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## **A Quick Guide to Finding Your First Job**

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Natural resource jobs are generally associated with resource management in some way. You may be directly involved in actual management of land or aquatic resources controlled by public or private owners, or indirectly support management by providing advice, products, or other services to these managers. Both the nature and ownership of resources varies regionally across North America, with distinctly more publicly owned land west of the Rocky Mountain Front, and more privately owned land east of the Rocky Mountains Range (see <http://www.nationalatlas.gov/printable/fedlands.html#us>). The availability of natural resource jobs generally reflects this broad trend, with proportionately more US Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) employment available in western states, and more Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and private employment jobs in other parts of the U.S. As a general job search strategy, **if you can identify a need, you can find a potential employer**. States, counties, municipal water districts and other local government agencies also control lands that benefit from professional natural resource management. Such lands may include watersheds, parks, flood discharge areas, public forests, campgrounds, or wildlife habitat areas such as greenways. Large private land holders such as railroads, corporate ranches, and timber companies, and land users such as mines, natural gas, oil, and electric power companies also employ natural resource managers.

In western states, such as Oregon, students entering the job market directly after graduation often seek employment with a federal agency such as the USFS, BLM, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or U.S. Park Service. Other federal agencies to consider are the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Geological Survey, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

**Specific requirements for federal employment are published as a series of job qualification standards** overseen by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (<http://www.opm.gov/>). These series are often referred to by their name and OPM number (<http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/Standards/group-stds/gs-prof.asp>). For instance, Range Management positions are within the OPM GS-454 Series, Soil Science the GS-470 series, Forestry the GS-460 series, Soil Conservation the GS-457 Series, and Wildlife Biology is in the GS-486 Series, but Wildlife Refuge Management is in the GS-485 Series. **Levels of required expertise/experience for available positions are indicated by their pay grades** within the agency. For example, a range management

position for a student right out of school would be listed as a GS5 or a GS7. Superior academic achievement or additional experience is required to qualify as a GS7. Students with a M.S. degree often are hired in GS9 positions, while new PhD holders generally start in GS11 positions. As a general rule-of-thumb, federal positions above GS9 are professional level, while GS7 or below are support positions.

**A complete listing of available federal jobs can be viewed at USAJobs**

(<http://www.usajobs.opm.gov/>). Current pay scales are available at <http://www.opm.gov/oca/10tables/indexgs.asp>. Some of the most desirable jobs are filled internally by transfer of existing personnel without ever being opened up to new hires. So, it is often wise for new job seekers to be as flexible as possible when applying for their first job. Currently available jobs may not be exactly what you want to do or where you want to be forever, but it is important to get your foot in the door and get some experience so that you can move on and up to something better. **It is always easier to get a job from a job.**

As with any job search, personal connections and past relevant experience are helpful in securing a job offer. However, **federal employment is quite strict in enforcing the minimum series standards as published.** If you do not meet all of the published standards, you will not be considered for that position. The best time to consult the series standards is while you are still a student, because a single course choice may qualify you for additional positions (series), or may prevent you from qualifying you from your target series. For example, Range Management majors (GS-454) may be able to qualify as Soil Conservationists (GS-460) or Wildlife Refuge Managers (GS-485) by taking a few strategically targeted courses.

**Practical experience and the personal connections they generate are very helpful in finding and securing a job.** Students often gain experience from summer employment with federal agencies or through Federal Student Employment Programs (<http://www.makingthedifference.org/federalinternships/employmentprograms.shtml>). The USFS, BLM, NRCS, and other federal agencies offer STEP or SCEP internships that provide summer employment while in college, leading to full time employment with that agency after graduation. Volunteer or paid experience is also available through clearing houses such as the Student Conservation Association (<http://www.thesca.org/>).

Natural Resources trained people often have a breadth of knowledge/skills that can be marketed in private sector or in local public service jobs. **Your job prospects are only limited by your creativity.** For example, range management students have been hired as field representatives for farm equipment manufacturers, agricultural chemical companies, farm/ranch consulting firms, and production credit associations, as well as managers of land for timber companies, hunting clubs, ranches, conservation groups, state land management agencies, watershed councils, and municipal water agencies. Job openings for these positions are often accessible through the employer's website.

Although job descriptions often mention a university degree as a qualification for professional employment, **simply holding a degree is often not sufficient to secure a**

**job.** Employers are often looking for a combination of current abilities (skills/knowledge/experience) that will meet their immediate needs as well as the potential to learn new skills as needed to grow with the organization. What you are marketing is not a degree, but the knowledge, skills, experience, and self discipline that it represents. This is evident on your transcript and accompanying description of interests, and experience. Many natural resource degrees are now subcategories of larger programs. For example, a wildlife degree may be offered as an option within a biology department, or a range management degree within an environmental sciences program. This makes it difficult for a potential employer to clearly understand what your degree actually qualifies you to do. The courses that you take and the experiential things that you do in pursuit of a degree are more important than the degree itself.

**Be sure that your job application is timely, orderly and complete.** You would be surprised how many applications are rejected for being incomplete. You will have the best chance of getting hired if you convince the employer of three things: (1) that you understand what the job is, (2) that you are qualified to do that job, and (3) that you want to work for that employer. You should organize your application to do these three things. This means organizing your application so that it is as easy as possible for the reader to say “Yes, that’s the one I want to hire”. If the job announcement has a set of categories, your application should be organized into the same categories. Don’t just send in a transcript. Provide a transcript plus a qualifications/skills page that organizes your past into a form that matches the job needs. There are many good resume writing guides available on the internet.

Don’t be afraid to call potential employers, ask what openings they have or if they know of any potential openings with other organizations. Many of us remember when we were starting out fresh just as you are now, and are inclined to be helpful if we can.

