

# Small Towns, Big Lessons

## Coburn Hanson, Conservation Across Boundaries '24



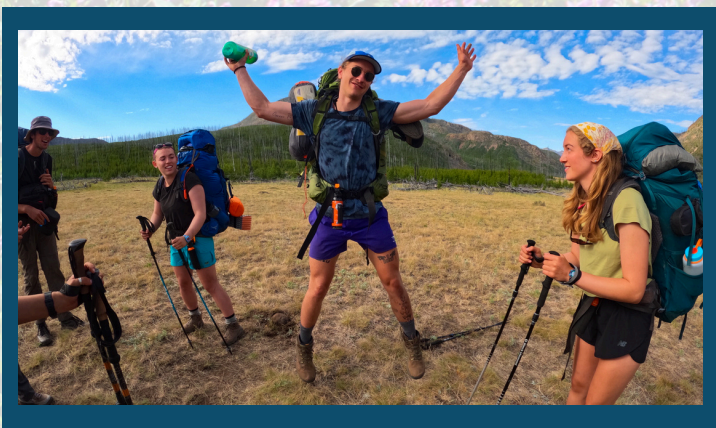
**“When deciding to take a WRFI course, the most important thing was broadening my perspective and placing myself in a position where I could learn about cultures that were previously foreign to me, which I think is extremely important, especially growing up in a small town.”**

Growing up in rural northern Wisconsin, Coburn was able to spend much of his childhood outdoors, instilling in him a deep appreciation of nature. His many Indigenous friends in the area introduced him to their ancestral knowledge and connection to the land, as well as the lasting impact colonization had on their communities. These lessons stuck in Coburn’s mind as they grew up together.

When it came time to head off for college, the city of Madison afforded Coburn many academic opportunities that his hometown could not, but he never forgot the lessons or love of natural spaces he learned there. That’s why, when a WRFI representative visited campus, he realized Conservation Across Boundaries had the potential to deepen the traditional ecological knowledge his friends from home had introduced him to, while getting him back into the natural world outside of the city.

While spending time in Glacier National Park on course, Coburn saw how the park was simultaneously beautiful and unjust. A visit to the nearby Blackfeet reservation and an in-depth discussion with Ninna Piiskii, Dr. Michael Bruised Head Chief Bird was transformative for his perspective on Native land. It impacted him enough to consider dedicating his professional life to supporting people like Dr. Mike Bruised Head who are doing the difficult work of preserving Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty.

**“I think that having this experience awoke something inside of me that really confirmed that I want to do something related to traditional ecological studies.”**



Coburn Hanson is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, majoring in Environmental Studies and Geography. Ecology and being in the outdoors are two of his biggest passions, and he hopes to combine these into a career that relies on traditional knowledge and supports Indigenous teachers of this knowledge.