

My name is Amanda Gagnon. I am a Student Conservation Association (SCA) intern in Christiansted on the island of St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands.

I graduated with honors from the University of Maine at Machias with an environmental studies degree. While there it was stressed upon me the importance of being in the field and getting your hands dirty. The professors instilled that you cannot learn about an environment just in a text book but you need to be in the field. While studying abroad in England I started to understand the true variation of environments and how different cultures and regions deal with conservation. This helped me to understand the varying nature and scope of global conservation efforts.

During college I also worked for British Aerospace Engineering (BAE Systems) in their environmental, health and safety department. Through this opportunity I was able to experience the business side of environmental regulation and work. I also became acutely aware that I truly enjoy field work and that shaped the rest of my course work at school and my goals after graduation.

My first experience with the SCA was in high school. I worked with a trail crew (maintains and clears trails) in the Okanagan National Forest in Washington state. This month long experience introduced me to the SCA and its core values. Upon graduation, facing a tough job market and wanting to work in my field, I once again turned to the SCA. I was familiar with their internship programs for people over the age of 18 and felt that it would be a perfect opportunity for me to give back and learn valuable skills.

My first internship was with NRCS in New Hampshire. The Concord field office was my base and we served two counties and 200 plus farmers. NH had interns from SCA for several years and while I was there the state had about 10 interns. This allowed me to not only have the resources of full time employees but to also have peers who had already been there for varying time periods and who had varied knowledge of the “in’s and out’s” of NRCS. During this time I was a Farm Bill intern and it was my job to take new applicants and get them through the paperwork process of becoming eligible. I also preformed all of the environmental documentation needed for the contracts. I assisted with varied field activities as needed everything from holding the rod in surveying to assisting in toolkit designs to spot and design checks. During my year long internship I also had trainings in toolkit, GIS, protracts, high tunnels, Cornell soil science tests, and the compact constant head permeameter. Upon the completion of my internship in November I was looking for a position within the agency or another position elsewhere when the ASC-programs for NH asked me about another internship opportunity. This opportunity brought me to my current internship in the Virgin Islands.

I am currently working as a Soil Conservationist Aide Intern in the St. Croix Field office in Christiansted. I have been here for the past six months and it has been quite a learning experience. I am the only intern in the VI and other than me there is only a DC in our office. I have taken on more roles in contract formation; helping to create plans, ranking applications and doing designs in toolkit. Aside from the difference in job roles I am also adjusting to the method and means by which Caribbean farming occurs. Here we do not have to worry about the freeze – thaw cycle but we do have to contend with droughts and a lack of fresh water sources on the island and conversely plan for hurricane season. Farming here on the island is significantly different and on a considerably smaller scale which presents itself with fresh and new challenges.

After this internship I would like a position within the agency. I feel that after two years of interning with two very different NRCS field offices and regions I could be an asset to the agency. If not then I will be happy to find a position that allows me to get my hands dirty in the field.

