

BACKGROUND

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service employs 8000 people nationwide to manage a network of land and water to conserve American's fish, wildlife and plants. There are six federal refuges in Michigan where these employees work, including the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge in Saginaw County and the Kirkland Warbler Wildlife Management Areas in several counties including Roscommon, Ogemaw, Crawford, and Clare.

The need for park rangers and dedicated conservation professionals is ongoing. The federal government annually distributes one billion dollars to state, territories and tribes for fish and wildlife conservation. Each year over 51 million people visit the 150 million acres of public land that are under the management of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Of the 8000 people employed, the career of Park Ranger is featured in the Talent Tour Video with this lesson. Federal employees have their own internal structure for career advancement within their system. This system helps with retention of employees and provides a very structured career ladder.

The following lesson features two elements of career exploration

- Understanding career laddering,
- Using metacognition of one's personality style and preferences to find career stability and satisfaction,

as well as conservation as a STEM topic.

Lesson: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Talent Tour Video

The lesson has three parts:

1. **Setting the stage** is accessing pre-knowledge and their current brainpower on the subject of conservation.
2. **A Talent Tour video** featuring U.S. Fish and Wildlife to build their knowledge.
3. **Extensions** to enrich the learning experience.

1. Set the stage with students: (20 minutes)

Discussion - With our lakes, shores, beaches, rivers, waterfalls, dunes, forests, and islands having a diverse and abundant natural environment isn't just nice...it's actually essential to our health, environment, families and economy. So much so that our federal government has a special agency that protects fish and animals and restores wetlands. It also makes sure people can enjoy these places.

Nurturing the connection between people and wildlife is so important to our country...there's a wildlife refuge within an hour's drive of every single major city in the nation. Close to, and within, the Great Lakes Bay Region we have three federal conservation areas.

Bring up and project the Shiawassee Refuge website: [Home - Shiawassee - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](http://Home-Shiawassee-U.S.FishandWildlifeService(fws.gov)). Ask for participation from students who have visited the refuge. Bounce around the website a bit. Bring up and project the Kirkland Warbler U.S. Fish and Wildlife page: [About the Refuge - Kirtlands Warbler - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](http://AbouttheRefuge-KirtlandsWarbler-U.S.FishandWildlifeService(fws.gov)). Again, ask for student participation and bounce around the site. Bring up and project the Detroit River Refuge page: [Home - Detroit River - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(fws.gov\)](http://Home-DetroitRiver-U.S.FishandWildlifeService(fws.gov)). Ask for student participation and bounce around the site.



One of the careers that is needed in refuges of our area is that of park ranger. Park rangers help visitors appreciate and enjoy the more than 189 million acres of public lands preserved, managed, and protected by DOI (Department of Interior). From the park ranger who greets visitors at the gate to the superintendent managing multiple large parks, all have an important role to play in making public lands inviting, inspiring, safe and accessible. Many rangers plan and conduct engaging and interactive programs to educate visitors of all ages and backgrounds about historical, natural, or scientific treasures. Others focus on law enforcement and emergency services.

Rangers can work in an amazing range and variety of environments from urban historical sites to remote mountain posts. Being a park ranger means bringing your passion for America's public lands to every sort of environment. Many locations involve significant time outdoors in remote, rugged areas, while others manage quiet farms or scenic parkways. A career as a park ranger has something for everyone.

2. You are now ready to take a Talent Tour! (50 minutes including 10 minutes for video)

[Share the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Talent Tour Video](#)

After the video - **So, let's ask ourselves, "What does it take to be a park ranger and is this a career that I can love for a lifetime?"**

Put students into groups of four (because there are four areas of research). Ask each group to number themselves 1-4. Distribute (or share as a Google Doc) the Fishing for Information and Hunting Down the Truth information collecting pages. The pages are numbered 1 through 4. Each student takes their numbered page and is tasked with finding answers to questions and prompts. Students with worksheet 3 have a Career Ladder as an additional worksheet to use as a resource.

Students are not expected to become experts or be able to respond with a lot of specific facts or data. The purpose is to expose them to a variety of resources for further exploration and career exposure.

(Give them 20 minutes for research.)

*During this information collecting time, have a sidebar meeting with students tasked with page 3. Help them understand the concepts of advancement and the general schedule for wages used by the federal government. The general schedule can be complicated but students understanding that more education/more experience transfers to bigger responsibilities with higher pay is the concept.

"Moving up" is a term used for obtaining a new work position with better wage, benefits, and/or working conditions. There are many entry-level opportunities and equally many opportunities to obtain education and training to improve working conditions, wages, benefits or to prevent burnout with the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Entry-level jobs for park rangers are usually at GS-5 which means a high school diploma plus at least two years of college education. GS-5 wages average \$35,000 per year. With additional education and experience park rangers can move up through GS 15. GS-15 wages average \$130,000 per year as a park superintendent.

You might refer to the [career ladder](#), which is a student resource, for better understanding.

Sharing the following website can be helpful to this understanding - [GS-5 Pay Scale for 2021 \(generalschedule.org\)](#). Don't spend too much time on it as the resources provided on their worksheet shares information as well.

At the end of the research and information collection time, students then share their information with others to fill in charts so that all the charts are completed. **(10 minutes.)**

Closure: (15 minutes)

Draw an outline of a human body on the board. Ask students to look at their notes and help fill it with the personality traits and strengths that make a good park ranger. All of these traits and strengths are from the provided resources but students might infer some as well.

Personality traits: "Adaptability, kindness, persevering optimism, willingness to learn and grow, loves outdoors, working and talking with people, cares for the environment"

Strengths: "Accountability, attention to detail, customer service, interpersonal skills, oral communication, teamwork, technical competence, writing"

3. Extensions:

Look into other careers related to park rangers such as Michigan DNR conservation officers, wildlife biologists, or outdoor marketing

[Conservation Officer | Mid Michigan College](#)

[Outdoor Media | Mid Michigan College](#)

[Bachelor's Degree in Biology - Saginaw Valley State University \(svsu.edu\)](#)

Look at other careers in National Parks - [Careers in the National Park Service \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

Deeper understanding of sustainability: [K-12 Lesson Clearinghouse - Middle School - Health - Calculating Your Foodometer - Green Education Foundation | GEF | Sustainability Education](#) As a MUST DO with this activity is to add Michigan just a few foods to the "Where Does Food Come From" resource page such as apples, blueberries, sugar, venison, whitefish, etc. Students need to understand that even though Michigan produces a lot of food products, many of those foods are processed in other states because of large factory locations.

