

How does one become a ranger or work for the department of forestry?

I have always had an interest in the outdoors. Like most normal kids I had a dose of cartoons after school each day; but, my brother and I were forever exploring around our neighborhood, coming home muddy, scratched and bruised or bringing home a variety of things our mother really did not want in the house. About 20 years ago while working as a landscaper my needs of and for the outdoors increased. I wanted to do more than just water flowers, I wanted to somehow pass on my concern for the outdoors and insure there would be generations of concerned stewards to follow.

As an older student I enrolled in Unity College in Maine. Three and a half years later, I had a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Science, with a concentration in Conservation Law Enforcement – I decided that I was going to be a park ranger.

I soon discovered that jobs in parks are often sought after positions, are not always readily available and can be very competitive. My wife and I moved from New England to California, she was soon an elementary school teacher and I was looking for work. Eventually I found employment with a company that provided contract services for Palo Alto in the Baylands and some of the downtown parks. After working for them for several years, I was accepted as an open space technician (a seasonal job) with the city, after another year or so I was accepted as a seasonal park ranger and after another year or so became a full time ranger. I could not be happier, I love my job.

You can expect to work for at least several years in an entry level, seasonal/part-time position with at least one governmental entity or a contractor before gaining full-time, permanent employment.

The main job qualification you will need is a love of the outdoors and a desire to protect the environment. Any qualifications you have above and beyond that will only help you out. In Palo Alto we are generalist rangers, we do some law enforcement, some emergency medicine, some fire fighting, some interpretation, some maintenance, some janitorial and some of everything else that happens or needs to be dealt with in 4,000 acres of open space.

There are several colleges and universities in California that have park management, park maintenance or similar programs. You may want to start your search for a job with one of those programs to gain a good working knowledge of what you will be doing and to begin networking, getting to know other professionals in the field. After you know what to do, you will need to find your first position and be ready to put in your time in the trenches. The knowledge is important; but, it will not guarantee a full-time position right out of the gates. As I mentioned before, the jobs do not come along very often, any experience you get will only help. Many jobs will require at least one interview, possibly an exam and/or skills test, a back ground check and physical exams. Be patient in your search.

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I have looked on the internet and found web sites where you can look for information and/or job announcements for the following agencies:

City of Palo Alto

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/depts/hrd/employment/default.asp>

County of Santa Clara

<http://agency.governmentjobs.com/santaclara/default.cfm>

County of San Mateo

<http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/portal/site/HR/menuitem.3d3ef1e987f7bbfb6d9897b6d17332a0/?vgnextoid=d4dfef2a75519110VgnVCM1000001937230aRCRD&vgnnextfnt=FullView>

California Department of Fish and Game, CalFire (used to be the Department of Forestry) State of California (listing for all state of California jobs)

<http://www.spb.ca.gov/index.htm?e=1>

United States Department of Agriculture, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, United states Fish and Wildlife Service (listings for all federal jobs)

<http://www.usajobs.gov/infocenter/>

Good luck in your search