

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is the state agency responsible for managing the natural and cultural resources of Texas. Through careful planning and administration, TPWD is able to conserve and protect these resources for current and future generations. Laws and regulations regarding wildlife and fisheries in the state are administered through TPWD. Composed of eleven internal divisions, the agency must provide a balance between conserving our resources and allowing for public enjoyment of these same resources. Officially founded in 1963, TPWD has spent the past 50 years working to protect the land and waters of Texas.



Sheldon Lake State Park
 in Houston, Texas.



Aquatic outreach event
 in Texas City, Texas.

Internship Objectives

My primary objective was to show children how to love and appreciate our natural resources, especially children who would not normally gain such an opportunity. A 2012 study conducted by The Outdoor Foundation found only about half of the people surveyed had participated in outdoor activities that year. They also found that 71% of youth and young adult participants were non-Hispanic Caucasian, but only 63% of all Americans were non-Hispanic Caucasian. This indicates a discrepancy between the percentage of minority outdoor participants in relation to their percentage as part of the whole population. The focus of our programs on low income families allowed me to reach new audiences in outdoor education.

Another objective I accomplished was to establish connections with the people I met during the summer, including people at the Dickinson office and elsewhere. These will be good contacts in the future. A final objective was learning and participating in other aspects of the agency.



Aquatic conservation
 booth at Sunnyside
 Community Center in
 Houston, Texas.



Alligator at Sheldon Lake
 State Park in Houston, Texas.



Collecting specimens
 in Friendswood, Texas
 for aquatic outreach
 event.

Description of Experience

My internship with TPWD was located at the Dickinson Marine Lab in Dickinson, Texas. My primary duty was to expose youth to recreational outdoor activities through education and awareness based programs. I conducted events such as Aquatic Education, Archery, and 'Project Wild', programs which allowed children to learn fun ways to enjoy nature. The children I taught were primarily from low-income families, so most of the information regarding outdoor activities was completely new to them. Throughout my internship, I collected data on the relationship many of these kids had with the outdoors and nature. I found the issue is not a lack of wanting to have outdoors exposure, but instead lacking the opportunity to have such experiences.



Family at 'Take Me Fishing'
 event in Texas City, Texas.



Archery lesson in Texas
 City, Texas.

Relationship to Career Goals

By teaching children to love and appreciate nature, my future job will be easier because my efforts will be met with greater public support. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, more than \$1 billion is generated annually by anglers that is used for fisheries conservation and habitat restoration. My career plans include work in coastal habitat restoration. Educating children about outdoors activities will mean greater funding and public interest in my future field.

References

- Outdoor Recreation Participation Report-Topline 2013*. Boulder: The Outdoor Foundation, 2013. Web.
 <<http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchParticipation2013Topline.pdf>>.
- Responsive Management and Southwick Associates. *On the Fence about Fishing-A Study of Why Anglers Do and Don't Fish and What Will Get Them on the Water*. American Sportfishing Association, 2012. Web.
 <http://asafishing.org/uploads/On_the_Fence_About_Fishing_Summary_Report_March_2012.pdf>.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Web. 20 July 2013. <<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us>>.

Acknowledgements

I thank my supervisors Greg Akins, Karen Marks, Nikia Lewis, and Kay Joshua for their support. Thank you to Callie Herrington, Brenda Allen, Debbie Howard, and the other TPWD employees at the Dickinson office who helped me during my internship. Thank you to Kevin Cunningham for helping me with initial contacts, and a final thank you to the public for funding my internship. Sponsors for high impact experiences for BESC and the BESC poster symposium include the Department of Plant Pathology and Microbiology, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs.