

MountainTrue

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MountainTrue is a non-profit organization that works with communities across 23 mountain counties on issues that matter most to sustaining our natural heritage. We focus on a core set of issues – sensible land use, restoring public forests, and protecting water quality – that have a high impact on the environmental health and long term prosperity of our region.

Internship Name:

Invasive Exotic Plant Control Coordinator at Sandy Bottom Forest Wetland

Description: The Sandy Bottom Forest Wetland near Asheville, N.C., is a protected area containing federal- and state-listed (rare and threatened) salamanders and reptiles. Several invasive exotic plants occur there, which threaten to displace native species and harm the wetland ecosystem that supports the wildlife community. MountainTrue (formerly the Western North Carolina Alliance) has inventoried the invasive plant populations and locations on the tract and employed Interns over the last two years to begin implementing a management plan to control these invasions and restore the native ecosystem.

Restoring natural habitat through invasive exotic plant control is an important part of our organization's Strategic Plan. MountainTrue focuses much of its forest restoration work in the area of invasive exotic plant inventory and control for over a decade, and our organization has developed extensive expertise in successful invasive plant control in mountain communities. This internship would further our organizational goals and help to restore an important ecosystem.

Responsibilities:

The interns will work together to implement the management plan by coordinating and supervising volunteers to perform various control treatments on the mapped populations of invasive exotic plants in the Sandy Bottom Wetland. The interns will communicate with volunteers, schedule work days, train volunteers on invasive exotic plant identification, control methods, and safety. They will determine/obtain the types and amount of tools and materials needed from MountainTrue's storage facility and make these available at the project site. The interns will provide the MountainTrue Ecologist with reports as needed, on estimated percentage of areas treated per week, and observations on any need for retreatment. The interns will accompany the MountainTrue Ecologist in any in presentations or workshops given during the internship and may be asked to give a co-presentation regarding Sandy Bottom activities. On days when project site work is not scheduled, the interns will compile the above reports and may perform research on invasive plant issues, as well as participating in other MountainTrue environmental opportunities (See "Additional Information" below). The interns will use a GPS unit (provided by MountainTrue) for some of this field work and will be instructed in this, if needed. They may also participate in other MountainTrue invasive plant control event days, occasionally.

Expected Products

The intern will compile a final report on the number of localized areas treated during the internship; the estimated percent of Sandy Bottom wetland that was treated, and the recommendations, based on the intern's experience, as to future management objectives, including what worked well, and what might be done to improve future management of the site.

Qualifications:

An advance knowledge, interest, and/or education in environmental science, ecology, botany, invasive exotic plants is desired. Students in environmental policy who are interested in performing intensive field work would also benefit from this internship. Experience with invasive plant control is a plus for this internship, but is not required. The interns will be given such training by the MountainTrue Ecologist. They will be required to take the N.C. Department of Agriculture herbicide certification training as part of this internship and MountainTrue will cover the registration costs. Interpersonal skills and an ability to communicate well with others is important to this work. Experience with GIS mapping is *not* required, but would be a beneficial skill that could be used to expand the overall scope of work and contributions to this project.

Is it a requirement that the student have a car? Yes

Additional Information:

- Expertise in identifying, inventorying, and controlling 15 species of exotic invasive plants that threaten Western North Carolina; first-hand expertise and solid field experience in controlling 5 specific problem plants in the Sandy Bottom Wetland.
- Opportunities to accompany MountainTrue Field Biologist on proposed Forest Service timber sale sites.
- Opportunities to participate in the French Broad RiverKeeper program involving water quality sampling/testing of the French Broad River.
- Opportunities to attend meetings involving local, state, federal agencies, and NGO's regarding environmental policies such as land management, protection, and restoration.
- Participation in MountainTrue hikes, river paddling trips, and other events geared toward involving citizens in the natural and recreational amenities of the Western North Carolina mountains.
- Possible graduate study opportunities that could evolve from this internship include Sandy Bottom-related projects involving herpetology (amphibians and reptiles inhabiting the site); invasive exotic plant response to wetland soils specific to this site; impacts from Highway 191 road runoff to Sandy Bottom (this highway is expected to be four-laned at some point in the future); Studies relating to the unique hydrology that sustains this wetland; other possibilities.