

Refuge Interns Share Summer Experiences on TOTR

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

If someone is interested in nature, and looking for a summer internship, Kodiak is a pretty swell place to set their sights on. Each summer dozens of internship opportunities pop up across the island offering plenty of adventures and unique experiences. Take for instance the five budding biologists and naturalists that interned with the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge this year. Shelly Lawson is the environmental education specialist for the refuge and said the internships are part of the Youth Conservation Corps, which usually focuses on trails and maintenance.

“And they have them across the nation at national park services and wildlife refuges and other agencies like that. And here in Kodiak since our refuge is off the road system, we don’t have a lot of access to our maintenance cabins out in the field, and trails, we don’t have a lot of trails in the refuge. So our work, YCC program, is a little bit different, it’s really diverse. So they get to go out in the field but then they also work here in town and help with outreach and education.”

The YCC crew spoke on KMXT’s Talk of The Rock, and recent Kodiak High School graduate Leila Pyle said they did get to spend a substantial amount of time out in the refuge at different remote sites.

“Our first trip was to Dead Man Bay, which is on the south end of the island and the refuge has a public use cabin there that we did maintenance on. And we also traveled to Frazer Lake, to the fish pass, and we stayed in the same compound as the ADFG that runs the weir there. And our last trip was to Camp Island on Karluk Lake, which is where the refuge has a field station, research station where people stay all summer. And there’s research projects going on out there that we helped with.”

The interns are typically out at each location for about a week, weather permitting. The entire internship lasts nine weeks, and encompasses a lot of work in town, especially with youth activities. The crew got to help with some of the WILD programs the refuge put on, and with Salmon Camp, which almost ceased to exist because of budget cuts related to sequestration.

Lawson said the same was true for YCC, but some last minute donors

and fundraising made both Salmon Camp and the YCC internship program possible.

“This year was pretty unique, with some issues that were going on with budget sequestration. And I don’t know what next year is going to hold. Prior to that we’ve had a lot of funding and support from the region and Washington D.C. for youth programs, and I’m hoping that will continue. But this winter I might be researching more grant opportunities, which is what we used to do with Salmon Camp and other programs. So we might be researching that this year and just having a back up plan in case it keeps going in this direction.”

As for this year, the crew worked on various projects while out in the field, a lot doing with maintenance of public use cabins, which are cabins available for rent throughout the refuge that offer anglers, sightseers and recreators a lodging place during out of town adventures. Anelise Zimmer is also a Kodiak graduate, but heading into her second year of school at Willamette University in Oregon. She participated in YCC in the past, and this year came back as a crew leader.

“Overall, just seeing how we grew together as a group and were able to work together at the end of the season really well. For example while we were moving an outhouse, we didn’t have very many tools while we were at the North Frazer cabin, and so we all worked together really well to figure out how to move it, because it was dug very far into the ground. It was a very unusual outhouse in my experience. But we actually ended up moving it, the person that was with us didn’t think we would be able to, and we ended up doing it, which I thought was awesome just to use our brain power and then our physical power to move it.”

Part of the internship requires the interns produce a short film about their summer experience. Those films will be shown tonight at the visitor center starting at 5:30 p.m. Anyone is welcome to attend and learn more about the YCC experience.