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## Connecting Stewardship with Place

Mardi Mileham  
*Linfield College*

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# Connecting stewards

Students hoist buckets of gravel, wooden posts, rebar, a pick and sledgehammer, and head up a steep coastal trail. Soon, they dig a trench into the trail to insert the post, secure it with rebar pounded into the ground, and fill the trench with gravel to reinforce a washed-out section of the trail. They gather everything and head to the next section needing repairs.

These 13 Linfield College students didn't just spend one day doing a community service project. They spent January Term in a wilderness sanctuary along the Oregon Coast, learning about environmental, social and personal stewardship by connecting with a specific place on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. The place was Westwind, a 529-acre wilderness area at the base of Cascade Head, dedicated to connecting humans with ecological stewardship.

Hands-on activities enhanced the experience. Students learned about group dynamics by sharing bunk rooms, cooking and cleaning. They tackled numerous outdoor projects including repairing trails and transplanting native beach grass to prevent erosion. They studied the history and ecology of Westwind, identified native plants and trees and learned the medicinal properties of various species. They talked about subsistence and practiced survival skills – how to build a shelter, start a fire, and even how to use a bow and arrow. They polished group communication skills, and worked together as a team. Throughout it all the goal was for the students to understand how stewardship and sustainability are connected.

Duncan Reid '10, Linfield environmental stewardship and sustainability assistant, said an important part of stewardship is creating a sense of place, establishing a relationship with a specific area that inspires individuals to care for it.

“What is the foundation of someone who is interested in sustainability or stewardship?” he asked. “What drives that passion for me is having a genuine need to take care of a place. I am looking for ways to introduce students to that setting, where that connection can emerge through intellectual, philosophical, creative and scientific approaches. My hope is that students will take the understanding of stewardship back to their own communities and continue to be active agents of the environment.”

Throughout the month, guest lecturers, including Linfield professors, helped students evaluate the interaction between humans and their environment through multiple perspectives: ecology, biology, history, sociology, anthropology and literature. In addition to readings, lectures and hands-on projects, students reflected on the lessons and their own personal experiences by writing journals.

“One thing I didn't expect to learn is that stewardship means giving back to the environment, as well as the environment giving back to you,” said Adam Hernandez '16, a biochemistry and molecular biology major.

Sarah Hutchinson '18 of Sequim, Wash., said she now understands the role of beach grass and how to identify the native species from the invasive species. She also learned to identify trees and plants, based on their bark, or the direction in which they grow. For example, salmonberry grows in a zigzag pattern and rose hips have prickles, not thorns.

Quinn Riesenman '17, a creative writing and religious studies major, said he originally was interested in the course because of the opportunity to spend a month in the wilderness. However, he found himself thinking about how people interact with different locations.





# Stewardship with place

"I grew up in Denver and never thought about how we interact with the land and how that shapes our opinions about it," he said. "I've learned a lot of great outdoor skills, but I've also learned how to appreciate where I am. If you have the ability to be present, whether on the beach with a beautiful backdrop or in a camp kitchen, you have the ability to be happy wherever you are.

"There is no task too small or insignificant to put all of our attention into doing it," he added. "No matter what you are doing, you have to pay attention to each detail. It's important."

For the final, the class designed and developed a project to implement within the Linfield community. They proposed

improving the Cozine Creek area on campus, including removing invasive species and planting native plants and vegetation. The plan also called for installing benches and creating an area that might appeal to students. Final design and implementation details are being finalized.

—Mardi Mileham

 Watch video: [youtube.com/linfieldcollege/videos](https://youtube.com/linfieldcollege/videos)



*The beauty and solitude of Westwind, a wilderness area along the Oregon Coast, provided opportunities for students in a January Term class to repair trails, transplant native beach grass and study the history and ecology of the area. The class helped students to understand how stewardship and sustainability are connected and how a sense of place inspires individuals to care for it.*