

THE DEMMER SCHOLARS PROGRAM AND THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

Fifteen Years of Natural Resources Leadership Development

The Demmer Scholars Program has been underway since May 2009. A total of 365 undergraduate or graduate students majoring in natural resources, environmental studies, or related fields have participated in the program. Another 26 are scheduled to participate as the 2024 summer cohort. The students come primarily from three Boone and Crockett Club-affiliated universities: Michigan State University, Mississippi State University, and the University of Montana.

Students are selected through a competitive process and then enrolled in a 12-week, federal natural resources policy course taught in Washington, D.C. While enrolled in the course, the students are placed in paid natural resource policy internships with federal agencies, in Congress, at nongovernmental organizations, and with trade associations. To date, 98 different organizations have sponsored interns over one or more of the last 15 summers. A few new organizations are on tap for the summer of 2024.

The course is taught in the classroom and through a series of visits with policymakers, with field trips in Washington, D.C., and around the Mid-Atlantic Region. Each summer, the students learn from a broad array of

policymakers, elected officials, natural resource managers, media representatives, and noted authors.

The course work and internships provided through the program have (1) exposed these students to a wide variety of natural resource management challenges; (2) introduced them to a broad range of working professionals in the field and policymakers (many of them Boone and Crockett Club members); and (3) enriched their overall academic experience with applied conservation policy analysis and training.

Blending students from three different universities also allows the students to interact with and learn from students from different regions, studying different kinds of natural resource

issues. The students greatly enjoy the experience and make lasting friendships they have maintained over time and space using social media that most of us in older generations will probably never fully master.

At the Boone and Crockett Club's annual meeting in Napa, California, in 2009—the first year of the Demmer Scholars Program—the Club heard from two of the summer 2009 students about their experience. Hannah Abou el Seoud and Nate Lyman gave attendees a moving review of their summer, calling it a “once-in-a-lifetime experience”—a view widely shared by the students and interns selected for the program during the subsequent 14 summers.

Equally important are the reviews from the intern

sponsors of the students sent to them. Comments about our Demmer Scholars from sponsors include, “He was the best intern we have ever had,” and “She was more like a regular staffer than a summer intern” have been very common over the years.

Perhaps not surprisingly in light of those sentiments, over 90 of our Demmer Scholars relocated to Washington, D.C., to start their careers in full-time professional positions in government or the private sector after having finished their academic studies. Seventy-three are still there (Hannah Abou el Seoud is currently the Director for Corporate and Government Affairs for Nestle, U.S.A.).

There are 16 Demmer Scholars serving as professional staff on Capitol Hill

LEFT: The Class of 2018 enjoys “Mississippi on the Mall,” on the National Mall. RIGHT: Members of the Class of 2019 pose at Grey Towers National Historic Site, the ancestral home of Gifford Pinchot in Milford, Pennsylvania.



(including the lead forestry staffers for the House Natural Resources Committee and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee). There have also been Demmer Scholars serving as political appointees in each of the past three administrations, as well as career employees in the Washington Offices of the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Foreign Agricultural Service, NOAA Fisheries, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense, and the Washington, D.C. Department of Forestry.

Some of our students have focused the start of their careers in government at the state or local level. Their experiences include four assistants to the governor of Michigan, one advisor to the governor of Mississippi, two advisors to the Michigan legislature, a senior advisor to the mayor of Detroit, and staff at the Montana Department of Lands, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Mississippi Department of Fisheries, Wildlife &

Parks, and the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. Two students have been elected as Michigan County Commissioners and another as a Montana State Legislator.

Despite the forgoing discussion of the public sector, many of our students focused their careers on the private sector. We have Demmer Scholars in the headquarters offices of Nestle, U.S.A., International Paper, Gallo Wines, Disney, Johnson & Johnson, Nike, and Walmart (Nate Lyman is the Senior Director for Price Analytics at Walmart).

The nonprofit sector has also welcomed our Demmer Scholars. They are, or have been, employed in the national or regional offices of The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, the Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, the National Forest Foundation, the American Forest Foundation, the National Association of Conservation Districts, the Society of American Foresters, the National Association of State Foresters, and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. One of our 2012 Demmer Scholars directs programs for "para la Naturaleza," the largest environmental non-profit in Puerto Rico.

The forest products industry has been particularly interested in Demmer alumni. Industry associations in Washington, D.C., have supported providing internship opportunities. That commitment resulted in permanent jobs at the National Alliance of Forest Owners, the Forest Resources Association, the Forest Landowners Association, the National Wooden Pallet and Container Association, and the American Wood Council.

The Demmer Scholars experience helped propel several students to law school. Ten are currently in private practice, two are clerking for judges, and two more are serving in the military in the Judge Advocate General's Corps.

More of our students are expected to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. We are educating the next generation of natural resource professionals, who are already taking their place. In fact, we were joined by three of them from Capitol Hill at our December 2023 annual meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, as the now-senior congressional staffers gave us an insightful and informative assessment of the outlook for natural resources legislation in the 118th Congress. ■



**2023 DEMMER SCHOLAR
GABRIELLA YBARRA**

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE

Gabriella currently works in Washington, DC for the National Wooden Pallet and Container Association.

"This summer felt like a fever dream. I went into my D.C. summer with the expectations I would enjoy it, but for the most part would wish I was somewhere else. Thankfully, this summer changed my life. My world view was shifted, and I feel as if my time in the world finally found a purpose, which I could build from. A huge reason for this was my internship with the legislative affairs team in the Forest Service. We collaborated with various agencies, staff on the Hill, and our regional offices daily, so I was exposed to a plethora of opportunities. The people I worked with and the students in the Demmer Scholars Program really made this summer memorable."

LEFT: Members of the Class of 2019 climb to the top of the Dome of the United States Capitol, enjoying one of Washington, DC's most exclusive tours. RIGHT: The Class of 2017 hears from the Honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg at the Supreme Court.

