

August 25th, 2010

My involvement with the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (LIBI) was due to a series of inquiries with various staff personnel at Montana State University, Range Dept. I have begun taking steps to complete my degree in Ag Ed./Range Ecology and Natural Resources. Though I have solid foundational experiences, working in and around agricultural surroundings, I lack some technical aspects in natural resource management and wanted to familiarize myself with current natural resource management practices. An opportunity to work for the National Park Service (NPS) became available, through MSU's Land Resource and Environmental Science Dept. as a Bio Tech Intern. The position allowed me to be involved with a Biological Control Options research project for non-native and invasive plant species, which coincides with my future goals of becoming a Natural Resource Manager.

Over all, my experiences at LIBI have been very educational, exciting, and challenging. I find the National Park Service (NPS) to be highly professional and well thought of by both the public and fellow co-workers. This gave me a sense of pride in being a part of an organization that is respected.

What excited me most was the opportunities of learning new aspects of resource management. I was allowed to participate in several different studies/surveys throughout the summer. These included: Receiving training in conducting water and sediment samples in the Little Bighorn River; Assisting with a plant species survey up-date crew from Glacier National Park; Learning to use a GPS with a group from MSU, doing an Invasive Weed Survey Project in cooperation with LIBI; and the challenge of learning the complexities of a research report on Bio Control Options for Invasive Plants. In addition, I have enjoyed seeing new country as part of my position, like the Bighorn Canyon Recreational Area and traveling to WY, to assist a NPS crew out side of the Pryor Mountains, doing work on an abandoned mine reclamation project.

I found my supervisor to be an outstanding individual, with high moral character. I appreciated her dedication to excellence and not wanting to compromise quality for quantity. I also found other park personnel to have the same desire of professionalism and doing a great job for the agency. My interaction with other park service employees was very enjoyable and I developed quality friendships during my tenure here.

The greatest personal challenges for me, were to set aside my preconceived ideas and in some cases, wrong ways of thinking. For instance, I have been spraying weeds for a while and got into a pattern that worked for me, as far as application, mixing, and cleaning up of equipment. This initially caused some minor disagreements. Some of the procedures used on LIBI seemed silly. However I had come to realize the procedures as set by my supervisor were sound and warranted my rethinking on how I do things personally.

Though my experiences at LIBI have been mostly positive, there were a couple of areas of concerns. First of all, NPS does a great job putting safety first. However, I feel at times, the safety meetings and tailgate sessions are out of balance. To the point of being counter productive and inefficient. I would like to see having one main safety meeting once a month instead of every week. Save the weekly gatherings for informal sessions and immediate safety concerns, as appropriate to each department.

It would be helpful if future interns could begin their research projects no later than the second week of hiring. I would consider a standard amount of time, to dedicate just for the research, each week. Such as one day out of the week or perhaps on a percentage, like 25 – 40%. Not lower than 25% and not more than 45% each week. I believe this to be a good balance of allowing enough time to meet weekly objectives and goals and still have enough time to devote and focus on research/information gathering.

Finally, I would like to see the supervisor and crew leader spend more time mapping out the next day activities the night before. So when the crew shows up at 6:30 am, they could be out the door by 6:45 am to begin that day's activities.

As mentioned before, my experiences working at the Little Bighorn Battlefield have been mostly positive and my supervisor was a good role model, in displaying a professional attitude at all times.

Tyrel Miller,