



# MONTANA

*Heaven on Earth*

## Cabela's Outdoor Fund Awards Grant to Boone and Crockett/Camp Woodie Fellowship Program

**A partnership between the Boone and Crockett Club and the South Carolina Waterfowl Association (SCWA) has been awarded a \$64,000 grant by Cabela's Outdoor Fund to create new learning opportunities for youths interested in wildlife conservation careers.**

The partnership between the two conservation organizations is called the Boone and Crockett/Camp Woodie Fellowship Program. The grant from Cabela's Outdoor Fund will cover all travel, room and board expenses

of fellowship recipients during the two-week program, which will include study and field work in both South Carolina and Montana.

In Spring 2016, 30 Camp Woodie alums were selected to receive the fellowship made possible through the grant from Cabela's. Fellowship recipients attended Level-3 classes at Camp Woodie, located at the SCWA Wildlife Education Center in Pine-wood, South Carolina. During this week-long course, fellowship recipients interacted with wildlife professionals

and learned about careers in wildlife/fisheries conservation and education.

At the end of the Level-3 Camp Woodie session, students went west to spend a week on Boone and Crockett's 6,000-acre Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch near Choteau, Montana. There they furthered their study of wildlife conservation and took part in a five-day Outdoor Adventure Camp instructed by western wildlife professionals.

"We're excited to be able to expand conservation education opportunities for

more young people," Boone and Crockett Club Conservation Programs Manager Luke Coccoli said. "Conservation evolves and the next generation of conservation professionals will benefit from exposure to a wide range of disciplines, not only to find out where the needs will be in the future, but what will suit them and their interests best."

To qualify, applicants must be age 16-17 and have attended all three levels of the SCWA Camp Woodie summer fish and wildlife conservation camp program.

**What did I learn? I learned mountain goats and bighorn sheep live where the mountains are steep and that sometimes when your airplane flies through a thick cloud it feels like King Kong is trying to shake you out of the sky. That and so much more.**

In the 2,000 miles I traveled, I saw many faces of this country. I saw the deep green hardwood forests of the South change to a maze of interstates and superhighways around the city of Atlanta. I saw the Great Plains sewn together in a patchwork of shapes in the colors of John Deere green and Land Pride beige, making up the prettiest quilt any man ever made. The many lakes of Minnesota reflected the sunset in a blinding glare of auburn. When I finally saw the grassy plains seamlessly sweep up into the ancient Rocky Mountains, the jagged edges of each mountain peak rising into the clear blue sky of Montana, I realized that this was about as close as I could get to paradise in this life.

