

Skylah Reis  
End of Summer Reflection

This summer I worked with the Buzzards Bay Coalition, a watershed policy, management, and outreach group based out of New Bedford, MA. Thanks to generous funding from the Harvard Club of Cape Cod I was given the opportunity to act as the Buzzard Bay Coalition's "on-island" environmental monitoring intern on Cuttyhunk Island, MA. The Buzzards Bay Coalition recently acquired 68 acres of land on Cuttyhunk and placed these lands under conservation restriction. I was assigned four independent projects that were all focused on gaining a better scientific understanding of these properties.

My first project was an upland plant community documentation, mapping, and restoration project. It was my job to design and conduct a plot method protocol to appropriately document the vegetative species (herbaceous, shrub, and woody) that live within the conservation area. Once I had gathered the species information from all of my designated plots, I used my findings to research appropriate native plant restoration methods. As the Coalition begins to manage these lands, my findings will inform their future restoration approaches. For my second project, I developed a monitoring and management plan for a unique species of sea duck, the American Common Eider, which uses Cuttyhunk as nesting and feeding habitat. Eider populations have never been studied in depth on Cuttyhunk. This summer, I was able to collect initial population and behavioral data by implementing year one of my monitoring plan. Third, I worked with the Coalition to plan, create, and maintain trails and public friendly areas on their newly acquired lands. This also involved a research project on the natural histories and resources of Cuttyhunk. Finally, I maintained a public boat pump-out station to prevent boat waste discharge into Cuttyhunk Harbor.

It was a challenge to be the only Coalition employee on island and have to receive all of my instructions remotely. It was also a challenge to connect with the Cuttyhunk community because of COVID safety regulations. Nonetheless, I was able to accomplish all four projects, connect virtually with my mentors at the Coalition and develop some relationships with those living on Cuttyhunk (from a safe distance, of course).

This summer fellowship exceeded my expectations. All of my past internships have allowed me little creative input and involved many binding instructions. This summer I was able to conduct real, independent science-based projects that I largely designed. My goal to walk away from this summer with an understanding of how to create and conduct a "real-life" conservation project was most definitely achieved. Additionally, the knowledge I have gained working with the Coalition has inspired me to take an advanced ecology and experimental design course this fall. If I had not produced the work I did this summer, I would be completely unprepared for this course.

I feel incredibly grateful for this opportunity and, as I have told many people throughout the summer, if I were to curate my perfect internship it would be wildly similar to my experience working with the Buzzards Bay Coalition on Cuttyhunk. This amazing summer would not have been possible without the support of the Harvard Club of Cape Cod, and I am incredibly grateful to all at the Club for allowing me such an immersive and informative learning experience.