

why I love my job as a

# FISHERIES BIOLOGIST

by Kelly Turek

**P**eople often ask me what I do for a job. Usually I tell them I play with fish. Although not entirely true, handling fish is a part of what I do. Being a fisheries biologist is much more than that, though.

So what is a fisheries biologist? Well, “fisheries” means what it sounds like ... fish. And, a “biologist” is someone who studies living things. So, a fisheries biologist is someone who studies fish and where they live. Fisheries biologists not only catch fish, they collect information that helps us determine the health of a single fish or group of fish. The information we collect is used to set regulations, or rules, like how many fish you can catch when you go fishing, and how big the fish have to be before you can keep them.

Probably the best part about being a fisheries biologist is collecting fish. We use a lot of equipment like nets, traps, hooks and even electricity to catch fish!

Many of us also get to use boats, canoes or kayaks. We get to catch all kinds and sizes of fish from tiny minnows to huge bass. We get to work outside in some of the coolest places on earth like streams, rivers, lakes, oceans and wetlands. There is always something new to learn or discover and you are always doing something different.

Although catching fish is a fun part of the job, fisheries biologists don't always deal directly with fish. Most of our time is spent looking at fish habitat and trying to make it better. Fish need food, water, shelter, and space to live just like any other animal. Things like logs, weeds and rocks give fish places to rest, lay eggs and hide from predators that might eat them.

Let's think about this. You live in a house that protects you from stuff like rain, snow and wind. Your house is probably also where you find most of your food. If someone took away your

house and food, it would be kind of hard for you to live. The same is true for fish. Fisheries biologists spend a large part of their time making fish habitat and food resources better because good resources results in healthier happier fish.

Believe it or not, fisheries biologists probably spend more time dealing with people than with fish. Education is a major part of managing fish. Biologists often go to places such as schools, fairs, and other group meetings to teach people about fish and wildlife and the importance of good habitat for them. Fisheries biologists also write reports and share what they find with other biologists, government officials and the public. This way everyone can learn from what they found without having to study the same thing.

There are many things that make being a fisheries biologist great. My favorite is working outside. People

always told me, “If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life.” I always kept that in the back of my mind when I was deciding what I wanted to be when I grew up. I knew I wanted to do

something outdoors and I love hunting and fishing. So, being a fisheries biologist is an awesome fit! Sometimes I can't believe I am getting paid to do what I do and see some of the places I've seen. I'm only just beginning my career as a fisheries biologist and I've already got to study fish in the mountains of Montana

and Idaho, the forests of Michigan, and now the Sandhills of Nebraska.

A fisheries biologist is one of the best jobs out there. You should consider becoming a fisheries biologist if you like playing outside, getting dirty, fishing, boating, or hunting and want to ensure that in the future people will have the same opportunities to enjoy the outdoors as you do. 🐟





# WHY I LOVE MY JOB

by Josh Staab

**W**hen I was young, I often worried about what I would be when I grew up. Would I be a fireman? Perhaps a police officer. No, wait! An astronaut! My options were endless, but even at an early age I knew that whatever I decided I would have to love what I did. I have always been hooked on the outdoors. I was involved in all kinds of outdoor activities: 4-H, Boy Scouts, camping, fishing and hunting. All of these led me down the path to what would eventually be my dream job ... a wildlife biologist.

Being a wildlife biologist lets you to do all kinds of fun things and still be able to call it a job. After receiving a college degree in biology, I went to work

as a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That is where I learned how to manage wetlands. Wetlands are rivers, streams, ponds and other wet areas used by ducks and other water-loving critters. One way we cared for wetlands was by conducting prescribed burns.

Prescribed burning consists of lighting fires in a way that makes sure the fire is safe, under control and meets our goals as well. Over time, wetlands can become overgrown with cattails and other plants. We conduct prescribed burns to remove the extra plant growth so ducks and shore-loving birds can use the open water and exposed mud flats. Prescribed burns also can help put life back in prairie plants by removing

old and dead plants to allow for healthier growth in the spring. The new growth is also better food for wildlife.

My current job is wildlife biologist with Quail Forever and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. This job allows me to work with farmers and ranchers. I help them restore pasture and farmland back to wildlife habitat. Where I work, eastern redcedar trees have grown so thick and abundant that they have taken over most of the pastureland. These trees are growing where there should be grass. Less grass means there is less for

cattle to eat. It also means there is less open grassland for wildlife, such as birds, to use. I organize the removal of these trees so

birds, such as prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse, can move back into the area.

