

Becoming a Wildlife Conservation Officer



Wildlife Conservation Officers are the Pennsylvania Game Commission's field officers and most visible employees. Applicants for these civil service positions must be in excellent physical condition, have knowledge of hunting and outdoor activities and be able to interact positively with people of all backgrounds.

Employees in this classification are selected and appointed following a competitive examination conducted by the Pennsylvania Civil Service Commission. Officers begin their careers as Cadets assigned to the Ross Leffler School of Conservation, the Game Commission's training school located in Harrisburg, and are required to complete the training program there. Classes are normally formed every two or three years or as necessary to maintain the complement of officers in the field.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS AND QUALIFICATIONS:

- Applicants must be a resident of Pennsylvania.
- Applicants must be a high school graduate or have a G.E.D equivalent certified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Although a college degree is not required, educational experience beyond the high school level is helpful. Persons interested in entering this occupation are encouraged to take courses in wildlife management, environmental sciences, police sciences and similar fields of study.
- Applicants must be 21 years of age as of the date of enrollment at the Training School.
- Must possess a valid Pennsylvania Driver's License.
- Must have possessed a hunting license for at least two years prior to the date the examination is announced.
- Applicants must pass a competitive written and oral examination administered by the Civil Service Commission.
- Any offer of employment is conditional upon successful completion of the medical, vision, hearing, physical, strength, fitness and agility, stress, drug scan, and swimming tests. A confidential psychological evaluation, pre-employment background and character investigation, credit history and criminal background check including child welfare clearances will be completed for all applicants considered for employment.



Additionally, once appointed you must be willing to:

- Work days, nights, weekends and holidays as assigned
- Travel overnight as assigned
- Live away from home during the training period of approximately 50 weeks
- Live and work closely with other cadets in a paramilitary environment
- You must be willing to wear an issued uniform and conform to Pennsylvania Game Commission policies on grooming and conduct
- Relocate to any district within the state upon graduation

TRAINING:



The Ross Leffler School of Conservation has been the agency's training facility for Conservation Officers since 1932. The school is part college, part police academy and part museum. The training program is about 50 weeks. The curriculum consists of more than 1,400 hours of instruction on more than 140 subjects taught by nearly 200 instructors. Many instructors are agency employees.

Cadets are paid \$1,316.80 bi-weekly and receive the same employee benefits given to all Commonwealth employees. Lodging and meals are provided at the training school at no charge.

Weekly, cadets report to the school Sunday evening and remain there until they are released Friday afternoon. They are required to reside at the school. Cadets are granted leave on Wednesday evenings for several hours. Otherwise, they are required to remain on the grounds. Evening classes or activities are held Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays unless the training schedule demands otherwise. Weekends are generally free of duty. On duty-free weekends Cadets must vacate the training school. Housing accommodations for the families of Cadets are not available.

A cadet's day is busy. First call is 0515. They are in formation for physical training (PT) at 0530 for one hour of PT. Breakfast is at 0700. Classes run from 0800 until 1200, and again from 1300-1700 after a lunch break. After dinner, evening classes run from 1800-2000 or later as needed. In addition to classes, cadets are required to perform maintenance and cleaning details while at the school, and maintain their quarters and personal effects in order and pass daily inspections. "Lights out" is at 2230 after which quiet hours are in effect. Any unoccupied time is used to perform daily details, prepare for exams, work on class projects or practice various skills taught.

Cadets are required to attend all classes. Classes may be indoors or outdoors depending upon the subject and type of instruction required. Cadets must listen to, read, and be able to assimilate large quantities of information. They must be able to observe, learn and perform many job related skills. Academically, cadets are required to maintain at least an 80 percent average of all tests and quizzes. Certain critical subjects require 100 percent proficiency.

Candidates are required to pass basic strength, fitness and agility tests early in the selection process. At the school, cadets participate in a progressive physical training program designed to develop strength and flexibility and endurance related to performing job functions and reducing injury. Cadets must pass a physical fitness test in order to participate in field assignments.

Cadets are expected to demonstrate a high standard of conduct and be courteous and respectful to all staff, instructors, classmates, visitors and the public.

Failure to meet any standards set by the school or to follow Game Commission or Commonwealth regulations is cause for dismissal from the program.

The use of cell phones and other modes of electronic communications are restricted at the school. Cadets are permitted to possess and use these devices only at certain times. Leave is granted only in extreme situations and as the schedule permits and cadets are required to make up any class work they miss.

Cadets provide their own uniforms to begin training as per instructions provided. The Wildlife Conservation Officer uniform is issued as the training progresses. Other necessary equipment is issued as needed.

Classes are typically made up of 25-35 men and women of all backgrounds. Many have college educations or special certifications; some are military veterans; some served as Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officers; some

are former PGC employees. No particular education, experience or background guarantees success. Candidates from each of these backgrounds have succeeded in the training and some from each have failed. Personal character, ability to learn and develop skills, and the will to perform the job are all important to a candidate's success.

