

This fall I participated in an internship in coordination with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Old Dominion University. My journey began during the spring semester in a course called Mitigation and Adaptation where my fellow students and I learned a great deal about our life support system and just how important it is to understand and conserve it. In the summer, my classmates and I then participated in an extensive Sustainability Leadership course where we learned what it means to be a leader and gained knowledge in the ins-and-outs of a National Wildlife Refuge. In Florida, we learned from and presented to the staff in Vero Beach and our eyes were truly opened to all the hard work that is put in at an agency such as the USFWS.

During my internship at the Great Dismal Swamp I have learned so much. Seeing nature as it was burned and grown again is such a beautiful experience. Working with the staff at the Great Dismal Swamp gave me grand opportunities to help build a new boardwalk for visitors, release Red Cockaded Woodpeckers back into the swamp, attend staff meetings and model launches, and to see for myself first-hand what it's like to manage such a beautiful place. During the internship I was able to connect with stakeholders, network, and see exactly how decisions are made and what it takes to create partnerships. Until being exposed to the atmosphere at the dismal swamp, I never knew the extent of the hard work and dedication that is put in everyday by the biologists, decision makers, fire squad, and even just volunteers. This experience has given me a better understanding of government and federal agencies.

Although I enjoyed pitching in on tasks around the refuge, my main concern was the case study paper and the topic of water management in the swamp. Looking deeper into this, I was able to collaborate with management and hydrologists on site and learn the innerworkings of the Dismal Swamp's water control structures. My focus is on 10 main structures in the Northern and Southern areas of the swamp where water often ends up in the backyards of private property owners. It has been my job to dive into what its like for the refuge and for the cities and counties and to develop recommendations for management between refuge and properties.

This internship has taught me great responsibility and leadership over the course of 15 weeks and 200 hours of work. This opportunity presented to me has given me the ability to work closely with people who do their job everyday to better conserve our life support system and it has been a great honor working along side such powerful and influential people in the US Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as those in the Cities of Chesapeake and Suffolk, and officials in Camden County, North Carolina. The Conservation Leadership minor at ODU has brought forth a hopeful future for me and my future endeavors as I pursue my career in Biology and Conservation.