

# Park Careers



## Introduction

Many park employees have been influenced by a childhood experience in a park, which eventually led to a career in the California State Park System. Not only does a unit on park careers expose Junior Rangers to future job possibilities, it also makes the connection between park careers and good stewardship of California's valuable resources.

Look for enthusiastic speakers from your district, neighboring districts, and regional offices. The Junior Ranger Program provides opportunities for service staff to share their knowledge and be involved with interpretation in the field. By sharing the values that inspired the speaker's involvement with the state parks, the stewardship message will be gently reinforced.

To give you some ideas on how to interpret state park careers, Kathryn Yee, as a Ranger I from the former San Francisco District, has included a script from her Career Day slide show. Try the Jobs webpage on the Department's website for more ideas ([www.parks.ca.gov/jobs](http://www.parks.ca.gov/jobs)).

The Park Careers segment offers opportunities to involve all levels of park staff. Junior Rangers will be exposed to people with different gifts and talents who work together to protect California's state park resources.

Some state parks have developed profession-specific "Junior" programs (such as Junior Historian, Junior Engineer, Junior Curator) as a creative way for children to learn about other jobs available within state parks. The Park Careers section of the Junior Ranger Handbook and logbook is an excellent place for these programs to be incorporated. These profession-specific "Junior" programs shouldn't be created as stand-alone programs but should utilize the Junior Ranger materials, awards, and awards structure. Staff who are developing profession-specific programs should report on, and request supplies/awards for their program, through the Junior Ranger Program.

More information on selected professions, such as archaeology, will be included in Appendix C: Additional Program Information as it is developed and made available.

## **Sample Program: Park Careers**

### **Outline**

- I. Pre-Planning
  - A. Confirm with your guest speaker the date and time of the program.
  - B. Ask the speaker to include the following in the talk:
    1. Hands-on activities
    2. Stewardship application (in the park and at home)
  - C. Ask the speaker if he/she will need any supplies or equipment for the talk.
- II. Introduction
  - Introduce yourself.
  - Introduce the Junior Ranger Program.
  - Introduce your guest.
- III. Participate in the Program
  - A. Assist the speaker with any displays or props.
  - B. Actively listen and participate with the Junior Rangers. They will catch your enthusiasm.
- IV. Concluding the Program
  - A. Ask if the Junior Rangers have any questions.
  - B. Quickly review the highlights of what the Junior Rangers have learned.
  - C. Ask what they learned about stewardship.
  - D. Stamp logbooks.
  - E. Thank the speaker!

## Sample Talk

"Hello, my name is Kathryn Yee. I'm a California State Park Ranger, currently stationed at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area in San Francisco. Have any of you ever visited Candlestick Stadium? Well, Candlestick Point SRA is right across the street, but many people in the San Francisco Bay Area do not know that a state park even exists within the city and county of San Francisco!

It might be easier to say that I have three functions as a park ranger and perform these functions in three ways. First, California state park rangers and state park lifeguards are fully sworn peace officers. Just like the police officers and sheriff's deputies, we have to go through a regular police academy. Unlike those officers and deputies, we also have to be trained in resource management and interpretation (which is like being a teacher or naturalist).

In general, I have to:

- Protect the park from the people;
- Protect the people from the park; and
- Protect the people from other people.

In many park units, people either do not know the rules or feel they are free to do the same things they do at home when they visit a park. Park regulations exist primarily for the safety of the visitor and the park.

Sometimes, potentially hazardous situations exist within parks, like cliffs, caves, undertows, and slippery areas. Park visitors need to be protected and warned of potential danger. Sometimes, they even have to be rescued from these situations.

The last item refers to people who try to either bring their problems to the park or behave in inappropriate ways. They may disturb their neighboring campers, commit crimes like vandalism within the park, or drink and drive their cars or boats while on park property. To protect visitors so that they may feel safe in the park environment and enjoy their visit, state park rangers and lifeguards are peace officers and will enforce local and state laws.

To maintain park units so future visitors will enjoy and experience each park's unique features, park personnel have to manage the resources within each park. Resource management may range from knowing what flowers, trees, and animals live within the park to taking care of historical objects, buildings, and artifacts significant to the park's history.

However, this is not enough. People visit parks not only to relax and use the facilities, but to also learn about the significance of the area. Most state park units are established because they have scenic value, are the home of endangered or threatened species, were the site of famous people, or contain cultural significance.

