



# Top 5 Wildlife Conservation Career FAQs for Students

Are you a student interested in a wildlife conservation career? Check out these Top 5 Frequently Asked Questions! A career in wildlife conservation is rewarding and challenging. Conservation professionals dedicate their careers to managing and protecting wildlife for current and future generations and ensuring meaningful opportunities for outdoor recreation.

## 1. What organizations hire wildlife conservation professionals?

Wildlife conservation is a dynamic career field with many types of organizations playing vital roles. State government agencies are responsible for managing each state's wildlife. For example, the [Pennsylvania Game Commission](#), [Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission](#), and [Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources](#) each plays a part in managing birds and mammals, cold-blooded animals like fish and reptiles, and habitat like forests and wetlands in Pennsylvania.

Federal government agencies like the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) coordinate national wildlife strategies and manage lands such as National Wildlife Refuges. Most conserved land in the United States is managed by the [U.S. Department of Interior](#) (e.g., National Parks) and [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) (e.g., National Forests) and each employ wildlife conservation professionals. Even the U.S. Department of Defense may also employ biologists and land managers for lands hosting military bases and other facilities. County and other local government bodies may also have wildlife conservation positions available.

Non-governmental organizations represent user interests, advocate for conservation, educate about wildlife, and otherwise advance specific conservation causes. For example, certain non-governmental organizations represent hunting users interested in ensuring the right habitat is available for waterfowl and wild turkeys. Other non-governmental organizations are dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitat; still others focus on habitat protection, regardless of species. Non-governmental organizations may be international, national, regional, state, or local, and each level may have a need for wildlife conservation professionals.

Academic institutions educate and train the next generation of wildlife conservation professionals while also supporting a range of wildlife conservation research and studies.

Finally, private sector companies employ wildlife conservation or forestry and land management professionals for a variety of reasons. For example, they may produce products or sell services that rely on available habitat and conserved spaces for recreational pursuits like hunting, fishing, camping, and hiking, wildlife photography, and more. Some companies

may also employ wildlife scientists to support the development of safe products or inform other product and service offerings. Many private companies also provide consulting services or conduct studies like environmental impact assessments as requirements before major infrastructure projects like roads, buildings, and pipelines can begin.

## 2. What career functions are available in the wildlife conservation profession?

A career in wildlife conservation can take you down exciting and diverse paths. Professionals are scientists, law enforcement officers, habitat managers, program leaders, communicators, educators, fundraisers in NGOs, and more!

At a state agency like the Pennsylvania Game Commission, **wildlife biologists** apply scientific principles to the hands-on study of wildlife. These biologists often have different focus areas. They may be experts on specific species, or focus on species diversity and genetics, or work on game or non-game species. **Wildlife technicians** and disease specialists conduct field research to understand the health of state wildlife populations. On any given day, you may band a migrating Canada goose, take dental samples from a white-tailed deer, install a barn owl nest box, or crawl into a black bear's den!

**Land and habitat managers** are responsible for the 1.5 million acres managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission for wildlife. **Land managers** and **foresters** take an ecosystem view of these lands, ensuring vital habitat for wildlife such as wetlands, grasslands, shrublands and forests are always available. Timber harvests and prescribed fire are two valuable tools used to promote health and diversity on our lands to the benefit of many species. **Habitat crews**, which includes game lands maintenance workers, put into action the habitat and ecosystem restoration plans created by managers and other experts.

The Game Commission also employs **game wardens and other law enforcement officers** responsible for enforcing laws against poaching, illegally selling species across state lines, hunting without a license, and other wildlife-specific crimes. They may also respond to nuisance wildlife calls, educate the public about wildlife issues, support field research, and may even go undercover to break-up illegal wildlife smuggling rings! Game Wardens protect and speak for wildlife since animals cannot speak for themselves. They are state law enforcement officers that have enforcement authority throughout the commonwealth.

A primary funding source for wildlife conservation is the sale of hunting licenses. Without a robust, engaged hunting population, funding for habitat management, ecosystem restoration, and endangered species protection would be limited. **Marketing professionals** inform the public about hunting and trapping opportunities while **communication professionals like videographers, public relations experts, and social/digital media managers** ensure clear communication to the public.

