ROCKY MOUNTAIN TRENCH
ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROGRAM

June 30, 2009
For Immediate Release

Mississippi Students Study Trench Ecosystem Restoration

Three graduate students from the University of Mississippi's Department of Biology were in the East Kootenay for much of June getting a crash course in ecosystem restoration.

Their three-week internship here was part of a training program in forest restoration ecology funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The master's degree program is focused on restoration research, but faculty also wanted to provide students with a real-life learning experience.

An internet search led to the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program. The first restoration initiative of its kind in BC, the program is in its 12th year of restoring tens of thousands of hectares of open forest and grasslands.

"We wanted the students to see a really successful restoration project on a large scale," biology professor Jason Hoeksema recounted from his office in Oxford, Mississippi. "We started searching around the world and found the Trench program."

Hoeksema made contact with Greg Anderson in Invermere. Anderson, now head of the provincial ecosystem restoration program, was the founding chair of the Trench restoration program.

"Greg was very receptive and put together an exciting and enriching program for our students. We think it was the internship in BC that made our proposal to the USDA a winning one," Hoeksema said.

During their jam-packed East Kootenay visit, students Anjel Craig, Erynn Maynard and Jason Ryndock were introduced to the nuts and bolts of on-the-ground restoration by foresters, burn bosses, fire ecologists, wildlife biologists, ranchers, range agrologists, naturalists and ethnobotanists.

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They toured Trench restoration projects on Crown land, in national and provincial parks, on private conservation properties, at resorts, and within municipalities.

They had lessons in writing restoration logging prescriptions and conducting prescribed burns, listened to stakeholders discuss economic challenges, helped measure restoration effects on plant life, and heard how restoration contributes to First Nations cultural values.

They were particularly impressed by the way government, industry and the public work together to achieve restoration goals.

"You've got so many different parties involved. It's amazing that you can satisfy so many objectives … hunting, grazing, forestry, wildlife," said Erynn Maynard.

"We've been pleasantly surprised by how much the public knows and cares about ecosystems," added her colleague Jason Ryndock. "People here are really environmentally conscious."

Fire-maintained ecosystems are familiar to the students. Like our grasslands and open forests, the upland forests of Mississippi are fire-dependent and have changed dramatically as a result of fire suppression.

But restoration treatments such as thinning and prescribed burning are still at the experimental stage in Mississippi, while in British Columbia they have been applied across the landscape for more than a decade.

"This has been an unprecedented opportunity to get a look at ground-breaking restoration work that has become a template for the rest of the world," said Anjel Craig.

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University of Mississippi students examine a badger burrow protected during restoration logging near the old Kimberley airport. Clockwise from left: students Anjel Craig and Jason Ryndock, Tembec planner Brian Dureski,range agrologist Shawna Larade, student Erynn Maynard and habitat biologist Sue Crowley.