A Summer In Colorado

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Throughout the three to five years a forestry undergraduate spends at Iowa State University, many opportunities for summer employment are available for him/her to pursue. Some students work at home with non-related forestry jobs, but every student must fulfill the Ag. 104 requirement before graduation by working in the summer as a seasonal for a government agency, with a private industry, or with a forestry-related job that meets the department's qualifications.

Working for the Forest Service as a seasonal is an excellent opportunity for undergraduate forestry majors at ISU. The job gives students a taste of what to expect when working for the Forest Service and provides a great overall learning experience for the student.

The process for inquiring about a seasonal job starts in December with a questionnaire to let the department know the student's interests. From there, the long waiting process begins. During the spring semester, the department receives requisitions for various forestry job opportunities, and the department tries to find the right person for the right job. Some students find out where they will be going as early as February, but most students have to wait until April.

I was lucky and found out in March, which relieved a lot of stress. My destination was the Saguache District of the Rio Grande National Forest which is located in south central Colorado.

As soon as my last final was over (For. 451, Ugh!), I focused all my attention in preparing for the job and the trip. Within two weeks, I found myself pulling into the quaint little town of Saguache, Colorado. To my delight, it was filled with Chinese Elms and many friendly people. On my first day in town, I went to the museum, toured the town with my boss, and moved all my gear into the bunkhouse.

The first week of work consisted of training courses and orientation which caught me off guard a little. I had expected to jump right into my assignment the first day, but the first week of run-around was necessary. I was hired to work on a sign initiative program, but due to some complications the program was delayed a year. At first, I was discouraged, but I later found out that it would help me in the long run. As a result, I was given a chance to work in the field with the trail crew and the range crew. I also worked in the office. I felt I gained more experience by working in a wider range of jobs compared to the opportunities related to the sign program.

I was trained to fight forest fires in the first few weeks which was interesting as well as long. The courses consisted of a series of lectures in the classroom, a mock fire, and the construction of a basic fireline. I managed to pass the tests and the courses and eventually received my long-awaited “red card”.

Steve DeCook working on the fire line.
I could hardly wait for my first call to go on a fire, and it finally came. The fire was on the Rio Grande National Forest and it only lasted two days, but the fire was very exciting. The fire was in old-growth timber with steep terrain which made for giant trees to come crashing down the slopes and echo through the valley with a tremendous roar. It was awesome!

My eventful summer ended with a two-week fire in central Idaho which was an experience in itself. There were about 600 fire fighters fighting the blaze which made for long lines for showers and food. We were camped on the town's football field which was lush green on the first day, but a trampled mess after two weeks. During the two weeks, I fell into a day-to-day rhythm consisting of work, shower, eat, and sleep. Free time was hard to come by. On the last day, the townspeople put up huge signs around the camp telling us how much they appreciated our efforts in controlling the fire. Seeing those banners really made me feel appreciated. It was neat.

Overall, my summer was probably the best experience I have ever had in my life. I used six rolls of film and there is a story behind every picture. On my 16 hour drive home, I often reminisced about the fires I went to and my summer in Saguache. I can hardly wait til next summer.

— Steve DeCook

Along with Steve, many other forestry students became involved with forestry related seasonal employment. The students were spread across the country and even across to foreign lands. Below is a list of the forestry students and their destination of the summer of 1989.

Steve Albright  
*Weyerhaeuser Company*

Chris Ball  
*Nature Conservancy*

Wendy Bantz  
*Iowa DNR*

Robert Bardon  
*Saylorville Lake*

Shannon Baughman  
*City of St. Louis, Missouri*

Steve DeCook's home away from home.

Nick Beelman  
*Gardian Tree Experts*

Sandy Boldt  
*Wenatchee National Forest*

Eric Dahle  
*Forestry Dept. ISU*

Scott Davis  
*Finland Exchange program*

Steve DeCook  
*Rio Grande National Forest*

Todd Derifield  
*City of Waterloo, Iowa*

Bryce Duncan  
*Pike Lumber Company*
Shannon Baughman finds a small park in downtown St. Louis, Missouri.

Dave Hansen  
Agronomy Dept. ISU

Shane Harmon  
Story County

Michelle Heiker  
Black Hills National Forest

Jeff Hildreth  
Black Hills National Forest

Cynthia Hosea  
Pikes Peak National Forest

Tom Huegerich  
Medicine Bow National Forest

Jon Klingman  
Saylorville Lake

J.T. McCubbin  
Weyerhaeuser Company

Eric Pugh  
Saylorville Lake

Ryan Reichenbacker  
Medicine Bow National Forest

Joe Roe  
Story County

Robert Seyler  
Temple-Inland Company

Nancy Shorma  
Wenatchee National Forest

Doug Simon  
Black Hills National Forest

Cynthia Snyder  
Hickory Grove Park

Richard Thramer  
ISU Seed Farm

Greg VanOrsow  
Routt National Forest

Kristen Weber  
Black Hills National Forest

Michelle Heiker demonstrating her painting skills in the Forest Service.