

Summary Report and Impact Statement for 2015 Navy Camp Program: Maine

On August 2nd, 2015 (16) Navy teens based in Rota, Spain arrived as a group in Portland, ME for a 1-week S.T.E.M. focused camp experience at Bryant Pond. The focus of the program was to introduce the participants to a real world problem; Invasive Species- Eurasian Milfoil (plant) and Large and Smallmouth Bass (fish), both now found in our local water body of Lake Christopher.

The group arrived in Portland on a late night flight, and was introduced to Bryant Pond 4-H Camp in the early hours of Monday morning, where they soon found their bunks and had a chance to sleep. We anticipated a later start to the day on Monday due to their long journey, yet were pleasantly surprised at how anxious they were to begin their adventures.

After a hearty breakfast, we began with orientation and goal setting followed by the challenge and ropes course. It was quite apparent that this was to be a high functioning group, and they excelled from the beginning. They were split into two groups of 8 participants, with 2 leaders, and 1 Navy liaison per group.

Lessons included team building, wildlife ecology, and outdoors skills. We began to focus on designing and constructing R.O.V.'s with the goal of utilizing them to explore the depths of Lake Christopher for invasive species. The teens worked in teams to build and construct these useful devices. The group worked well together and stayed focused on the tasks at hand.

I presented the problems of invasive species in our lake and we focused on identification, problem solving, risk management, and solutions. The group came up with several ideas on how best to proceed in our work of finding and identifying possible suspected species. Milfoil, an invasive plant has been found here for several years, and is somewhat easy to identify. More recently, bass have been found in this cold-water species water body. In 2014, the first confirmed Largemouth Bass was caught, with several potential Smallmouth Bass caught the previous year. If bass do exist, an anticipated upset with the trout and salmon fishery is expected.

The question we needed to answer: "Is there a breeding population, or could these be adult fish illegally introduced in the lake recently?"

Each group, using canoes, explored the lake in search of suitable habitat and structure that may be used by bass. They identified weed beds and shallow rock piles as the best places to investigate, and using masks and fins, small collecting nets and ID cards, they began their data collecting and exploring. One young woman in particular, Kennedy, took this challenge very serious and was elated to have found exactly what we were looking for! Within a short period of time she found bedding areas from adult female bass that were still being utilized as nursery areas for bass fry (young immature fish).

What was of most importance was the prevalence of both Large and Smallmouth Bass in her sample. This confirmed that the illegal introduction is beyond a recent illegal stocking and now presents other challenges.

The confirmation of this find was presented to the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and in 2016, the fishing regulations will be changed to encourage all bass to be kept or killed immediately. This will appear as a code **S-13: No size or bag limit on bass.**

Highlight's of the week overall was the willingness of the group to work together and try new things. They enjoyed the new climbing wall, extensive high and low ropes course, and an unscheduled field trip to Wal-Mart, followed by a picnic at Frenchman's Hole, a popular swimming destination in the mountains of Western Maine. On Thursday evening, we put on a traditional Maine Lobster Bake for those that wanted to try fresh lobster. Afterwards, a closing campfire wrapped up the week with a chance to have fun and relax with other campers, and a time to reflect on their experience. The glow of the fire on their faces illuminated their sense of adventure and accomplishment, and many spoke up only wishing their stay was longer.

The level of respect was uncommonly high for a teenage group, and I was very impressed by the enthusiasm and willingness to learn and to try. Many times we see our older campers arrive with a "too cool for camp" mindset, but the entire group was vested and involved. Kaylee and Andrea were exceptional leaders and represented this group in a very positive way. We enjoyed their company, and the communication was excellent between us throughout the week.

In a follow up email with Kaylee, I learned a bit more about how much impact this program has had on the group, and I learned that some were planning a camping trip together. Several folks expressed that this program changed their mindset and lives. Most notably, Kennedy has shown a new interest for the outdoors and felt such pride for her work and involvement in this project. She is a wonderful young woman, and I wish all of them the best of luck in their future endeavors.