



Student Conservation Association

Intern Satish Serchan

USFS Forestry Sciences Lab, Juneau, Alaska



FROM HIS NATIVE NEPAL, to urban Baltimore and the wilds of Alaska, Satish Serchan has already traveled far and wide. And, according to those who know him best, his journey in science, natural resources and different cultures is far from over.

Satish spent his entire childhood in Nepal before studying environmental science at the University of Vermont, which led to a range of environmental research programs. He ran nutrient analyses on leachate, conducted phytoplankton research at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, and earned a grant to research stream hydrology as a McNair scholar.

After graduation, Satish traveled to Baltimore, where he became an Urban Resources Initiative Intern at the Parks and People Foundation specializing in creating “green” individual and community networks.

With his undergraduate degree and internship under his belt, Satish turned to the Student Conservation Association in 2010, taking a research assistant position at with the US Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station, Juneau Forestry Sciences Lab, in Juneau, AK. This is where he merged his love of the outdoors with his passion for research.

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Over the course of the following two years, he managed forest re-vegetation data collected by field crews, conducted statistical analysis, and reported on findings to lead scientists. Satish also

supported the development of scientific, technical, and popular publications, and joined field crews in measuring vegetation and site conditions. In short, he did anything needed at this remote field station.

“It was a dream to work in Juneau,” Satish states. “I saw several different sides of the Forest Service: hydrology, soil science. There are so many diverse opportunities available.”

Satish says his favorite part of the SCA internship was field recording plots of the forest overstory and understory on isolated Prince of Wales Island. “We’d travel 45 minutes by boat to our work site, right in the middle of brown bear country. We’d see two or three a day,” he recalls. “Immersed in the beauty of Alaska; the challenges of outdoor life; the inclement weather; (and) hiking through slash. It was great.”



Satish conducts a soil respiration test measuring carbon-dioxide levels.

He loved the long days, and combination of field and lab work. It brought science to life for him, he said, by connecting the rigors of field sampling and data logging, with analysis and management application. Satish enjoyed it so much that he extended his SCA internship to two years, further strengthening his forestry and science knowledge, and making life-long friends.

“During his two year-long internships with us, Satish became a good friend and valued colleague,” said Dr. Mike McClellan, Research Ecologist & Maybeso Experimental Forest Lead Scientist, Juneau Forestry Sciences Lab. “His departure was definitely bittersweet—we really miss having him here at the lab, but we know he is going on to do great things in grad school, in the Pathways

Program, and ultimately with Forest Service Research & Development.”

SCA honored Satish’s hard work and dedication by awarding him the “SCA Alaska Conservation Leadership Award,” for outstanding service, inspiring creativity, and extraordinary contributions to Alaska public lands. It’s given to SCA interns who embody the vision and commitment, of SCA founder Liz Titus Putnam, for America’s cherished and irreplaceable natural resources, parks, forests, refuges and public lands.

As a result of his outstanding two year’s work at the Forestry Sciences Lab, Satish was selected by the Forest Service Research and Development (R&D) Executive Team to be among a national group of 12 Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) candidates to be sponsored in their academic studies, leading to a career with the agency. It comes at a perfect time to support his graduate studies.

This fall, Satish begins his master’s degree program in water resource studies, at the State University of New York – College of Environmental Science and Forestry, in Syracuse, NY. His mentors and peers at the lab couldn’t be happier for his success and continued professional development. It didn’t surprise them that Satish received FS support for his education and career pathway. “As I told Satish, sometimes life is about being in the right place at the right time, but it also comes back to the individual demonstrating their ability to get the job done and to work successfully with other people. He has clearly shown these capabilities, says Paul Brewster, assistant director for program development at the Pacific Northwest Research Station in Juneau.

“I have been particularly impressed by his dedication, his desire to contribute to the science mission of PNW Station, and his general curiosity and willingness to learn as much as possible in his time with us. Plus, he’s just a great person.”

Satish is grateful for such glowing characterizations, but says he was “just being professional.”

“It wasn’t just my effort,” Satish notes. “I’m really lucky to have such boosters behind me, like Paul and Mike, and SCA, who are so supportive of what I want to accomplish later in life. At some point I’d like to return to Nepal and, with my knowledge and training, help the government there become more sustainable.”

At the same time, Satish who just began his graduate work at SUNY-ESF, is taking it one day at a time. “Getting paid by the US Forest Service to work outside,” he reflects, “knowing there’s a sense of security at the end of the road after investing two and a half years in Alaska—SCA was supposed to be a one year internship. It’s all so amazing.”



Station Manager Paul Brewster and Research Director Mike McClellan celebrate Satish receiving the SCA Alaska Conservation Leadership Award.