

Wildlife Express!

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Wild Careers



Conservation Officer



Choosing a Wild Life

*By Jon Heggen
Chief of Law Enforcement
Idaho Department of Fish and Game*

I have always loved the outdoors. On family visits to my Grandpa's farm in Minnesota, I played outside, went fishing, and my Uncle Denny taught me to shoot a BB gun. He even taught me how to drive a tractor. When I got back home, my adventures didn't stop. I joined Boy Scouts just so I could be outside. During the summer I also went to camp. I learned to build fires, float a canoe, use a compass, and sleep outside under the stars. By the time I got to junior high, I knew that I wanted a job where I could be outside!

In high school, I loved science. My favorite science teacher also loved the outdoors and took us on many outside field trips. With his encouragement, I went to the University of Montana to study wildlife biology. For four years, I learned everything I could about critters. This knowledge came in handy when I got my first job as a Land Management Technician. That job led to a job as a Fisheries Technician where I learned all about fish. Sometimes, a conservation officer would help us on a project like sampling fish or trapping Canada geese, but it was their "real" job of catching poachers that really got me interested. So, I started helping them out sometimes by going on patrol. I even flew in an airplane looking for poachers trying to hunt ducks and pheasants before the season started. It did not take too long for me to know that this was the job for me!

In 1985, I became a South Dakota Conservation Officer. It was very rewarding to work to protect wildlife. By 1988, I was ready for new challenges, so I moved west to become a conservation officer in Idaho. I have worked in some of the most remote and beautiful places. I have also lived in many communities around the state and met a lot of great people who love wildlife. I have learned how to travel on horseback, run rivers in a rubber raft, and trap mule deer from a helicopter. I have even had the chance to put all my Boy Scout skills to work. In every place I have worked, I have caught my share of poachers who cheat and don't hunt or fish by the rules.

Now, I work with all of Idaho's conservation officers as Chief of Law Enforcement. A lot of my time is spent finding the right people with the skills, talents and passion for wildlife to become new officers. If you think you would like a career as a conservation officer, I would love to visit with you. It is never too early to start thinking about your future.

My Dream Job

*By Dane Cook
Senior Conservation Officer*

If you are reading this, it's likely you are interested in wildlife. You may even be interested in a career working with wildlife. Well, read on and see if that's really something you'd like to do. I can honestly say I'm doing a job now that I wrote an essay about wanting to do when I was in 6th grade. That was 33 years ago. I really wanted to work with wildlife or work for a wildlife agency. I was especially interested in being a Conservation Officer, otherwise known as a CO.



This is one of those jobs that are hard to describe. A CO's duties change with the time of year and day to day. A CO might be checking hunters and fishermen to make sure they are following wildlife laws. Because we enforce laws, we also get to work with lawyers, judges and the court system. On another day, a problem bear might need to be trapped, removed, and relocated. Sometimes a wildlife biologist needs a hand (or several) to collar deer or elk. Maybe the fisheries biologists need help counting fish in a lake or stream. Any and all of these are "just another day in the life of" a CO. A CO helps the public understand wildlife better. He or she enforces wildlife laws. This protects wildlife but still allows people to enjoy and harvest them. A CO also helps protect the critters' habitat, so they have a place to live.

Being a CO is a great job, but it's not for everyone. Here are a few things to think about if you want to pursue a career in this field. One, school is very important. In order to get a job, you'll have to have a college degree. Two, your actions at a young age may come back to haunt you later - don't have a criminal record. Three, you must be willing to move, possibly to another state, in order to get a job.

If you really like wildlife, wild things, hunting, fishing and basically all things outdoors, this may be for you. It's never too soon to start thinking about it.

My Day with Matt O'Connell

It was a beautiful, sunny day in November when I got the chance to ride-along with Idaho Fish and Game Conservation Officer, Matt O'Connell. We left Boise at 8:30am on our way up into the Boise Mountains toward Arrowrock Reservoir. Officer O'Connell said that we would most likely find people fishing and find archery hunters looking for deer and elk.

We did find people fishing at Arrowrock Reservoir. Officer O'Connell chatted with them about whether the fish were biting. He checked their licenses and the fish they had kept. One group was doing great. They had many fish and seemed to be enjoying themselves, even though it was below freezing!

