Saving Seabirds and Wildlife

SCA Interns Respond to Gulf Crisis

For SCA intern Jennifer Raabe, the Gulf of Mexico isn't just an assignment. It is her home.

The Mississippi native still lives in Long Beach and serves at nearby Gulf Islands National Seashore, an area under siege from the BP oil spill. “Petit Bois Island was the first to see large numbers of tar balls. They were fresh, more oily than rubbery,” Jennifer says. Early on, the dead birds and turtles she found showed no sign of oil, raising concerns that chemical dispersants as well as the crude were taking a toll. Now, she notes, “every barrier island I’ve been to lately has large amounts of oil on its shores.”

Jennifer, 23, began monitoring ospreys and other nesting seabirds before the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Since then, she’s undergone hours of hazardous materials training and now uses a hotline to summon rescuers to oiled wildlife. “Seeing it firsthand makes me feel physically sick,” Jennifer confesses. “The seafood industry—so many people's livelihoods are at stake. The beach—it's what I've known my whole life. Now it's closed. And I know once all the oil comes in it will impact us for years to come.”

Intern Elizabeth Lesley took a leave from her position at a Texas refuge to assist federal wildlife rescue and recovery teams along the Alabama-Florida coast, where she helped retrieve dozens of injured wildlife. “I feel really good about the surviving birds we've captured and sent to rehab because most were able to be set free,” says Elizabeth. “At the same time, I feel kind of helpless as oil keeps coming.”

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At the Unified Area Command office in New Orleans, SCA's Peter White, Jr. creates status maps as part of a federal cartography team. He also transferred from his previous internship to support the Gulf response. “We get many requests for maps each day from the Coast Guard, Navy, Homeland Security, and other agencies,” Peter notes. “The data are so dynamic. We have to keep things as up-to-date as possible to ensure that resources are properly allocated.”

On Florida's east coast, SCA interns Nicole Wutzke-Moore and Christopher Reddin have been pulled from normal duties at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge to conduct wildlife

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You've reminded him of Muir’s wisdom many times during this crisis, which has dramatically magnified the interconnection among corporate actions, government policy, global ecosystems and families’ futures. Yet I have also been reminded of the resolve and resilience of our young people. No sooner had the oil started flowing when the emails and phone calls began: “How can I help? Where do you need me? When can I start?”

Since the spill first occurred, SCA has been consulting with our federal resource management partners including the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others, to offer our support. Understandably, the Gulf states’ initial priority has been hiring local residents who have been financially impacted by the spill. Our planning, therefore, is focused on a long-term restoration effort.

As you will read in this report, however, a number of SCA interns were already serving in the Gulf when the spill occurred. Many of them have seen their responsibilities revised to support the response. Their willingness to embrace these changes and take on new responsibilities is inspiring and reflects the eagerness of all SCA members to do whatever is necessary to meet the need.

I have also been heartened to hear from so many other friends who are grateful for the efforts of SCA members and keenly interested in getting behind a formal spill response program. I will be sure to keep you informed of our progress in this area as we will need the support of the entire SCA community to repair the horrific damage in the Gulf.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, not to react emotionally to this catastrophe with frustration, alarm and anger. Along the Florida coast, however, SCA intern Nicole Moore may possess the most useful perspective. “We can’t just sit around and fume—we must take action,” she says. “I’m focused on what I can do to make this situation better.”

So must we all.

Victor Gollub, SCA ‘10, Dallas Community Conservation Crew
How are you adapting to the So-Cal climate and living in a tent? It’s all great. I’ve wanted to visit Cali since I was 10. As for sleeping outside, I expected there to be some adjustment and though I was prepared, but those first nights under the stars were a bit scary.

What kinds of projects have you completed? We’ve done trail work on the Pacific Crest Trail, rebuilt picnic tables destroyed in the fire, refurbished campsites, and recently dug out a campsite covered by a mudslide.

Your major is mechanical engineering. So, what drew you to SCA? I love the outdoors and SCA seemed like a great way to feed my passion and make a difference. It has only been five weeks and already we’ve made a huge impact here.

For more alumni stories and profiles, visit thesca.org/blog

We are “family!” We are Acadia crew.

Trail names are a popular part of hiking culture—but they’re usually assigned to people, not wooden planks.

Establish a deferred gift annuity with SCA and you will save taxes now, enhance your retirement income later and make a difference forever by helping to build new generations of conservation leaders.

SCA founder honored with Spirit of Vassar Award. In June, SCA founder Elizabeth Cushman Titus Putnam saw the past, present and future converge as she not only accepted the prestigious Spirit of Vassar Award from her alma mater, but also met with Hannah Clark and Jason Carter, the first interns to work at Vassar Farm and Ecological Preserve. As Land Stewardship and Research interns, Hannah and Jason are working on several major projects to protect the Vassar Ecological Preserve and promote its use as an educational resource.

The Spirit of Vassar Award is given by the college annually to an individual or group whose volunteer efforts exemplify an enduring spirit of community and caring.

In exchange for your gift (minimum $5,000), you will receive a set dollar amount each year, beginning on a future date you specify and continuing for life. The longer you wait for your payments to begin, the higher the rate you will receive.

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Example: Donate $10,000 at age 65 with payments to begin at age 70. Once payments begin, you will get $720/year (7.2%).

