

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE ASSOCIATION

Voices at the *Seashore*



Outdoors for Everyone

BY GRACE FUJII

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This summer I have had the honor of serving as Point Reyes National Seashore Association's (PRNSA's) first ever Environmental Education intern. From leading kids on backpacking trips to assisting on field programs and eventually creating and hosting my very own program, this experience has taught me so much about the world of environmental education and what it means to be an environmental steward!

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One of the questions I have been asked throughout the summer is, “How did you end up here?” It’s a question that I have sometimes struggled to answer myself for many reasons. I am originally from the Sacramento Valley and went to UC Berkeley where I graduated in 2019 with an Astrophysics degree. Following this, I took a swift departure from academia to pursue creative work. Along the way, my passion for social justice began to emerge. That’s what initially stood out to me about this position—the intentional focus on environmental justice.

It is difficult to try to sum up environmental justice in a few words, but for me, it means creating an equitable and inclusive space for people outdoors and in environmentalism—whether that be in education, conversation, or decision-making. This is something that I care about deeply on a professional and personal level.

Prior to this year, I didn’t see myself as an “outdoors” person. Sure, I liked nature—because let’s face it, nature is pretty cool—but I wasn’t the outdoors type. Because I did not feel like I belonged in the outdoors, I also thought I did not belong in environmental education. This was the worry in the back of my mind coming here. There was also the concern of not having the typical background and degree for this field, so somehow I was a double impostor.

Knowing my own concerns, I understand how this is a very real barrier for many others, particularly those who have had less access to nature and exposure to environmental careers. That is why it is so important to create opportunities for environmental education at the Seashore, especially for youth from underserved communities.

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Over the course of this internship, I worked with dozens of kids, many of whom had never been to Point Reyes before. Watching them learn and have fun outdoors and knowing I had made an impact, even on just one kid, was both fulfilling and motivating. It reminds you that this is why we do this work.

What I have learned from this experience is that the outdoors is for everyone and anyone. Not everyone has to love being outdoors, but anyone can go out and enjoy what the natural world has to offer. I hope this is the lesson I have been able to impart during this internship—that everyone has a place in the outdoors and environmentalism. Environmental education is so much more than learning how to identify poison oak or being able to spout some nature facts off the top of your head (although I did learn those things as well). It is about fostering positive connections between yourself and the natural world around you—

whether that be seeing how many mole crabs you can catch in one go, spotting the fluffy white butts of elk on the hill side for the first time, running into freezing cold water just to say you swam in the ocean, or savoring that first bite of dinner made on a camp stove. These are just some of my many fond memories of this summer.

Although I am leaving this position, I am not leaving behind everything I have learned and my role as a steward of the land. Whenever people ask me about this experience, I can give them both my informational spiel on the Point Reyes National Seashore and my newfound perspective on environmental education. In this way, I have become a lifelong ambassador of the park. Hopefully hearing and seeing someone like me—a queer femme person of color—talk about the outdoors inspires others to explore, learn, and nurture their own connections to Point Reyes and the natural world.