

Meet an MI Student

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Master of Forest Resources, 2013 Oregon State University Ethiopia, 2010-12



I went into the Peace Corps Master's International program with a focus on forest policy and how international forest policy ultimately affects U.S. forest policy. I have not lost that interest but I have discovered that my true passion is forest ecology. The world is facing continued population growth and this growth is occurring at an alarming rate in areas with often the most biodiversity and the fewest protections.

I am currently a student at Oregon State University (OSU). I began my studies in September 2009, and I am working toward a master's degree in forest resources. I was at OSU for a full year before leaving for Ethiopia in September 2010. I returned to Oregon in January 2013 and immediately

began more coursework. I will be at OSU from January to June taking courses, analyzing my data, and writing my thesis. I hope to defend my thesis by the end of this coming summer.



I chose OSU because it is one of the premier forestry programs in the United States. It has a great reputation for its College of Forestry and is recognized by the Society of American Foresters as an accredited program for foresters. The professor I am studying under has remained flexible and helped to find me teaching appointments to help with tuition relief.

I served in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia from 2010–12. I was placed in a very small rural village in Bale Mountains National Park located in southeastern Ethiopia. My Peace Corps cohort was the first group to focus on conservation and natural resource management in partnership with both governmental agencies and nongovernmental organizations. Our main assignments were to

implement tree-planting activities and to aid our counterpart organizations in whatever way we could in relation to conservation and natural resource management.



My husband and I expanded the local bamboo nursery into a native tree nursery, collected and procured seeds, and led tree-planting activities. We aided in environmental tourism initiatives, such as English training for tour guides and local restaurants; identified local sites and hikes for developing tourism opportunities; and aided in improving local honey for sale to tourists. I also taught English in the primary school in our village.

My work as an MI Volunteer provided me with a deeper sense of commitment to my site. It re-enforced my commitment to learn the local language and the customs of my community so that I could have a broader understanding of the place and of how people in my community used and relied on the

surrounding forest for my research. I feel that now, that I have lived and studied in Ethiopia, I am more committed to returning to continue what I have started. My experience abroad has given me a focus and a place to begin my international forest ecology research.

It is our responsibility, as foresters, to help to understand how the conversion of forests to agriculture or pasture lands in tropical areas is affecting resource availability, ecosystem services, and livelihoods of those who depend on the forest. What are we losing in terms of species and are these species contributing to the mitigation of climate change? There are so many questions that can only be addressed by folks willing to work in developing countries. Peace Corps Volunteers, especially MI Volunteers, are uniquely equipped to work to answer these questions. It is my hope that eventually I can respond, through research or active participation, to the need for a more global forest policy to protect and grow what is left—for the good of all.