At 10:25 am, Officer O'Connell noticed that a truck was parked in a strange place along the road. Footprints in the snow went from the truck, across the road and up the hill. This was an area that he was concerned about. The area was closed to deer and elk hunting, but people were still hunting there. Officer O'Connell parked his truck and pulled out some binoculars. We both started scanning the mountain side. We saw a group of deer and then I saw him: a hunter hiding behind a sagebrush with a bow in his hand. I showed Officer O'Connell where the man was on the mountain, and he took action.

He opened his door and started to climb up the steep, snow-covered mountain. Without binoculars, he looked like a small speck. He got the man to follow him down off the mountain. Officer O'Connell showed the man on a map and in the hunting regulations that the area was closed to hunting. He ended up writing the man a citation, or ticket, for hunting in a closed season.

We ended up seeing 27 hunters and anglers that day. Officer O'Connell checked licenses, looked at a deer that one lucky hunter got, and wrote one ticket. I realized that Officer O'Connell is more than a "wildlife cop." He is just as much a teacher, counselor and friendly face to the people he meets. For the most part, people were happy to see Officer O'Connell, and they appreciated the work that he does protecting Idaho's fish and wildlife.



From Cheese State to Gem State

*By Doug Meyer
Senior Conservation Officer*

It's a damp, cool autumn evening in Wisconsin. The leaves are red and orange, and it smells like fall. All is silent as I wait quietly in my deer stand. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I hear the rustle of leaves. Is it a big buck? The footsteps get closer and my heart starts racing with excitement. Through the tree limbs and shrubs I see something moving closer. Suddenly, there he is. . . my pesky friend the gray squirrel! He's here to scold me for being in his woods!

It is simple outdoor experiences like this one that got me hooked on hunting and fishing when I was a kid growing up in Wisconsin. Even as a kid, I knew I wanted to work outside. The moment I got to meet a game warden and found out that it was a real job, I knew what I wanted to do when I grew up. After studying hard in school and graduating from college, I got a job as a Conservation Officer here in Idaho.

In my job, I have experienced so many things. Every day I get to interact with great people, teach young kids, handle wildlife, and be a cop at the same time. I have radio-collared mule deer, rescued baby owls, searched for elk, stocked fish in lakes, and even

helped with an airplane crash. In between all these exciting activities, I help educate people about wildlife regulations. Sometimes I have to give a ticket to someone who chooses not to follow the rules that protect our wildlife. I think the best part of my job is getting to share outdoor experiences with others. Seeing people with a smile on their faces after a great day in Idaho's outdoors makes my job as a Conservation Officer the best!

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A Job I Have Come To Love

*By Matt O'Connell
Senior Conservation Officer*

Unlike many of my coworkers, I cannot honestly say that I wanted to be a game warden from the time I was a little boy. I grew up in rural Wisconsin. I went fishing and spent time hiking, exploring and camping with my family and Boy Scout troop. I loved being out in the hardwood forests chasing wild brook trout in the streams and rivers. Every summer my family and I would take trips to places like Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. At a young age, I fell in love with the mountains and wide open spaces of the western United States.

I graduated from college with a degree in Forestry and Natural Resource Management. I really thought that a career with the National Park Service or Forest Service was in my future. In a way, I was right. I was five years into my first career with the Park Service when I was hired to be a ranger specializing in wildlife enforcement at Shenandoah National Park. My love of wildlife law enforcement was born while on a hiking patrol. My partner and I discovered a well-hidden illegal bear trap. The trap had been half buried into a hillside, and a live bear was caught inside. Finding that trap led to the bear being freed. A serious wildlife poacher was arrested and found guilty of many poaching crimes, and my new career path was laid down.

Several years later, I moved out west. I was hired by the Wyoming Department of Game and Fish to be an Enforcement Aide. Now, 15 years into a rewarding career with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, I know that I am where I want to be. I have the best job in the world. I get to help wildlife, be outside and work a flexible schedule. I was 30 years old when my Idaho experience began, so don't feel like you need to be in a hurry to get your career going. Gain experience, have fun, and find a career that you enjoy.