## *Junior Ranger Program Handbook: Park Careers*

State park rangers and lifeguards must be able to relate these things to visitors. Then the visitor will feel a bond and perhaps be inspired to learn more or change his or her behavior to improve our environment.

There are many different jobs available within the California State Park System besides that of state park ranger or lifeguard.

The field operations that are visible to the park visitor are supported by many people who aren't visible to the public. In fact, many visitors will only see the park aids (who work to collect fees, clean bathrooms and remove litter) or park volunteers (who give interpretive programs, perform search and rescue, or ride on horse patrol).

When a park is first considered for inclusion within the State Park System, employees must work to determine if the property is of significance to the people of the State of California. Land agents, architects, surveyors, contractors, engineers, and financial advisors may be needed for the business end of this. Historians, archaeologists, wildlife or marine biologists, and others may also be called in.

Once the property is purchased, facilities may be built for staff and visitors. Landscape architects, building contractors, resource ecologists, and engineers will be needed. As soon as possible, the area is opened to the public.

Once an area is open, staff is usually assigned to monitor and maintain the area. Maintenance is a very large part of park work. Think about the parks you have visited. I'm sure you would have noticed dirty bathrooms or overflowing garbage cans. Maintenance people try to keep state park facilities clean and neat. They may also be involved in the maintenance and care of the plants, removal of hazardous trees, care of historic buildings, and repair of park equipment. Landscape technicians, groundskeepers, sewage and water treatment operators, heavy equipment operators, electricians, plumbers, and other skilled people work for California State Parks to keep everything working properly so the visitor can enjoy his or her stay safely and without worry.

Of course, backing up all of the field staff are those who make the decisions. Managers and superintendents, along with supervising rangers and lifeguards, work to run each park district efficiently and professionally. They are assisted by regional administrative officers and technicians, office clerks, account clerks, dispatchers, and other support personnel. As most of us know, almost everything important must be communicated in writing—and that's a lot of paper!

Behind all of these people are the administrators, attorneys and legislators in Sacramento, who make policy, set the budget, and coordinate efforts throughout the state.

Whether you seriously consider a career in the field of Parks and Recreation or decide to pursue some other field, you need to stay in school, gain some work experience

(volunteer or paid), and set realistic goals for yourself. Many employers will accept applicants with a variety of education and experience, but they insist that verbal and written English skills are essential. Take English composition and rhetoric courses. If you cannot write or speak well, you will lose credibility and be misunderstood when attempting to communicate thoughts, ideas, actions, or discoveries. Most jobs require some public speaking skills, whether you have to address large groups of people, make a business presentation, or interview a witness.

Competition for jobs is keen. Whether you want a career that will garner a high salary or a career that is long on personal satisfaction and job development potential, remember that others will want that, too.

Although currently California state park rangers and lifeguards only need to have two years of college, most have at least a bachelor's degree. This is partially because of the competition for jobs. Many people have to work seasonally in parks before acquiring enough experience to land a full-time, permanent position. During the winter months, they either go to school or find other employment. Park rangers and lifeguards also have to be versed in a wide variety of skills like emergency medical response, search and rescue techniques, teaching, and scientific and historical knowledge for a variety of areas.

So, set your goals, work and study hard, and reach your dreams!"

## **Activities**

### **Working in Parks**

Number of Children: One or more

Environment: Any

Equipment Needed: Working in Parks Crossword Puzzle (see Appendix B)

Purpose of the Activity: To explore various park careers

Activity:

1. Discuss the different types of positions within the State Park System. To make this interesting take the Junior Rangers on an investigative tour of the park so they can watch different employees in action or have different employees talk with them.
  - What is each individual doing?
  - What skills, training or education do they need to complete their work?
  - Why are they important to the park?
2. Ask the Junior Rangers to share three personal qualities or skills they think they have that would enable them to work in parks. What position is best suited to their qualifications or interests?
3. Provide the Working in Parks Crossword Puzzle (Appendix A).
4. For their log book ask the Junior Rangers to choose a park position they think they would enjoy and have them draw themselves as that employee.

5. Emphasize to the Junior Rangers that an important part of any park employee's job is the preservation of the state's natural and cultural resources for the education and enjoyment of the people of California. How can they as Junior Rangers help protect our state parks? (pick up litter, stay on trails, etc.)

