

Park Managers



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

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Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- City Managers
- Consumer Affairs Directors
- Customs Agents
- Foreign Service Officers
- Police Commissioners
- Public Works Commissioners
- Welfare Directors

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Battalion Chiefs
- Court Deputies
- Deputy Sheriffs
- Detective Chiefs
- Fire Captains
- Fire Chiefs
- Fire Marshals
- Harbor Masters
- Head Correction Officers
- Internal Security Managers
- Police Commissioners

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Education Administrators
- First-Line Supervisors, Administrative Support
- Food Service Managers
- Human Resource Managers
- Instructional Coordinators
- Natural Sciences Managers
- Postmasters and Mail Superintendents
- Treasurers, Controllers, and Chief Financial Officers

Park managers ('park 'man-ag-ers) plan, direct, and coordinate the operation, recreation programming, maintenance, natural and cultural resource protection, visitor safety and security, and administration of national and state parks.

National and state parks range from undeveloped and natural lands, to fully developed sites, to cultural and historic sites. The parks offer visitors sight-seeing, camping, fishing, hiking, boating, and other recreational, environmental, educational, and cultural pursuits.

Extremely large parks employ hundreds of part-time and full-time staff. Small parks may have only one worker. Park managers lead and direct staff who maintain the park, protect the resources, and serve the public.

Work Performed

Park managers engage in activities to develop, protect, administer, and promote the use of national and state parks. They select, train, and oversee workers who protect resources and maintain the parks for the use and pleasure of visitors. Staff may include park rangers, grounds keepers, skilled maintenance workers, office workers, sewage and water plant operators, park interpreters, landscape architects, botanists, mechanics, historians, and resource managers. Park managers may also oversee workers who carry out rescue operations or fight fires.

Park managers set priorities for park maintenance. They plan work schedules and assign staff to projects. They inspect the progress of work to insure it meets operational and professional standards. They may regulate the use of the park by scheduling the times when park areas, recreation facilities, and other accommodations are open to the public.

Park managers or their subordinates tour the park regularly to observe the condition of the park and to determine maintenance needs. They and other park staff observe how visitors are using the park, inspect buildings and equipment for wear, and investigate complaints from patrons about park accommodations or facilities. They inspect concessions for compliance with health and safety standards. Park managers direct investigations of accidents, damage, or thefts. They may evaluate the need for emergency repairs after an accident, storm damage, or other events.

Park managers also promote plans to preserve and protect natural and cultural resources. Managers work with experts in land use and planning, archeology, historical restorations, and other matters to insure the future of the park. They work with wildlife managers, engineers, architects, landscape architects, environmental protection specialists, foresters, conservationists, and other scientists to carry out conservation programs. They make and enforce rules to safeguard historic structures, the landscape, plants, and wildlife.

Park managers' duties include paperwork. As government employees, they spend some time filling out forms and writing reports. They prepare or direct the preparation of reports on expenditures, attendance, income, supplies, inventories,

accidents, and other statistical or financial reports. They also prepare budgets and cost estimates on measures to improve the resources for recreation and visitor safety.

Managers deal with the public in many ways. They may work with public agencies, schools, colleges, nonprofit groups, and Native Americans to preserve and renew the parks. They issue reports of park plans and schedules for local radio, television, and newspapers. They may give talks to park visitors or to civic clubs. They support programs or classes in environmental protection at the park or at nearby schools. They also regularly meet with elected officials at all levels and may be called upon to provide Congressional or state legislature testimony.

The National Park Service has policies and explicit guidelines on management, resources, legal boundaries, and public use of national parks. Managers must follow these directives when they make management decisions.

State and municipal park managers also have a similar set of guidelines. They may have to report to a state park's department or to the parks and recreation department of a town, city, or county. Some managers report to individuals. Others report to a panel or a board.

Working Conditions

Although park managers routinely supervise all park activities, they spend much of their time in an office on administrative work. They tour the park regularly to observe park use, worker activity, and overall operations. National park managers frequently travel outside their park to attend meetings, serve on national committees, meet with stakeholders, or to conduct public meetings and hearings.

Park managers may work in a populated place such as a historic site in a big city. They may direct the staff in a remote national park such as Katmai National Park in Alaska. During peak seasons managers work with a larger staff and deal with more park visitors. They might, for instance, plan a new boat ramp or the layout of a new hiking trail, or prepare the budget for the coming season.

Hours and Earnings

Most park managers work full time. Year-round, full-time managers usually work a forty-hour week. Since parks are often open twenty-four hours a day, however, they may be called at any hour to deal with an emergency.

According to recent government job listings, starting salaries for park managers begin at about \$35,000 a year. Wages range from a high of more than \$120,000 a year to a low of less than \$25,000 a year. Earnings vary depending on geographic location, education, and years of experience. Those who work at larger federal parks tend to earn more than those working at smaller state parks.

Fringe benefits for most government workers are good.

Managers who work in state, county or municipal parks are generally employed by that particular governing body. They receive comparable salaries and benefits, including paid vacations, sick leave, paid holidays, health and life insurance, and pension plans, to those individuals employed by the federal government.

Education and Training

National park managers reach their positions by serving in other park jobs. Many begin as park rangers, maintenance supervisors, park interpreters, administrative officers, or other management workers. To become managers, they must have education, experience, or a combination of both. Park managers usually have a bachelor's degree. Competition for the limited number of positions is keen, however.

