This summer I interned at Camp Capers, a summer camp associated with the West Texas Episcopal Diocese, in Waring, Texas. My primary position was as a land management intern, although I was part of camp program staff and had other duties associated with that position.

Camp Capers is situated on 80 acres in Hill Country on the Guadalupe River. Many of the trees on the property had succumbed to oak wilt over the past few years, and the camp was in the process of replacing them. The other Sewanee intern and I were first tasked with taking inventory of new and notable trees on the property, filling out hazard reports, and marking trees for future management. Many of the trees on the property had been planted in poorly chosen sites, and, in some cases irrigation, had not been properly maintained. After taking camp priorities into account, we placed most of our focus on tagging problem trees that presented a liability to property or safety of campers and on finding practical management solutions to improving the health of existing trees. Suggestions for future planting were included in a final management plan.

Our main task actually turned out to be the construction of a freestanding limestone retaining wall in an area that had recently undergone construction, leading to streamside erosion. This required us to research retaining wall construction and suitable native erosion control species, haul limestone from a pile of leftover construction materials across the camp, and then actually build the wall. Neither of us had any experience with this type of construction, and the bank that we were working on was very steep; however, we managed to build a retaining wall with four terraces that has so far proved effective and is aesthetically pleasing. We planted American beautyberry, pigeon berry, and red Turk’s cap on various levels of the wall. All of these are native erosion control species and encourage the presence of wildlife.
Our other tasks included tending to the camp garden, assisting with various camp activities, and occasionally subbing for counselors.

As an independent project, I built and placed seven birdhouses around the camp, as well as a donated bat house.

I think that the greatest skill that I gained through this internship was practical labor skills and self-management. The tasks that I had to accomplish required the use of many different tools and skills that I was unfamiliar with until now. I had never touched a saw until I began building birdhouses. Now, I can use nearly every tool in Camp Capers’ sizeable shop. The retaining wall was also a progressive learning experience and surpassed any expectations.

My partner and I were mostly unsupervised so we were often in charge of our own schedule and self-motivated. We both kept to our tasks and made sure that our goals were completely satisfactorily with or without supervision. It was a great practice in duty and willpower, since one does not often wake up wanting to carry 40-60 pound rocks down stairs in extreme heat.

Despite the sometimes difficult nature of my work, it was accompanied by a great sense of accomplishment. It was rewarding to have a concrete result to my labor and to feel that I was learning new skills. I was recently very pleased to discover that I can lift 80 pounds without too much effort. I definitely owe this discovery to my labor at camp.

There were some ways in which the internship could be made better for future interns. This was the first year that Camp Capers had Sewanee interns, so it is understandable that the internship has some issues to work out. The most noticeable problem we had was a lack of inclusivity. We were dropped into orientation with no knowledge of camp tradition, while all of the other counselors and staff had known each other for quite some time. This most likely would
have been remedied with time if the two of us were able to be more involved with camp. We were not ropes course or lifeguard certified, and most of the camp did not know our duties or purpose. Our forestry professor from Sewanee had suggested most of our tasks; the camp did not have many clear goals for us. A lot of the time it felt as though the camp had little to no investment in our jobs, and it made it difficult for us to be invested and also to work with the camp. We have spoken to the camp management about future improvements to the internship should it be continued, and I believe that there is still potential for Sewanee interns at Camp Capers.

Overall, I had a positive internship experience. I learned a lot of practical skills, and I think that nature of my work enforced my current career plans to work in either the park service or with another conservation organization. I found the physical labor, no matter how tiresome to be more rewarding than indoor work, and I enjoyed having a concrete effect on the camp. I would recommend this internship to anyone interested in land management and practical conservation solutions and who is comfortable with hard work.
Dear Ms. Webb,

Attached is my internship report.

Best,
Kristin Stockton

"With all of its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams,
it is still a beautiful world.
Be cheerful. Strive to be happy."

--Max Ehrmann
Desiderata