



## How to Land A Job In Conservation This Summer

TIPS FROM EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF NATURAL RESOURCE  
CONSERVATION

“

...Enjoy yourselves, keep your brain in your head and your head firmly attached to the body, the body active and alive, and I promise you this much; I promise you this one sweet victory over our enemies, over those desk-bound men and women with their hearts in a safe deposit box, and their eyes hypnotized by desk calculators. I promise you this; You will outlive the bastards."

— Edward Abbey

”

## Make This Your Summer to Do Something Great

**The world needs more people like you.** People who care about the condition of our natural world. People who understand that nothing connects us more than the air, water and soil we all share every day. You could be part of the solution to help restore and conserve these critical resources. You could do something great this summer – and for the rest of your life.

## Landing the Job of Your Dreams

There's an old saying: "Luck is where **preparation** and **opportunity** meet". So, if you think about that for a minute, think about how you can prepare yourself, and where to find opportunities. One step you're taking is reading a resource like this one – good for you!

We've asked two industry professionals to tell us what they look for in their new hires, and give you some great insight into the best opportunities for young adults entering the field of natural resource conservation.

## The Experts



**Michael C. Sprague** is founder and CEO of [Trout Headwaters, Inc.\(THI\)](#) an ecological restoration design/build firm based in Livingston, Montana. For nearly 25 years at THI, Mr. Sprague has helped to advance river, wetland and habitat restoration projects and technologies, making THI an industry leader in the field of ecologically sustainable restoration.

Mr. Sprague has taught training courses and workshops (**this is the preparation part**) on the topics of sustainable restoration and ecological assessment methodologies for a diverse group of organizations and students. THI takes a multidisciplinary approach to habitat creation, restoration and enhancement services for a broad range of private and government clients across the United States (**this is the opportunity part**), completing some 550 projects nationwide.



**Adam Scherm** is southeast director for [American Conservation Experience \(ACE\)](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing rewarding environmental service opportunities that harness the idealism and energy of a volunteer labor force to help restore America's public lands. Scherm graduated with a degree in zoology and a minor in Spanish at Oklahoma State University. After college, (**this is the preparation part**) Adam served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Panama focusing on environmental conservation from

2006-2008. That experience led him to apply for a job as an assistant crew leader with ACE. After several months, he began leading crews on public lands all over the Southwest. In 2013, he assumed the role of Trails Trainer and Coordinator for the Arizona office. He managed the trails projects as well as trained crew leaders and corps members in technical rock work, rigging, trail maintenance, and layout. Adam is currently the Director of ACE's Southeastern branch in Asheville, North Carolina (**this is the opportunity part**) which supports and manages 40 young people in conservation activities and is working with 6 different land management agencies and non-profits.

## About the Green Economy

Did you know? The \$10 billion-dollar per year Ecological Restoration Industry provides more than 126,000 jobs utilizing many skills and occupation types. Factors creating demand for green jobs include regulatory drivers like the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and other federal and state statutes and regulations that require restoration as an offset for permitted activities. Other important sources of demand are federal, regional, and local initiatives. Private investments by foundations, non-profits, corporations, institutions, and private individuals are also driving demand, as a way to increase sustainability or meet corporate social responsibility goals.

According to research provided in the Pacific Institute's Sustainable Water Jobs Report, 136 occupations are involved in achieving more sustainable water outcomes in agriculture, urban residential and commercial settings, restoration and remediation, alternative water sources, and stormwater management. But how do you find these jobs, and then, how do you land one for yourself?

## Green Jobs Are Quality Jobs

First of all, who wants to stand behind a fast food counter or sit in a stuffy office when you could be outdoors helping nature heal in some of the most beautiful places in the world? Green jobs often involve a variety of tasks, along with fresh air, exercise and a sense of purpose. Though these jobs may have seasonal fluctuations in income, restoration jobs are well-compensated in comparison to average wages.

Seasonal jobs can also offer good supplemental pay to opposite-season employment or during summer breaks. Entry level jobs would include:

- Ecological restoration – restoring streams, wetlands, estuaries or coastlines, improving habitat for threatened and endangered species, and eradicating invasive species.

