

How to Find a Government Internship in Environmental History

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A great deal of our usable (and unexplored) environmental history lay on federal lands administered by the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). All of these agencies have internship programs that can provide valuable experience to students and new professionals, but they can be difficult to navigate.

For example, the vast majority of NPS and FWS internships are offered through the individual parks, refuges, or offices lacking a centralized location for information about opportunities. These require finding a likely refuge or park and inquiring directly about internships that might support your scholarship and your career aspirations. One exception is internships involving museums, archives, and historic preservation. A number of these internship opportunities are conveniently located at a centralized database cleverly named PreserveNet at: <http://www.preservenet.cornell.edu/employ/ncpe.html>.

Another program that we use in the FWS and other federal agencies is called the STEP/SCEP program, which offers hands-on internships/jobs on parks, refuges, and forests. The Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) attempts to bring bright students into the FWS to work on a variety of projects, ranging from the biological to education and outreach – and many of these projects have a historical component. The Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) brings students into the FWS workforce from undergraduate through graduate and postgraduate levels to give them hands-on experience directly related to their field of study. The SCEP program can and often does lead to a full-time appointment with the agency. In this way, STEP functions like a traditional internship, whereas SCEP may be more of an apprenticeship program. Once again finding the internships available is often a challenge. Although some of these are listed on USAJOBS (<http://jobsearch.usajobs.gov/>) many can only be found through local sites.

Alas, finding the internship is only the beginning of the job (pun intended). Working at the Fish and Wildlife Service's museum and archives (<http://training.fws.gov/history/index.html>), I have hired a number of paid and unpaid interns in the last 10 years and have a few suggestions that may be of some use when applying for an internship:

1). Do your research. Just as you would do background research before a school or job interview, it is always a good idea to know as much as possible about the agency you want to work with. Interns who tell me they want to work for the *Forest and Wildlife Service* are more likely to find an internship there than with the correctly named *Fish and Wildlife Service*.

2). Be interested in the agency's work. Or at least feign interest. Doing an internship as a class requirement or to build a resume may be important to you, but your potential supervisor will expect more. You can assume that your supervisors are working in that refuge, office, or artifact-crammed archive because they are enthused about their work and their agency's mission, not the pay or paperwork. As collegial animals we like to surround ourselves by likeminded individuals whom we believe share our passion. Allow your supervisor to maintain this illusion.

3). Be confident as an environmental historian. Environmental history is a vibrant and growing field whose scholarship has permeated many of the government natural resource agencies. As scholars and educators in the field you have a wide array of talents useful and critical to all our land-management agencies. You know how to interpret landscapes and make their stories accessible to the public. You know how to research both the human and natural artifacts and intertwine the two through history. You understand the broad sweep of ecological change in landscapes that may have undergone numerous management regimes. You have exactly the type of skills needed to explain and conserve our public lands – in writing and verbally. Your training has made you an ideal intern—a point worth making in every interview.

So seek out these opportunities. As our environmental needs evolve, federal agencies increasingly need historians to help make sense of these changes and explain them. Many government natural resource agencies have increasingly humanistic needs in education, research, and historical outreach. They are beginning to heed former Forest Service employee, and later environmental historian, Aldo Leopold's prophetic words: "Wildlife management is comparatively easy; human management is difficult."

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