Science Internship, Volunteer, and Career Opportunities

Internships and Volunteer Opportunities – Resource Management, Interpretation, and Education

Geoscientists-in-the-Parks (GIP)
http://www.nature.nps.gov/geology/gip/
Three month to one-year paid internships in parks and central offices for undergraduate and graduate students, post-docs, professionals, faculty members, teachers, and retirees. GIP program is run in collaboration with GSA GeoCorps™ America Program (http://rock.geosociety.org/g_corps/index.htm). Participants receive a $3,000 stipend/3 months of work and a $250 travel allowance. Longer-term (up to one-yr.) guest scientist positions have higher stipends. Park also provides housing or housing allowance. Participants must be U.S. citizens or permanent legal residents. The Geoscience-Teachers-in-Parks Program at Mount Rainier NP is run in collaboration with the National Association of Geoscience Teachers. (www.nagt.org/nagt/programs/GTIP.html).

Mosaics in Science (MIS)
http://nature.nps.gov/geology/mosaics/index.cfm
Established in 2013, the MIS Program provides youth age 17 – 35 that are typically under-represented in natural resource science fields with on-the-ground, science-based, work experience in the National Park System. This multidisciplinary program run in partnership with the GSA provides students with opportunities to work on inventory and monitoring, research, GIS, and interpretation and education projects.

Volunteer in Parks (VIP)
http://www.nps.gov/volunteer/
There are a wide range of positions available for U.S. citizens with specific expertise. Volunteer positions receive reimbursement for expenses such as food, mileage, gas, and training. Parks may provide housing. Often a minimum of 8 weeks work is required.

International Volunteers in Parks
http://www.nps.gov/oia/topics/ivip/ivip.htm
Program is for non-U.S. citizens who are interested in volunteering for a national park in the U.S. Positions are open for college or university students, persons who work for another country's park agency, or have a background in environmental fields. NPS selects candidates who meet visa and immigration requirements, have the needed educational and professional background, and have the best potential to share his/her experiences with colleagues and scholars when they return to their home countries.

Student Conservation Association (SCA)
http://www.thesca.org/
Nonprofit organization that engages high school, undergraduate and graduate school students through internships, conservation jobs, and crew experiences in resource management, historic preservation, cultural resources, and conservation programs for the purpose of training, career development, and education. SCA places volunteers in more than 350 park units and NPS offices each year. There are a wide range of positions with specific expertise requirements. Three to 12 month internship opportunities are available. Living and travel expenses, insurance, housing, and education awards are provided to interns.

AmeriCorps
http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/americorps
AmeriCorps is a network of local, state, and national service programs that connect more than 75,000 Americans each year to meet our country’s critical environmental, educational, health, and public safety needs. Positions are full or part time. Upon completion of 1 year of service, full-time members receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award to pay for college, graduate school, or to pay back qualified student loans. Participants receive health insurance, training, student loan deferment, and may also receive a modest living allowance while working for AmeriCorps.

United We Serve
http://www.serve.gov/
Nationwide service initiative that helps meet growing social needs resulting from the economic downturn. Online resource for finding volunteer opportunities in communities, but is also focused on individuals and organizations creating volunteer opportunities.

Presidential Management Fellows (PMF)
http://www.pmf.gov/
PMF is a program for outstanding graduate, law, and doctoral-level students to help fill the need for leadership continuity. Two year fellowship may involve public policy and administration, domestic or international issues, information technology, engineering, law, financial management, and many other fields in support of public service programs. Appointments are made for two years, and may then be converted to non-competitive permanent federal employment. These fellowships are now part of the federal Pathways Program. The application period is in the fall. Visit https://www.usajobs.gov/
Research Opportunities

NPS Research Permit and Reporting System
https://irma.nps.gov/RPRS/
Website lists requirements for applying for scientific research and collection permits and specific research needs in NPS units.

Research Learning Centers (RLCs)
http://www.nature.nps.gov/rlc/
RLCs are public/private partnerships created to facilitate research efforts and provide educational opportunities. RLCs involve a wide range of people and organizations including researchers, universities, educators, and community groups. Goals of the RLCs are to attract non-NPS scientists to conduct research in national parks and to share the information to a broad audience.

Cooperative Ecosystem Study Units
http://www.cesu.psu.edu/
Partnership between federal agencies and academic and research institutions that was established to provide research, technical assistance, and education for resource and environmental managers. Natural, cultural, and social sciences are included. There are currently 17 CESUs covering the United States.