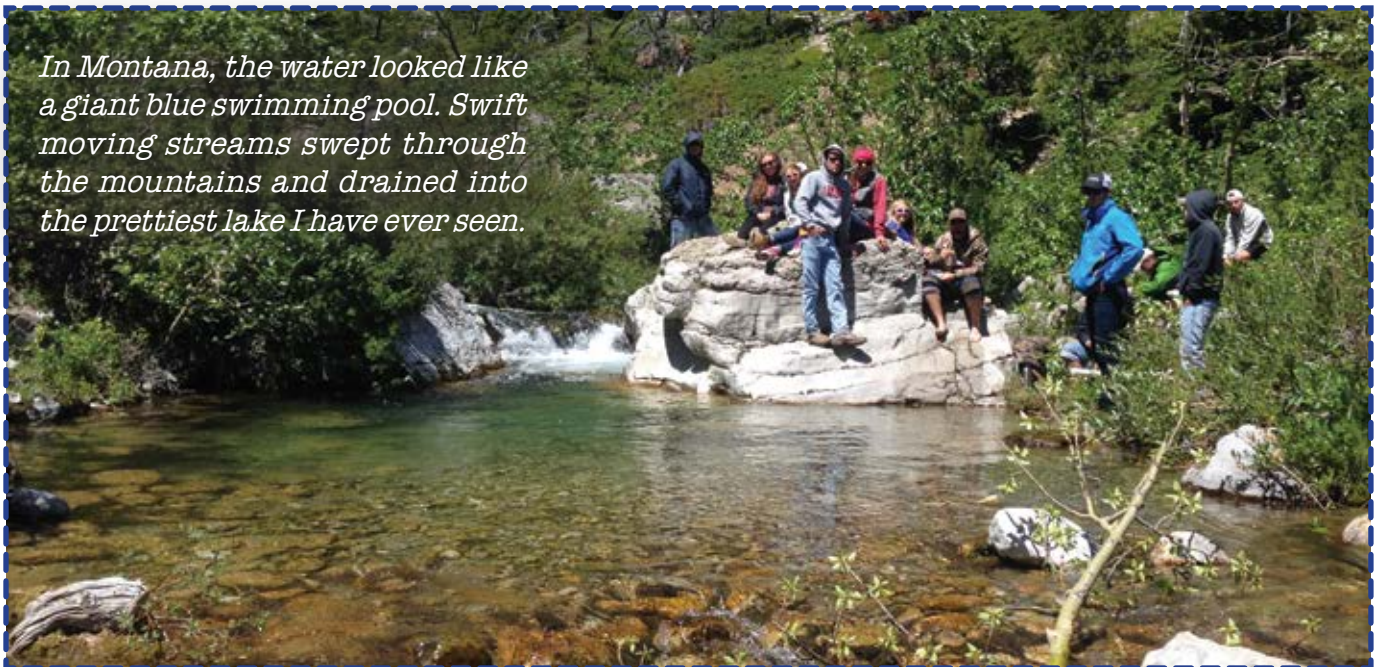
Many people think of paradise as a white sandy beach on some tropical island where it is summertime all year round. My idea of paradise is a little different. I would want snow-capped mountains with hidden crystal-blue lakes and little streams growing into huge inland waterways that meander all the way to the ocean. I would want all the hopping, flying, and swimming things I could eat, and a white sand beach with a couple of palmetto trees wouldn't hurt. Most importantly, I would want seasons. Different seasons bring different changes. You get to see the full potential of the land you live on.

Fall has to be my favorite season. The leaves in the Appalachians show off their brilliant shades of color ranging from a pale yellow all the way to a deep brick red; apples and pumpkins are ready for picking, and every buck in the forest is showing off the biggest set of antlers that they can put on for the ladies. Winter brings (to most of the country) a healthy dusting of blinding white snow (and duck season for the South)! Spring wakes everyone up, sprouts a mosaic of new bright green leaves, and pops out from the ground a rainbow of flowers; it also means there are baby animals everywhere. Summer means no school, farming time, and everyone making a beeline for the water.

A Montana summer is a heck of a lot different than a South Carolina summer, where we are used to 80 percent humidity and a heat index in the triple digits every day! It's also considered a cool-down when the high is 90. When I was in Montana, I clearly saw the need for a summer jacket. With its crisp mornings, warm (but not hot) days, and the Rocky Mountain-shaded evenings that pair well with the crackling and glowing red embers of a campfire, I saw summer through a completely different lens.

On the coast of South Carolina, warm rivers and beaches offer sticky, jet-black pluff mud (the best stink in the world). Most of the water around where I live averages close to 90 degrees in the summer time and stays a perpetual muddy brown color. The water is considered "clear" when you can barely see 3 feet under. In Montana, the water looked like a giant blue swimming pool. Swift moving streams swept through the mountains and drained into the prettiest lake I have ever seen. Surrounded by the majestic Rockies there was a body of water edged with rocks that have eroded from the mountainsides over thousands of years. The shallow edges of the lake

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started as a gorgeous emerald green and blended into a royal blue in the center. And the water is cold! I experienced the coldness firsthand by hurling myself over a 25-foot cliff into frigid water. It was quite a change from the warm Atlantic Ocean I am used to.

I got to experience hiking in the wilderness of Montana. The never-ending smell of Christmas trees permeated the air around me as we began the four-mile hike uphill to an alpine lake to go fishing. As I went higher in altitude, I could see the change in plants and wildlife. There were lots of conifers and some wild strawberries at 4,000 feet, and more rocky terrain and patches of wildflowers as we got closer to 7,000 feet. At lower altitudes, there were whitetail deer and also a bighorn sheep ram, standing like he was king of the mountain at the very top of a rocky ridge with the endless blue sky as his backdrop. As we got near the top of the mountain, I looked to the east, and I could again see the patchwork quilt that was the Great Plains. It made me see how truly small God has made me compared to the rest of this world. After a whole lot of huffin’ and puffin’ from the 3,000-foot climb (we are flatland people from South Carolina not used to thin air and giant mountains), I peeked around the corner and saw a scene straight out of a movie—a quaint little lake surrounded by towering mountain peaks with banks of snow (in August!) in the shaded corners, leftover from the cold winter months. Looking closer, clinging to the side of the mountain with their split, suction cup-like hooves, you could see a small group of mountain goats. In a little grassy valley above me, I saw a group of four bighorn sheep rams sitting like the eligible bachelors that they were, resting without a care.

