

## Opportunities Arise for Young Professional

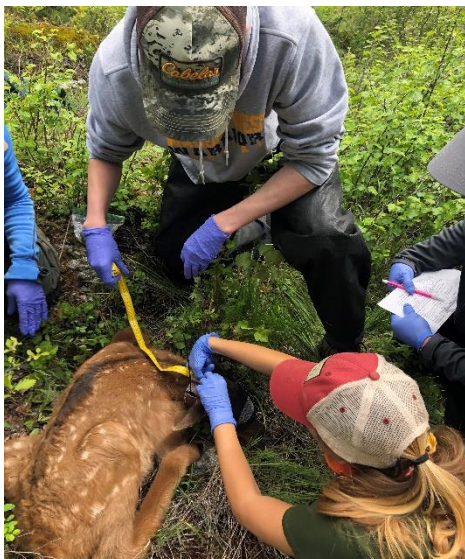
by Brilyn Brecka

Capturing and collaring elk calves is an exhilarating experience even for seasoned wildlife biologists, and the chance to do so is sought after by many young wildlife students. UW-Stevens Point junior Sam Sodke was lucky enough to have this opportunity as an undergraduate, and to this day it has been his favorite summer job so far. Growing up in Wausau, WI, Sam always had an interest in wildlife and the outdoors. Enjoying his time hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and birdwatching, he gained an appreciation for nature at a young age. After volunteering for a waterfowl and eagle survey with a local biologist, Janet Brehm, his path to majoring in Wildlife Ecology and Management at UWSP was further cemented.



*Sam Sodke worked with Dusky grouse as a research technician in eastern Nevada.*

Sam described his decision to attend UWSP as the “perfect combination”: close to home, affordable, and the wildlife ecology program and professors are highly recognized across the country. He describes the faculty as, “amazing guides and teachers to help mold me and every other student into natural resource professionals.” In his time at UWSP, Sam experienced more



*Sam helped collect data and attach collars to elk calves and white-tailed deer fawns while working in Washington in the*

than he initially thought he would in college. Not only did coursework provide educational experiences that translated into a career in natural resources, but his involvement in the Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society has provided opportunities to gain hands-on learning and different experiences outside of the classroom. He is a Co-leader for the Fisher and Flying Squirrel research projects; these projects pushed him to work harder to gain new experiences that will aid in his ability to be an effective wildlife manager.

Sam’s experiences inside and outside the classroom led to success in his professional career. His first wildlife job was as a Dusky grouse research technician in eastern

Nevada, but his favorite summer job was in northeast Washington. There, he helped collar elk calves and white-tailed deer fawns for a research project called the Washington Predator-Prey Project. Sam was responsible for collaring young ungulates, tracking them with radio telemetry, and then identifying cause of death for individuals that may have died. The project's goal is understanding how wolf recolonization and other predators like bears, bobcats, and mountain lions are impacting ungulates in the state. The project is also investigating how resource limitation, timber harvest, and human interactions could have an effect on these animals and their populations.

After graduation (anticipated in May 2022), Sam would be interested in pursuing a master's degree but is still unsure of what kind of research he wants to do. His career goals and aspirations include becoming a wildlife biologist for a state or federal agency where he can work to better understand and manage wildlife populations and improve habitat. His appreciation and passion for wildlife will aid him in achieving his goals; he believes his role in the natural resource field is, "doing my part in helping to protect and preserve our natural resources and our natural



*Collared fawns and calves offer valuable information on survival rates.*

world as a whole. With rapid species decline everywhere, it feels important and it feels like I'm a part of something bigger than myself to help work and protect wildlife and to better understand what they need to flourish."

Sam attributes much of his success in the wildlife field to his mentors: Stephanie Landry, Taylor Ganz, Shelli Dubay. These women have provided crucial support to put him on the right path as an early career professional. He notes they are "tremendous advocates and voices for women in the wildlife field," and he believes it is important for women and people of color to participate in the wildlife science discipline. Sam's mother has also played a large role in his development as a person and has provided support in all his endeavors.

Sam already has a job lined up for the summer of 2021 as a bobcat intern in South Dakota with the state Game, Fish, and Parks agency. He will be helping to collar kittens and track survival while researching bobcat den selection and environmental needs for successful reproduction. This work is crucial to evaluating the requirements for healthy populations of these predators in the state, and these experiences will allow him to achieve his career goals as a wildlife biologist.