



Becoming an SCA



The 2013 NPS Academy at Grand Teton (NPS photo)

Are you a high school or college student interested in nature and conservation? Have you ever heard of the Student Conservation Association (SCA)? This organization connects young people to the environment in ways that benefit both!

If you've never heard of the Student Conservation Association (SCA), I would definitely recommend giving it a try. I did and I am so grateful for the opportunities I've had as a result! Of course, my experience with the SCA began by accident. Let me tell you how I just happened to be at the right place at the right time.

Every fall semester at Valparaiso University in Indiana, they hold a free laundry day. Students can wash all they want for free. As you can imagine, the laundry room in the residence hall becomes a mad house that day. Finally, I was able to put a load into the washer when I saw a friend of mine across the room. We started chatting and she told me about her summer internship in a special program called the National Park Service (NPS) Academy through a partnership with the SCA. She suggested that I apply and, being a nature lover that was on the lookout for summer internships, I took her advice.

I was fortunate enough to be selected

to take part in the week-long program at Grand Teton National Park with thirty other college students. Everyone was from diverse backgrounds, representing places from all over the country. During our time there, we learned about the NPS and the park's different resources, went hiking and snowshoeing, and so much more. The best part was that upon completing the academy, the facilitators worked hard to get the students into internships for the summer, and I was placed at White Sands National Monument in New Mexico.

As a native to the Midwest, the Southwest was a whole new world for me. The climate, animals, plants, and bugs were things I had never experienced before. Working here, I have lead interpretive programs and immersed myself in the ever-changing landscape of White Sands. And I have gained a new goal: to work in the National Park Service. Before the NPS Academy, I had only visited two national parks and never realized what the agency had to offer. Now, I

hope to continue working for the NPS and eagerly await what the future has in store for me. If you are interested in learning more about the SCA, visit www.thesca.org.

—Maricela Avalos, Student Intern



Student-Intern, Maricela Avalos