

Madeline Blaha

LPA intern, summer 2023

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I came to the Vineyard this summer hoping to solidify my personal direction. After 3.5 years of a primarily humanities-driven undergraduate curriculum, I stumbled into an Intro to Fisheries class that awoke my previously undiscovered love of science. Experiencing this shift during my final semester of college meant that I had very little time to learn more about fisheries and marine science in an academic context, and the Lagoon Pond Internship has been an amazing real-world exploration of this new trajectory. I found the propagation process absolutely fascinating, the juvenile shellfish beautiful, and the people I met so wonderful.

I was lucky enough to be working alongside Mr. Robert Simpkins-- I will admit, I initially had some reservations about working with a high schooler, but it didn't take long for us to develop a close working relationship. Robert and I spent two days per week in Oak Bluffs with Donovan and Marco, and two days in Tisbury with Danielle and Fred. We also collaborated with many Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group employees, who exposed us to the hatchery side of shellfish operations. Connecting with so many others who are prioritizing the health of Vineyard waters was part of what I saw as a strong community component of the LPA internship. Much of the shellfish constables' jobs is really as an ambassador for the local waterways. I learned about various levels of regulations and the techniques that the departments use to convey them to the public, and I was part of many conversations with commercial and recreational shellfishers. I also helped Danielle out with the Tisbury Family Shellfish Day, which was one of the highlights of my summer. About 40 people attended, islanders and vacationers alike, and many of them had no previous experience or knowledge about shellfish and their environmental benefits. Connecting with the community and getting people excited about one of my own passions was just so much fun.

In addition to the social aspects, I greatly enjoyed the day-to-day labor. The primary intern tasks this summer were seeding baby shellfish and caring for growing juveniles. During one of my first weeks, the Tisbury department took us to split scallops, which involves dividing the population of one scallop bag into two to give them more space to grow. I was blown away

by their delicacy and beauty. I grew to care deeply for our shellfish, and I learned many new things about their anatomy and development process.

Informal learning was a large part of the experience. Danielle, Marco, Donovan and Fred each have great knowledge bases and were always teaching Robert and me as we were working on the day's tasks. I learned through activities as diverse as repairing the family shellfish area picnic table, practicing boat handling and docking, and chatting in the truck as we traveled to different sites. I also got to know the island in a way that I had never experienced before, since previously I had only visited for a few weeks at a time to see family. Planting eelgrass with Alley-- on the cutting edge of her field-- was quite a unique experience and prompted me to do some independent research on the green crab invasion and the eelgrass bed ecosystem. I really like learning how systems operate as a whole, and by the end of the summer I had a much greater understanding of the dynamics of local aquatic ecosystems. The LPA internship introduced me to previously undiscovered scientific processes and beautiful places, both on land and on the water.