

Moderator: Amber Robinson, HDR Engineering

Panelists: Matt Schweisberg, Private Consulting
Kimberli Ponzio, St. Johns River Water Management District
Bill Morgante, Maryland Department of Public Works
Jodie Burns, Cattails Environmental, LLC
Alani Taylor, US Army Corps of Engineers
Jessica Brumley, East Central University
Sanil Kumar, Professional Environmental Planner

What is the coolest thing that you get to do in your job as a wetland scientist?

- Kim - I get to drive airboats in places no person has gone.
- Matt - Everything! Get to be out in the middle of nowhere and see incredible places, meet amazing people, and every day is different and interesting.
- Jodie - Being out in nature and getting to come in and write a report about it to escape the heat. Every day is different and you're problem solving.
- Bill - Constantly praising wetlands to government officials who are not as aware of them.
- Alani - Have some direct influence and get to point out when something is wrong and needs fixing.
- Jessica - Teaching freshmen to lure them to wetland science.
- Sanil - Get to interact with a lot of people and connect the different worlds of politicians and scientists and community members.

What are some things a college student entering their senior year of undergraduate should be doing to land a good entry level job?

- Demonstrate some passion and commitment for environmental science and wetland science.
 - Clearest way to do that is through internships and summer experiences while in undergraduate, whether paid or unpaid
- Demonstrate that you have good writing skills
- Volunteering and internships are always good, whether at your own university or somewhere else.
- Communication skills have to be excellent, both written and verbal.
- Take your classes seriously, especially in your senior year. It shows that you are committed to your career path and building the knowledge you need for it.

Should I get a graduate degree straight out of undergraduate or go right into the workforce?

- Depends on what your goal is. Sometimes getting a PhD can hurt your chances of getting hired in private industry.
- Graduate school is a huge commitment! So definitely take advantage of opportunities to clarify what your goals are - for example summer internships can really help for this.
- Sometimes you might want to go back and get a master's to build out a skill set you didn't get in undergrad but that you discovered is useful in your first few years of work.

- For consulting, a master's degree is often recommended but a PhD is probably not the way to go. By the time you graduate with a PhD, someone who started their master's at the same time you started your PhD program already has a couple of years of work experience under their belt. That's hard to compete with.
- There are research centers in the federal government as well so those skill sets can still be applied in the public sector.

How do I select a graduate school?

- Find someone who researches what you're interested in. Funding is important, too, but the interest is really pivotal to keeping your motivation up.
- Research Experience for Undergraduates program is a great way to identify a school and advisor you may end up working with for your graduate degree as well.

How do I develop networking skills and find people to mentor them before and after graduation?

- Being active in your professional and scientific societies. Don't only attend the annual meetings, but also get involved in the leadership somehow (even if it's just something little and local).
 - Plug for the SWS Webinar Committee
- Get on LinkedIn and manage it well. Keep it updated and use it to put yourself out there. It's a good platform to connect with people and also continue to communicate with them more casually.
- Don't think that because you're a student or don't have a lot of experience in wetlands yet that you can't get involved.
- Many professional organizations have inexpensive associate or non-professional memberships that are accessible for students that help to really expand your network.

What are the major differences between a wetland career in private consulting versus public sector versus a non-profit?

- They differ a lot in terms of pay, job flexibility, upward mobility, and education requirements.
 - If you're looking to grow in your professional background and experience and like field work, private consulting is probably the way to go.
 - If you're interested in policy and regulation, then government might be the way to go.
 - If you like non-profit work where you'll be working with communities and other organizations to try and do the right thing, then the non-profit sector might be a good fit for you.
 - There are opportunities to do all of those things in pretty much each of those categories, so it really depends on the positions you get.
- If field work is very important to your career, consulting is the way to go. Public sector often is more office-heavy.
- Private or non-profit sectors can often offer more flexibility in terms of your day-to-day work than working in the government.

- There may be more certainty in state or federal government than in other sectors.

Will relocating for an entry-level position be useful to my career? Why or why not?

- Absolutely! Particularly as it relates to work with the federal government. There are a lot of quality jobs that are only available after you are already in the federal employee pipeline. Even after landing your first job in the government, you may have to be willing to move around to pursue the next one.

How do you balance work and life as a wetland professional?

- Focus on what you can control and don't let what you can't control take up your headspace.
- Don't be afraid to say no at times. It's hard because we're conditioned to say yes and feel bad when we don't, but it's ok.
- Establish and maintain boundaries, especially in a work from home context.
- Having security in your job definitely helps with maintaining balance between professional and personal life.

What is one piece of advice you would give students?

- Even if your career track doesn't take you in the direction you anticipated, it doesn't mean that you did something wrong or that you won't be successful. It's quite alright if you end up having to take another job or take a pause between school. If you stay focused on your goals, you can find that satisfaction even if it's not on the path you pictured when you started out. - Alani
- If you have to take detours, make the most out of them. You can learn something valuable no matter where you are and what you do. It's the attitude and the approach that really makes the difference. Get everything out of a job that you can. Don't lose sight of what you want to do, but don't be afraid to take detours if you have to. - Matt
- You can have long-term and short-term goals and do a lot of experimenting when you're starting out. I tried a lot of different things, like graphic design and learning languages, which I now get to apply in my work and get to bring to the communities I'm working with. - Sanil
- Put yourself out there and don't underestimate yourself. If you become a leader, you lead in consensus and collaboration with other people. You can't do it all yourself. You need to rely on your support network. Take chances and give 110%. Work your passion and do what you love. I want to have a job where I say "I get to do this, not that I have to do this." - Kim
- Persevere and give 100%, whatever job you do. Have a network of people that you can talk to and really support you. - Bill
- You can't overvalue your school cohorts. They can open a lot of doors for you. I've had the best time working with some of my graduate school friends taking on projects as professionals. It's not work when you get to work with people you love. - Jodie

- Take advantage of those networking opportunities. Sometimes you have to bend some of the rules and play hookie to really maximize your options. It can really pay off. - Jessica