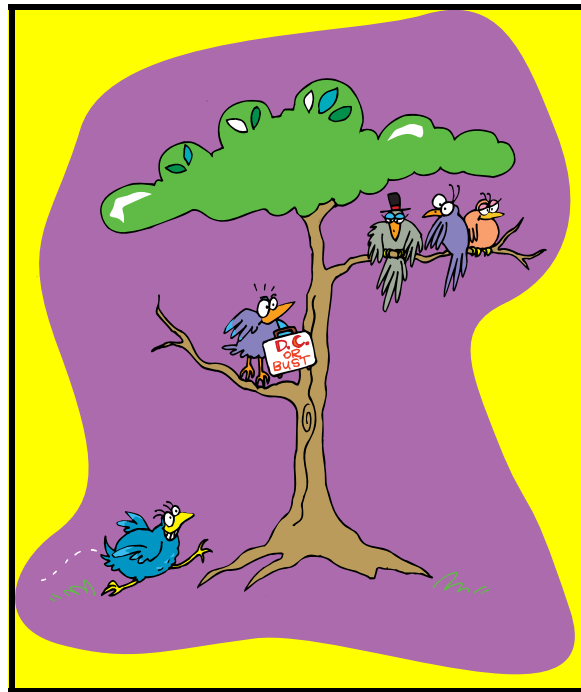


Planning to Fledge the Ivory Tower?

- A Flight Plan for Conservation Practitioners

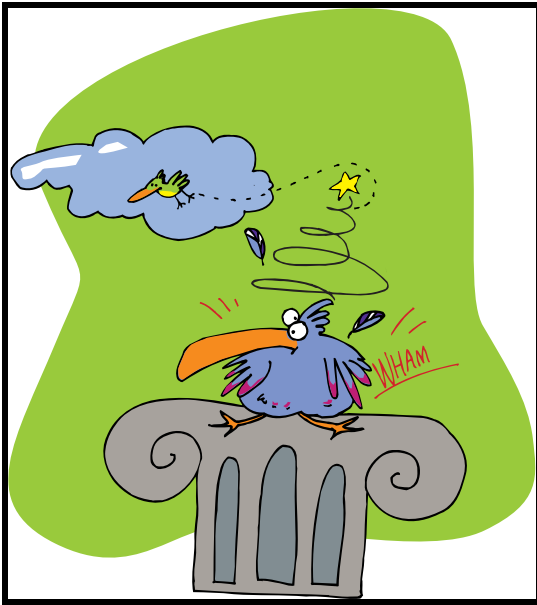
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Introduction

Wham! Kirrrrplop. It does not sound good and it not a pretty sight, but we witness it on a weekly basis here in Washington, D.C. Someone has fledged the ivory tower, barely skirted across the express lanes, and smacked into the glassy inner beltway world of environmental policy and management, unprepared. There they sit, head spinning, feathers ruffled.



No. The degree alone, whether undergraduate or graduate, was not enough.

An environmental job in Washington, D.C. is not everyone's concept of the ideal. However, for many conservationists interested in environmental policy and program management, especially positions international in scope, D.C. is their migratory destination, or at least a career stop over. Many academic fledglings, as well as numerous mid-career jumpers, flock to D.C. each year. And, like their relatives who continue on an academic route, they have a tendency to want to navigate by the

stars...Lovejoy, Mittermeier, and Earle. Alas, without some significant preparation, cloudy skies can be predicted.

In our experience, the successful bird is one that has earned its wings; it has been well fed, practiced, and observant. It has the determination, patience, and flexibility necessary to enable it to thrive on strategy, opportunity, and, yes, luck. We, thus, offer the following flight plan for those heading our way.

Learn the Terrain

The landscape of environmental jobs is diverse and ever evolving. Although most people think of the large non-profit (conservation organizations (e.g., Conservation International, Environmental Defense, National Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund) when they envision environmental jobs in D.C., numerous positions exist in large and small institutions, across a wide range of disciplines and sectors. There are employment opportunities in the biological and social sciences, law and policy, regulation, education, business management, fundraising, journalism, and activism, among others. Employers include, but are not limited to, non-profit conservation organizations (often called non-governmental organizations or NGOs), foundations, government agencies and Congressional offices, universities, museums, "think tanks" (social science research institutions), scientific societies, corporations, and a wide range of consulting agencies (aka. "The Beltway Bandits"). Annually-updated directories of environmental organizations list hundreds of potential employers in the Washington D.C. area (Box 1).

