



Jeremy Dedic, Wyoming State Forestry, talks about a logging operation with a land manager. Photo courtesy of the Weston County Natural Resource District.

Consider a career in natural resources

Are you leaving high school soon, or wrapping up college and looking at career options? Or maybe you're interested in making a career shift? Whether you're into hands-on work outside, enjoy teaching, or prefer working on a computer in an office setting, there's a place for you in the natural resources field.

Natural resources are found in the environment and are valuable to or used by humans. Examples include air, soil, and sunlight, as well as consumable resources such as water (drinking and irrigation), trees (timber), vegetation (forage and crops), coal, oil, and natural gas. Wildlife is also considered a natural resource.

Across the country, natural resource professionals study these resources and our interactions with them. They work to ensure natural resources are managed sustainably and in a way that supports multiple uses of public lands. Natural resource professionals also educate the public about the importance of natural resources and how communities can work together to conserve them for future generations.

Natural resource careers span a diverse array of sectors, each offering unique opportunities. This variety means you may find a job that matches your interests and skills.

Why natural resources?

As the demand for resources increases, so does the demand for professionals who can manage and optimize these resources. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects an average of 5% growth for jobs in natural resources over the next decade.

While many professional-level natural resource careers in fields like range management or environmental science require specific degrees, plenty of natural resource jobs offer on-the-job training and certification programs or don't require a degree. These roles include field or lab technician positions and various internship opportunities.

Many jobs in natural resources include outdoor physical labor activities such as logging, range monitoring, building erosion mitigation structures, or

Careers in "green" tech

There is a growing demand for employees with the knowledge and skills to develop and support resource-efficient "green" technologies. In the energy sector, two of the fastest-growing positions are wind turbine technician and solar photovoltaic technician.

collecting water or soil samples. Some jobs might require you to work both indoors and outdoors, doing fieldwork and then generating maps or reports in the office. Other jobs, such as office administrator, web developer, or information technology specialist, are primarily based in an office setting.

Local, state, and federal opportunities

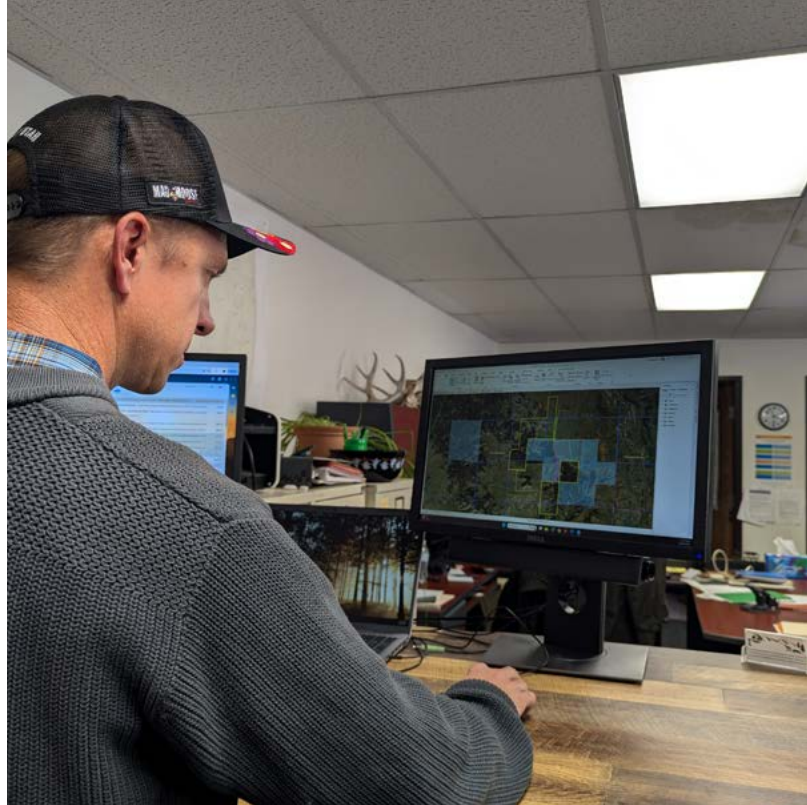
Nearly two-thirds of conservation scientists and foresters are employed by local, state, or federal governments. Many state and federal agencies also offer internship opportunities or summer work, which are great ways to gain experience and see if a natural resource career is a good fit for you.