You will also get an immediate income tax deduction for a portion of the value of your gift. This can help offset tax from a Roth IRA conversion or high income.

For further information, please contact Hugh Montgomery, SCA’s Director of Gift Planning, directly at 603.504.3241 or hmontgomery@thesca.org.

Rake in Retirement Income Later... and Take a Tax Deduction Now

Student Conservation Association

SCA crew members put their backs and hearts into rebuilding and restoring popular hiking trails at Acadia National Park.
The Case of the Curious Detectives
by Tasha Frazier, SCA ’10, Visitor Services Intern,
Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge

As two big yellow school buses came slowly down the gravel road, filled with excited and smiling second graders, it was clear that today was not going to be another typical Monday at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Thurgood Marshall Elementary had come to spend the morning and learn about what we do here. They quickly filed off the buses and ran towards the entrance of the Visitor Center, full of energy after their 45-minute drive. Staff biologist Gabe Harper, a former SCA intern, greeted the students who inched in close, hanging onto every word.

I hoped the students wouldn’t be distracted by me snapping away with my camera. They were filled with questions about snakes and fishing. They became even more engaged when Gabe announced that they would be broken into three groups around in the air and swimming around in the pond. The “Detective” group was given nets and told to go down to the sand to find 17 “turtle eggs.” Boy, did their eyes light up eager to learn how things came to be.

The “Scavengers” group had to go out onto the beach and do a simulation of a turtle crawl, where they had to dig through the sand to find 17 “turtle eggs.” The “Detective” group, which we referred to as the “Cool” group because they didn’t have to be outside in the heat, was tasked with watching a movie inside the air-conditioned Visitor Center about sea turtles and ocean animals here on the refuge and then to go outside to observe and learn. It was refreshing to know that children today are still fascinated by the great outdoors and eager to learn how things came to be.

The typical 100° heat didn’t bother the kids in the least; they were all about learning. One young girl named Unique asked me if any of the snakes would bite her. I chuckled and told her that “the snakes won’t bother you if you don’t bother them, but don’t worry I’ll be here so everything will be okay.” She asked several more questions, some I didn’t know the answer to, but her inquisitiveness warmed my heart. It was refreshing to know that today are still fascinated by the great outdoors and eager to learn how things came to be.

The most common challenges cited were the public’s sense of ownership of public lands, land access and funding, all of which were seen as lacking. Schools don’t include outdoor education in their curricula. Property owners are required to carry expensive liability insurance to open their lands to the public. Limited funding restricts parkland development, outdoor education, and public/private partnerships. Most participants felt they are fighting an uphill battle for our nation’s greatest treasures—the lands that inspired our country’s greatness.

A second session with Park and Forest Service officials focused on those of us pursuing outdoor careers. Where did we want to see conservation in 20 years? What did we want to change? Where is the federal government succeeding and where is it missing the ball?

This discussion centered on education and the need to engage children and community. I come from just outside San Francisco, where people generally support the green movement but where there is not an abundance of public land. Now, however, I am serving in Idaho and living in a national forest. I love waking up to vast mountain ranges, creeks and rivers, and wandering wildlife.

I recommended we inspire people by using whatever resources their home communities have to offer. In California, non everyone has the means and opportunity to travel hours to see Tahoe or Yosemite, so it’s important to incorporate the local outdoors. If that means a community garden, plant one. If it means restoring a local park, get the community behind it and let them see the tangible results and take pride in their accomplishment.

Afterwards, my SCA mates and I met with Tom Tidwell, U.S. Forest Service Chief, and Jon Jarvis, Director of the National Park Service. We talked about our work in the Salmon-Challis National Forest. Director Jarvis personally thanked me for my comments.

As a SCA intern, I’ve learned so many things so I’d like to share one of them with you. I was a part of a group of interns that was part of the Missoula, Montana, “Great Outdoors” listening session, following a “Great Outdoors” listening session, part of a new Obama Administration campaign to reconnect Americans to nature and expand volunteer opportunities. SCA interns Ashley Stremme was there (far left, in photo).

We—rangers, hunters, college students, conservationists and others—were given color-coded nametags as we entered the University of Montana auditorium. I was assigned to the Blue Team, a discussion group that included Montana residents, nonprofit leaders, Montana Conservation Corps staffers, a local congressman’s representative, and several SCA colleagues.

We were given, stirs my excitement for the future of conservation. But appreciative of the work SCA is doing here in Idaho. The time is missing the ball?...

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I am thankful that officials who have important jobs and places to be—Jarvis was headed back to the oil-ravaged Gulf immediately following our session—were not only aware, but appreciative of the work SCA is doing here in Idaho. The genuine respect and interest we were shown, and validation we were given, stirs my excitement for the future of conservation and I am thrilled to know that I will be a part of making it happen.

You can submit your ideas or stories about conservation online at: http://doi.gov/americasgreatoutdoors
Ever wondered what it’s like to spend the summer on assignment with SCA?

Follow Leah, Eli, and Adrian as they build trails in the backcountry of Massachusetts and Alaska, save turtles at a wildlife refuge in Virginia and preserve an historic Anasazi site in New Mexico. We hope you’ll be inspired by their energy and creativity, and by their commitment to improving our natural places.

The journey begins at thesca.org/follow-me

Save the Sea Turtles

SCA to begin sea turtle recovery process! For more information and to apply visit thesca.org.