Box 1. Read *Environmental Career Publications*, for example:

Books

- *Careers in the Environment* (Vgm Career Horizons, 1995)
- *The Complete Guide to Environmental Careers in the 21st Century* (The Environmental Careers Organization, 2004; online at: <http://www.eco.org/Guide/>)
- *The Conservation Directory 2005-2006: The Guide to Worldwide Environmental Organizations* (The National Wildlife Federation, 2005; <http://www.nwf.org>; annually updated)
- *The ECO Guide to Careers that Make a Difference: Environmental Work for a Sustainable World* (The Environmental Careers Organization and Island Press, 2004).
- *The EnviroDirectory* (Environmental Marketing Group; <http://www.EnviroDirectory.com>; updated annually)
- *The National Green Pages* (Co-op America; updated annually)

It is at least as important to understand *how* conservation is being approached as it is to know *who* is doing *what* and *where* in Washington. Not so long ago, conservation organizations were largely reactionary in attitude and practice, taking antagonistic, defensive stances to halt habitat destruction or the slaughter of species. Today, many conservation-oriented institutions tend to focus on proactive protection measures and attempt to bring a wide range of stakeholders to the table. The public sector has been following these trends as well; government officials work on pollution prevention, managing the pathways of biological invasion, and establishing marine protected areas, and

more or less, depending on the administration, cooperate with non-federal advisory committees and partners. In preparation for the U.S. Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014; <http://www.usdecade.org/v2/index.php>), some forward thinking individuals and organizations are even starting to explore how to create and promote a compelling vision of a sustainable future – one that supports biodiversity and human needs.

The spatial and temporal scales of conservation planning and practice have changed dramatically, and will continue to do so. Globalization is perhaps the most significant force behind these changes. Local activism has largely been foregone for national and international agendas. Numerous emerging and expanding technologies are driving conservation solutions or problems on multiple-scales. For example, the Internet now enables conservation-minded individuals to communicate and muster support rapidly over long distances, but it can also facilitate the speedy transfer of non-native species (e.g., seeds) around the world. Other major drivers of conservation practice in Washington, D.C. include economics and politics, both of which heavily influence and reflect environmental values and in turn translate into law, policy, regulation, and market interests (e.g., “bird friendly” coffee, or hybrids vs. SUVs), and strongly influence conservation funding. Every environmental job in Washington, D.C. is affected, directly or indirectly, by the ever modified outer-beltway landscapes.

Those who come to D.C. as scientists have two additional points to consider: 1) while scientific knowledge is relevant

to every environmental field, there are relatively few scientific degree-holders who actually practice “Science” within the District, and 2) scientifically-trained professionals need to be able to work well outside the “specialist niche” in order to communicate and partner with individuals from a diversity of other professions - from policy makers to industry leaders to philanthropists.

Decide Where You Want to Land

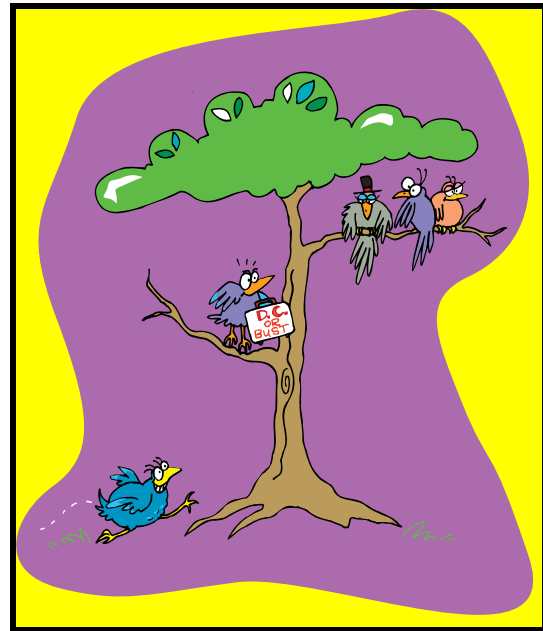
In determining what kind of job you ideally wish to hold, you need to consider the specific kind of position (e.g., environmental educator), job sector (e.g., governmental, non-governmental, industry, intergovernmental), and rank (professional level and thus salary). For an introduction to the breadth of environmental jobs in Washington, D.C., see the resources listed in Box 1.