## **Background Information: Park Careers**

### **Public Safety**

California State Parks employs over 700 peace officers to safeguard both visitors and the resources themselves. Rangers and lifeguards provide not only public safety, law enforcement and aquatic rescue services, they also provide public education through interpretation. Lifeguards and state park rangers are trained and designated as sworn peace officers. They perform patrol duties primarily by vehicle, boat, and foot patrol; issue citations; write reports; make physical arrests for misdemeanors, felonies, and warrants; take command in emergencies; perform search and rescue activities, including detecting and rescuing persons or vessels in distress; assist in wildland and structural fire suppression; provide emergency medical aid; train personnel in all phases of life-saving activities, operate and maintain emergency rescue equipment; and other related work.

- **Lifeguard**—Performs a wide variety of aquatic services at state ocean and inland beaches, underwater parks, and recreation areas. Lifeguards may perform scuba diving and ocean, surf, river, and lake rescue. They may specialize in assignments such as cliff rescue; off-highway vehicle and motorcycle patrol; or canine team handler. Park units where lifeguards work include state parks, reserves, recreation areas, beaches, wayside campgrounds, and underwater parks.
- **State Park Ranger**—Is involved in the law enforcement and visitor services functions of the State Park System. Rangers perform professional and technical duties in state park units involving park operation, interpretation, resource protection/management, patrol, safety and law enforcement. They assist with program management activities, and may supervise and/or serve as a lead to seasonal and lower level permanent staff. Rangers work primarily in field districts of the State Park System including state parks, reserves, historical units, recreation areas, beaches, wayside campgrounds, and underwater parks. Positions are also assigned to Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division units located throughout the state.

### **Interpretation and Education**

Interpretation is a special form of communication that helps people understand, appreciate, and emotionally connect with the rich natural and cultural heritage preserved in parks. It is the mission of interpretation in California State Parks to convey messages that initially will help visitors value their experience, and that ultimately will foster a conservation ethic and promote a dedicated park constituency.

- Guide—Interprets exhibits and historic objects to the public; guides visitors; arranges, maintains, and protects exhibits.
- Interpreter—Plans, researches and develops interpretive projects for the Department; participates in or directs small interpretive projects or portions of large interpretive projects; conducts interpretive/educational programs for park visitors.
- Exhibit Technician—Produces skilled artwork using a variety of media and techniques in the preparation of interpretive exhibits, graphic presentations, and house museum displays; assists with related exhibit construction and installation work.
- Exhibit Designer/Coordinator—Is responsible for the design of interpretive exhibits, using all forms of media. Participates in planning and budgeting for exhibit development; coordinates departmental and public review, working drawings, and fabrication of exhibits.

## **Recreation**

Recreation is a key component of the State Parks mission and legislative mandate to provide recreational opportunities and experiences to the public. Recreational experiences are sometimes provided directly (such as guided nature walks or guided ski tours), while in most instances parks provide the opportunity for visitors to direct themselves in a wide assortment of outdoor-based activities, such as hiking, bicycling, fishing, swimming, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle recreation, jogging, camping, and picnicking.

- Park and Recreation Specialist—Performs program development and evaluation, and analytical and administrative work to identify and improve methods for meeting the outdoor recreational needs of the citizens of California.

## **Cultural Resources Management**

The Department's mission clearly defines the responsibility to preserve and protect the state's most valued cultural resources, both inside and outside of state park boundaries. The preservation of cultural resources within California State Parks from both natural and human effects involves:

- Acquisition and preservation of all types of cultural resources
- Survey, recording, assessment, protection, monitoring and maintenance of archaeological resources
- Recording, condition assessment and development of management plans for historic structures, sites, districts and landscapes
- Cataloging, description, preservation and housing for historical objects
- Administration of documentary materials
- Ensuring compliance with state and federal law and state policy regarding potential impacts on cultural resources
- Development of policy and provision of training necessary to carry out State Parks' cultural resource mission
- Research, documentation and interpretation of archaeological, ethnographic and historic objects and cultural materials

