

Where Am I Going, How Do I Get There? Conservation Careers

Brad Alper

I BELIEVE THE SESSION WAS AN AWESOME IDEA and I felt very lucky to be a part of it. Everyone was very excited about the concept of the session, especially the grad students who were eager to get their careers started. Being in a room full of professional conservation scientist was both inspirational and humbling. All of them brought something unique and it was cool to hear them explain their career paths.

I learned so much just by listening to their stories and passion for the conservation sciences. It was the first time that they ran a session on this topic and overall I think it went smoothly. They divided the professional into three groups as follows: NPS government employees, university employees, and employees of private businesses/organizations. Each professional was given the chance to talk about their career path and how they ended up in their field. It was really encouraging to hear about all the work opportunities available in conservation and the diversity of paths one can take. The session continued by allowing students to ask each group of professionals' questions about their field and hear about some of the pros and cons. Professionals rotated between groups of students answering individualized questions. Students and professionals continuously interrupted one another as they rotated, skirmishing to get in questions and comments! I found myself wondering if questions I had were being asked and answered in other group circles. The way it was organized only allowed me to hear the questions answered in my specific group. Additionally, I was put in the group of students who attended the university in which most of the professors taught. Therefore, the questions asked seemed to be biased toward those who wanted to become teachers.

Professors and program directors urged students to remain members of academia, forever writing research papers. They were convinced that they had the safest and most secure jobs in the country, especially those with tenure. When explaining their careers paths, the professors seemed quite proud of all the universities they were associated with. I could only wonder how one could be so interested in conserving natural resources on paper but have what appeared to be little interest in immersing themselves in that very nature.

Furthermore, it was apparent that members of private organizations had the largest salaries of the three categories of professionals. Although they were interested in helping to conserve natural resources, they seemed to profit off the concept of "going green." The idea of conservation was commercialized and turned into something that could be bought and sold. In general, the NPS

Citation: Weber, Samantha, ed. 2016. *Engagement, Education, and Expectations—The Future of Parks and Protected Areas: Proceedings of the 2015 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites.*

Hancock, Michigan: George Wright Society.

© 2016 George Wright Society. All rights reserved. Please direct all permission requests to info@georgewright.org.

employees seemed to be the most excited. Along with other employees of the government, they jokingly complained of the bureaucracy, yet rejoiced in the fact that they were making the biggest difference in the world of conservation. I learned it really is up to the biologists and ecologists employed by the government to balance and manage our natural resources.

Reflection

In the first part of the session it was very helpful to hear about the different paths of the professionals. However, I believe the session could have been organized in a way that better expressed the overall goal. First, the session needed to be longer. It was a really important subject that deserves more than one two-hour window. I felt I was unable to have all my questions addressed simply because there was not enough time. Continuously, I believed that the second part of the session, where questions were addressed, should be organized better. There were too many people trying to speak at once and not enough time for professionals to make their point. If, perhaps, they kept the same categories of professionals and put them in front of everyone and have each of them answer a set of general questions one by one, that might work better. Examples of questions might include: What's the difference working for the government versus working for a private organization? (or vice versa?). What are some key ways to be successful in an interview? What are some of the downsides to working for the government, university, or private organization? What kind of work does your particular job include?