Box 2 provides a list of some of the most useful websites to surf for insight into the D.C. job market. Review job descriptions carefully. A job entitled, “Policy Analyst,” for example, is likely to have varying responsibilities and require somewhat different skills in each sector. A job entitled, “Program Director,” might require a Ph.D. and many years of professional experience at one institution, yet require little more than a bachelor’s degree and limited on-the-job experience at another organization.

Determine What Branch You Are On Now

Where are you in your career at this time? It is not necessary to be a scientist or have a doctorate to have a job in D.C. that will enable you to make significant contributions to environmental conservation. However, federal agencies

and nonprofit organizations are increasingly requiring Master’s degrees of job applicants.



Your level of academic training might, in fact, be more important than the topic of academic expertise; it is quite common to find people in Washington, D.C. well-perched in jobs unrelated to their courses of study, no matter what the field. Nevertheless, you need to assess where you are now in order to map out the most direct and prosperous route to your intended destination.

If you haven’t done so already, prepare your resume or *Curriculum vitae* (*Cv*). Most non-profit organizations ask for 1-2 page resume, while government agencies typically request that you upload your resume in a specific format (<http://www.usajobs.gov>), and scientific institutions will prefer a *Cv*. There are numerous books available that provide step by step guidance on resume and *Cv* design. You can also review the job tips found online (Box 2). For guidance in applying for federal government jobs in particular, visit The

Resume Place, Inc.'s website (<http://resumeplace.com>).

Box 2. *Surf the Web*, for example:

- EcoEmploy.com (<http://www.ecoemploy.com/>)
- Environmental Career.com <http://www.environmentalcareer.info/>
- EnviroEducation.com (<http://www.enviroeducation.com>)
- EnvironmentalPrograms.net (<http://www.environmentalprograms.net>)
- Green Dream Jobs (<http://www.sustainablebusiness.com/jobs/index.cfm>)
- Idealist.org (<http://idealist.org/>; especially for NGOs)
- Orion Grassroots Network (<http://www.oriononline.org/ics>)
- Sustainable Business Leaders Network (<http://www.sblnetwork.com/SBL/jobboard/>)
- The Amazing Environmental Organization Web Directory (<http://www.webdirectory.com>)
- The Environmental Careers Organization (<http://www.eco.org>)
- The Job Seeker (<http://www.thejobseeker.net/>)
- The Riley Guide (<http://www.dbm.com/jobguide>)
- The Society for Conservation Biology (<http://www.conbio.org/SCB/Services/Jobs/>)
- The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM; <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov>)

How do you look on paper? What is the level and breadth of your current academic and job experience? Have you worked abroad? How many languages do you speak? What computing or other technical expertise (e.g., GIS) do

you have? What is your publication and public speaking record? How have you proven your leadership potential? Have you worked in a team-oriented situation and/or supervised other people? What strategic planning and fundraising experience do you have? What is your understanding of the federal policy making and budgeting process?

Identify the Resources You Need

Compare your resume or *Cv* to advertisements for the type of job that you would eventually like to have. No doubt, you will notice that the job descriptions place a strong emphasis on certain “people skills” that are unlikely to be part of your degree program’s course list.

While your academic background is indeed important, it does not necessarily make you the ideal candidate or set you apart from other people with the same or similar degrees (Box 3). Unfortunately, even the most sophisticated environmental science programs typically lack practical courses on the “human dimensions” of environmental conservation.