At the local level, positions often focus on urban planning, community outreach, or management of parks and urban forests. Many local government jobs are offered through municipal parks departments or special districts, such as conservation districts. These roles typically involve ensuring that local natural resources are conserved and used responsibly. Conservation districts also work with landowners on voluntary natural resource conservation projects.

At the state level, natural resource jobs focus on broader regional concerns. State environmental agencies, departments of agriculture or natural resources, forestry divisions, and wildlife agencies employ environmental scientists, biologists, forestry technicians, and hydrologists. These professionals conduct research on local ecosystems, manage state forests and other habitats, and implement regional and statewide conservation initiatives. State employees also work in the fields of reclamation, wildfire mitigation, and water management.

Getting started

Entering the natural resources field is more accessible than you might think, regardless of where you are in your career path. To get started, check out the Careers in Natural Resources Initiative website, created by the Colorado Youth Corps Association, at nrcareers.org. This site can help you identify the steps you need to take on the path to a career in natural resources!



Caleb Carter, district manager of the Weston County Natural Resource District, works on a map using ArcGIS Pro. Photo courtesy of the Weston County Natural Resource District.

Federal job opportunities in natural resources often involve working for agencies like the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), or the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). These agencies hire for positions with responsibilities ranging from county-wide to nationwide.

Natural resource professionals in federal agencies include wildlife biologists, range specialists, conservationists, ecologists, foresters, park managers, and resource analysts. These roles typically involve managing federal programs, monitoring natural resources on federal lands, conducting research, and developing policies that impact natural resource management on a regional or national level.

The private sector

In addition to government agencies, natural resource employers include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), colleges and universities, private research and consulting firms, and resource extraction industries.

Non-governmental organizations offer a different perspective on natural resource careers, often emphasizing conservation and advocacy. Positions with NGOs might include conservation biologists, policy



Jeremy Dedic, Wyoming State Forestry, discusses forestry projects at a forest health tour hosted by the Weston County Natural Resource District. Photo courtesy of the Weston County Natural Resource District.

advocates, field researchers, and even social media managers. These roles often involve working on specific conservation projects, lobbying for environmental policies, and educating the public about natural resource issues. NGOs can provide opportunities to work on global or local initiatives, often in collaboration with other conservation organizations.

Private research and consulting firms present another career avenue. These companies often focus on environmental impact assessments, natural resource management policy, or sustainability consulting. Potential positions include environmental consultants, ecological modelers, and resource economists. These roles often involve analyzing data, preparing reports, and advising businesses or government agencies on how to manage natural resources responsibly.

Research and education

Colleges and universities offer natural resource roles in both teaching and research. Academics may pursue a faculty position or become a research technician, among other opportunities. They might conduct studies on ecological systems, teach the next generation of natural resource professionals, or lead research projects that contribute to scientific knowledge and policy development. Universities may also offer extension services and lead other outreach efforts that provide resources and education to the general public.

Resource extraction

Resource extraction industries include mining, forestry, and oil and gas. Professionals in these

industries include geological engineers, environmental compliance officers, operations managers, land reclamation specialists, and field technicians. These positions require balancing resource extraction with environmental stewardship. There are also many entry-level positions that do not require a degree, typically in the extraction process.

Beyond the sciences

While many job opportunities in natural resources involve fieldwork, there's also plenty of opportunities for professionals whose interests tend toward the more creative side. Many agencies and organizations need to fill administrative or creative roles like website designer or manager, communications manager, graphic designer, copywriter, photographer, office administrator, payroll and account manager, community outreach coordinator, and more.

Job satisfaction

A career in natural resources offers a solid mix of job stability, diverse opportunities, and personal satisfaction. Managing resources that benefit society and solving real-world problems can make your job feel meaningful. It's also rewarding to see how your efforts directly impact your neighbors and community.

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Natural resource professionals **Erin Darlington-Whitcher** and **Caleb Carter** encourage you to consider career options in their field. Darlington-Whitcher is office administrator for the Weston County Natural Resource District and can be reached at westoncountynrd@gmail.com. Carter is district manager of the Weston County Natural Resource District and can be reached at ccarter.wcnrd@gmail.com or (307) 746-3264.