I spent 12 weeks working for Sierra Pacific Industries as a Forest Technician during the summer of 2012. Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) is a third-generation family-owned forest products company based in Anderson, California. SPI owns and manages nearly 1.9 million acres of timberland in California and Washington, and is the second largest lumber producer in the United States. I worked with a team of 12 individuals from all over the United States to perform inventory and analysis of the properties owned by this great company.

My job as a Forest Technician consisted of many different task and goals that changed daily and week to week. My main job as a Forest Technician was to “cruise timber”. To accomplish this job, I would be given a map with pinpoints and locations where I would need to locate and create permanent survey points, measure trees, analyze wildlife habitat, note landscape position, as well as collect course woody debris data for carbon sequestration information.

Each day would consist of coordinating with my team on where we would be cruising and where we would meet at the end of the day. We would either work by ourselves or with a partner depending on the number of plots needed to be established for that day and the location. Good communication skills were a must. Teamwork and communication skills were improved and sharpened throughout these 12 weeks. Each day there were many challenges that were faced both physically and mentally. Some adventures and physical challenges include climbing a 75 percent sloped hill with nothing but manzanita and buck brush in the understory or crossing a class one stream that comes up to your shoulders! Being able to overcome adversity and always being on your “A” game was a big part of the day to day task because you never know what you’re going to run into while being in the woods (bears, snakes, etc).
During this 12 week internship I acquired an immense amount of knowledge about what it takes to run a successful and prosperous forestry company. Sierra Pacific is a family owned and operated company. They really care about the people that work for them and strive to make each relationship personal and meaningful. SPI also is one of the leading “GREEN” forestry companies striving to use clean energy through the use of biomass and wind turbines on all of their mills throughout the state of California. This just goes to show that even in a competitive industry doing the right things through relationships and being up-to-date on technology allows for great things to follow in the future.

In my day to day task I specifically learned all about the Western tree species, tree measuring, landscape analysis techniques and skills, wildlife habitat in the West, as well as the challenges of working with 12 very different people. This summer was one of the greatest experiences I have ever had. I learned and enjoyed amazing places and things I was able to explore while living and working in Western United States. A key skill that I was able to acquire while working this summer was teamwork and a sense of the real world. Teamwork was a huge part of my day to day task with our team of 12 people and my sense of the real world came with my 7am to 5pm work hours and living in an apartment in a neighboring city. All of this was such an amazing experience and truly allowed me to see what amazing opportunities there are out there. This internship also showed me what I am made of and the potential skills I can bring to the table for a company. My leadership and being confident in what I am doing allowed me to be successful and have fun. Sewanee and the many things that this great University has to offer (football, Cru, etc) has allowed me to be at the top of my game when it comes to competing against others.

This summer SPI gave me and my fellow co-workers many tasks and projects throughout our 12 weeks. We would have a new goal and objective each day; this allowed us to focus on the task at hand and strive to succeed. I would receive a map and a task each day when I got to the office. After receiving this information I would then coordinate with the co-workers to plan the most efficient route for the day and coordinate beginning and ending destinations. Once we reached the locations it was up to each and
every individual to be accountable and be in the right spot at the time designated; it got pretty hectic at times, but by the end we were all well-oiled machines.

The amount of high points in my experience out West in Northern California outweighs the lows exponentially. I’ll start with the lows because there aren’t many at all. One of the lows would have to be when I would be hiking all day and then all of a sudden come to an area that I had to cross to finish my line and it was either a 85 degree slope with a 20 foot slash pile in the middle of it or crossing a class one stream that comes up to your shoulders at the beginning of the day. These lows aren’t too bad just something that added to the element of intensity of the field work. I have so many high points and learning experiences from this summer I could actually probably write a small novel about them but I’ll try to keep it so a couple sentences! One of my favorite things that I enjoyed was the people that I worked with, and how different we all were. We all were from all over the United States like: Montana, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Minnesota, and Georgia. This was so great because we all had similar interest in forestry but all of us come from different walks of life and backgrounds. Another high point was being able to actually live and learn about another geographic area other than the Southeastern United States. Being able to see it live and be in the landscapes and tree species everyday helped to engrain what I had learned in class or in a book in my mind.

Another great thing that I was able to do is explore and travel on the weekends. Within a 250 mile radius of Redding where I was living, my co-workers and I were able to venture out and see, fish, and climb everything. This allowed me to see and do things that I honestly had not dreamed possible when preparing to leave for the summer. We actually did almost everything that was physically possible! From climbing a 14,179 foot Mount Shasta to catching 18 inch rainbow trout on a fly rod and camping out on the beach on the Pacific Coast the adventures were endless and spectacular!

This internship truly was a once in a life time experience and I highly recommend anyone to step out of your comfort zone and venture out into a different part of the world and explore the vast and
endless adventures that are offered today. Thanks to Sewanee and the great programs and connections that it has; I was able to receive financial help that made all of this possible. This internship not only reinforced my decision of being a forestry major; but it has allowed me to pinpoint exactly what I want to do in the near future. Knowing this has allowed me to be confident and know what exactly what I need to do in the near future in grad school or in the work force whichever one comes first. I am very grateful for the opportunity and experience that I able to have this summer! Without the help of Career Services and my forestry professors this would have never happened. Thanks again for everything and I hope this has allowed you to have a better understanding of what I did this summer and the greatness that came out of it.