

My LPA internship experience - Robert Simpkins

Going into the LPA internship I wasn't sure what work I would be doing, all I knew was that I would be doing hard work outside. When I started up work, I was with Oak Bluffs Constable Donovan, and I was immediately put to work with Marco, my supervisor and the Oak Bluffs deputy shellfish constable, putting together quahog trays. I had never seen this before, and as we worked I asked question after question of Marco to see what this tray would be used for. It was the Oak Bluffs way of seeding Quahogs into Sengekontacket. This experience was the basis for everything that followed in my internship. No matter if I was in Tisbury or Oak Bluffs, every day I would be doing a different thing, and it would always be something I knew that I had to learn all about.

During this internship I did everything from culling crab populations with crab traps, to jury rigging quahog bags because the weather was windier than forecasts predicted. I loved everything that we did, and, not only was the work fun and entertaining, but the people that I worked with were great. I and my fellow intern Maddie quickly gained a close friendship and were constantly bantering and having fun while working. My supervisor Marco was always joking around with us, but he knew his way around a boat and was great at improvising. Donovan was always the serious one and made sure that we got things done. On the Tisbury side things got a little faster paced with Tisbury Constable Dani, who somehow manages to multitask and get over 20 things done everyday. Then there was the Tisbury Deputy Fred who was the most steadfast person ever, and the best teacher that I have ever had. He taught both myself and Maddie how to drive a boat well enough that I could retrieve the boat from its mooring, dock and then return the boat to the mooring all by myself, which is no simple task. Then there was Aiden who was previously a Friends of Sengekontacket intern and had gotten a full time job with the Tisbury Shellfish Department. Aiden was the closest to my age and was always fun to hang out with, and was great when we went crabbing.

For the scientific aspect of the internship, I learned how all the various stages of aquaculture work. I know how shellfish are hatched, grown, seeded, and then released. Before working at this internship, I didn't know anything about shellfish other than how to harvest, cook, and eat them. One of my favorite parts of the internship, scientifically, was when we got to work with the Hughes Hatchery and assisted them with their eelgrass recovery project. The loss of eelgrass is a very serious issue, and affects not only Martha's Vineyard but the world. The Hughes Hatchery is the first place in the world that has managed to grow eelgrass inside of a hatchery, and to be a part of this ground breaking research is amazing. I assisted with the planting of the eelgrass in the artificial beds that were created and placed in Lagoon Pond. These beds had sensors placed in them that will allow the study of various factors in the surrounding waters and would collect data on what helps or harms eelgrass. In addition the hope is that the eelgrass will root well enough into the sand that the bed can be turned into sod, so that some lost eelgrass beds can be artificially recovered. When we discovered that the eelgrass was not staying inside of the beds, I also assisted in creating burlap disks that would help keep the eelgrass in the bed and prevent nearby currents or boat wakes from uprooting the grass.

Another of the interesting things about this internship was how different Oak Bluffs and Tisbury were. Almost everything about them, other than the size of their staff, was different. Because of the geological differences in the sites that we worked with we had to do things differently. One of the major differences was the way that we seeded quahogs. In Oak Bluffs we used quahog runs and trays, but in Tisbury we used rafts. In Oak Bluffs we had much shallower waters, so we had to use seeding techniques that were based on the ground, like trays and runs. In Tisbury we had deeper waters so we could suspend the quahogs in the water and use rafts. In addition to these differences, Senge also had a much lower rainfall limit so we often had to close it, and discuss with the local and tourist shellfishers the closures and restrictions.

In addition to all of this practical and research experience, I also got to see some of the local and state political interactions. I watched both constables interact with shellfishers who were breaking rules, and I observed how the vibrio investigation was handled. For the state side, I saw how the Shellfish Department had to adapt to the Department of Marine Fisheries new regulations.

Overall this internship was a great experience that I would not replace with anything else, and I thank the Lagoon Pond Association for the hosting of such an internship. All the experience that I have gained will greatly help me in my future endeavors.

Thank You,

Robert Simpkins