Upon arrival at the school, cadets shall adhere to the Game Commission policy on grooming and appearance.

Major Subject Areas Of Instruction Include:

- Wildlife Management Principles
- Law Enforcement Principles and Methods
- Wildlife Laws and Regulations
- Land Management Practices
- Public Relations and Conservation Education
- Firearms, Defense and Control Tactics, and Use of Force
- Agency Administration



In addition to classroom studies, the training program includes temporary field assignments with experienced Wildlife Conservation Officers. Field training provides Cadets with practical experience in law enforcement and other duties performed by Wildlife Conservation Officers. Cadets are reimbursed for authorized expenses incurred on these assignments.

Upon successfully completing the training program, Cadets are promoted to the position of Wildlife Conservation Officer and are assigned to fill vacancies throughout the Commonwealth. The current annual starting salary for this position is \$40,560.

DUTIES OF A WILDLIFE CONSERVATION OFFICER:



Wildlife Conservation Officers are responsible for administering a wide variety of Game Commission programs within an assigned district of about 350 square miles.

These activities are as varied as the day of the week or season of the year. Although officers have police authority with statewide jurisdiction, Wildlife Conservation Officers primarily enforce the Commonwealth's Game and Wildlife Code and federal laws and state regulations governing natural resource conservation.

In the course of their patrol, officers may detect violations of law, apprehend and arrest violators, conduct investigations, prepares cases for trial and ultimately presents findings and evidence in court. Accordingly, reports are written and records are kept in a manner reflecting the professionalism of credentialed law enforcement officers who have sworn to uphold the laws of the Commonwealth. Other primary duties besides law enforcement are servicing nuisance wildlife complaints, providing conservation education and administrating the Hunter-Trapper Education Program. Officers are also responsible for directing and training an effective volunteer staff of part-time Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officers, and participating in wildlife management fieldwork, which includes working with and collecting samples from dead animals. In addition, an officer is a frontline employee and as such must be able to address the concerns of landowners and other constituents in a multitude of areas relative to the mission of the agency.





The Game Commission provides all necessary equipment for Wildlife Conservation Officers to perform their duties. Uniforms are provided and are required to be worn in a prescribed manner consistent with grooming regulations. Firearms are also provided and required to be in a state of operational readiness to be utilized whenever and wherever needed. In addition, Officers are provided with a fully-equipped automobile, personal computer and office furnishings. Officers work from their residences and are subsidized for rental of office space.

Wildlife Conservation Officers work under the supervision of a Regional Director and supervisory staff. Officers generally work 40 hours per week and often work overtime under certain conditions. Hours of work vary and often include nights, weekends and holidays.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES:

Wildlife Conservation Officers are eligible for entry into the specialized field of land management when vacancies exist. Land Managers are responsible for wildlife habitat management on State Game Lands and other lands under the control of the Commission. They supervise full-time labor crews that make up the Game Commission's Food and Cover Corps.



Promotional opportunities to higher level supervisory and managerial positions are available to both Wildlife Conservation Officers and Land Managers.

Conservation Officers may also be selected to serve as Special Investigators or K-9 Officer/Investigators.

In addition to servicing a district, WCOs may be selected to serve as a member of the ceremonial unit, woodland tracking team, peer counselors, field training officers, or training school resident instructors.

Advanced training and instructorships in firearms, defense and control tactics, first aid/CPR, law enforcement communications, Taser, emergency vehicle operation, all-terrain vehicles (ATV), and water survival are available as well.

COMMONWEALTH EMPLOYEE BENEFITS:

- Medical/Hospitalization Insurance
- Dental Insurance
- Paid Prescription Care
- Vision Care
- Life Insurance
- Mandatory Membership in the State Employees Retirement System
- Paid time off, including sick leave
- Paid State Holidays
- Workers Compensation

Additional Agency Benefits

- Issued Uniforms/ footwear
- Uniform allowance
- Home Office allowance
- Meal allowance
- Assigned vehicle and equipment



SELF ASSESSMENT

A career as a Wildlife Conservation Officer provides many opportunities to perform interesting and rewarding work. However, the position has inherent challenges and conditions you should consider early in the selection process. Please be sure you are willing and able to:

- Work nights, weekends and holidays. Work unusual and varied shifts. Be “on call” during time off.
- Spend hours outdoors in all types of weather.
- Enter remote areas alone and confront, question and/or arrest armed persons
- Maintain professionalism in the face of verbal abuse.
- Handle wildlife, alive and dead.
- Investigate fatal shooting incidents.
- Be prepared to use force, including deadly force if needed in self-defense or the defense of another.
- Successfully complete rigorous physical and academic training in a paramilitary environment.
- Relocate to another area within the state which may mean a change of school for children or a change of job for a spouse.
- Spend much of your time dealing with hunters and related organizations.
- Work independently, without daily supervision, to meet regular deadlines.
- Promote and support all Pennsylvania Game Commission operations and programs.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission is an Equal Opportunity Employer.



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