One of the best things about my job is that there is always something unique and different taking place. I help with different projects and research, educational days at schools, and I help other biologists with the work they are doing.

I helped with a study to learn how far pheasants travel in their habitat. To do this we caught wild rooster pheasants, and then put a band with an identification number and telephone number on a leg. We ask hunters who shoot a rooster with a leg band to call the phone number on the band and report where they shot the bird. That tells us how far the rooster moved.

One of the cooler studies we are doing is to find out how many of

American Burying Beetle



the endangered American burying beetles there are in Nebraska and where they live. This beetle was thought to have been gone in Nebraska, but now we know there are a few in certain areas. We bait traps with a dead rat that will attract live beetles. Every day the trap is checked and the beetles are tagged, counted and then released. Getting all of this data will give us an idea of how many live in Nebraska.

A friend of mine once told me I have the best job in the world. I agree! I love my job and recommend it to anyone who loves wildlife and the outdoors! 🐾



Rooster pheasant, Eric Fowler

American burying beetle, Randy Bright



# why I love my job as an ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR

By Monica Macoubrie  
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

There is an old saying by the Chinese philosopher Confucius that goes, "Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life." I live by that quote. I am an environmental educator at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and I never "work." I do not see my job as work, I see it as



Jeff Kuras



Chris Masada

*A leopard frog (top) is gently held and observed by a student. Compare the leopard frog to the bullfrog below it. Various frog species have different colors, patterns and body shapes.*

fun, and something I truly enjoy doing.

So what exactly does an environmental educator do? Well, there are a few things that I can tell you I do on a regular basis, but much of the time, it is new or different. That is one of the many reasons why I love my job; I never know what the day is going to hold. One day I might be teaching a workshop, or looking at trail camera photos trying to identify animals, writing Trail Tales articles, or even designing posters. A good chunk of what I do is educating the public, hence the title "environmental educator." I teach people about awesome things in Nebraska. This includes the landscape and animals, and how it is our job to take care of their habitats.

When educating the public I do as many hands-on lessons as possible. Some of the topics I teach about are prairies, owls, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and

insects. Often, I bring live animals for students to touch. These animals include snakes, frogs, toads, turtles, and salamanders.

Many of these animals are creatures that people tend to be afraid of, or not really like at all. It is my job to show them how cool these animals are, and how they help people. My favorite animal is a snake, I love teaching people about them and seeing their faces when they touch one for the first time. I talk about what they eat, how they move, where they live, and what they do in the winter. I hope that people will then gain knowledge about those animals and protect them in the wild.

One of my favorite things about my job is helping at the Outdoor Discovery Programs or Outdoor Expos. We attend three expos a year – at Platte River State Park, Fort Kearny State Recreation Area, and Ponca State Park. This is when educators,



Lincoln Children's Zoo

*I'm holding two snakes for an outdoor class to touch and get a close-up view. Students discover that snakes are our friends by eating destructive bugs and rodents like mice. They are good links in nature's food chain because they help protect our gardens and crops.*

other Game and Parks staff, and I get to teach and help kids and families do outdoor activities. Usually I teach about reptiles and amphibians, but sometimes I help with bow fishing, kayaking, archery, and hiking.

The best part about these expos is you work with students and families who have usually never done any of these activities. I remember the first time I got to touch a snake, or

went kayaking for the first time. It is exciting stuff.

Helping teach people about all the fun activities you can do outside, and seeing their reactions when they get to experience these enjoyable events for the first time is an amazing part of my job! In addition, it is neat to be able to travel across the state and see all the different parts of Nebraska. I have always liked Nebraska, but this job has made me love it.

Being an environmental educator was never really my plan. I never had a moment when I woke up one morning and told everyone that I was going to be an environmental educator. It just sort of happened, and my paths led me here. Ever since I was little, I loved telling people facts about animals and the outdoors. Now I can finally do that for a job. I absolutely love my job! 🐸



# why I love my job as a PARK SUPERINTENDENT

By Jeff Fields, Ponca State Park Superintendent

Photo by Jenny Nguyen

**A**t some point in my youth, maybe while wandering along the creek below my house or sitting in a fishing boat, I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in the outdoors.

