



Careers in Forestry

Do you like spending time outdoors? Are you interested in environmental issues? Do you care about the future of natural resources such as forests, fish and wildlife populations? Are clean air and water important to you? Do you like technology such as GPS (global positioning systems), computer mapping, Google Earth, palm pilots, and other electronic gizmos? Do you want to make a difference? If you answered “yes” to most of the questions above, you just might want to consider a career in forestry.

There are currently exciting career opportunities in the forestry profession for jobs that require a college degree and for jobs that require a high school diploma with some work experience. Professional forester jobs that require a four-year college degree are the most promising at this time. The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) currently employs roughly 100 professional foresters state-wide and most are called Resource Foresters. I started my career with the Conservation Department as an Assistant Resource Forester about 24 years ago when I was fresh out of college with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Forest Management from the University of Missouri. For these types of positions, MDC requires a four-year degree in forestry, but we sometimes accept a four-year degree in a related natural science like botany, biology, wildlife management, or even agriculture sciences if the applicant also has some practical experience with forest management work. Individuals employed as professional foresters have many job duties including: assisting private forestland owners with sustainable forest management by providing technical advice; managing publicly owned forestland on Conservation Areas for forest health, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities; assisting local communities by providing technical advice on caring for “town” trees; suppressing wildfires and conducting controlled burns; training local rural fire departments for wildfire suppression; and providing forestry education to local school and civic groups. Sound like fun?

In addition, MDC’s Forestry Division employs roughly another 100 individuals state-wide in positions called Resource Assistants or Technicians which require a high school education and some experience with “woods work” or managing forests. Individuals that are employed for this job have duties that include: maintaining public use facilities on Conservation Areas, implementing forest management in the field by conducting forest inventory, marking timber sales, overseeing timber harvesting operations and

sometimes running a chainsaw to pre-commercially thin trees; operating farm equipment to plant and maintain wildlife food plots; suppressing wildfires and conducting controlled burns; and training local rural fire departments for wildfire suppression. Sound like even more fun?

If the job descriptions listed above appeal to you, forestry just might be the career for you. Other employment opportunities besides the Missouri Department of Conservation include the United States Forest Service/Mark Twain National Forest, private forestry consulting firms, Pioneer Forest/LAD Foundation and some forest products companies.

Forests are crucially important to our state and the nation because they provide clean air and water, wildlife habitat, wood products, scenic beauty and a place for outdoor recreation and solitude. In Missouri alone, we have roughly 15 million acres of forestland (approximately 1/3 of the state). As urban sprawl, insects and diseases, global warming and other threats jeopardize the health of our forests, it will become increasingly important to have talented, dedicated and passionate people working in forestry careers. The time is now to consider this rewarding career because there will be many job opportunities as the “baby boomers” retire and managing our nation’s forests becomes a higher priority. For more information about forestry and conservation careers visit the MDC webpage at www.mdc.mo.gov or the Society of American Foresters at www.safnet.org.

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