



Crista L. O'Conner
Bleak Internship 2011
Taylor Wilderness Research Station

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To the Members of the DeVlieg Foundation,

I remember the day I was flirting with the Idaho of pursuing my BA in Idaho; I was surfing the web to gather information on not only the University of Idaho, but the whole state of Idaho. Growing up in the east, I thought Idaho was nothing more than the "potato state", but then there it was: The Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness, encompassing 2.3 million acres in the heart of Idaho. Soon after, I found myself driving 2,580 miles across the country to attend the University of Idaho and chase my dream of serving an internship in the wilderness at Taylor Ranch. As fate would have it, I was one of the five students from the U of I to be awarded the opportunity of spending ten weeks in the second largest wilderness in the contiguous United States.

Under the guidance of Dr. David Tank and Pamela Brunsfeld, Shaylee Martling and I were selected to carry out an **extensive collection of the plants inhabiting the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness**, namely within the Big Creek drainage, of which Taylor Wilderness Research Station is nestled upon. Throughout the summer, armed with a deep admiration for plants and a day pack consisting of first aid, water, GPS and cameras, we set out to traverse the rugged



terrain and gather fertile specimens. A typical day consisted of hiking far distances, across extreme elevational gradients, in search of flowering or fruiting vascular plant species. The days began early to avoid the exposure of the intense mid-day sun, while evenings were spent pressing and identifying the collected species. By recognizing and utilizing each other's strengths and weaknesses, Shaylee and I were able to create a remarkable dynamic. The remote location of this region has allowed ambiguity to remain of the specific composition of the species as well as the richness and abundance. Our efforts this summer have aided in the broader understanding of what species have come to colonize this wilderness.

I truly believe that the most valuable education comes in the form of “hands on” and that is just what the visiting professors provided: experiential education in the wildest classroom. I found that the topics, ranging from wilderness ethics to stream ecology, allowed us to continually gather more from our environment. A summer amid the wilderness provoked a deeper sense of understanding, not only of the natural world in which we were immersed, but also within myself; in no other environment would I have been able to leave behind societal restraints and fully embrace the connectivity of earth, uninterrupted in the absence of dominance by humankind.



To recollect the experience now, I am filled with the deepest gratitude. If it had not been for your graciousness, I would not have been able to travel to such a revered land to undergo both growth of mind and spirit. I also must relay that the DeVlieg Foundation has ministered to the expansive understanding of plant species composition surrounding Taylor. In addition, I praise your strong presence in academic and research endeavors, past, present and future, at the Taylor Wilderness Research Station and throughout the world. Thank you DeVlieg Foundation!

Sincerely,

Crista L. O’Conner

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College of Natural Resources

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