

[From Winter 1999]

It's a Wonderful Life!

Have you hugged an intern, today? Well, actually we don't need hugs. But we will accept money and food donations. Although we joke around about our destitute lifestyle as interns, our true feelings are quite the opposite. Not many people get the chance to live on a virtually uninhabited island where majestic birds fly overhead and deer dot our front lawn. The Assateague Island Lighthouse serves as a charming lawn ornament by day and our porch light by night. White sandy beaches are just a few short miles away. But, besides having the opportunity to live in a naturally beautiful landscape, there are other perks to being an intern at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR).

The staff here go out of their way to make new interns feel at home and comfortable. I immediately felt a part of the Refuge family when I arrived in early June. And working along-side them, I've grown to think of them as friends and not just office personnel. The staff's willingness to assist and advise on both refuge projects and career placement is reassuring and indispensable.

The experiences gained as an intern at CNWR are invaluable for our future endeavors. Internships are available through the biology department, public use department, and YCC (Youth Conservation Corps). However, the refuge encourages interns to take advantage of all the opportunities available here to broaden the scope of our knowledge and experiences.

Some of the duties of interns include: monitoring piping plovers, leading nature walks with the public, visiting elementary schools to conduct environmental education programs, supervising YCC projects, staffing the visitor center, and countless other tasks.

The relationship between the refuge and their interns is a special one. With the assistance of interns (A.K.A. cheap labor!), the refuge can tackle projects that would otherwise fall by the wayside due to overworked staff. On the flip-side, interns gain the opportunity to work at a prominent refuge, get a feel for the job opportunities available to them, and make decisions regarding their career interests without being tied down to a permanent position. It's not the most glamorous job but, as my father always told me, "You gotta start somewhere". If "somewhere" happens to be CNWR, then we're already off to a good start.

Alison McGuire
Public Use Intern, CNWR