There was never really a moment when I decided “I want to be the manager of a state park – a park superintendent.” A combination of career experiences, personal interests, job location, and other factors led me down the path to this career. Having a variety of work experiences prior to this job provided great training for the wide-ranging duties of a park superintendent.

The job duties associated with a park superintendent often require them to wear many hats – sometimes worn one stacked on another. The following is a list of roles or “hats” often worn by park superintendents: carpenter, planner, business manager, event coordinator, plumber, crisis/emergency manager, utility technician, educator, roads supervisor, land

steward, landscaper, mechanic, livestock manager, partnership builder, grant writer, activity director, team builder, and many more.

In Nebraska, park superintendents manage three types of public areas – state parks, state recreation areas and state historical parks. Some of the park superintendents who manage these 79 areas actually live on their area – a residence comes with the job. I can still remember the “wow” feeling when we first moved to the park. Having an oak forest and the Missouri River for a backyard is a priceless benefit.

At many of our larger state parks, such as Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, Fort Robinson, Ponca, Platte River and others, park superintendents manage a team of people similar to what is needed to run a city or town. They are responsible for the park’s utilities, large multipurpose buildings, roads, cabins, campgrounds, swimming pools, landscapes, trails, events, natural resources,

budgets, activities, and thousands of visitors. It is a big responsibility that requires a general knowledge in a wide variety of subjects.

Park superintendents stationed at state recreation areas manage land and public services associated with Nebraska’s larger reservoirs and lakes. Fishing, boating, camping, and hunting are the main activities at these areas. Some state recreation areas, such as our Southwest Reservoirs, are located in the state’s most unpopulated and isolated regions. Others are located within or next to cities, such as Fremont Lakes or Louisville state recreation areas. At some of our larger lakes, such as Lake McConaughy, campgrounds and lake access areas stretch for more than 100 miles – a day’s travel just to check all the areas.

Some of our park superintendents manage our state’s most treasured historical features. These areas are called state historical parks and include parks such as Buffalo Bill



*Ponca State Park hosted a jerky-making workshop during an Outdoor Cooking Camp. We ground the meat, mixed in the spices and spread it on drying racks with tubes that look like caulking guns. Several of the parks, including Ponca, have expos, skills camps, outdoor activities and lodging year-round. Check out the Calendar of Events at [OutdoorNebraska.org](http://OutdoorNebraska.org).*

Ranch, Arbor Lodge, Fort Kearny, and Ashfall Fossil Beds. These superintendents are responsible for the preservation of historical landscapes and buildings, conducting tours, hosting events, and managing other visitor services similar to those found in state parks and recreation areas.

There are many reasons for why I love my job as a park superintendent. I take great pride and joy in creating opportunities for families to discover, learn about, and enjoy the outdoors.

Knowing that I have helped create lifelong memories for thousands of visitors far out-weighs any of the negative aspects of my job.

As a park superintendent, I also enjoy the opportunities we have to share our outdoor passions, skills and knowledge. My job offers the perfect stage from which to teach or “pass-on” some of the outdoor skills that were taught to me. I can teach people how to shoot a gun, catch a fish, and how to cook a meal in a Dutch oven. I can also provide them with valuable

information that can make their outdoor experience more enjoyable and rewarding. I can show them the best places to view wildlife, what poison ivy looks like, and which trails have the best views of the Missouri River.

The life of a park superintendent is unique. It is challenging but very rewarding. My career path towards a park superintendent was not a direct route – there were a few curves along the way. However, if I had it to do all over again, I would choose the same path. 🌿



# why I love my job as a CONSERVATION OFFICER

by Mike Luben

**W**hen I was a kid, my favorite subject in school was recess. Why? Because I got to spend time outside. Well, I am lucky enough to have a job now where most of my time is spent outside. I am a conservation officer for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

What does a conservation officer do? Well, let's look at my job title. "Conservation" is the management and protection on our natural

resources (water, animals and land). And an "officer" is a person who enforces or carries out the laws. So, a conservation officer is a person who enforces the laws that protect our natural resources. Conservation officers spend much of their time outside protecting Nebraska's wildlife and natural resources.

Enforcing the laws is just part of our job. We also get to do lots of other fun things, like education. Conservation

officers often go to schools, church groups and scouting classes to teach people about wildlife. We also get to show people how they can get more involved in outdoor activities, such as fishing and hunting.