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- Trail building and maintenance – building or maintaining trails locally, in state parks, or in national parks, recreational areas, or wildlife refuges.
- Forestry fuels reduction – clearing brush and reducing fire risks in state or national forests.
- Surveys and monitoring – planning ahead for work to come, or making sure previous work was successful; counting invasive plants, taking measurements of forest density, observing plant health, fish, wildlife, insect or plant surveys.

These entry level jobs can then lead to additional education or training for eventual careers in the restoration industry including:

- Engineers
- Hydrologists
- Geomorphologists
- Biologists
- Ecologists
- Environmental Technicians
- IT and GIS Specialists
- Project Managers
- Outdoor Recreation Specialists
- Landscapers
- Equipment Operators
- Laborers

## **Want to Play for a Living? Outdoor Recreation Jobs Are Real**

With a national outdoor recreation industry that generates \$289 billion in retail sales and supports 6.4 million jobs per year, there is ample opportunity to capture recreation spending in newly restored areas. The value of ecosystem services supplied by healthy, functioning, and climate-ready floodplains and wetlands is increasingly understood and appreciated. With tangible values identified, demand for restoration professionals and installation specialists will continue to grow.

## Who's Hiring in the Green Economy?

Michael Sprague and Adam Scherm both say that entry level jobs (often shorter-term internships and seasonal jobs for young adults) can be found in three main sectors:

- Private industry,
- Government agencies,
- Non-profit organizations.

**Private industry** jobs would include large and small environmental consulting firms, engineering firms, recreational fishing consultants, and landscaping companies or nurseries specializing in native plants.

*“Look for companies who specialize in ecological restoration, environmental conservation, fisheries enhancement, stream and river restoration, and hunting and fishing improvement projects,”* suggests Sprague. *“Also be prepared to start applying early in the year.”*

Put the following terms in your search engine:

- Seasonal environmental jobs,
- Entry level conservation jobs,
- Ecological restoration internships,
- Entry level jobs in environmental science.

**Government agencies** that hire seasonal crew members or offer internships include local, state and federal agencies involved in conservation work.

Put the following terms in your search engine:

- [Your county, your state] conservation district],
- [Your state] department of natural resource summer jobs and internships
- [Your state] department of fish and game summer jobs and internships
- USA job board entry level environmental jobs
- Department of the Interior summer internships

**Non-profit organizations** hire entry level and seasonal workers, too. A great place to start is with youth conservation corps around the country. The great thing about joining a conservation corps is that most offer both job training and leadership training. The majority of youth conservation corps fall under The Corps Network, but there are some independent conservation corps as well.

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*“Each conservation corps is modeled in a slightly different way,” says Adam Scherm. “Some focus on local projects, and some state or federal, and sometimes private-public partnerships. In general, conservation corps have a mission of doing great work, getting young adults into the outdoors, and teaching them the skills needed to be successful. To find candidates, we (ACE) post jobs on job boards, participate in career fairs, and use word of mouth from other youth corps members or leaders.”*

Put the following terms in your search engine:

- Nonprofit entry level jobs in conservation
- Summer environmental jobs nonprofit
- American Conservation Experience (ACE) job board
- The Corps Network
- Youth conservation corps summer jobs

## **What Skills and Traits Are Employers Really Looking For?**

Okay, now we get down to the really important stuff. You may have searched and found some great sounding jobs, but how do you land one for yourself? Let’s see what employers really look for – the answers may surprise you.

Michael Sprague and Adam Scherm offer some great insights....

Sprague’s company, Trout Headwaters, Inc., hires full-time professional employees and interns, and also employs seasonal, entry-level crews for ecological restoration work. Typical projects involve stream, wetland and estuary restoration using instream structures, and native vegetation. Other projects may include controlling invasive species and/or fish and wildlife habitat improvement projects. Seasonal crews may also perform surveys and monitoring related to these projects.

