



The four Costa 5 Rivers students who spent time in the Pacific Northwest. From left to right: Dan Eiden (Gustavus Adolphus College), Morgan Bradley (University of Colorado-Boulder), Matteo Moretti (Middlebury College), and Dyer Benjovsky (University of Buffalo)(courtesy of Matteo Moretti).

aspirations, and shared some late-night meals under the basin's beautiful canopy of stars. We valued each other's company, and we shared each other's passion.

I think the 5 Rivers Odyssey is an exceptional program because it not only allows a group to highlight the problems and successes surrounding our fisheries, native fish, and public lands but also is a catalyst that connects people to people. An amazing thing happens when you put many unique and different people together who share a common connection to the environment: they push each other to continue to make change.

This odyssey challenged me in all sorts of ways, from having to swallow the hard truth about seemingly impossible recoveries to capturing every genuine moment of our interactions, lessons, and experiences through film and photography. Thanks to this challenge – and because of the connections I made – I will continue to aspire to bring about change in my own way.

Having the privilege to capture and document the stories of people whose souls are connected to their lands and rivers has taught me so much about conservation. In particular, it has shown me

the importance of pushing past the negativity that sometimes surrounds our current environmental situation. If I could conclude with only one takeaway, it would be this: there are countless people in our world dedicating their lives to save, protect, and recover what they love. This realization only has given me more guidance to do the same. The drive, kinship, and love I saw in these people is what will inspire me to continue to tell these stories throughout my life.

Without getting too corny or nostalgic, I think I can speak for us all when I say that this was a truly life-changing experience. Not many college-aged students have the opportunity to tour an entire area of the U.S. for a month, let alone have the pleasure to meet the honest and inspirational souls we did along the way. We learned that there are still countless problems for habitat in the Columbia River basin, some that seem insurmountable. However, we also discovered the importance of actually listening to the local stories of the men and women who dedicate their lives to saving what native and wild areas we have left and, hopefully, to bringing them back.

As a culmination of our odyssey, I plan to make a short film documenting our journey, our discoveries, the stories of the Columbia River basin, and the passion for inspiring others that brought our group together as friends.

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Drone footage of the Sheep Creek Restoration Project where the students got to experience working with a hand crew (courtesy of Matteo Moretti).