With a fly rod in my hand, I carefully stepped my way across fallen boulders to a spot to start fishing. I moved the rod back-and-forth, similar to that of a bullwhip, until I saw the line long enough to cast into the cobalt blue water. A streak of silver and the bend of my rod told me to start pulling in the line. I had caught my first fish while in Montana (it was also my first fish caught with a fly rod), giving me the name “Cutthroat Queen” (because of the kind of trout it was and because of my very blunt, un-sugar-coated way of talking). But before long, it was time to leave the picturesque views of the lake. I was the last one to leave this little hidden paradise and begin the tiring trek back down the trail. The hike back was easier in the sense that it was downhill, but harder because I had to leave one of the most beautiful places on Earth.

The 9 p.m. sunsets were absolutely breathtaking—blue sky blending to gold and then to a deep orange with a blinding ball of fire sinking into the west behind the silhouette of the Rocky Mountains. The last night I was there, a storm began to hover over the mountains, and the evening’s last light showed the cold rain falling thousands of feet to the ground. The bright white lightning lit up the western sky in a light show greater than anything you could pay to see in Las Vegas. I saw the uncontrollable beauty and wonder of a summertime storm and I learned to appreciate it, despite the fact that it carried with it a certain level of danger.

Before we piled into the SUVs to leave, I looked up at the Montana night sky for the last time. The storm had passed, and I saw the most brilliant display of any night sky I had ever seen. I saw tiny specks of stars glittering like diamonds, scattered against



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Applications and more information about SCWA's Camp Woodie and the Boone and Crockett Club's Wildlife Conservation Skills Camp can be found at [www.wildlifeeducation.org](http://www.wildlifeeducation.org) and [www.boone-crockett.org](http://www.boone-crockett.org).

a navy blue canvas and a white dust trail that was the Milky Way. I kept staring, trying to see every inch of the never-ending sky. Orbiting the Earth were little satellites moving in every direction and I remember thinking, "How many countries can see me right now?"

As we began the journey back across the country on the various Boeing 7-something-7s, I couldn't help but hum Dan Seal's "Meet Me In Montana" in my head, "Won't you meet me in Montana? I want to see the mountains in your eyes. I've had all of this life I can handle. Meet me underneath that big Montana sky."

Stepping off the plane in Charleston International Airport, I got my luggage, said goodbye to everyone, and met my sister and brother-in-law holding "Welcome Home Emery" and "Bigfoot spotted in Montana" signs (he says I have big feet, just women's size 11-12—he's just jealous). Walking through the automatic sliding glass doors, I immediately felt the unpleasantly familiar weight of the South's famous heat and humidity on my shoulders.

That night, sitting at a table in Logan's restaurant, with a tall glass of sweet tea in front of me (the only thing bad about Montana is that they

have no sweet tea!), my momma asked me if I had missed my family. I did the smart thing—I told her that I did miss them and I wish they could have seen Big Sky Country.

Seeing bear tracks, bighorn sheep and mountain goats, crystal-blue lakes, and a completely different variety of plants for the first time really showed me how diverse this land is and how we need to protect it for everyone to be able to see. I feel privileged to have seen what the middle of nowhere (a.k.a. where your phones have no service) looks like. It was amazing to get to see a completely different landscape than what I am

used to. I got a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take an adventure not many other people get to take. I hope more people get to do what I did and develop as deep a love and respect for this land as I have, and that they admire absolutely everything in it. What I got to see on my trip was what I had only seen in movies, and it makes me wonder, if God made such beautiful things on Earth, I can only imagine what heaven will look like. ■

*Emery D. Yumbleston*

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