

Ali Bailey

Food and Ag Projects: Spring 2022

Thurston Conservation District Community Outreach Internship

Mid-Quarter Self-Evaluation

For my final quarter at Evergreen, I enrolled in Food and Ag Projects for a capstone experience serving as a Community Outreach Intern with Thurston Conservation District. I intentionally designed my internship contract learning objectives to be broad and inclusive, allowing for a variety of experiences and the flexibility to dive into any emerging areas of interest. During the first five weeks of the quarter, I've attended and helped facilitate multiple outreach and educational events, including South Sound Regional Envirothon for high school students, an Earth Day trash clean-up event with Teens in Thurston, a Healthy Yards tabling event at an active senior community, and a Southwest Washington Grazing Association meeting. I've designed a resource guide for agricultural plastic recycling options in the region, signs and awards for Envirothon, and an informational guide for the Annual Native Plant Sale. I've also had the opportunity to attend a staff meeting which coincided with a site visit to a local goat dairy farm which recently installed a manure filtration system with TCD's technical assistance to protect the wetlands on their property.

A few weeks ago, my field supervisor and I decided that for part of my capstone experience, I would coordinate the May Teens in Thurston event. One of the main activities I identified in my learning contract was to assist staff with planning and coordination of outreach and educational events, and this opportunity will help me gain skills in event coordination and leadership, especially for youth education and engagement. For this event, TnT members will participate in Center for Natural Land Management's annual Prairie Appreciation Day at Glacial Heritage Reserve, learning about prairie restoration, ecology, and conservation grazing and participation. My previous experience working with JBLM Fish and Wildlife as a prairie restoration intern and biological technician will help with leading a scotch broom pulling activity as well.

To support my experiences and expand my understanding of agricultural economics, history, and relationship to conservation, I've read *Farm (and Other F Words): The Rise and Fall of the Small Family Farm* by Sarah K. Mock and most of *The Farm as Natural Habitat* edited by Dana L. Jackson and Laura L. Jackson. Through Mock's book, I've found myself especially drawn towards learning more about collective farming, Indigenous foodways, the protection and sustainable management of common-pool resources, ecological and social justice at the food-water-energy nexus, and equitable opportunities for beginning farmers. Wishing to deepen my learning about commons and collective management of natural resources, I also have read *The Uncommon Knowledge of Elinor Ostrom* by Erik Nordman. These emerging interests and passion for community-led conservation efforts have helped me define more specific goals for the last five weeks of the quarter.

In addition to coordinating TnT's involvement in Prairie Appreciation Day, I will spend the next few weeks getting more involved in supporting the South Sound FarmLink program, which matches agricultural landowners looking to lease or sell with beginning farmers seeking land. I will reorganize the participant database and redesign some of the applicant forms, as the current system is outdated and difficult to use. Hopefully, the incoming Veterans Conservation Corps intern, who will be taking on a leading role in FarmLink, will benefit from this work. I will continue seeking opportunities to lay groundwork for a renewed chapter of interest in participation in FarmLink, especially regarding future enrollment campaigns for landowners.

I've been fortunate to experience a vast range of communications and outreach work at TCD already. Alongside my other current internship with the City of Olympia's Climate Program, as well as reflecting on my past experiences, including my Bachelor's of Science capstone research in Freshwater Ecology and Hydrology, helping to establish the co-curricular community garden in Spring 2021, and the various institutions (informal and formal) governing natural resources I've encountered during previous internships, I find my interests and passions coming into full focus halfway through my final quarter at Evergreen. Immersing myself in local agricultural and conservation communities, organizations, and initiatives while critically examining broader contexts in which our

decisions and options exist has shown me that I want to pursue further education studying social-ecological systems with a focus on environmental policy and governance.

While deepening my understanding of the complex factors that drive American food systems and natural resource management, I find myself with more questions every day, and a paradoxical dual feeling of urgency and hope. How can communities equitably transform the governance of our common-use resources, especially water? How can we increase access to land and resources for young regenerative farmers without perpetuating fundamentally broken concepts of ownership? In the face of a rapidly changing climate and suburbanizing landscape, there is not much time to ponder these vital questions. However, I've found a multitude of examples of how communities have solved these problems and averted disaster, and I must believe that enough people are willing to learn from the past and find our own answers, together.