

ESS Newsletter

November, 2025



Riley working in Malheur National Forest

Senior Comp - Riley Hunter

Riley Hunter, January '26, completed a senior project combining forest ecology and creative nonfiction writing. In a series of essays, she explores the human connection to forests through her own childhood stories and undergraduate experiences working in forestry. She talks extensively about working with the local Foundation for Sustainable Forests, which acquires forested property through grants, outright purchase, and occasionally through donated forests to simultaneously conserve biodiversity and sustainably harvest timber in support of the local economy. Written to inform a general audience, the series is woven together by foundational forest ecology concepts and context of the U.S. 's history of forestry and environmental law. The collection of essays illustrates how we can grow our appreciation of forests through lenses of nostalgia, aesthetic, locality, and a connected moral obligation to nature and ourselves.

Alumni Update - Elsa Waidelich

Elsa Waidelich '25, an Environmental Science & Sustainability major, has gone on to work on getting her masters in biology at Virginia Tech. She is working in a lab that studies soil ecology, specifically looking at how biological systems interact with their geological counterparts. Her research regarding her thesis will be investigating the effects of adding Biochar to soil for agricultural benefits. Biochar is a substance similar to coal that has been used in farming for thousands of years, and has been thought to assist with soil health.

Elsa will be conducting field research on this topic looking into how it actually affects the soil; specifically how it impacts nitrogen cycling in soil. This is relevant to the leaching of nitrogen, nitrous oxide emissions, and availability of nitrogen to plants. She also looks at how the effect microbial activity changes as biochar ages, and microbial activity related to nitrification. She is also in the process of applying to the National Science Foundation graduate research funding programs to possibly get her PHD in the future.



Elsa in the field





Forest Description and Management Plans

This semester, students taking the Forest Ecosystems & Management course are working with Professor Rich Bowden to compose a forest description and management plan for the recently acquired forest property of the Tamarack Wildlife Center. Forest surveys help property owners assess the health of their forest and better understand how they should maintain their forests to get the things they need from their property, while balancing ecosystem values.

The forest class has spent many hours in the field assessing tree quality and quantity of three different sites on the property by identifying tree diversity within plots, measuring the DBH of the trees, and taking tree cores to assess annual growth. They also have assessed rates of deer browsing for both 2025 and previous years. The report they have composed will be used to help Tamarack Wildlife Center identify potential concerns with their property that should be monitored and provide recommendations for the best use of different areas of the property and general forest management.



Forest team at Heart's Content



Food Recovery Network Back in Action!

Thanks to the time and effort of the Green Coalition and the Bonner program, the Food Recovery Network, or FRN, is starting up again at Allegheny College! The Food Recovery Network is a nationwide nonprofit organization that is dedicated to recover leftover food to benefit local communities. At Allegheny College this will look like working with Parkhurst to get leftover food from the dining hall at the end of the day and distributing it among local nonprofits. This will prevent that food from going to waste, along with providing food to people in the Meadville community in need.

As FRN is restarting it will begin by working with CHAPS to meet the needs of the broader Meadville community. Along with the leftover food donation, Allegheny's FRN will feature a food resource center on the third floor of the Campus Center where anyone can donate or pick up food. There will also be grow towers which will allow for easier access to fresh produce for students in the winter months, who are unable to get food from the dining halls, which will be starting up next semester.

FRN is looking for volunteers, if you are interested reach out to the Green Coalition at greenco@allegheny.edu. They plan to begin as soon as possible, which can happen with the support and dedication of Allegheny's community.

Alumni Update - Ivy Ryan

After graduating in 2019, Ivy worked as a School Program Educator with Rivers of Steel in Pittsburgh. They're a local nonprofit that conducts environmental science programming for elementary and middle school students, and they also operate arts programming at the Carrie Furnaces. She was also an Education Intern with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. Being involved with both of these organizations introduced her to the nonprofit world in Pittsburgh and really helped her get a foot in the door!

Currently, Ivy is a Naturalist Educator at the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy! They run the high school program, called High School Urban Ecostewards, where students from nearby schools visit the park to take action on climate change through various stewardship projects like tree planting and invasive species removal. They also assist in middle school programming, leading field trips for 8th grade students to explore the forest and stream environments.

Ivy credits Casey Bradshaw-Wilson's Conservation Biology class for being a pivotal moment in their time at Allegheny. In that class they were able to take the information they had gained about ecology and apply it to real world scenarios that could make an actual impact. From there, they spent the summer at Allegheny in the Freshwater Ecology and Soil labs, assisting with research. One of the most memorable moments of their time at Allegheny was identifying freshwater mussels in the field, in part with Penn State staff! Ivy says Casey Bradshaw-Wilson's natural excitement for everything freshwater showed her how important it is to showcase your passions and how that can transform the people around you!

Ivy says their advice to Allegheny ESS students would be to let go of any fear of trying something new, because that's usually where we learn and grow the most! Looking back, there are so many classes she wishes she took and programs or research positions they wish they applied for. She says to lean on the support from faculty to discover your passions and where you may thrive, and don't be the one holding yourself back!



Ivy with a millipede

Upcoming Events!

12/5 - First Friday Sustainability Series - Natural Crafts and Gift Workshop - 1-4pm in Tippie B010

12/5 - Axe Throwing Trip with Outing Club - 5pm sign ups come out 12/1 at 9pm via Outing Club email list

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**Interested in writing
for the ESS Newsletter?
Have news you think
needs covered?**

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