Box 3. *“I expected to become a Professor. However, when personal circumstances brought me to D.C., I decided to use my expertise in evolutionary biology to solve environmental problems in a very direct and tangible way. I applied to program coordinator and policy analyst jobs at several of the large NGOs. ‘Why not,’ I said. ‘I have a Ph.D. from Harvard; I’m certainly qualified.’ Some 20 applications later, I had not received a single interview. I was shocked. What was wrong?*

I needed to prove myself. Within the beltway, doctorate degrees are not necessarily considered evidence of performance potential. In fact, some employers believe there is an inverse correlation between advanced degrees and success in Washington! All those years chasing bees in the tropics did not count as ‘real world

experience.' I swallowed my ego and went looking for internships. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation opened its door to me and, after a month as a volunteer, they offered me a full time position as a project coordinator. The internship, though brief, provided me with the skills and attitude that I needed to make it in Washington. I encourage other people to try my path. If I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't change a thing." GC

Employers in D.C. often look to hire staff who have already have a wide range of life experiences and well established networks, and who exhibit flexibility, critical thinking, passion, and a motivation to develop expertise on new issues, as well as gain new skills along the career path. The following list reflects skill sets that are in great demand within the D.C.-based conservation community. The more expertise you can develop in these areas, the more likely you are to land among the higher branches. See Box 4 for a list of organizations that provide capacity building for environmental professionals.

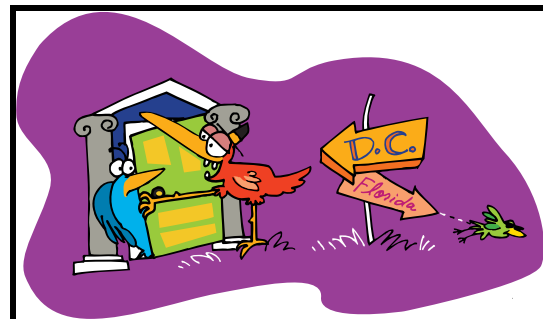
- Public speaking
- Fundraising
- Writing - brief and to the point
- Project management
- Personnel management
- Strategic planning
- Process facilitation
- Partnership/team building
- Leadership
- Foreign languages
- Computing (esp., GIS, desktop publishing, data and accounts management)
- Budgeting (esp. with regard to the Federal budget process)

Box 4. Get More Job Skill Training, for example:

- Aldo Leopold Fellowship (<http://www.leopoldleadership.org/content/index.jsp>; note: specifically for individuals in academia)
- Donella Meadows Leadership Program (efarwell@sustainer.org)
- Environmental Leadership Program (<http://www.elpnet.org>)
- Ecos Systems Institute (<http://www.ecos-systems.org>; also offers personal coaching)
- LEAD International (<http://www.lead.org>)
- Smith Fellows Program (<http://www.smithfellows.org>)

Exercise Your Wings

Once you have determined what kind of experience you need and want, it is time to exercise your wings in Washington. Getting your feathers in the door may very well be your biggest challenge - you need to be strategic, opportunistic, persistent, patient, and, most definitely, flexible.



For many people, the first D.C. experience comes with the taxonomic classifier, "intern," "fellow," or "volunteer." While such titles often bring up images of a lesser evolved species, in D.C. these titles are as likely to describe an undergraduate on summer leave as they are a recently

fledged Ph.D. or tenured faculty member on sabbatical (Box 3). Furthermore, contrary to popular belief, they are not all volunteer or minimum wage positions; some, in fact, pay quite well. See Box 5 for a list of selected government-based fellowships in Washington, D.C. The websites in Box 2 can lead you to information on internships and additional fellowships.

Box 5. Places to Perch and Feed

The following fellowships offer some of the best opportunities to begin an environmental career in the Federal government. See information in the other boxes for guidance on the many non-governmental positions in Washington, D.C.

- AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowships (<http://www.fellowships.aaas.org>)
- Mass Media Science and Engineering Fellowships (<http://ehrweb.aaas.org/massmedia.htm>)
- Presidential Management Fellowships (<http://www.pmi.opm.gov/index.asp>)
- National Sea Grant Fellowships (<http://www.nsgo.seagrant.org/funding/fundingfellowships.html>)
- White House Fellowships (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/fellowships/>)

A much under utilized D.C. roost is that of the “temp.” There are numerous temp agencies in D.C. that service major consulting firms and government agencies. They provide an opportunity for flexible employment (e.g., short term placement, limited hours), dependable income, and networking (Box 6).

