Having never worked at a nonprofit before I wasn’t sure what to expect when I got my internship at SRF; it seemed like an awesome opportunity to learn about restoration and monitoring. The scientist in me was excited to find out what kind of things I would be doing in the field, yet I was also keen on seeing how a nonprofit organization like SRF operates.

I can still remember my first day. I arrived early and found the office dimly lit. I wasn’t sure what to do since there didn’t seem to be anyone there yet, so I sat down and began to look through some of the informational brochures. While reading about the South River’s water quality in one of the report cards, I heard a noise and looked up to find a cute yellow lab coming towards me. As an avid dog lover, nothing could have been more comforting on my first day than to be greeted by a dog. After giving the dog a few good scratches behind the ears, I got up and began walking down the hall with the yellow lab as my tour guide. After peeking into a few empty rooms, I finally met Jennifer and Josh. They were both very welcoming and alleviated any first day nervousness I was still feeling. Josh then took me to a few of the Federation’s restoration projects, some of which were still being constructed. It amazed me to see how many different projects there were, as well as the amount of work and coordination it took to create them.

As the weeks went by I came to find that coordination was as essential part of the Federation. I got to sit in on a few meetings with stakeholders, engineers, and county officials. One thing I noticed was that everyone at these meetings was working toward the same end goal, and nobody’s concerns were left unaddressed. I also came to find that the everyone at the Federation was very friendly and welcoming, making me feel right at home at the office.

I’ve worked in places where the overall office mindset is unsettling, making it unpleasant, but at the Federation everyone was focused on helping each other. Whether that meant writing addresses on letters to homeowners, preparing items for fundraising events, or going out onto the boat to do tidal monitoring, everyone was involved throughout. Although certain people had specific jobs it never stopped them from lending a helping hand when needed. This kind of camaraderie is what I believe sets the Federation apart from many other workplaces. I think it is difficult to get a group
of people from different backgrounds to come together and work well unless they are also good friends and mentors.

This internship has taught me a lot about stream restoration, water quality, and habitat management. I've seen and handled a variety of wildlife including frogs, fish, deer, turtles, and birds. I've learned to identify certain invasive plants and how they can be managed, as well as what kinds of trees can be effectively planted in riparian zones to reduce erosion. I've learned how to take water quality readings and calibrate expensive monitoring devices.

But out of all of the scientific knowledge and experience that I've gained over the past three months, the most important thing that I will take away from my time at the Federation is that the most effective nonprofit is one composed of people who truly care, not only about the issue at hand, but also about the people they work with and help.