

# Sealaska resource manager interns learn and earn

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Juneau correspondent

Jack Lorrigan and Don Williams are back in the classroom, but they probably got more out of a summer of riffle shocking, glide trapping, reach transecting and channel typing than they do from tests and lectures.

The college students are Sealaska shareholders who spent the summer as paid interns with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) collecting field data from seven remote watersheds in Southeast as part of a major study on how logging effects fish habitat.

"The experience was a lot better than a classroom," says Williams, a senior in geological engineering at Washington State University. "Once you see something or have it in your hand it stays in your mind better than



NMFS biologist Jon Heifetz (left) and Jack Lorrigan set a baited fish trap.

country's largest. And, it's significant to Sealaska, which is logging more than 2,300 acres this year and is expected to bring in \$57 million from export of 150 million board feet of timber (two-thirds of that from village corporation lands) by next spring.

Sealaska is entitled to own up to 330,000 acres of land in Southeast — most of it blanketed with valuable spruce and hemlock. And, it handles cutting and marketing contracts with five village corporations in the region.

"We want to continue good stewardship," says William Ellison, president of Sealaska Timber Corporation (STC), a subsidiary of the regional corporation. "And I'm not just saying that. We believe it."

Lorrigan and Williams are convinced that using buffer zones in

(Continued on Page Fifteen)



Jack Lorrigan checks a hand scale he'll use to weigh and measure silver salmon and trout.

looking at a book or being in a classroom."

"We learn hatcheries at school," says Lorrigan, a second-year aquaculture student at Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka. "I learned more in the field than I did in the classroom. It opened my eyes to wild fish needs and I learned about experiments being done related to hatcheries."

Lorrigan and Williams were two of 10 interns who worked for Sealaska or its subsidiaries last summer, according to Maxine Richert, the assistant vice-president in charge of the program. "Most students provided a valuable service," she says. "Some did things managers needed but don't have time to do."

For example, one young woman this year designed computer software and instruction manuals to record historical files and to inventory resource holdings of the company.

Sealaska has sponsored 32 internships over four years. It's open to college students who have above-average grades. Four trainees have, after graduation, landed fulltime jobs with the corporation in sales, management and accounting.

"It exposes them to the corporate world and gives us a

chance to offer training to shareholders and evaluate them for future managers," says Richert. Sealaska spent \$45,000 on intern wages last summer.

Williams and Lorrigan earned some of those wages by spending several weeks in the wilds trying to figure out what sort of stream habitat best supports juvenile king and coho salmon, as well as cutthroat trout. The length or "reach" of each stream, was divided into a score of "transects" for myriad measurements.

Woody debris — which the studies have shown to be an important component of fish habitat — was also analyzed, especially for how it effects the character of the stream.

Fish were trapped in calm water, called a glide, or gently stunned in faster running riffles so that their vital statistics, too, could be recorded. Collection of all these numbers has contributed to the scientific conclusion that if a buffer strip of trees is left standing between a stream and a clearcut, fish have a better chance of survival.

That kind of information is critical to federal agencies managing the 17-million acre Tongass National Forest, the

# Sealaska interns

(Continued from Page Eight)

logging plans is the way to do that. "Fish were in areas where there were trees around," says Williams, who has lived in Juneau 13 years and who worked as a forestry technician with Huna Totem Corporation two summers ago. "We went to Kake and compared (logging sites) and there were a lot more fish in areas with buffers."

STC does not establish buffers in all cuts. "It's almost site specific," says Ellison. "And it can create hardship (on the company) because we can leave a valuable resource standing. Of course, that has to be offset with the stream resource and water quality."

"We're trying to save two resources — logging and

fisheries," agrees Lorrigan. "If they work at it they can do both."



*Sealaska intern Don Williams.*

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Ellison, however, points out

(Continued on Page Sixteen)

# Sealaska interns

(Continued from Page Fifteen)

that narrow ribbons of trees can be susceptible to blowdowns. Lorrigan, who grew up in Craig, Colorado, and fished with his grandfather out of Ketchikan every summer, says he's learned that fallen logs are good for fish.

"People in remote areas who see a lot of logs and want to clear it out, they should leave it alone. Juveniles need that debris. I never realized that before."

Lorrigan and Williams were an experiment for Sealaska. It was the first time the corporation entered a joint agreement with an outside organization for intern employment. The federal government picked up one of the salaries (which ran between \$6 and \$10 an hour). It was a partnership that worked well.

"It provided a great opportunity for the kids in the field and provided us with a source of employment," says NMFS biologist K.H.J. Koski, leader of the habitat studies. "Working with Native students was a plus, too, because it gives them a chance to get involved with local resources. It was really kind of fun. They did a good job."

The fun part included lots of helicoptering ("a free chopper — you can't beat that," says Lorrigan); encountering six bears in a single day ("Ten more feet and I wouldn't be talking to you now," he promises); and being a "Hacker" back at the lab ("Once I got the raw data I plugged it into a computer and that was fun, too," says Williams).

Both guys would like to participate in the internship program again and think more students need to know about the opportunity. "I'm a shareholder and I'd like to see stock stay in Native hands," says Lorrigan. "Those of us in college are the future of the company."