- State Historian—Performs basic historical research; recommends and executes programs of identification, description, evaluation, preservation and resource management of historical and cultural objects, sites, and buildings; and directs the development of employee training programs concerning California historical resources and historic preservation.
- State Archaeologist—Performs or directs the performance of work in cultural resource management programs; recommends and executes programs to locate, identify, describe, evaluate, preserve, and manage archeological and ethnographic sites, features, structures, and materials; conducts or directs field surveys, archaeological excavations, and related archival research; provides research data of archaeological significance to various programs in State departments; directs the development of employee training programs in California archaeological resources; and does other related work. See Appendix C for additional information and ideas for programs on archaeology.
- Museum Curator—Plans, organizes, and manages programs of acquisition, conservation, registration, interpretation, and/or storage of museum objects at established museum facilities. Museum curators supervise a subordinate staff engaged in curatorial and preservation duties.
- Restoration Work Specialist—Performs a variety of skilled carpentry, masonry, and other tasks in connection with the restoration, preservation, and stabilization of historic buildings and sites; checks on details bearing on authenticity and does research as required; consults with other craftspersons and leads less skilled assistants; assists in maintaining project safety; keeps tools, materials, and equipment in good condition and keeps simple records.

## **Natural Resource Management**

California State Parks is the steward of some of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. With the role of stewardship comes the responsibility to protect and, when necessary, restore and maintain these natural systems of state and national significance. Natural resources within the State Park System and throughout California face a variety of risks:

- Continuous urban development
- The introduction of non-native or exotic plant and animal species
- Loss of critical habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species
- Interference with natural fire cycles leading to a buildup of fuels that prohibit natural propagation of certain species
- Environmental Scientist—Performs a broad range of staff work involved in the management of natural, scenic, and recreational resources of the State Park System. Resource ecologists conduct major and complex ecological investigations and studies dealing with degradation, enhancement, and perpetuation of natural, scenic, and recreational resources; assess human impacts and use intensities; survey natural areas of local, state, and national significance and recommend acquisition priorities based on ecological values and degree of threat; collect and evaluate information on terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in existing and proposed State Park System lands; conduct technical evaluation of soil-vegetation-animal relationships; identify present and potential long-term resource

degradation; formulate and direct broad programs and specific projects, such as exotic plant and animal control, tree hazard control, re-vegetation, pesticide use and control, wildland disease and insect control, erosion control, wildfire control, and prescribed fire management; set forth resource management guidelines and policies; perform technical review and analysis of planned developments in or near State Park System lands that may impact the environment; prepare unit resource inventories and the resource element of the Department's general plans; administer the Department's statewide resource management program with budgetary and contractual responsibilities; and provide technical guidance and assistance to park managers and their staff.

- Geologist—Provides interpretive geologic services and conducts geologic investigations. Principal work assignments include gathering, analyzing, and disseminating geologic data, crustal strain and seismic risk investigations; completing geological and geophysical mapping; and geologic hazards identification, analysis, and reporting. Geologists inventory mineral and marine geologic resources, publish geologic information, maintain a geologic data center, and review and analyze geologic reports submitted by governmental agencies.
- Forester—Deals with forest, range, and watershed management by providing encouragement, advice, and assistance to landowners; regulating use; demonstrating good wildland management; and seeking through research and studies the necessary knowledge to utilize and protect forest, range, and watershed lands while protecting all forest benefits. Foresters are also required to assist in the suppression of fires and the rehabilitation of lands and their natural resources damaged by such incidents.

## **Facilities**

Facilities are a key element in the realization of the Department's mission.

Campsites, trails, visitor centers, museums, roads, water systems, and restrooms are all essential in meeting the demands of protecting resources, educating the public, and enabling recreation.

- Park Maintenance Worker—Does skilled and semi-skilled structural and facility maintenance and repair work, including carpentry, painting, electrical, plumbing, masonry, and roofing; clears and maintains trails; fights structural and forest fires; protects natural resources from destruction by constructing erosion control, diversion and drainage facilities; maintains trees, shrubs, lawns, flowers, and native vegetation; cleans campgrounds, picnic sites and other public facilities, and collects and disposes of refuse; operates and performs routine preventive maintenance on a variety of vehicles, such as trucks, beach cleaners, small tractors and mowers; and leads and trains a crew of maintenance employees.
- Museum Custodian—Performs routine housekeeping and preservation duties in museum facilities; applies and regularly uses knowledge of preservation and handling techniques on and around valuable objects; maintains antique furnishings and other objects of historical or artistic value; does semi-skilled manual tasks in the maintenance and preservation of museum objects; and does other related work.

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- Carpenter—Conducts or supervises the construction, maintenance and repair of various buildings and structures; the drawing of working sketches and preparation of cost estimates; the maintenance of tools, materials and equipment in good repair; and the preparation of simple reports.

**INSERT *PLANT LIFE* TAB HERE**