Wildlife Laws

Like many things in life, hunting and fishing come with rules. These rules are made to protect wildlife and to make sure that your kids and grandkids and their kids can also enjoy Idaho's wildlife, but it was not always this way. Long ago people hunted or fished whenever they wanted and took as many animals as they wanted. Some people, called market hunters, supplied wildlife to markets in the eastern U.S. They killed so many animals that populations of some species became very scarce. Have you ever heard of the passenger pigeon? Their population once numbered in the billions. People never imagined that passenger pigeons would ever disappear, but by the early 1900s they were extinct mainly because of both market hunting and over-hunting.



Fortunately, other hunters and conservationists realized what was happening to America's wildlife. They began working to convince hunters that rules were needed to protect wildlife. Before long, laws were being passed all over the country to limit hunting to certain seasons. Limits on how many animals or fish someone could harvest were made. Idaho's first wildlife law was written in 1864 when Idaho was a territory. Today, responsible hunters and fishermen are proud to obey wildlife laws. They are grateful that the hunters and anglers of years ago worked to protect wildlife. They are also proud to continue that tradition today.

Wildlife CSI

Today's conservation officers use some pretty neat tools to solve wildlife crimes. One of those is forensic (for-EN-sick) science. Forensics is the use of science and technology to solve crimes. It can provide important evidence that is often unseen.

Wildlife forensics is a lot like human forensics. Many of the same kinds of high-tech equipment and tests are used. DNA testing is a very valuable tool for wildlife forensics. A tiny DNA sample can tell a forensic scientist a lot of things like the species of animal or if the animal is a male or female. A tiny sample can also be compared to other samples to tell exactly what animal the sample came from. For example, if an officer finds a dead moose, he can collect blood, hair, bones, antlers, or tissue (like skin or muscle) to get a sample. He can then take a sample of the frozen meat in a suspect's freezer. DNA testing will tell if the frozen meat is from the dead moose. If it's a match, the case is made!

Idaho's only wildlife forensic scientist is Karen Rudolph. Her work has helped solved many wildlife crimes in both Idaho and Oregon. She works very closely with conservation officers and not

just on solving cases. Rudolph also trains officers to properly collect evidence from a wildlife crime scene. Evidence that is not collected properly cannot be used and this could make it hard to solve a case. She also testifies in court to explain the forensic evidence to judges and juries.

So, what is Karen Rudolph's favorite part of her job? "Working with our great officers and other people to help protect wildlife," she says. For her, forensics is part of a puzzle that can help solve a wildlife crime. For the officers, Rudolph's knowledge, skills, and talents help make their job easier. Together, they make a powerful team working to protect Idaho's wildlife.



A Very Diverse Job

You may have seen a conservation officer while you were camping, fishing or hunting with your family. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have their job? What is the job of a conservation officer? They help to protect the fish and wildlife of Idaho, and there are many ways that they do this.

Conservation officers do not have a "typical" job. They don't work in an office from eight in the morning until five at night. Conservation officers work in Idaho's mountains and high deserts. Their office is the great outdoors. They patrol Idaho's lakes and wild rivers. They work in areas of Idaho where most people only go on vacation! Their desk is a truck, snow machine, horse, jet boat or ATV. Conservation officers may work during the day or during the night. It all depends on what is happening at the time that needs their attention. If you like to be outside, this may be a job for you.

Conservation officers are police officers. They have the same training as Idaho's state troopers. Conservation officers could give a person a ticket for speeding, but they focus on enforcing wildlife laws. They make sure that people follow the law while they are out hunting and fishing. The laws they enforce not only help to protect wildlife. They also help to keep people safe.

Sometimes conservation officers are detectives. They investigate crimes against animals, such as when a deer or elk is killed out of season. They must be observant and look for things that are out of place. They may take pictures or collect blood or bullets. They look for

anything that might help them find their criminal.

Conservation officers must like things that have fins, fur and feathers. They do more than enforce laws. They also help biologists study Idaho's wild animals. They may help collect information on animals' habitats, or they might trap and tag animals in studies. Sometimes they are asked to help an injured animal or trap and move a problem bear. Conservation officers also help farmers who have deer or elk eating their crops. They have a "hands-on" job with wildlife.

How do you get a great job like this? You need to know about fish and wildlife. You must go to college and earn a degree in fish or wildlife management. It is also important that you are a good listener and communicator. You will be working closely with people every day who are outside enjoying Idaho's wildlife. It helps to talk with them if you too like wildlife and like to fish and hunt.