Paid Positions—Seasonal, Temporary, and Permanent Positions

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is the federal authority for federal hires. Each agency's hiring practices may vary. If you need additional information, call a personnel specialist in the agency, region, or park where you plan to apply.

- All government vacancy announcements are posted on USAJOBS at: http://www.usajobs.gov/ or call 1-478-757-3000 or TDD 1-478-744-2299.
- Seasonal employment:
  http://www.nps.gov/personnel/seasonal.htm
- NPS careers information: http://www.nps.gov/personnel/
- Federal pay and leave information:
  http://www.opm.gov/oca/
- Federal job qualification standards:
  http://www.opm.gov/qualifications/sec-iii/a/num-ndx.htm
- Workforce Recruitment Program for persons with disabilities can be found at: https://wrp.gov/AboutPre.do

Other Helpful Information

Application requirements vary. Be sure to read each job announcement carefully.

- In many cases, positions are noted as being open to “all sources,” which means that you do not have to be a federal employee to apply for the position.
- Announcements often require that you prove you are a U.S. citizen.
- If you are applying for a seasonal job through a centralized seasonal hiring system, be aware you may be required to apply directly to the park. Seasonal jobs are very competitive, particularly at larger, well-known parks. The number of applicants is usually far greater than the positions that are available.
- Opportunities within the NPS may be sponsored in whole or in part by a partner organization, which may have job requirements specific to their organization. Opportunities may or may not include park housing. If housing is included it may be shared, bunk house, or dorm-type settings. Parks may have RV sites available for temporary (seasonal) positions. Visit http://www.nps.gov/index.htm.

Student Pathways Program

The National Park Service Hires students and recent graduate through the new federal Pathways Program (http://www.opm.gov/HiringReform/Pathways/ and https://www.usajobs.gov/StudentsAndGrads). Upon successful completion of the Pathways Program, agencies may convert the participant to a competitive service position, but they are not required to do so.

There are three components to the Pathways Program:

- **Internship Program** – Paid internship that is available for current high school to graduate students.
- **Recent Graduate Program** – Career development program that is open to students who have graduated or obtained certificates from a qualifying educational institution or program within the last 2 years (time period is extended to 6 years for veterans).
- **Presidential Management Fellows Program** – Open to recent graduates that have demonstrated an interest in, and commitment to, leadership in the federal government. Two year paid internship includes formal training and rotational assignments.
Tips for Applying for a Federal Job:

Your best bet in getting a federal job or a Pathways position is to:

**Conduct Research**
- Decide which parks you would like to work in and make a prioritized list.
- All national park units are listed at: [http://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm)
- Information about geologic parks can be found at: [http://www.nature.nps.gov/geology/tour/index.cfm](http://www.nature.nps.gov/geology/tour/index.cfm)
- Familiarize yourself with the NPS. Go to: [http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm)
- Find out why the park was established.
- Consider doing research or writing a paper about a park that you are interested in, as this will give you background about the park, and perhaps create an opportunity to interview a park specialist or manager (e.g., this provides a networking opportunity).
- Decide what type of job(s) you are interested in pursuing.
  - While duties vary from park to park, the following is a rule of thumb regarding heads of park divisions:
    - Chief of Resource Management – manages natural, and possibly cultural resources, facilitates research and resource management activities in the park
    - Chief of Interpretation – manages all education and outreach activities
    - Chief of Maintenance – manages park infrastructure
    - Chief Ranger – manages all law enforcement, including environmental violations

**Contact the Park**
- Visit, call, and/or write to the appropriate person in the park. A personal visit shows the most interest. A call may create a strong connection. Writing is more distant, but shows your ability to put things in to words.
- Call the park. Phone numbers are listed on each park’s website. Go to: [http://www.nps.gov/](http://www.nps.gov/), go to the park’s website and click on “Contact Us” to get each park’s contact information. Ask for the name, email address and phone number of the person you want to reach (e.g., ask for the name, phone number, and email of the park’s Chief of Resource Management).
- During your conversation with the park:
  - Let the chief know that you are interested in a seasonal or part-time job or positions through the Pathways Program, and would like to talk about this.
  - Ask if there are seasonal, internship, or Pathways opportunities in the park.
  - Let the chief know that you are a student and whether you will be continuing school after the summer.
  - Emphasize that you are very interested in working for the NPS / park.
  - Briefly tell the chief what interests you about his/her park.
  - Note the variety of courses you have taken, including geology, biology, ecology, hydrology, GIS, public speaking, etc.
  - State that you are responsible, describe your level of interest in specific projects, whether you are in “good standing” at your school, and note your qualifications and ability to work well with others.
  - If you are willing to work in any job in the park just to get your foot in the door, let the person you are speaking with know that.