*“For entry-level positions, I’ve always valued aptitude and attitude as much, or more, than degrees and a long resume,” says Sprague. “Having said that, we look for employees that are dedicated to the work we do, interested in learning and growing into the job and beyond, and those who are able to follow directions, and work as part of a team.”*

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*“The work we do requires a lot of flexibility, persistence, and grit,” he said. “You might be out in the field one day and post-processing data on your computer the next. Great communication is key, so we do need you to understand the basic terms and language of aquatic restoration. One of our goals is to prepare those who work with us, through training and opportunity, to make a real difference for the health of aquatic resources we all share, wherever they may use their talents in the future.”*

Adam Scherm said young adults who come to American Conservation Experience (ACE) are looking for training, field experience, and networking opportunities.

*“One thing ACE works to provide is good quality trainings in CPR, first aid, wilderness first aid, chainsaw use, habitat restoration, plant ID, and pesticide application.”*

To get a position on an ACE crew is a competitive process and requires a three-to-six-month commitment. Scherm says 85-90% of those who start with ACE, stay with ACE.

*“The typical ACE team member is 16-25, usually a recent college grad looking for field experience and training. But some are high school students, or recent high school grads, and a few are older adults, up to about age 35,”* said Scherm.

*“There’s no experience required to become an ACE team member, but education and experience can be helpful. We typically look for folks with a good, positive attitude, who are flexible, hard-working, have good attention to detail, and are passionate about the outdoors and the natural world. Good team members will need to be flexible –there are lots of challenges with weather, schedule changes, and difficult terrain – previous experience in the outdoors is a plus,”* he said.

To recap, both Sprague and Scherm emphasized:

- Flexibility,
- Teamwork,
- Positive attitude,
- Passion,
- Persistence,
- Hard work,
- Grit,
- Good communication,
- A willingness to learn.

## How to Prepare Yourself to Do Something Great

How do you become that candidate that gets the offer? This is where preparedness comes in. Once you are prepared you can take advantage of the opportunities out there and that becomes “luck.” You will then be one of the lucky ones outdoors, restoring our natural resources and enjoying meaningful work.

Get prepared by:

- Doing your homework,
- Getting as much relevant training, education, and experience as possible,
- Line up your contacts and network,
- Being a flexible, team player.

## Tips and Steps to Getting Hired

First impressions count. It is your first chance to stand out and be considered a strong candidate for any job. Every contact with a potential employer is your chance to show a clear link between your knowledge, experience, passion, and abilities and the needs of the employer.

Many available jobs involve work around water. Water connects us all and many conservation jobs will involve protecting and restoring rivers, streams, wetlands, estuaries and coastlines. So start getting your hands wet! You may want to begin with a paid internship, or even volunteer, to get going right away.

### Steps to Getting Hired

- 1) Get training, education and experience when and where you can. Volunteer, take online training courses, take summer short courses, and document everything.
- 2) Collect recommendation letters from teachers, professors, former employers, and/or any professionals you know in the field. You'll need three or four good references.
- 3) Prepare your resume and cover letter.
- 4) Research jobs online for potential jobs and employers.
- 5) When you are interviewing for a job, be prompt, courteous, and you want to ask some of your own questions.
- 6) Be flexible in taking those first few jobs or internships and think long term rather than short term.

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## 10 Great Questions to Ask During Your Job Interview

- 1) What is a typical week like in this position?
- 2) Can you show me an example of a project I'd be working on?
- 3) Is this a new position or did someone leave? Do you mind telling me why they left?
- 4) Is there room for advancement or career training in this position?
- 5) Is there the opportunity for mentorship in this position?
- 6) How will you define success for this position?
- 7) What are the most important objectives from this position in the first few months?
- 8) What's the company or organization culture like?
- 9) Do you have any concerns about my qualifications? How could I be a better candidate?
- 10) What are the next steps in the interview process? When can I expect to hear back from you?

If you read and follow these tips and steps, you should have no problem doing something great this summer!

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## You Can Get Started Today!

Get a great start to your career in conservation! **Waders** in the Water v. 3.0. distance learning. Get industry recognized certificate of completion, on demand, on your schedule.

**Waders** in the Water On-Demand instructs conservation-minded young people nationwide in basic safety, materials, and installation techniques for aquatic restoration. Students have the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials and gain additional pathways to a conservation career by learning how to improve the climate-resiliency of our streams, rivers, coastlines, and wetlands.

Along with a certificate of completion, students receive a letter of recommendation, and access to job boards and contacts in the Green Economy! <https://wadersinthewater.org>

