

When did you graduate from Oregon State and what was your specialization in?

I graduated in fall 2016 with a specialization in Wildlife.

Where do you work and what is your job title?

I work for the Boise District Bureau of Land Management as the District Fisheries Biologist.

What is a normal day of work like?

There really is not a normal day of work as each day brings new challenges and tasks. Today for example, as a member of an interdisciplinary team, I worked on the renewal of multiple grazing permits and a timber sale, quality assurance tested temperature-monitoring devices, gave guidance to the field crew on riparian area monitoring, and processed and developed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) forms. Central to all of my tasks is an open-minded approach from a fisheries perspective.

How often do you work with animals (e.g., hands-on, in the field, etc.)?

On average, I work hands-on with fish and wildlife about 1-2 times a month. This is not as much as I would like, but I am able to conduct other activities that get me out of the office. Many of these activities center on stream health and fish habitat.

How often do you work in the office?

During the winter months I spend about 4-5 days a week and during the other months 1-3 days a week in the office.

What advice can you give to someone entering this field?

Be flexible and accept criticism. As with many aspects of life, there are people willing to help you accomplish your job, task, or mission, but you must be willing to accept criticism. Often this criticism changes from day to day and sometimes you find yourself back where you started, but without flexibility, the willingness to help quickly disappears and you become ineffective at your job.

What do you find most rewarding?

What I find most rewarding is my ability to influence decisions in an effort to improve fisheries across a broad landscape. Recently I was in a meeting discussing landscape improvement projects across all the resources and was able to influence the decision makers to keep a project to improve a quarter-mile section of stream. Although this may not seem like a world changing event, this stream stretch is likely used as spawning habitat for redband trout and, at the very least, improves water quality downstream in known redband trout habitat.

What do you find most challenging?

What I find most challenging is the conflicting resource and management objectives. For example, stream habitat can be degraded by an activity, but the simple solution to stop the activity cannot be used due to law, so how do we keep the activity and improve stream habitat? This is where flexibility, open-mindedness, listening, and other skills are necessary to be able to overcome this challenge.

What do you enjoy when you are NOT working?

I enjoy the outdoors through camping, hunting, fishing, photography, or driving on roads less traveled.

Can you elaborate on what events and experiences led you to your current position?

The story of how I became a fisheries biologist is unique and involves a lot of luck. It started when I was preparing to leave the military and determining my next step in life. I spent time thinking and studying different career paths, but knew I wanted to work with wildlife. I determined that I needed to have a supporting career to pay for schooling since I would likely need at least a master's degree. I left the military and began working towards a nursing degree, remembering to choose classes that would work towards both goals. After a short time getting the pre-requisites for the nursing program taken care of, I found myself running in place and watching many others waste time and money waiting for an opportunity that required a "who you know" push to get into the nursing program.

At this point, I fell back on my military experience and got a job in an information technology (IT) field. To make the IT career work, I supplemented my military experience with a bachelor's degree in Electronics Engineering Technology (EET). This deviated from my original goal, as many classes would not transfer, but I saw it as an opportunity to pay for my education in wildlife. As soon as I received my EET degree, I began working on my Fisheries and Wildlife Science degree. By this time, my family was growing and my job was taking up much of my time, but I often looked at small steps forward as going forward, even if it were one class per quarter. It was not long until I found myself in the common position of losing my IT contractor job.

Not yet having the degree I needed to move towards a wildlife profession, I fell into an opportunity to work as a government civilian in the IT field. Through an extensive hiring process in the midst of a recession with at least 500 applicants for eight jobs, I was lucky to be considered and extremely lucky to be hired. I saw this as another step towards the wildlife profession, since I often heard it is easier to change jobs within the government as opposed to trying to get into the job from the outside. With this opportunity, I began taking additional classes in contracting, acquisitions, and project management, things often tied to government positions, to bolster my resume for the jump to a wildlife profession. I also took on responsibilities outside of my normal work, like safety officer and being a member of multiple hiring boards to aid my experience further.

As I was nearing the culmination of my Fisheries and Wildlife Science degree, I found myself attempting to work an internship into my location and schedule of full-time work and family difficult, so I took additional classes in fisheries to satisfy my desire to keep moving forward and to bolster my education. Finally, an internship opportunity came up that I was able to work into my schedule and location. This schedule required working long days and traveling a fair distance daily to keep the IT job to support the family and schooling while fulfilling this requirement for the degree. During this flurry, I got my degree and began looking for the jump into the wildlife profession by applying to many different jobs, including range specialist, biological technician, fish/wildlife biologist, but was not getting through to the interview phase. With experience in the government hiring process, both inside and out, I knew I was missing the "who knows you" aspect of the resume.

Nearing the end of the internship and experiencing an unfavorable work environment, I received a call asking if I wanted a job as a fisheries biologist. Amongst the flurry of job applications, I applied for a Pathways [Recent Graduate Program](#) position and was offered the position. I took a minute to think about it, considering that it was a one-year temporary fish biologist position, involved moving from Maryland to Idaho, would incur a pay cut of about 50%, and the lack of response to other applications. I accepted the offer and began scrambling to finish the internship, pack the family, and all the things one does to make a big move. I gave my two-week notice and the next day a hiring freeze was instituted, which put the new fish biologist job on hold.

Holding out hope and being realistic, I was luckily able to withdraw my notice and wait out the freeze. I continued taking whatever coursework I could, prepared for beginning my master's degree, and applied to other positions

during the freeze. After a few months of living out of boxes and enduring increasing job opposition, a call came asking when I wanted to start as a fish biologist in the Pathways programs.

Finally, the big move came and I began my career as a fish biologist. It was not too long until I realized I had a steep learning curve, since the previous fish biologist had taken another job and I was walking in as the temporary replacement. Soon I found myself inundated with work, on top of getting my bearings of the fish resource in the area. I continued to ask questions, help out wherever I could, even in areas outside of the job title, and maintain a positive attitude, despite hearing that one-year clock ticking until the Pathways term ended. I took whatever training I could to bolster the resume and within what seemed like moments, I was 3 weeks from the end of the year. That is when my supervisor pulled me to the side and asked if I felt I could take on the increased responsibility of being the district fish biologist. This was a unique situation (having the previous fish biologist vacate the position and a hiring freeze making filling the position more difficult) enough so that I would be considered for the position. I gladly accepted the position.

As I look around and meet other fish biologists in the Idaho Fish and Game, Forest Service, Bureau of Recreation, and Bureau of Land Management I find a common theme: 5-10 years of temporary positions, and a lot of flexibility in location and job type before gaining full-time employment. In comparison to other personnel in a similar position that I am in now, I am decades of experience behind them. I happened to be in the right place at the right time, with just enough experience to be able to attain the job I have. Although extremely lucky, I was not dissuaded by the altering course throughout my journey. I also continued to add skills to improve my marketability, such as certification in chemical immobilization, electrofishing coursework, acquisition coursework and certifications, project management coursework, amongst many other courses and certifications. With all of this, I was better prepared when the opportunity came, so I could stand out amongst all those that are attempting to get to where I am.

Now that you have a permanent position, have you given any more thought to furthering your education? (e.g. pursuing a master's degree, graduate certificate, or with additional professional experience, a Professional Science Masters in Fisheries Management)?

Furthering my education is still on my mind as I was looking at pursuing my master's degree if the Pathways position ended without a full-time position. For now college education is on hold to devote time to my family, the current position, and learning opportunities within the government. I plan to re-evaluate my situation next year, something I usually do at the beginning of each year, to see how I am progressing through the goals I have set for myself.