

Stepping into Stewardship

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From my earliest memory, I have enjoyed nature. Growing up, my home backed up to a state forest, and I spent many days exploring the natural world around me. Something instilled in me while trekking through that forest? These are our natural resources to enjoy and protect. Although I can't remember a defining moment, per se, at some point, I decided I wanted to help conserve those resources. This was the beginning of my journey as a steward of our lands.

I took the path less traveled relative to most wildlife professionals, earning an associate degree in wildlife management in Lubbock before moving on to a bachelor in wildlife biology at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas. I had only about a year and a half in Canyon to build my résumé and gain valuable experience in the field. Being able to work with the Texas State Bison herd was invaluable, and I was also able to work alongside graduate students, professors, and state biologists collecting data for research.

I have not been at the Nature Center long, but time has flown by. It has been nearly a year since I started as a natural resource



Welding the frame together for a new bridge on Canyon Ridge Trail. FWNC&R Staff Photo.



Working with our newest education and outreach ambassador, Olive, the eastern screech owl. FWNC&R Staff Photo.

technician, and I count myself very fortunate to have been offered this position straight out of my undergraduate degree program. I took my last final on a Friday in Canyon and was in Fort Worth at employee orientation the following Monday. As many of you can imagine, I prefer to hit the ground running, and our natural resource team loves to keep that pace.

I will be the first to admit, I was a tad green coming straight out of school. The

majority of my focus and experience had been on assisting with research and lab specimens. There were quite a few gaps to be filled when it came to natural resource management, but I was able to excel, filling my knowledge gap to better myself and my cause. Working at the Nature Center is the first time I have been able to fulfill my goal of becoming a true steward of our natural resources. We have incredible prairies, crosstimbres, and bottomlands, on which Chinese privet, an invasive species, is encroaching. This is one of our greatest goals: maintaining native communities while pushing back invasive plants.

Over this past year, I have learned more practical tools and techniques than I ever would have expected, not only growing as a professional, but also as a human being. I am very thankful to be stepping into a stewardship role for our natural world, and I am even more thankful that y'all are able to enjoy it with me.