Box 6. *“I never expected to become an inner-beltway biologist. For as long as I can remember, I had dreamed of exotic field sites and mud under my finger nails. Long before college I was taking every opportunity I could to engage in ecological research. However, just as I was graduating from the College of William and Mary, my mother was diagnosed with cancer and her care necessitated that I find a job close to her Virginia home. With a barely dry diploma, I arrived on a friend’s floor in D.C. I quickly signed on to a temp agency, extremely thankful that my mother insisted that I take business electives in middle school! I worked odd jobs by day, networked at every opportunity, and kept the resumes and business cards flowing. Within a couple of weeks I was hired by the Smithsonian Institution. Fourteen years, a doctorate, and a number of D.C.-based policy jobs later, I still greatly value my first “insider” job and continue to collaborate with Smithsonian colleagues as a Research Associate.” JKR*

Environmentally-oriented Temp Agencies include: EnviroStaff (<http://www.envirostaff.com>), ETI Inc. (<http://www.etiprofessionals.com>), and KellyScientific (<http://www.kellyscientific.com>).

Forage Widely

No matter where you first land in Washington, be sure to cover as much territory as possible. Temporary positions (e.g., internships) are less lucrative and secure, and thus not feasible for everyone. However, they do enable you to forage widely and gain a range of job experiences and skills in a relatively short period of time. Along the way, you can refine your job criteria as well as get to know professionals in a variety of programs and institutions.

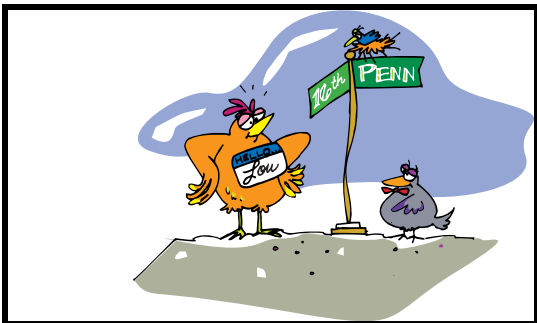
Know What Tune to Sing and Sing It!

As you get to know the D.C. community, you will have the opportunity to fine tune and strengthen your own song. Let your qualifications

and unique talents be seen and heard. Continue to revise your resume or *Cv* so that they are up-to-date and appropriate for your ideal job. Ask the time-matured professionals you get to know for advice on document formatting and word use - how your information is organized and what specific terminology you use will convey whether or not you are “of Washington.”

Flock, Flock, Flock, and Twitter

In D.C., the equation is simple: the more people you know among the inner beltway flock, the more promising your career. “Networking” is the code name for career courtship in Washington. At receptions and happy hours, over “brown bag” lunches and dinners, amidst seminars and workshops, there is much preening, displaying, and vocalizing.



Join in! Many jobs, especially internships and fellowships, are largely advertised by word of mouth. Volunteer opportunities, and even senior-level positions, are often created *after* the “right person” is identified. See Box 7 for a list of networking opportunities in D.C.

Box 7. Engage in Networking, for example:

- Bioneers (<http://www.bioneers.org/programs/satellite/2004.php#washington>)
- EcoWomen Dinner Speaker Series (women only; <http://lists.essential.org/mailman/listinfo/dc-ecowomen>)
- EcoWomen Community (information on jobs, events, etc.; women only; <http://lists.essential.org/mailman/listinfo/ecowomen-community>)
- Green Festivals (<http://www.greenfestivals.com/>)
- NGO brown bag lunches and seminars (Contact NGOs that share your interests)
- Scientific society meetings (See websites relevant to your field)

As you are starting out, use the social engagements to ask questions, such as: “What was your approach to finding your ideal job?” “What were the most important lessons you learned in the process?” “What are the most important academic and non-academic qualifications for your field?” “Do you know of anyone looking to hire someone who has expertise in (insert your personal expertise/interest here)?”

