



ECOLOGY PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL
2017 BITTERROOT WILDLIFE INTERNSHIP

Interns, along with EPI and MPG Ranch staff enjoy the sunset after an evening of wildlife viewing

From June through August, **11 EPI alumni participated in the fourth Bitterroot Wildlife Internship** at the MPG Ranch in Florence, Montana. Two cohorts of interns spent one month each camping at the ranch and working with research mentors on a diverse range of projects, from invasive weeds to the breeding ecology of tree-dwelling bats. Under the guidance of an EPI instructor team, they contributed to restoration projects like removing clay targets from a former shooting range and retrofitting barbed wire fencing to permit movement of large mammals across the landscape. Interns **explored stakeholder perspectives on wildlife and landscape management issues** and delved into the scientific process during lessons designed to give them the tools to think



2017 AT-A-GLANCE

11	INTERNS	2	MILES OF FENCING REMOVED OR MODIFIED
345	RESEARCH HOURS	4	ACRES OF HOUNDSTONGUE REMOVED
491	SERVICE PROJECT HOURS	33	GALLONS OF DEBRIS AND PLASTIC REMOVED

Research and Conservation Service

Conservation Service

This year, the primary conservation service projects at MPG Ranch were **removing houndstongue**, an invasive plant species, and **retrofitting and removing fence**. Both projects contribute to a more wildlife-friendly landscape by removing hazards and impediments to traveling elk, bear, deer, and other animals. These two projects help fulfill the **long-term restoration goals** of MPG Ranch. Interns also removed invasive plants from the Ranch's education garden and native seed plots, removed clay pigeon and plastic debris in the floodplain, collected native seeds, and participated in hummingbird banding as well as the Ranch's annual July 4th Butterfly Count.



Research Studies

Each of the 11 interns **contributed to a research mentor's long-term study**, while receiving hands-on experience in the design and implementation of wildlife biology research. While connected by the common goal of gathering information about the native and invasive flora and fauna of MPG Ranch, the **projects addressed diverse topics** including roost-site fidelity in silver-haired bats, germination techniques for wildflower seeds, effects of invasive plants on soil chemistry, and population dynamics of ground squirrels. The conclusions of these projects will inform future restoration efforts at MPG Ranch.

Symposium

At the end of the season, all 11 interns presented the results of their research projects at the **Bitterroot Wildlife Internship Symposium**. The 65 symposium attendees included MPG Ranch representatives, EPI staff, and the interns' families. The intern presentations chronicled their role in MPG Ranch research projects that addressed questions about invasive species, understudied flora and fauna, and aspects of restoration biology. In addition to increasing awareness around the work that occurs at MPG, the interns' presentations also **contributed to region-wide conversations about wildlife issues**. The evening showcased the positive impacts of the ongoing MPG Ranch-EPI collaboration on local youth and the Bitterroot Valley landscape.



"The most impactful part of this experience was working with my mentor one-on-one. It was a lot of fun to see what a future career as a researcher might be like."

~ Whitney, intern from Corvallis, MT

Notable

The Bitterroot Wildlife Internship curriculum focuses on **research project development and teaching the scientific process** in greater depth than during EPI's Yellowstone field courses to enable the interns to develop and answer a research question. The curriculum also **dives into advanced concepts** of community ecology (succession, inter-specific relationships, etc.) and builds on the interns' prior experience as EPI students. Interns also spend time learning about natural resource management and cultural ecology in the Bitterroot Valley.

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