In the 1930s, Dutch Elm Disease (DED) invaded the US and threatened forests and street elms. Since the 1970s, USFS researchers at Delaware’s Northern Research station have been breeding surviving elm trees in the hopes of creating DED resistant Elms to go back on streets and into the environment.

As a student trainee, my job consisted of assisting researchers with their daily tasks and long-term projects. This ranged from field work of maintaining trees, to lab work collecting data on planted trees for various experiments. Daily tasks were diverse! Sometimes the USFS partners with universities and allows them to use our facilities to conduct research, and I assisted them as well.

In mid-July 2023, the invasive species Elm Zigzag Sawfly (Aproceros leucopoda) was discovered by a technician. This was the first known sighting in Ohio, and we pivoted quickly to study the scope of the problem and how to best move forward. I learned to always expect the unexpected!

The biggest asset I gained from my experience with the Forest Service is to be flexible and treat unexpected changes as opportunities. I also learned to work “in the moment” and enjoy my time working outside knowing I was also helping to restore our forests.

Government moves slow, especially federal government!

Be sure you set expectations of clear communication, not everyone communicates well or frequently

Be prepared for the elements!

Prof. Roger Williams for emailing this job opportunity to students.

USFS Researchers and Technicians who served as amazing mentors.