Conservation officers also do wildlife surveys. This means we go out and count the wildlife we see. Sometimes we are looking for bobwhite quail, other times we may be looking for mule deer.

Then, biologists can use this information to determine how many animals or fish are out there and make sure those animals populations are OK.

Have you ever been to a state park or state recreation area? Conservation officers spend a lot of time working in these areas, especially in the summer, when people are active outside. Most people that use these areas are law-abiding folks, but sometimes people do not follow all the laws and that is when we write tickets. Why do we write tickets? Well, just think if nobody obeyed speed limit signs or stop signs. Would that be dangerous? You bet it would. We write tickets to make sure people follow the laws designed to protect people and natural resources.

Another cool thing about being a conservation officer is the stuff we use to do our jobs. We go all kind of places in all kinds of weather, so we need special equipment to help us get to these places to do our job. We have four-wheel drive pickups, four-wheel all-terrain vehicles, kayaks, canoes, airboats, motorboats, personal watercraft, snowmobiles, binoculars and spotting scopes. All this equipment helps us



*I enjoy helping with outdoor education programs across the state. We expose participants to a variety of fun activities. Here, a young shooter is learning how to fire a muzzleloader accurately and safely.*

do our job to the best of our ability. We even have communication radios in our pickups (like walkie-talkies) so we can talk to other people – like sheriffs and police officers.

But by far one of my favorite things about being a conservation officer is the chance to work with wildlife. We go out, pick up sick or injured wildlife, and take it different places where hopefully it can be released back into the wild. We are always very careful when working with wild animals. We have catchpoles, which are long poles with a noose on the end, so we do not get injured or bit. So, I would tell you to never try and approach or touch wild animals because they can

bite and it scares them to have people close to them, and they are just trying to protect themselves.

Besides working with wildlife, I work with and meet lots of different people. That can be a fun part of my job also. I get to go to different groups like schools to teach people about wildlife. Sometimes, when I am not even working, people will stop me and ask a question about wildlife and the outdoors.

The best part of being a conservation officer is knowing that I get to help protect wildlife and make sure that wild critters will be around for you (and even your children) to enjoy when you are adults. 🌿



*Kayaking on a river is a great way to enjoy the outdoors and work at the same time. I perform wildlife rescues in the frosty chill of winter, and assist with wildlife surveys year-round.*



# why I love my job as a **GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

**By Donna Schimonitz**  
**Nebraska Game and Parks Commission**

I grew up on a dairy farm at St. Paul, Nebraska. You could find me outside playing with the farm cats, calves, dog and lambs. I often walked through the trees looking for critter tracks or searching for minnows, turtles and snail shells at our pond. I was occupied for hours watching tadpoles swimming in the mud puddles. If the puddles were drying up, Mom would gather the tadpoles in a bucket and take them to the pond in our pasture. My brother, Phil, and I were told that frogs and toads eat a lot of bugs, so that was a good thing on a dairy farm!

When we weren't outside, my brother and I would draw and doodle to keep from being bored. Like many girls I knew, horses were my favorite subjects to draw. The more I explored outside, the more my choices for subjects to draw broadened.



*At age 14, I sketched the injured hawk we rescued.*

Down in our pasture, by the windbreak lining the Middle Loup River, a beautiful hawk was flapping like it had been injured. Dad grabbed a thick parka and we headed to the bird. When we could see the raptor's wing was damaged, Dad threw the parka over the bird to safely carry it to our barn until a conservation officer could investigate what happened and take the hawk to a raptor recovery for treatment.

Before the conservation officer arrived, I took a pad of paper and colored

pencils to the barn to draw the beautiful bird. I sketched the black beak, the piercing eyes staring back at me ... and those talons! That was one of my best drawings because I had a "live model" to draw from. This experience opened my eyes to more than horses to draw.

One March day, I heard the many calls of geese, ducks and cranes migrating north. Wings Over the Platte, the first sandhill crane migration celebration and art show, was to be held at the Stuhr Museum in Grand Island. Mom mentioned I should try and



*Black-billed Magpie, Merit Award, 2015 Wings Over the Platte Show*

enter a piece of artwork, so I did. After being on their evening crane bus tour, then listening to Jim Fowler from Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom's speech at the banquet, I was hooked. Little did I know, but this event would become something I enthusiastically anticipate creating an entry for each year. Each year I learn more about wildlife by researching the subjects for my art entries.

