

Are the park rangers full time employees? How do I go about getting a job as a park ranger?

The City of Palo Alto has several different job classifications, all of which may be confused with, or considered to be, a “park ranger.”

The first is an “open space technician” (OST for short). OST is our entry level job position. OSTs perform many basic duties in the parks from light maintenance and janitorial duties to trail clearing and staffing the entrance station on weekends. OSTs are seasonal employees and are hired for a maximum of 1,000 hours per year. Generally OSTs will work less than 40 hours per week so that we can extend the work season for them.

Next up are “seasonal rangers.” They are also seasonal employees that have the same restrictions on how many hours per year they can work. Their duties include all OST duties with the addition of some law enforcement, emergency medicine and fire fighting. Again, we try to work seasonal rangers less than 40 hours per week to extend their work season.

Any person who has a seasonal job classification is subject to an end of season lay off.

Park Rangers are next on the list. We are generalist rangers, we do a little bit of almost everything: janitorial duties, light to heavy maintenance, field work, trail work, law enforcement, emergency medicine, fire fighting, interpretation, traffic control at accidents, catching stray animals and rescuing people stuck in the mud. You name it, if it happens in open space, we deal with it.

We also have a Senior Ranger position; their duties are the same as a park ranger with addition of much more contact with managers and people from other agencies. Above the senior ranger is the Supervising Ranger, who is actually management staff. Between the senior and supervising rangers they make sure that our department, within the city, is run well and are our primary contacts with upper level managers.

The key to getting a job as a park ranger is to have the desire and the willingness to see your choice through to completion. Start off by getting an education (most places that hire for ranger positions will expect you to have at least an associates degree in some related field (i.e. law enforcement, biology, resource management or some other nature related field of study). Next you need to be willing to start

at the bottom and work your way up, almost nobody that hires rangers will hire one who has no job experience. You should expect to spend at least a season or two as an open space technician or the equivalent. Then another season or two as a seasonal ranger. Then you might get a position as a park ranger. Remember competition is strong. Do some research, learn what the department you are applying to is looking for, and get it before you interview; the less training they need to provide, the better you look. Do not be afraid to apply for a position and not get it, every interview you go out on will make your interview skills stronger (many people do not make it past a first interview).