

Connecting Youth With the Outdoors:

Cultivating the next generation of naturalists and conservationists

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DETROIT ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY®



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About Me

- Graduated MSU in 2016 with a B.A. in Human Development & Family Studies
 - Minor in Women's Studies
- Currently obtaining my Master's in Social Work from Madonna University
 - Clinical track with a specialization in Mental Health with a minor in Community Engagement & Leadership
- Currently an Education Specialist with the Detroit Zoological Society





Overview of the Program

ESI is a youth development program in which Detroiters aged 16-19 years-old explore careers in the natural resource and conservation field, discover recreation opportunities in the state of Michigan and build their employability skills.

As a capstone project, the youth also investigate environmental issues affecting Belle Isle and the Great Lakes watershed as they are introduced to wildlife conservation and environmental stewardship through hands-on projects, training and fieldwork.

These experiences support the youth in expanding their comfort with nature as they develop various skills applicable to their professional, personal, and academic lives. These skills range from species observation and identification to managing time effectively.

How We Connect Youth and Conservation

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide features a large, dark teal leaf with a white vein, a smaller light green leaf, and several light blue circles of varying sizes.

Creating a positive and safe space

Interns build relationships with their peers and mentors. This intimate team dynamic allows for each intern to celebrate and inspire each other while also healing from experiences of otherness and exclusion

- Part of creating a supportive and safe space means building trust between me and every intern as well as trust amongst the group
 - Journaling
 - Community contracts
 - Open dialogue



How We Connect Youth and Conservation



Facilitating positive experiences in nature

Interns participate in a variety of outdoor recreational activities such as beekeeping, snorkeling, camping and canoeing. All of these activities meet their developmental needs, challenge them and build reverence for nature.

Developmental needs:

1. physical activity
2. competence & achievement
3. self definition
4. creative expression
5. meaningful participation
6. positive social interaction
7. structure & clear limits





How We Connect Youth and Conservation



Making connections with other naturalists and conservationists

Interns are introduced to other enthusiasts and professionals to build their professional network and understand how nature can be enjoyed in many ways.

Interns are able to meet and engage with:

- Environmental educators
- State park workers and officials
- Government workers and officials
- Zookeepers
- Sustainability and conservation experts
- Scientists
- Enthusiasts
- Former interns



By making connections

How We Connect Youth and Conservation



Hearing conservation stories

Interns hear stories from a diverse group of professionals about conservation efforts to enhance their knowledge, build reverence and take action.

- The Detroit Zoological Society (SSP and rescue stories)
- Green Toe Garden (Bee Conservation)
- Becky Johnson, DZS (Mudpuppy Conservation)
- Belle Isle staff/ DNR (habitat restorations, non-indigenous species removal and fish hatcheries)



How We Connect Youth and Conservation



Exploring careers

Exploring careers in the conservation field allow for interns to improve their knowledge of career options and see themselves in these roles.

Careers relating to conservation in:

- Military
- Law enforcement
- Outreach
- Research
- Education
- Recreation
- Activism
- Policy/ Government
- Finance
- Construction
- Civic environmentalism
- Writing
- Music
- Art
- Dance



Exploring careers

How We Connect Youth and Conservation

Practicing environmental skills and doing conservation work

Interns leave the program with certifications, training and experiences that could give them an edge when applying for future jobs and prepare them to be leaders and standout employees.

Certification the Interns Leave With:

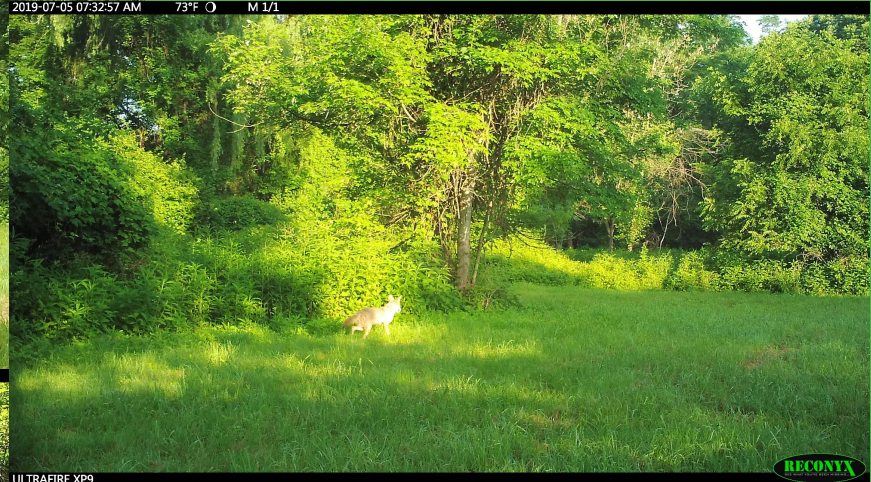
- CPR - Infants, children and adults
 - ALS
 - BLS
- First Aid - Infants, children and adults
- Stop The Bleed
- Hunter safety
- Fishing license
- Leave No Trace



