

MOUNTAINS

Internship bridges an educational gap



Word from the Smokies
Frances Figart
Columnist

Kaylie Hallcox and Morgan Kirkpatrick just finished up six weeks working in Great Smoky Mountains National Park as part of the 2021 summer high school internship program. Assisting rangers, researchers, and scientists with a variety of projects, the two recent high school graduates had an especially memorable day helping the park's fisheries crew at Walker Camp Prong.

"When we were told that we would be helping the fisheries staff shock fish, I thought, 'Are they going to die, or are we going to give them brain damage?'" recalled Kirkpatrick.

"But then I realized, this is a national park, and the rangers are here to take care of this resource, so they are not going to hurt the fish," she said. "Turned out, the fish just took a little nap so we could count them."

Like many aquatic animals, fish are sensitive to changes in their watery environment. To monitor their health, NPS fisheries employees work in teams to identify, count, weigh, and measure individual fish.

A senior staffer is equipped with a backpack shocker. That person stuns the fish and passes them to netters, who then pass the fish on to other helpers carrying buckets.

"We called ourselves 'bucketteers,'" said Hallcox. "I didn't know that whole process even existed."

This summer's six interns had the opportunity to do hands-on work with divisions of the park such as fire management, historic preservation, interpretation, search and rescue, trails, vegetation management, wetlands monitoring, and wildlife. The internship is a partnership with American Conservation Experience, in which high school students are paid a stipend to work in the various facets of careers in national parks.

"The program's goal is to introduce



Experiences in the Smokies often help summer interns like these to better determine what type of career they want to pursue when they head off to college in the fall. From left to right: Carson Johnson, Kaylie Hallcox, Grace Pepperman, Morgan Kirkpatrick, and Becca Foster. PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

youth from all backgrounds to the national park experience — not just kids that have grown up around parks, but also those from urban or rural areas who have never experienced a park before," said Education Park Ranger Julianne Geleynse who serves as the internship coordinator for the Tennessee side of the park.

"As the park itself seeks to diversify its own workforce, we also want to expose youth to a diversity of careers," she said. "We want to eliminate barriers such as transportation that often keep people from applying for jobs in parks."

Interns' experiences in the Smokies often help them to better determine what type of career they want to pursue. Hallcox, who just graduated from Seymour High School, has been visiting national parks around the country most of her life and was excited for the opportunity to work in one for the summer. Kirk-

patrick, a recent graduate of Coker County High School, grew up in Parrottville, Tennessee, and had always wanted to spend more time outdoors.

"The NPS employees we met were anything but cookie cutter," Kirkpatrick said. "There were so many different types of people from different backgrounds doing different jobs — many of which I didn't even know existed — all with one thing in common: caring about species and their environment. I enjoyed learning how all the different jobs in a park benefit each other: fisheries benefits wetlands monitoring, for example."

The internship helped Kirkpatrick decide that her major will be environmental studies when she starts at Walters State Community College in Greeneville, Tennessee, in the fall.

"My favorite day of the internship was the fish shocking day, but what I'll

remember most are all the people I've met. Everyone was so nice to us," said Hallcox, who will study environmental and soil science at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and hopes to someday work in a national park.

"The value for these students is that they are getting a glimpse into the type of career options available to them in national parks," Geleynse said. "Plus, they are learning all the aspects of work that go into managing a national park, so they are simultaneously learning to be better stewards of public lands."

Frances Figart is the editor of *Smokies Life* magazine and the Creative Services Director for the 28,000-member Great Smoky Mountains Association, an educational nonprofit partner of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Learn more at SmokiesInformation.org and reach the author at frances@gsassoc.org.

BUBBA NEEDS YOUR HELP

We've all had anxiety or felt insecure at some point in our lives. For sweet Bubba it's every day. This 3-year-old boy has bounced around the shelter system simply because he is misunderstood. While we don't know what happened early in his life, we know there must have been a kind woman at some point. Although Bubba gets along with most everyone, he is really a ladies man. And let's be honest...he's a one woman dog! Perfectly sized at just under 40 lbs, Bubba loves to be close to



his person and is very affectionate. Additionally, he is an awesome traveler who adores car rides and is a perfect gentleman in social situations. He does get anxious when left alone for long periods and can get a bit possessive of his human. We know it is going to take a special person, but this special dog is totally worth the search. Could you be Bubba's leading lady? Call Oconee Humane Society, 843-425-2858 for more info or to schedule a meet and greet in Asheville.

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County to pay \$1,200 for video hosting after quitting YouTube

Rebecca Walter
Hendersonville Times-News
USA TODAY NETWORK

An online streaming platform has been chosen by the Henderson County Board of Commissioners to replace its previous system of uploading meetings and other county-related videos to YouTube.

The county chose the video conferencing service BlueJeans by Verizon, which comes with an annual \$1,200 price tag. The county did not pay to upload videos to YouTube, which is a free service.

"The proposal we have from BlueJeans will cost \$1,200 annually; this will allow us to have one live-streaming event for up to 100 viewers at a time, but will also give us the flexibility to change the feature to set or grow as the need arises," county IT Director Mark Seelenbacher explained.

"The 100-viewer limit is also burstable in that the 101st viewer and above would not be 'cut off' from the live stream, but in the event we require more viewers, they would bill us for the additional usage."

Commissioners voted on June 18 to

replace YouTube as its posting service, after the video-sharing platform took down the board's June 16 upload due to medical misinformation that was expressed during a meeting about COVID-19 vaccines.

During the meeting, commissioners passed a resolution stating Henderson County will not use county tax dollars to support the promotion of, or incentives for getting, COVID-19 vaccinations.

The resolution followed a dozen people speaking out against the vaccines, claiming they were harmful and part of a hidden agenda by the government, media and pharmaceutical industries.

For years the county has uploaded its Board of Commissioners meeting videos to YouTube about one or two days after the meeting, where the video remains for 60 days. During an emergency meeting called to discuss the video's takedown, commissioners described YouTube's action as censorship.

The plan is to use the BlueJeans streaming platform for all county departments moving forward, Seelenbacher said. All the videos will be embedded in the county website.

The services will start with the commissioners' Aug. 2 meeting.

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