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Project Title: A Comparative Evaluation of Freshwater Mitigation Wetlands in Broward County, Florida, Using Chironomid (Diptera) Pupal Exuviae: A Potential Technique for Assessing Mitigation Success.

I was born in Santa Barbara, California, to a pair of well intentioned, but rather short-sighted folks who liked the idea of the southern California sunshine. However, these same, well-educated folks apparently didn't realize the sun's mildly adverse effects on us fair-skinned peoples of northern European descent who are better adapted for the more melancholy climes favored by our ancestors. Since my inherited complexion can best be described as a shade or two short of polka-dotted albinism, they eventually realized the peril they had put me in and thoughtfully relocated to the shadier confines of southern New England before I reached the age of two, thereby adding what I conservatively estimate to be at least 20 years to my predicted lifespan.

As a child, I split my time between winters in rural New England and summer vacations in the U.S. Virgin Islands. In both locales, these same ambitious parents continually introduced me to a world of natural wonders that still ceases to impress me. When vernal pools and blackberry briars in glacial Connecticut were neither muddy nor bloody enough, and beaver ponds in northern Vermont were not cold enough, there were mangrove prop-roots to hang from and turtlegrass flats and coral reefs in the briny Caribbean sea to help dessicate my freckled flesh. While this decadent exposure to Mother Nature's variety certainly enlightened me as to her abilities, it also fueled my developing appreciation for aquatic systems. Over the years I devoured every field guides that passed through my hands with a sort of reckless abandon and I examined the fauna and flora I encountered with such wanton curiosity that they became etched indelibly in my memory.

While my high school comrades and peers were struggling with higher education choices, I knew already that I wanted only to study some sort of natural science so I could better avoid the bustle of capitalist America and spend more time observing the natural world around me. I subsequently elected to spend my undergraduate years at the University of Rhode Island, located near Rhode Island's southern shoreline in the quaint little farm town of Kingston, and enrolled in the Wildlife Biology and Management program. Courses in plant taxonomy, wetland wildlife, forestry, wildlife management, just affirmed my choice of degree and intended career path.

After graduation in May 1999, I returned to URI the following autumn and enrolled in Frank Golet's Wetland Ecology course at the recommendation of a friend who had heard of Dr. Golet's reputation as a superlative educator and as a leader in the field of wetland science. As it turned out, this course was arguably the most entertaining and educational course ever taught by a human being, and was certainly the one I found most enjoyable over my four year tenure. His curriculum exposed the class to every major type of wetland eastern New England had to offer from red maple swamps and cranberry bogs to spruce fens and saltgrass tidal marshes. Where I had previously only experienced some of these habitats as a casual passerby with little awareness of their intricacies, Dr. Golet's expertise and enthusiasm opened my eyes to the intriguing potential of formal wetland science (if there is such a thing) as a career.

In 2000 I moved to south Florida with the eventual intent of enrolling at Nova Southeastern University's Oceanographic Center and pursuing a marine biology masters degree but I did not have a specific thesis project in mind. Delayed enrollment forced me to find employment outside of the University and, without the daily guidance of faculty researchers, I struggled trying to develop several different independent projects. In 2004 I accepted a position with a private consulting firm which allowed me to reacquaint myself with much of my rusty botany/wetland science background, and provided me an excellent opportunity to observe the inadequacies of today's wetland management policies. From these observations I developed several ideas which, after numerous phone calls and meetings, eventually morphed into an idea which closely resembled my current project.

These days I work as a Natural Resource Specialist II for the Biological Resources Division of Broward County's Environmental Protection and Growth Management Department by day while I moonlight as a graduate student intent on saving the planet from certain doom. My project has been endorsed by my work as valuable to our understanding of Broward County's wetland regulations and, through this endorsement, has also expanded to become a collaborative effort with the County's Environmental Monitoring Division where the environmental data I record is catalogued and analyzed. The GCA's decision to award me this fellowship is further evidence that there is a real need for this type of practical research. While I anticipate that I'll finish this project sometime during the winter of 2009, my ultimate hope is that my findings will shed some undeniable light on a few of the misconceptions about wetland mitigation that regulatory agencies in south Florida continue to perpetuate. GCA's generosity will aid me in my pursuit of this goal, and hopefully help catapult me into a PhD program where I can continue to focus and apply this interest.

