



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Success Story

The Hourglass Fen at Wagner Natural Area in early August.

YEE student helps maintain and protect Wagner Natural Area

THE WAGNER NATURAL AREA NEAR
Edmonton is a small wetland of boreal forest, that
serves as a home to precious wild things – including
amphibians, butterflies, insects, and orchids.

This beloved land and its species require constant care,
maintenance, and protection, and is looked after by the
Wagner Natural Area Society.



WAGNER NATURAL AREA SOCIETY,
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

Canada

This project is funded by
the Government of Canada



Kiera Coleman on an orientation tour of the Wagner Natural Area comes across an active porcupine den in early May.



Natural Area Specialist from Wagner Natural Area Society giving a presentation on wetlands to a group of homeschooled students at Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park.

The non-profit WNAS is the Volunteer Steward of the As a non-profit organization, the society relies on volunteers to manage the site. However, in the summer of 2023, its president Dave Ealey had the opportunity to hire conservation biology student Kiera Coleman, who served as the society's Natural Area Specialist. Her position was funded from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Youth Employment Experience (YEE) program. This program, funded by the Government of Canada, is designed to build skills and remove barriers to employment for youth. The program further builds capacity in the parks and recreation sector by providing mentorship support to each youth throughout their work experience.

"For us, it's getting to be essential to have a summer student available because there are so many things that we have to do to manage this site," says Ealey, who mentored Coleman throughout the summer.

As part of her work, Coleman was responsible for clearing the area's trails for people to enjoy, giving tours to visitors at the site, as well as conducting research work on the area's wildlife including birds and amphibians.

She also had office-related tasks such as report writing, newsletter writing, and giving presentations.

"This job really helped me figure out what I like to do – which was going out and sampling plants in the research plots," Coleman says. "I'd like to explore that more in future jobs. It was really helpful to experience a variety of things."

Ealey describes Coleman as a "stellar employee" who was instrumental in helping manage many aspects of the site.

"It's only a square mile, but that means four miles of fencing. We've got a kilometre and a half of trails. We have picnic shelters, an entrance gate and a parking area and a whole host of other things," Ealey says. "Kiera was also really good this year with the perimeter checks and was able to alert us to a few things, so it was really good to have someone here to do those checks."

He adds that Coleman delivered engaging, high-quality tours of the site to the public – which is important for the society because it builds and creates public awareness about preserving Wagner Natural Area.

"We need to make sure we're connecting with people, because when we have to call upon the public for help when we have to battle against some external plans – like a development or highway changes – it really helps to have a group that are supportive," Ealey says.

As one of the original founders of the society, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022, Ealey adds that the funding opportunity helped the society raise awareness of the site to the next generation.

Coleman remained passionate about her work even after her employment period ended. Every weekend, she returned to the site to help with different projects such as barbed wire rolling and fence clearing.

"It's really rewarding work, and you get so much more hands-on experience and knowledge that you don't get in a classroom," she says. 🍁