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## Environmental Restoration Warrior Program Restoration helps fight for bottom line

BY CATHY HAMILTON-WISSMER

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The Environmental Restoration Warrior program and the Department of Public Works Environmental Division Fish and Wildlife team who initiated it have made unique efforts to accomplish environmental objectives, conserve rare species and comply with the law, while also saving the Army hundreds of thousands of dollars annually — serving the active-duty community and preserving the military mission.

The efforts of this program meet the goals of the Sustainability triple bottom line plus: mission, environment and community — plus economic benefit.

This internship program is for injured and retiring active-duty service members. JBLM's Fish and Wildlife team is involving the ERW in ecological restoration, conservation, and science.

"I love this stuff man. Wind and sleet don't matter; I just love being out here. Putting up these boxes, helping out some ducks, this is awesome to me," said Sgt. Ron Rudolph, who served in Afghanistan as a mortarman before interning with JBLM's ERW program.

ERW is now in its fourth year and continues to build on its successes. Participants in the program help conduct varied, critically-important recovery activities such as restoration forestry, rare species surveys, habitat enhancement, invasive species control, native seed collection, salmon passage, riparian restoration, wetland searches for rare amphibians and timber sale raptor surveys.

During the summer, interns are trained and nationally certified as wildland firefighters and assist in prescribed burns to maintain sensitive prairies and oak woodlands. These activities help JBLM meet environmental management objectives, ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations. Among other things, this helps prevent critical habitat designation and other similar hindrances to military use of JBLM's training lands.

ERW interns work side-by-side with professional biologists and students from nine local colleges, gaining job-skills training, building practical experience and learning about academic opportunities — all while immersed in a civilian professional environment. Most of the program's 78 graduates are now gainfully employed and building civilian careers, and many are enrolled in college or working in environmental-related career fields.

In fiscal year 17, the ERW supplied the equivalent of more than \$500,000 in volunteer labor to Fish and Wildlife. In a time of budgetary uncertainty and increased requirements of additional species listings, this inflow of labor has been critical to the accomplishment of a wide range of biological objectives.

Interns are typically active-duty personnel in their last year of service, and it provides them with job-skills training and resume building to prepare them for careers in a wide array of environmental fields. It also pairs them with student volunteers from nine local colleges, who are able to provide insight into academic opportunities and involve interns in ecological research.

A high proportion of the program's 79 graduates over its four-year history have successfully transitioned into post-service careers and college enrollment.

Those interested in interning with Fish and Wildlife should email: [dennis.buckingham@colostate.edu](mailto:dennis.buckingham@colostate.edu).



Environmental Division  
Serenity Ainsworth, Evergreen student intern at JBLM, touches a bluebird nest and discusses nesting habits in the cantonment with a group of volunteers in the Environmental Restoration Warrior program Dec. 11, 2017. Pictured with Ainsworth left to right: Nichole Criss, Christina Darnell, Spc. Adam Luttrell and Spc. Chris Carriveau.

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