**Complete an Application and Submit it Before the Due Date**
Note that some job announcements state that the application is due by close of business in a certain time zone (e.g. EST). See the next page for tips on how to improve your chance of getting hired.

**Improving your Chances of Getting Hired**

**Get the degree(s)**
- With most professional jobs it is likely a college of advanced degree will increase your chances of getting the job.
- Are you considering different degree options? Look at what the NPS is doing in resource management and interpretation/education. For example, there is currently a growing emphasis on technical skills (such as GIS), inventory and monitoring, climate change, coastal geomorphology, restoration, and ecosystem management. The foundation of the NPS is interpretation (informal education), resource management, and recreation. Multiple degrees also increase the spectrum of marketable skills that you have. Depending on the position that you are seeking, this may increase your ability to get and do the job. By combining degrees such geology / biology, geology / communications, or geology / computer science or GIS, you will often find you are eligible to apply for more NPS positions.
Get the experience
The importance of related on-the-job experience cannot be over emphasized. It is essential to get experience in your field of expertise and to work with the general public, various land-managing agencies, and organizations. If you do not have the necessary experience you may want to consider volunteering or doing an internship for an agency, company, or organization. Volunteering is an excellent way to network and gain on-the-ground experience. This is also an opportunity to ask permanent employees how they got their “permanent status” and you’ll likely discover numerous “ways to get your foot in the door.” Include your volunteer experiences and internships on your resume, both of which indicate that you are willing to go above and beyond standard expectations.

Be flexible on the job title and location
Read the OPM job standards (see http://www.opm.gov). Check the announcements for common NPS positions. The NPS does not have many “geologist” positions. Your ideal job may have a different title such as physical scientist, natural resource specialist, environmental protection specialist, GIS specialist, or ecologist. The title “park ranger” may also interest you, but be aware that this title covers two very different kinds of jobs: interpreters (park guides and education specialists) or protection specialists (law enforcement). While these are usually separate positions, sometimes these are combined in to one position. Please read the job announcements and qualifications carefully because they vary from job to job. Be willing to work somewhere that may not be your first choice. Once you have a federal job you can always apply for positions where you have always wanted to work.

Focus on the application
- Be as brief as possible, but include all pertinent information.
- For paid positions, describe your past and current positions – succinctly describe each position in one or more paragraphs.
- Make sure and adequately address all of the duties listed in the job announcement. Besides summarizing your skills and knowledge, your resume is an excellent way for the person hiring you to determine your communication and writing skills. Make sure and spell check your application!
- When filling out the assessment questionnaire consider all of your experience—volunteer, informal, and work. You are asked to rate your skills and abilities. If you do no rate high on the questionnaire, your application will not be forwarded to the selecting official.
- Don’t limit the list of skills listed in your application to only academic skills. Parks often need people with many skills, including: operating 4-wheel drive vehicles, ATVs, or boats; mountain biking; horseback riding; backpacking; skiing; snowshoeing; swimming; first aid, CPR, SCUBA, EMT, or wild land fire fighting (Red Card certification); expertise in GIS and GPS; teaching or presenting information to all levels of the general public, including experience communicating scientific information to non-scientists, managers, and technical experts, etc. Also list job-related skills on your application (e.g., oral / written foreign language skills, computer software/hardware, tools, machinery, typing speed); current job related certificates and licenses; and job related honors, awards, and special accomplishments (e.g., publications, memberships in professional or honor societies, leadership activities, public speaking, and performance awards).
- For paid positions, there are several applications that may be accepted. See the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) website for acceptable forms.
- Include exact dates of your previous employment, instead of simply stating the month & year.
- Ask yourself if your application reflects your knowledge and how dynamic and personable you are. Emphasize what makes you the person the selecting official wants to hire. You are likely competing with many people for a job that will require a great deal of teamwork. Where applicable, stress that you are a team player in your application.

Be persistent in your job search
Apply for all of the positions that you qualify for and in which you are interested. Some positions may have 2000 applicants, while others may only have a few. The NPS selecting official will only know the number of applicants for a given position after the application deadline closes.

Good luck and we hope to see you in the National Parks!