Distributed by UW News Service, December 29, 2025

Link to original story: <https://www.uwsp.edu/news/lukas-elliot/>

**UW-Stevens Point student discovers direction and purpose through hands-on fieldwork**

Written by University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point

When University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point student Lukas Elliott enrolled in college for the first time, he thought he had found the right path. He began his academic journey at a small private school in Mequon, studying early childhood education. It didn’t take long, however, for him to realize it wasn’t the right fit.

“College is hard but rewarding,” said Elliott. “When you realize your major is no longer the path you want to go down, college becomes a lot less fun, a lot more quickly.”

A turning point came the summer he spent working at a large scout camp in New Mexico. Elliott lived in a 140,000-acre remote mountain environment, surrounded by conservation crews cutting back brush, burning slash piles and rebuilding meadows.

This experience stayed with him. After returning to Wisconsin, Elliott began reevaluating what he wanted from his college experience. That reflection led him to apply to the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point’s [College of Natural Resources](https://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/college-of-natural-resources/).

Within his natural resources courses, he found the kind of practical, hands-on education he had been looking for. His initial courses took him week by week through various concepts within natural resources that helped him narrow down what he was interested in pursuing.

No matter if he was learning about measuring trees or studying wildlife or wetland science, he was immersed through direct experience rather than lecture alone.

“I’ve never had a lecture here that was just a lecture,” said Elliott. “There isn’t a week that goes by where I don’t have a class in [Schmeeckle Reserve](https://www3.uwsp.edu/cnr-ap/schmeeckle/Pages/home.aspx) . We will talk about timber plotting in class, then spend a lab out in the woods doing it.”

Elliott noted that the College of Natural Resources differentiated itself from other programs with its focus on hands-on research and learning.

“For a data analytics class, we were going around campus, measuring trees and collecting the numbers ourselves, so even in a class like that, we are still getting that field opportunity and practice,” said Elliott. “They could have very easily just pulled up a study and used that, so it’s this really cool opportunity where you still get that practicality to it.”

Between his work out west observing meadow restoration and taking Associate Professor Bryant Scharenbroch’s wetland science and soils classes, Elliott decided to pursue [Ecosystem Restoration and Management](https://www.uwsp.edu/programs/degree/ecosystem-restoration-management/).

“I’m a person that likes solving puzzles,” said Elliott. “I found the idea of something being wrong with an area and figuring out how to fix it really fascinating.”

His interest grew even deeper during his summer field experience at UW-Stevens Point’s Treehaven Field Station in Tomahawk, WI. For six weeks, Elliott and his classmates spent full days in the field studying soils, forestry, wildlife and water resources. The work was intensive, technical and physical.

“It’s the most fun you never want to do again,” said Elliott. “You are out there doing fieldwork all day and then come back, write papers, do research and publish what you learned that day.”

Alongside academics, Elliott pursued training through UWSP’s Fire Crew. He earned his Type II Wildland Firefighter certification and joined the crew, assisting with real fire suppression work.

“It’s not make-believe. It’s a real fire crew,” said Elliott. “The DNR (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources) will call our students to do ride-alongs or join them on high fire risk days. You’re learning about fuses and drop torches, setting up water pumps running from streams and putting out burn piles.”

The fire and field experience reshaped his career interests and opened new doors. Elliott is now preparing to return to New Mexico to fulfill his summer work experience, this time as conservation staff. He will spend the season doing stream restoration by fixing water tables, putting up dams and erosion barriers.

The community he found at UW-Stevens Point strengthened his personal and professional growth. As a transfer student, he was unsure at first but quickly found support among peers and faculty. “Coming in as a transfer, you don’t know anyone, but people here are overwhelmingly welcoming,” he said. “Professors remember you. They care.”

Elliott works in UWSP Admissions and regularly meets prospective students on campus tours. He stays connected socially as well, including weekly tabletop games with friends he met during his summer experience at Treehaven.

Blending fieldwork, training from fire crew and his major’s program work helped shape a clearer academic direction for Elliott. These combined experiences have guided him to a foundation grounded in hands-on work, technical training and confidence in real environments.