Rocky Mountain Conservancy
Edited by Emily Pritchard

UM alumni, Geoff Elliot, of Rocky Mountain Conservancy talks about the work that they do and the importance of University of Montana interns. “Rocky Mountain Conservancy strives to create the next generation of stewards through the internship and fellowship programs provided. With this in mind, we also want to cater the experience of our interns to their interests in the field of natural resources.”

Tell us more about Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

“Rocky Mountain Conservancy is the official non-profit partner of Rocky Mountain National Park and many other public lands throughout Colorado and Wyoming. As the non-profit partner, the Conservancy promotes stewardship of Rocky Mountain National Park and similar public lands through education and philanthropy by producing educational publications, leading field classes for all ages, raising funds for projects, selling interpretive materials, connecting people to the public lands through membership, and managing a conservation corps program that supports land management agencies.”

What is your connection to the University of Montana? How did your own experiences as student shape your current career?

“Personally, I am a University of Montana alumni. My college path was somewhat scattered and a little misdirected, but the University of Montana provided me with the exposure to opportunities and an openness to explore that landed me with the career I have now. I started school at University of Connecticut and hopped around to different colleges and universities in the Boston area and in London before arriving at University of Montana. Nowhere felt quite right before I got to Missoula. With a degree in Philosophy and English Literature from U of M, I was equipped with the skills, creativity, and drive to get any job I put my mind to, and this is evident with my current position at Rocky Mountain Conservancy.”
What are the goals of the internship program at Rocky Mountain Conservancy?

“The first two programmatic goals of the Conservation Corps Program are to increase participant awareness of careers related to the environment, environmental stewardship, and public lands and to link Conservation Corps projects to the missions and visions of the Rocky Mountain Nature Association, Rocky Mountain National Park/National Park Service, and Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest/USDA Forest Service. To achieve these goals Rocky Mountain Conservancy works to be inclusive of all parties involved in the organization when making decisions. For example, the Conservancy encourages Conservation Corps interns to be in communication with the Conservation Corps Manager regarding suggestions for programmatic improvement.”

What are some of the tasks assigned to your interns?

“This year we have UM students interning with our conservation corps program. These interns provide the on-the-ground support for the National Park Service and USDA Forest Service in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Arapaho-National Forest. The interns provide critical support to the land management agencies by helping the trail crews and resource management teams complete priority projects on time. These projects include campground maintenance, trail construction, hazard tree removal, native plant seeding, and watershed restoration.”

Roughly, how much time do your student interns work a week? Do they have any special responsibilities?

“Our interns work forty hours a week with the National Park Service and USDA Forest Service. Their primary role is to support the needs of the land management agencies, so their day-to-day projects and responsibilities are scheduled and assigned by the agencies. These responsibilities tend to include equipment and tool management, keeping trail reports on work completed, safe use of tools on the trail, driving government vehicles, and training other crew members in tool use and project details. With Rocky Mountain Conservancy, crew members (interns) from each crew are responsible for providing trail reports, blog posts, and photographs from the field to the Conservation Corps Manager.”

Where do the interns stay? What is the work environment like?

“The intern lives with his crew of six members at a USDA Forest Service bunkhouse in the Grand Lake area of Northern Colorado. The six crew members live and work together, which creates a very tight-knit community. This includes morning meetings to prepare for each day in the field, family style dinners at the end of work days, and frequent weekend adventures with the crew members.”
How can participating in this internship program enhance the future careers of UM students?

“As an internship program focused on career development in the field of natural resources, Rocky Mountain Conservancy provides all Conservation Corps interns with career development opportunities within the National Park Service and USDA Forest Service by providing interns with a career enhancement day throughout the season to volunteer with a different division to enhance their awareness of other careers opportunities. Additionally, Conservation Corps interns go through a workshop on how to successfully navigate the USA Jobs website and are provided with career resources developed by Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education, NOLS, and 21st Century Conservation Service Corps. Rocky Mountain Conservancy also offers opportunities for college students and graduates interested in Environmental Education within our Field Institute and with the National Park Service, which Conservation Corps interns are encouraged to pursue in future summer seasons.”

Do you have any final advice for UM students looking to get an internship?

“The biggest advice I have for students is: don’t let you degree or major limit your career opportunities, if you are passionate and invested in a particular path pursue it; find opportunities to volunteer, intern, and explore careers before committing to them. Those experiences will either provide you with the awareness that the career is not for you or equip you with the skills necessary to move forward in that field.”

Where can students go for more information? www.RMConservancy.org

How can students contact you directly?

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