When it came time to pick a major for college, I started taking basic art classes, design and typography (how words look on a page), and found not only did I love graphic design, but my teachers were positive when grading my projects. One of my first logos chosen from a class project to be used publicly was for the Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA) in Kearney. What an honor!

After several fundamental jobs, a design opportunity at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission became a reality. What a perfect fit! I have great people to work with, opportunities to learn and teach about wildlife – both in person and through my creative designs, develop logos and materials for expos, commission events,

educational displays, and other items needed by the agency and public. Best of all, I help create Trail Tales!

Trail Tales stories are scheduled and submitted to our coordinator, Lindsay Rogers. Our editor, Jerry Kane, refines the text and makes it easy for our readers to understand. Some stories are submitted with hard to understand scientific information! After Jerry has edited the stories, they come to me.

Sometimes photos are provided, but often I have the freedom to pick or draw pictures to help explain the text. How boring a story would be without pictures!

Growing up on the farm started my journey to the fulfilling career I currently enjoy. Working in Lincoln for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission as one of their graphic designers has further developed my love, respect and voice for nature. 🌿



*At the Outdoor Discovery Programs, I taught Outdoor Art to fourth through sixth grade students.*



# why I love my job as a **FACILITY MAINTENANCE MANAGER**

By Mike Jelinek, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Photos by Jeff Kurrus, NEBRASKAland Magazine

I have one of the best jobs in the State of Nebraska. I am a facility maintenance manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. It is a job that I truly enjoy and feel very lucky to have.

When I was young, I enjoyed hunting, fishing, camping, and just being outside. I played sports, went swimming, and built tree houses and bicycle ramps. You might say I was a bit of a daredevil. On the days when it was not so nice outside, I spent time inside playing with LEGO building blocks. I would build all kinds of

things. My imagination had no limits!

In school, I liked math and science, but my favorite class was industrial arts (what we used to call shop class). I enjoyed working with my hands and building all kinds of things.

In college, I studied automotive technology. After college I took a job working for a commercial construction company. It was hard, physical labor, but I really enjoyed it. I was spending time outside (even when it was cold) and I was working with a team to build amazing

things. I watched the people I worked with and learned a lot! It was this “on the job” training that made me ready for my next job. After 15 years, I started my own company. While being my own boss was nice, I quickly learned that this also meant long hours and no vacations!

Seven years ago I had the opportunity to come work for Nebraska Game and Parks in the Operations and Construction Division. I jumped at the chance! Having a job in construction, and getting to work in all of our beautiful state parks, was perfect for me. I had



*I'm the one standing in this picture, helping part of the crew interpret blueprints of a complex structure we are building at the State Fair. Everyone works together so we can complete tasks on time.*

to start out as temporary employee, but through hard work and dedication, I worked my way up to become a full-time permanent supervisor. And now I am a facility maintenance manager.

What is a facility maintenance manager? My job is to repair or maintain the cabins, lodges, equipment, and really all of the “stuff” in our state parks and wildlife management areas.

I love my job because I get to work with so many dedicated and skilled people that also love what they do. In the Operations and Construction Division, we have skilled carpenters, electricians, plumbers, welders/fabricators, and

heavy equipment operators. They work on projects that range from minor repairs to major remodels and new building construction. My job is to plan the work that needs to be done on each project. I also make sure that our people have the materials and information that they need to complete their work.

The projects that we are given are constantly changing. Nothing is the same week after week, or even in the same place. Being versatile and able to adapt to changing weather conditions and locations is a big part of our job. We might be roofing cabins at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park one week, and repairing concrete at

Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area the next. We could be replacing a culvert at Memphis Lake State Recreation Area, hauling equipment on one of our semi-tractor trailers, or repairing broken water or a sewer line at Ponca State Park.

One of my favorite projects has been the State Fair in Grand Island. We have an amazing display that does an excellent job of showcasing what Nebraska Game and Parks is all about. I was fortunate to be involved in the construction of this area and take great pride in it. If you have the chance to visit the fair, be sure to stop by and see how cool it really is. 🍁



*Our crew takes a break from building an elongated bridge at the Nebraska State Fair. We've been erecting several new structures at the Game and Parks' display area since the fair moved to Grand Island.*