Future generations cannot carry on the tradition of conserving wildlife without education today. At the Game Commission, educators share the work and principles that underpin our state's shared conservation heritage. **Dedicated education and outreach professionals** may guide school and adult groups, as well as the public, through wildlife lessons and activities. Specific

programs may reach out to new or lapsed recreationists, providing them a bridge back to hunting and trapping.

Finally, **Geographic Information Systems and other technology experts** enable the agency to make informed decisions about ecosystems and habitat. This includes land acquisition targets, biometric work, data collection tools, spatial analysis, and recommendations to policymakers for new state game lands and other conservation areas

### **3. How do I find out about jobs and internships available at the Pennsylvania Game Commission and other organizations?**

Job and internship opportunities at the Pennsylvania Game Commission are [available here](#) --- or by visiting [www.pgc.pa.gov](http://www.pgc.pa.gov) and selecting “Careers and Volunteers” from the *Information & Resources* tab. Jobs at all agencies in the Commonwealth can be found at the [PA Employment site](#). The [Game Commission's Wildlife on WiFi program](#) also provides educational information for K-12 and college students about wildlife conservation careers.

Federal wildlife conservation positions are available on [www.USAJobs.gov](http://www.USAJobs.gov). Check the career sections of other state and local government agencies for their opportunities.

Different organizations also host wildlife conservation-specific job boards. Examples include the [Texas A&M Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences Job Board](#) and [The Wildlife Society Career Center job board](#). Other conservation job boards exist, and job and intern seekers may visit the career sections of specific companies and NGOs. For example, the [Society of American Foresters posts forestry-specific job opportunities](#).

### **4. I am a high school or college student. What courses should I take and how should I gain experience? Are there colleges and universities with specific wildlife programs?**

As discussed above, wildlife conservation professionals may be scientists; foresters and habitat managers; law enforcement officers; marketers, communicators, and educators, or GIS and technology experts, among other career options. Generally, a firm understanding of science is required for these positions and so high school students should consider taking available biology, chemistry, environmental science, and similar courses. Another good way to learn about courses would be to check current job postings and align your academic pursuits with required experience.

College students should consider majoring in a wildlife or conservation field if offered by their university. Many colleges and universities with agricultural or technical programs have wildlife science-specific majors. Environmental or biological science departments may also offer conservation-oriented majors and programs. For example, many Pennsylvania universities offer wildlife and fisheries programs, often agricultural science colleges. *The Wildlife Society* also offers students [a resource listing information about wildlife science degree programs](#).

Many university programs provide career services to help pair their students with internships and early career jobs. Be sure to check the job and internship boards mentioned in question ‘3’

for more information. As an undergraduate, a great way to gain experience is to volunteer, which will help improve your competitiveness upon graduation for paid positions.

Depending on your conservation interest, you may want to pursue a specific degree. For example, students interested in forestry should consider pursuing an accredited forestry program degree. Accreditation information can be viewed on the [Society of American Forestry webpage](#). Associate degrees are also all that is required for most forest technician jobs. After a few years of experience as a forest technician, many workers can be considered for a forester position.

## 5. What else should I know about being a wildlife conservation professional?

Wildlife conservation is a dynamic field. Depending on your chosen career path, you could spend many of your days out in the field or in a laboratory conducting hands on studies. You could also spend most of your time in an office helping manage programs, coordinating and creating communications and hunter marketing strategies, or in a classroom educating youth about the importance of conservation. While the career paths are diverse, they are united by a common mission to conserve wildlife and its habitat for current and future generations.

Wildlife conservation is a competitive field. Many people love wildlife and outdoor spaces and like the idea of a career in the field. One way to advance your career is to study hard, obtain a major in a relevant field, and begin to build a resume of internship and early career opportunities. Many of these first internships and early career opportunities may be term-limited (the job is only for a certain period, often 9-months or 3-years) and relatively low paying. If you have volunteered, include it in your resume and consider volunteering to build experience. Experience, even unpaid, will help set you apart from candidates with a similar educational background. Being open to multiple locations can help expand your marketability and gain the vital early experience.

Wildlife conservation requires adaptability and multiple skillsets. A major in wildlife sciences or similar fields will help you develop expertise in natural resource management. However, like most careers, developing multiple skillsets will help set you apart. Leadership and communications, analysis and critical thinking, consensus-building among diverse interests, budget and project management are all important skills that can be built through extracurricular activities and early career experiences that are vital to long-term success in the field.

To learn more, visit [www.pgc.pa.gov](http://www.pgc.pa.gov).