Set up meetings with people working in your areas of interest. Prior to those meetings, please, do your homework. Most organizations list information about programs and program staff on their websites. Get to know the institutional habitat and ready yourself to ask meaningful questions about their

organizations, as well as others doing similar work. Keep yourself abreast of the latest policy issues (See Box 8 for a list of resources), and *learn the repertoire of acronyms* associated with your specific areas and organizations of interest; acronym-speak is a key measure of inner-beltway fluency. If you come across as unprepared in D.C., you can expect to find yourself out of luck and out of work. (“Word” gets around in Washington).

When you do land an interview, focus on not only being prepared intellectually, but behaviorally. More than 50% of what you communicate to another person about you and your qualifications is conveyed through your non-verbal behavior. See Box 9 for a list of websites offering interview tips. Some of the sites in Box 2 will also be helpful in this regard. When interviewing in Washington, it is also important to be conscious of the role of party politics in career making and breaking. Typically, as an interviewee, it is best to keep your personal politics to yourself. Do, however, pay attention to any political views expressed by your interviewer (especially when it is someone who might become your boss) to determine whether or not their views are congruent with your own. Also, be aware that an interviewer might make comments to test your political leanings and “hot buttons.” Speak to the facts of the issues and carefully weigh whether or not it is in your best interest to express your personal views and emotions. It is illegal for an interviewer to ask you to reveal your party affiliation.

Box 8. Gather Your Environmental News Resources, for example:

Journals and Magazines

- *BioScience*
- *Science*
- *Nature*
- *Conservation in Practice*
- *World Watch Magazine*

Periodicals

- *New York Times*
- *L.A. Times*
- *Sacramento Bee*
- *High Country News*
- *Washington Post* (often weak on environmental reporting, but useful for viewing inner-beltway politics)

Free E-News Alerts

- E&E Publishing, LLC (Eenews.net and numerous linked sites)
- Greenwire (Congressional news service; <http://www.greenwire.com>)
- Visit the websites of the various conservation organizations and review their press releases (often in their on-line “press room”). The National Resources Defense Council (NRDC; <http://www.nrdc.org>) and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF; <http://www.nwf.org>) have particularly useful sites. The Union of Concerned Scientists (<http://www.uscusa.org>) supports members with scientifically-defensible campaign information through its website and e-mail alerts.

And, finally, the cardinal rule: ALWAYS have your business cards handy. Even if you do not yet have a job, we highly recommend making business cards that provide your name, contact information, and area(s) of interest/expertise. If you want to be particularly well prepared in this electronic age, carry a USB stick that

includes your resume or *Cv* as well as one or more writing samples.

Box 9. Learn How to Behave as a Professional, for example:

- R.J. Stevens & Associates, Inc.
(<http://www/interviewing.com>)
- Monster Jobs
(<http://www.monster.com>)
- The Wright Career Solution
(<http://www.thewrightcareer.com>)
- The Wall Street Journal Executive Career Site
(<http://www.careerjournal.com>)

Outside the Beltway? Put out Seed

If you are still an academic nestling and a member of an environmental club or other relevant organization, expand your networking opportunities by inviting speakers from D.C.-based organizations for a career day program or professional seminar. Academic departments typically have funds to support the latter. Let the department chair or the head of the seminar committee know of your interests and the importance of making such networking opportunities available to both undergraduate and graduate students. Ask your school's alumni association to help you identify individuals working in the environmental field in Washington, D.C. who might be enthusiastic about making the trip back to campus, or at least providing guidance by phone.

Keep Moulting and Growing New Feathers

It is not uncommon for the environmentally conscious to find themselves moving back and forth between governmental and non-governmental roosts over the years. Changes in administration can necessitate changes in plumage. They may also result in a bit of feather plucking (voluntary and otherwise).



No matter how long your stay in D.C., there are always opportunities for career growth.

As you move up the flock hierarchy, remember to keep a look out for the newly fledged. Perhaps you can help someone else get their feathers in the door. Or, at the very least, you might toss them a caterpillar or two.

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Feedback Welcome

Please send to Jamie K. Reaser at ecos@nelsoncable.com

Notes: