

NEWS

New Employee to Join Visitor Services Team

By Michael Dixon

It's confirmed! We recently received official confirmation that Melissa Perez has accepted the offer and will soon be joining the Visitor Services team here at Chincoteague Refuge. We are all very excited and cannot wait for Melissa and her husband to arrive later this summer.

Her strong background in interpretation and environmental education, combined with a love of natural resources, especially salt marsh estuaries and barrier island ecosystems, will add depth to our existing program.

Melissa brings with her a wealth of knowledge in interpretation of natural and cultural resources through her previous experiences with the National Park Service. She has worked at both Gulf Islands National Seashore and Vicksburg National Military Park.

Her leadership capabilities have only been bolstered by the complex issues, challenging projects, and unique partnerships she was assigned to manage while working at the Bureau of Land Management's Sloan Canyon National Conservation Area.

I am sure you are all eager to know more, but that will have to wait until her arrival.

To best capture the essence of this moment, it would be fitting to borrow song lyrics from *Survivor*, a band founded in 1977, whose popular lyrics quietly exclaimed... "*The Search Is Over.*"



The Adventures of a Visitors Services Intern

By Megan Fox

Before arriving at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge, the job description "visitor services intern" left much to the imagination. Coming from a solid background in field biology, I was eager to explore a new way of passing on my love of nature to other people, but what would I be doing? Would I be hiking over huge dunes, leading eager young children in search of the elusive wild ponies? Or would I engage inquisitive visitors in an interpretive bird walk? While some things dreamed have become reality, the title "visitor services intern" has encompassed so much more than I ever imagined and has become a wonderful adventure into the world of barrier islands.

Not three days into my new job I went out on the northern end of Wild Beach with the biologists to help necropsy (an animal autopsy) a dead humpback whale. Would you believe that the eye of the whale was about the size of a softball? Or that they actually have short, matted hair all over their bodies? Now I've seen Flipper and Shamu, but seeing this magnificent creature lying on the sand evoked thoughts of a 25 ton body gracefully slipping through the water. Thoughts of life, death, and new life through decomposition. Amazing!

Luckily for me and my inquisitive mind, the experiences have not stopped there. My position has also allowed me to discover the ocean and salt marsh through our partnership with the National Park Service's environmental education programs. As the kids explore mud snails, coquina clams, blue crabs, and bioluminescent jellyfish, so do I. These experiences have afforded me a deeper look at all things aquatic in Tom's Cove, teaching me that there is always more to things than meets the eye, or the nose, in the salt marsh.

Of course, my adventure has also included some quintessential visitor services activities such as engaging the public in discussions about ponies, bird identification, and impoundment management, as well as great environmental education programs and running the visitor center. And although I will not be hiking over huge dunes in search of the wild ponies, I know that I will come away from my "visitor services intern" adventure with many new perspectives, knowledge and experiences that I never expected before I stepped foot on this island. I hope I will have passed on some of my love of nature too.