

White River National Forest

The White River National Forest is located in the Northwestern region of Colorado, and is the most visited national forest in the entire United States. I worked for the Forest Service out of the Holy Cross Ranger District in Minturn, CO; a town of around 700 people. The Holy Cross Ranger District is in charge of a vast amount of forest land ranging from Vail Pass to Glenwood Canyon, around a 70 mile stretch of land. One of the key attractions in the Ranger District, and is also its namesake, is the Mount of the Holy Cross (picture below). The Mt. of the Holy Cross is the only peak over 14,000 feet in the entire district, and attracts lots of visitors to ascend its peak during the summer months.

There are a lot of different departments that run out of the Holy Cross Ranger District that help to accomplish a lot around the forest. There is a Wilderness Crew, Trails Crew, Fisheries Crew, Timber Crew, and Recreation. I personally got the opportunity to work with the Wilderness Crew this summer, and intern as a Wilderness Ranger. There are three different designated wilderness areas that run out of the Ranger District: the Holy Cross Wilderness, Eagle's Nest Wilderness, and Flat Tops Wilderness.



Mount of the Holy Cross



Maroon Bells Wilderness

Wilderness Intern Objectives

This summer I was a member of the Wilderness Crew at the White River National Forest. It was my objective to help clear the trail within the designated wilderness areas of all the fallen trees. In order to do this we had to use a cross cut saw, as chainsaws and any other sort of mechanized tool is not allowed to be used within the designated wilderness due to the Wilderness Act of 1964.



Cross-cutting a large tree that had fallen through the middle of the trail.

Clearing the trail tended to occupy most of my time during the summer, but I also had various other duties. I helped to clean up old campsites that people had abandoned in the wilderness, engage with the public to inform them of the rules of the wilderness, and to fix and replace old signs on the boundaries of wilderness areas.

The Surreal Experience

My experience as a Wilderness Ranger is one that I would strongly suggest to anyone, whether or not you want to get into government work some day. Every week I spent four days and three nights out, performing the duties I described in the objectives section. After spending about ten hours a day hiking and working, we would set up camp at night and cook food that we had to carry around with us. Being given the opportunity to live almost primitively this summer was truly a fun and memorable experience. Outside of the camping and backpacking I really enjoyed my work, as it certainly challenged me physically and even mentally at times. I learned a lot about the ecology and environment of Colorado, and got to see many rare species of animal in their natural habitat. Most of all though, I got to engage my inner-naturalist for an entire summer.



Camping at Treasure Vault Lake after a long day of work



The endangered pika was spotted on top of Notch Mountain.

Relationship to Career Goals

This internship was very helpful to me, as I have always considered going into government work, especially through the U.S. Forest Service or the National Park Service. I made a lot of good connections with various forest rangers up in Minturn, CO; and I believe those connections will be helpful in the future. What I took away the most from this internship experience was all of the useful skills that I gained; such as using a cross-cut saw amongst many other tools, useful tips when it comes to backpacking and backcountry cooking, and how to handle disgruntled forest visitors!

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