

MSI Report 2021

After I started my college career, I began planning to take a term off of school to participate in a marine-related internship. Traveling outside, and even within, the United States can be expensive and it requires a great deal of planning. After several months of hard work, research, and saving up money, I finally made my way across the country to Florida where I'd begin my 3-month internship as a conservation intern at Loggerhead Marinelife Center. Due to the funds I received from the MSI Award this year, it helped contribute to the expenses of a plane ticket from Oregon to Florida. Without this award, it would have been very difficult to cover the expenses of travel and would have prevented me from furthering my marine-related academic pursuits. These funds have allowed me to gain experience in the field of marine conservation and have ultimately helped me to take the first step towards my dream career.

In high school I discovered my passion for marine conservation, but I didn't quite understand what a marine conservationist would *do* for their job. I began wondering if I could even make a living by doing my passion, or if it would simply have to be a hobby and something I cared about. Thus, I became determined to dedicate a term of my college education to truly discover what it means to work in the field of marine conservation. I was aware that I'd be assisting with a lot of beach clean ups, but I was surprised at the amount of data collection that was involved in this. After beach cleanups, we labeled, weighed, and sorted all the trash with the help of some very dedicated volunteers. We kept track of the types of debris we found including hard plastics, film, foam, straws, cups, fishing gear, and many more categories. Using the data collection sheets, we could see what type of debris we were most commonly finding on our beaches. From there, we would reach out to various organizations or city officials to implement conservation initiatives. We would also upload the information from the data sheets to our own online database and the databases of our partner organizations. There were a plethora of other tasks I completed over the course of this internship, some of which include monitoring our monofilament recycling bins, emptying cigarette receptacles, informing fisherman on how to properly care for a hooked sea turtle, implementing a "Sea Turtle Protection Zone" during nesting season, recording boat speeds in this protected area, and teaching others about the importance of keeping our beaches clean.

I'd say one of the most important skills I learned was how to properly inform and educate the public about marine-conservation related topics. This is not simply limited to the issue of plastic pollution in oceans and how it harms marine life, but also the concept of overfishing, how to avoid boatstrikes with a sea turtle, and why shark-fishing is not beneficial to fishermen who want to actually catch fish. We are not here to shame people and tell them what they are doing wrong, but rather educate them and hope that they decide to make the right decision that will benefit the planet. This internship has allowed me to talk to people about what I love, spread awareness on marine-related issues, and gave me the opportunity to make a direct impact on the Florida coast.