

November 13, 2021

Experience report: Pacific Northwest Salmonid Veterinary Externship Program

AAFV Scholarship

Dear AAFV Scholarship Committee,

Thank you for choosing me as one of the 2021 AAFV Student Scholarship recipients. Because of your generosity, I was able to participate in the Pacific Northwest Salmonid Veterinary Externship Program (PNWSVEP) October 4th – 15th, 2021. I wanted to participate in this externship specifically because the focus was salmonids. Prior to veterinary school, I contributed to research on salmon breeding habitats and freshwater biodiversity. These experiences led me to pursue a Master's degree at the University of Washington, where I studied fisheries ecology, restoration, and management. In the Pacific Northwest, salmon are a keystone species of the native environment, but also extremely important to the local and traditional culture of the region, and a source of economic livelihood. My goals for the externship were to learn how veterinarians support this species in both conservation and production.

My veterinary mentors with PNWSVEP, Dr. Betsy Bamberger, Dr. Nora Hickey, and Dr. Katherine Onofryton, faced several challenges due to COVID while hosting me, and they did a wonderful job making the externship an enjoyable and valuable experience. I spent most of my time with Dr. Hickey and Dr. Onofryton at the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission in Lacey WA. With them, I was able to visit four different salmon hatcheries: White River Salmon Hatchery and Keta Creek Hatchery managed by the Muckleshoot Tribe, and Grover's Creek Hatchery and Gorst Rearing Ponds managed by the Suquamish Tribe. I was very surprised to see how different each hatchery was. Dr. Hickey and Dr. Onofryton walked me through the systems that each hatchery employed to house, rear, and spawn their fish, discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each system from a veterinary perspective. I learned how to do population level health assessments, how to necropsy individual fish, and how to collect samples for specific disease screening.



Working with the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission was extremely rewarding. At White River Salmon Hatchery, I got to help with spawning Spring Run Chinook, which are listed on the Endangered Species List. It was very cool to see how much work and care went into rearing these fish every year, with the suspense of wondering how many of the thousands of juveniles that get released would make it back 3-4 years later to spawn again. I also got to see how the hatcheries support



their local communities. At Grover's Creek Hatchery, they had finished their spawning season and I got to see them donating extra fish to members of their community. Seeing these programs really reinforced how important hatcheries are to salmon in the Pacific Northwest and to the communities who rely on them.

Unfortunately, I wasn't able to work with Dr. Bamberger at the Douglas County Public Utilities District in Wenatchee, WA as originally planned. However, my mentors arranged for me to still meet Dr. Bamberger as well as another fish veterinarian, Dr. Megan Finley, from the Washington Department of Fish and Game. We had a great

conversation about the advantages and disadvantages of using hatcheries to support native fish restoration. We also spoke extensively about each of their career paths, how they decided to go into aquaculture, and the advantages and disadvantages of this particular field of veterinary medicine. My time doing site visits and meeting with my mentors was supplemented with didactic lectures, which I felt really rounded out my experience and gave me the opportunity to learn more about aspects of fish medicine that I didn't see in person. I learned about water quality, drugs used in aquaculture and the laws and regulations surrounding their use, and common fish diseases and how to treat them.

Overall, I had a wonderful experience. My mentors were knowledgeable and also kind, friendly, and encouraging of my interests. I feel lucky to have been able to get such a good view into an underrepresented but important field of veterinary medicine. I would definitely recommend the Pacific Northwest Salmonid Veterinary Externship Program to other veterinary students curious about aquaculture.

Through this experience, I have made connections that I will keep as I graduate and move forward in my career. AAFV Scholarship Committee, thank you so much for supporting my interest in fish medicine.

Sincerely,



Tala Woodward

North Carolina State University class of 2022

