

KRAA Interns Wrap Up Sunny Summer, Head Back to Sunshine State

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Elizabeth Fata (left) and Heather Sadusky open the weir at Monashka Creek to check king salmon collected as brood stock for Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association. Brianna Gibbs/KMXT photo

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For the past two months, Elizabeth Fata and Heather Sadusky have been living in a trailer at the head of Monashka Bay, near white sands beach. They aren't squatters, and they certainly aren't tourists camping out for the summer. The two are actually interns with Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association and have been living in the field to better monitor king salmon, or as Sadusky explains, manage the weir.

"You know if you've ever been out there and looked up the river you can see this strange metal structure. And it's actually a trap for king salmon. And so we are stationed out there to collect the brood stock which is kind of like the family that will create more salmon in the future. So we're collecting males and females and we will be harvesting them in the beginning of August, so, like I said, to make more salmon for the future. Probably five years from now these ones will start returning."

The two are both from Florida, but met each other for the first time when they touched down in Kodiak. In fact, they actually went to rival schools — Sadusky is a Seminole at Florida State and Fata a former Gator at University of Florida. But regardless of collegiate rivalries, the two have spent what they call an incredible summer monitoring and collecting king salmon, surveying fishermen and creating outreach materials for KRAA to use in months and years to come.

While Alaska has had an exceptionally sunny summer, it's still quite different from the real sunshine state. Both said those differences were what attracted them to work in the last frontier. They said the entire experience has been quite the adventure, especially learning about daily life in Kodiak.

"People are like 'oh, we took the floatplane out this afternoon to go fishing at some remote lake.' That's an expedition, that's a crazy experience for me. Even though, being from Florida, we have a lot of water and everything, I mean we have a lot of fish just like up here, it's a very different life style. It's much more centered around the resources here I'd probably say. Yeah, it's not really work for us. It's fun. We got here and I think both of us were just amazed by all the eagles everywhere. We're still pointing them out to each other. We've been here for two months and we're still like, 'oh, eagle.' Yeah, it's just been really an adventure."

Aside from the scenery and adventure, Sadusky said working with KRAA was an incredible glimpse into fisheries management and support.

"I was looking for this type of thing in Florida, before I was offered this position here. And it was kind of frustrating that it doesn't really exist so much in Florida. I mean, I've never seen a hatchery. I've never seen any form of aquaculture operation. So this is so interesting to see it in action and to be actually working with it. It's a little disappointing to compare to Florida because we could certainly use some aquaculture for our fisheries down there. But it's just so amazing that so much can be done by us in order to aid the natural system."

Fata agreed and said she absolutely expects to use what she learned in Kodiak throughout life.

"Yeah for me this is great because I'm going back to school in August, I'm going to law school and part of what I want to do is environmental law and I really want to work with regulations and fisheries and things like that. So this is fantastic for me because I got to come up here, get my feet wet and really have an amazing example of how these things are run and regulations and the problems and the pros and different ways to do it. And I can now take that back to Florida and apply it to our problems and the issues that we have and the management that we need down there."

The two were hired for the internship with KRAA through the Student Conservation Association, an online resource for internships that focus on the environment, conservation and sustainability.

The girls leave Kodiak this week, unfortunately before the king salmon they helped capture are harvested for eggs on August 10. They said they did have an opportunity to visit the Kitoi Hatchery during the chum salmon egg take, so in a way they were able to see the operation come full circle. As for a return to the emerald isle, both have more schooling on the horizon, so probably won't be making another visit anytime soon. But who knows, maybe like the chinook they collected this summer, Kodiak can expect the interns' and the salmon's return in

another five or six years.