High school students should take a college entrance program with subjects covering natural and physical sciences. In college they should major in natural resource management, recreation and park administration, biology, history, archaeology, wildlife management, conservation, or forestry. Besides science and liberal arts courses, they should take psychology, public relations, communications, recreation, and business management courses. Computer science courses are vital.

State parks require similar education and experience of their managers. Exact requirements depend on the state, the location and size of the park, and the difficulty of the job. Large parks that offer a wide range of features employ managers with the most extensive education and experience. Small local parks tend to hire persons with a background in recreation management or maintenance skills.

Professional Societies

Park managers may join any of several groups interested in national and state parks. There are the National Recreation and Park Association and the National Association of State Park Directors, which consists of the chief administrators of each state park agency. Other professional organizations include the National Association for Interpretation, the George Wright Society, and the Association of National Park Rangers.

Personal Qualifications

Park managers should be leaders—able to direct others and make decisions. They need integrity, flexibility, and a sense of humor. Self-reliance and self-control are important. To get ahead, they should be willing to work and to move to new assignments.

Managers must have good communications skills, both oral and written. They must be able to delegate work.

Dealing with the public, not all of whom are pleasant and courteous, demands tact and patience.

Park managers must balance the calls for conservation from activists with the public's right of access, along with budgetary constraints. Park managers must be calm in emergencies. They must be skilled in public relations. The work demands poise.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

Park managers work all over the United States in federal and state parks. About 90 percent of all park managers work in one of over five thousand state park areas, covering more than thirteen-million acres. National park managers work in more than 388 units of the National Park System, set aside for recreational, historical, or natural scenic values. The National Park System encompasses approximately 80.7 million acres, of which more than 2.8 million acres remain in private ownership. The largest area is Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Alaska. At 13,200,000 acres it is 16.3 percent of the entire system. The smallest unit in the system is Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial in Pennsylvania at 0.02 of an acre.

Parks include natural preserves, historic sites, battlefields, seashores, deserts, swamps, woodlands, mountains, plains, rivers, and geysers. Some managers work in the semitropics. Others work in arctic parks. Park managers work in big cities and in remote wilderness areas.

Employment Outlook

Parks and recreation jobs are hard to get because the number of applicants is greater than the number of openings. The job market is tight. It may improve with the growing public support for the conservation of natural, cultural, and recreational parks. These predictions, however, do not give the extent of expansion. Cuts in public spending may further reduce funding for parks, though this may be offset by the growing trend of charging admission to parks. The number of jobs for managers will be fewer than those for other park workers.

Entry Methods

Those who hope to become park managers should expect to begin their career in a lower park position. The National Park Service fills all jobs according to Office of Personnel Management rules. Civil service standards also apply to most state jobs.

College students should watch for announcements of examinations for jobs in federal or state park systems since the testing periods are limited to certain intervals.

They should also check with academic departments and professional societies. Job announcements are displayed in the lobbies of post offices, in employment offices, and in local branches of the Office of Personnel Management. Students should also get experience in part-time or seasonal jobs in conservation or park work.

Advancement

Government park management services place their staff in positions where they can best use their skills and knowledge. Advancement is by demonstrated merit. All qualified park employees may apply for openings in higher grades. They may advance to become district rangers, chief rangers, historians, or other management workers. Those with experience and demonstrated ability may become park managers or staff specialists in resource management or park planning.

Park rangers or other park personnel often take courses in park administration, resource management, or other subjects offered by the National Park Service. The service may send outstanding workers to college for a semester or more of study. With schooling and years on the job, park rangers or other workers may advance through the ranks.

Many colleges offer advanced studies. There are more than 300 baccalaureate programs and more than 280 associate degree programs in parks and recreation offered by colleges and universities in the United States. The National Recreation and Park Association, in cooperation with the American Association for Leisure and Recreation, has developed standards of accreditation for four-year programs. Persons interested in parks or conservation work might look into the jobs of foresters, environmental researchers, wildlife managers, rangeland specialists, or soil conservationists. Other work that might be of interest is that of conservation officers, landscapers and grounds managers, urban planners, and landscape architects.

For Further Research

D-Amp Publications, 401 Amherst Ave., Coraopolis, PA 15108.

The Book of U.S. Government Jobs. Dennis V. Damp, Victor Richards (editor). \$27.96 softbound plus software. Covers professional occupations, how to apply, and who to contact.

John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Professional and Trade Division, 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158.

The Environmental Career Guide: Job opportunities with the Earth in Mind.. Nicholas Basta. 195 pages. \$13.56 softbound.

National Association of State Park Directors, 9894 E. Holden Place, Tucson, AZ 85748. Web Site: www.naspd.org

Name and contact information of each state's director of parks.

National Parks and Conservation Association, 1776
Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20036.

Web Site: www.npca.org

National Parks. Six times a year. Subscription free with membership, \$18.00 for students, others \$25.00.

National Park Service, 1849 C Street, Washington, DC
20240. Web Site: www.nps.gov

Employment information. Write or check Web Site for Career Guide, General Information, Internships, Seasonal Employment, Contacts, OPM Job Announcements and more.

National Recreation and Park Association, 22377
Belmont Ridge Rd., Ashburn, VA 20148-4501. Web Site:
www.nrpa.org

National Job Bulletin. Published twenty-two times a year. \$45.00 a year for members, \$5.00 each for nonmembers.

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