At times, the job of a conservation officer is demanding but look at their office. Conservation officers work in Idaho's beautiful out of doors. It can't get any better than that!



What's a Poacher?

If you have ever heard the word “poacher,” you might have thought it had something to do with eggs. In wildlife law enforcement, a poacher is someone who steals wildlife. They do it by hunting or fishing at the wrong time of year. Or they kill too many animals at once. Or they just kill an animal and never take the meat. Or they do illegal things such as spotlighting animals or chasing them with a vehicle. Because Idaho’s wildlife belongs to all of us, poachers steal from everyone.

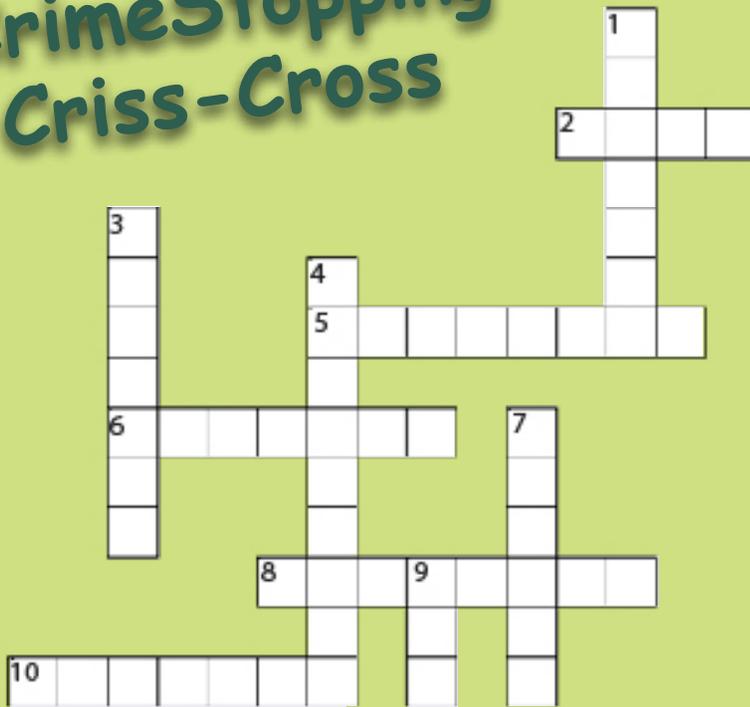
Poaching is bad for wildlife and hunters. Wildlife laws are meant to protect wildlife. Poachers hurt wildlife by taking too many animals or hunting at the wrong time of year. They hurt hunters by giving other people a bad impression of hunters. Poachers are kind of like the kid in your class who is always causing a problem. That kid may do something wrong and your whole class gets blamed. That’s pretty unfair! Hunters feel the same way when they are blamed for the actions of poachers.

Responsible hunters take a lot of pride in following the rules and obeying wildlife laws. They don’t like poachers either. Hunters often help catch poachers by contacting conservation officers to report illegal hunting behavior. They even helped set-up a special “hotline” phone service.

It’s called “Citizens Against Poaching” or CAP. The number is 1-800-632-5999. CAP is a valuable tool for conservation officers. Some pretty big cases have been solved because a call was made to CAP by someone who wanted to help. Anyone can call in to provide information. You do not have to give your name, and you could get a reward if a case is solved.



CrimeStopping Criss-Cross



Words

College	Outdoors
DNA	Poacher
Forensics	Police
Hunters	Typical
Laws	Wildlife

Across

2. Wildlife _____ helps to protect wildlife and people.
5. The office of a conservation officer is the great _____.
6. You must go to _____ to gain the education needed to be a conservation officer.
8. COs enforce _____ laws.
10. These are the people that helped to create some of the first wildlife laws.

Down

1. A _____ steals wildlife.
3. Conservation officers do not have a _____ job.
4. The use of science and technology to solve crimes is called _____.
7. Conservation officers are _____ officers.
9. Scientists can use _____ to identify animal species.

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For more information, call or write: *Wildlife Express*, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, 600 South Walnut, PO Box 25, Boise, Idaho, 83707 (208) 287-2890.

Lead Writers: Adare Evans, Vicky Runnoe **Layout:** Renai C. Brogdon **Contributors:** Lori Adams, Brenda Beckley

WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU !

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