Learning appropriate skills



Doing the work of conservationists



Doing the work of conservationists



ULTRAFIRE XP9





Impact on Youth

- By the end of the program, many report leaving with new thoughts and feelings about themselves and the realization of how capable and resilient they are
- Many have also worked through personal trauma and developed coping skills, a positive self-identity and self-love
- Many interns have spoken about how having consistent access and engagement with nature has shaped and developed their identity as an environmental steward
- Others have credited the program with developing their beliefs relating to environmental justice, climate change and sustainability— information that will help them advocate for changes in their community
- Our interns have also reported how inspired they are to adopt more environmentally-conscious behaviors such as no longer swatting bees, using sustainable products, and becoming ethical consumers
- These changes make what they're learning more relevant and help develop a deeper interest in nature.

From our ESI program, many of our interns have gone on to accept job positions and explore other opportunities in the natural resources field.

Intern Highlight

Following the ESI program, Evan Morton attended Michigan State University studying Environmental Science. While there, Evan accepted an undergrad research position in the Geoscience Laboratory. He later accepted an assistant teaching position in West Africa, focusing on sustainability and the environment. He is also working on a project dealing with plastic bag consumption around Dakar, Senegal and conservation after researching this subject. Evan hopes to be able to share this research with the public soon.



Intern Highlight

Following ESI, Rachel Felder was hired by Detroit Outdoors as an education intern. She worked with Detroit youth and connected them to nature through camping and other activities while teaching about nature's beauty and importance. Following this opportunity, she was offered an internship with the Detroit International Wildlife Refuge, where she was placed at the Minnesota Valley Wildlife Refuge. She created and facilitated events to educate the public about the humane treatment of urban wildlife while working within Somali and Spanish communities. She has expressed how ESI has been her "springboard" into this natural resource field and how it has provided her with skills that directly helped her land these opportunities.



Intern Highlight

Jeremiah Steen is currently a sophomore at the University of Detroit Mercy. He currently serves as the Steen Foundation's founding director, the youngest Jane Goodall Roots & Shoots Fund II National Fellow, he serves on the Advisory Board at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit and is the Audubon Great Lakes Detroit Wild Indigo Nature Exploration Coordinator. He has an unwavering commitment to creating equitable and inclusive spaces for underserved members in Detroit. His goal is to strategically develop pipelines and provide resources to usher in more people of color into arts & culture and conservation careers. Jeremiah's formative experiences and connections he gained during his time at the Detroit Zoological Society & Department of Natural Resources: Environmental Stewardship Internship gave him the skills required to not only survive but thrive in a city he loves. There is a need for more quality programs such as this to ensure more of Detroit's youth get exposed to conservation, environmental stewardship, quality green spaces, civic science and possibly take on a career in this field.





Things to Consider

- “Curiosity conserves nature”
- For a lot of BIPOCs and marginalized groups, connecting with nature means facing systemic racism and safety concerns
- Disproportionate access and engagement in nature is an issue for **EVERYONE** to solve
- We all experience the outdoors differently
- Model the behavior you want to see
- Programs like ESI are not universal! We need more!

Action Items

- Support and advocate for policies and initiatives that further connect youth to nature

- Build and leverage relationships with government representatives, and public policy experts at every level

- Promote outdoor recreation and conservation among BIPOC and other marginalized communities by practicing cultural humility and spending time within these communities

- Join and promote social movement such as **#LatinosOutdoors**, **#BlackBirdersWeek** and **#IndigenousWomenHike**

- Dispel and counter stereotypes and examine your own blindspots and biases

- Support affinity groups



Thanks!

ANY QUESTIONS?

Special thanks to our supporters!



Contact Information

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