**Showcasing the DNR: Career videos highlight dedicated work force, detail a wide range of opportunities**

**By CASEY WARNER**

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

From leading a group of fourth graders on a state park field trip to fighting wildfires to studying Michigan’s fish and wildlife – and a whole lot in between – the Michigan Department of Natural Resources offers jobs and career paths to suit a wide range of interests and skills.

More than 1,300 passionate full-time employees contribute to the department’s conservation efforts. To highlight some of the work those employees do, the DNR has started a growing collection of videos, compiled in the [Michigan DNR Careers playlist on YouTube](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLAt8-P23ZJgugokiD4XXA80EMkbVXF8uT&si=yRrbkzs5mW387E5I).

Here’s a glimpse at some of the careers featured.

### Park ranger and park officer

With 103 state parks in Michigan, the frontline staff at those parks are some of the most iconic employees on public lands. Commissioned and noncommissioned [seasonal park rangers](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/careers/park-ranger) provide customer service and help carry out day-to-day operational and maintenance duties and make sure visitors and staff stay safe. Commissioned rangers, also called park officers, also have law enforcement responsibilities.

“What they do is they protect the people from the park, the park from the people and the people from the people. You’re very involved with the everyday inner workings of keeping the park going,” said Tony Hiatt, park officer at Warren Dunes State Park in Berrien County. “At its core, this job is a customer service job, so we’re interacting with the public a lot, and we’re able to educate them on the importance of our resources and how to recreate responsibly and respect the resources that we have here and what we’re here to protect. It’s a great career; it gives you purpose.”

Park rangers and officers also get to spend a lot of time outdoors in some of Michigan’s most unique and beautiful places.

“What I do here, most importantly, is encourage and empower men and women who want to come out to the state parks and start a career,” said Johnny Ford, park supervisor at Warren Dunes. “Warren Dunes State Park is so amazing. The main feature here at our park is the sand dunes, climbing the sand dunes and our beach area. … You get a chance to enjoy greatness on a daily basis, and that’s what we do here.”

[Watch park ranger/officer video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfnWPVTYWSY&list=PLAt8-P23ZJgugokiD4XXA80EMkbVXF8uT&index=1&pp=iAQB).

### Fisheries biologist

DNR [fisheries biologists](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/-/media/Project/Websites/mdcs/JOBSPECS/F/FisheriesBiologist.pdf?rev=6e1a4fb4a94b45e0adc66f566802f400) study fish populations, their habitat and their ecology to help ensure that the state's fisheries are appropriately maintained and that environmental conditions are suitable for a variety of Michigan fish species.

Shawn Sitar, a fisheries research biologist who works out of the DNR’s Marquette Fisheries Research Station, explained that the position integrates both work on a computer, in the office, but also exciting work out in the field and in the laboratory.

“We essentially can become explorers out in nature, and we're answering questions that have never been answered before,” Sitar said. “And some of the studies that I've been on are actually expeditionary in that we're going to places that no one has gone before or answering questions that nobody really was able to answer before.”

Sitar, who started his career working on Lake Erie, now works on Lake Superior, whose deepest spot is 1,320 feet.

“When I started my career, I asked if there were fish at the deepest hole in Lake Superior and entire Great Lakes, and others told me probably, and that got me excited in that nobody knew if there were fish down there,” he said. “My specialty was to study and inventory populations and Michigan's resources in the deepest holes in Michigan water, so I sent our crew on an expedition out there and we documented and published that there was a deep-water form of lake trout at the deepest extent in the Great Lakes.

“Pretty exciting to work with many partners to come up with these discoveries and help guide managers to keep our resources sustainable.”

[Watch the fisheries biologist video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwC2ex-bxW0&list=PLAt8-P23ZJgugokiD4XXA80EMkbVXF8uT&index=2&pp=iAQB).

### Wildland firefighter

DNR [wildland firefighters](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/careers/firefighters) respond to hundreds of fires across the state each year, protecting people, homes and nature from the effects of wildfire.

“We're the primary ones responsible for wildland fire in the state of Michigan. We do that by responding to natural wildfire events,” said Jake Burton, a forest fire officer who works out of the DNR’s Stephenson Field Office. “If we can do our effective training, our effective prevention and then our effective suppression, we could potentially save these houses and these loved ones of the state of Michigan.”

Fire officers also carefully use fire as a tool during prescribed burns to improve wildlife habitat and reduce wildfire risks. In addition, they assist with forest management including cultivation work, operate heavy machinery, work with partner organizations and maintain firefighting equipment.

“Anything that happens in the forest, we're always there to help out – probably the most diverse job there is,” said Nick Wheeler, forest fire officer in the DNR Newberry Forest Management Unit.

Jen Hansen, forest fire officer in the DNR Atlanta Forest Management Unit, talked about the difference that wide-ranging work makes to Michigan.

“Wildlife, timber industry and outdoor recreation – we give all of them a place to live, work and play,” Hansen said. “Wildlife benefits from the wise management of our forest that gives them a healthy environment to live, the timber industry provides the economic boom for our area, and we give people a place to go and enjoy the outdoors.”

[Watch the wildland firefighter video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kB8ew2EsvBU&list=PLAt8-P23ZJgugokiD4XXA80EMkbVXF8uT&index=3&pp=iAQB).

### Public information officer

The Public Information Office staff plays a unique, but key, role for the DNR.

“Overall, it means that I'm a spokesperson for the department, but my job actually is pretty varied, and it has a lot of components to it,” said John Pepin, DNR deputy public information officer, who works out of Marquette. “I work a lot with media, I do a lot of on-camera interviews, I also write a lot of press releases, take photographs. We do Showcasing the DNR feature stories, and I edit and coordinate that, the statewide stories that we send out weekly that communicate to the public things that the DNR is doing behind the scenes.”

With the many components of the job – see some examples on the [DNR Newsroom webpage](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/newsroom) – Pepin said, “It's something new every day.”

As a kid, growing up in the Upper Peninsula, Pepin said he loved Michigan’s wildlife, parks and, especially, waters, and he wanted to work for the DNR.

“Being part of telling the story and working for the department and being part of that great heritage and legacy, it's fantastic and I love doing it. It's a great thrill to just get up and go to work every day.”

[Watch the public information officer video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhWNOjqTdDc&list=PLAt8-P23ZJgugokiD4XXA80EMkbVXF8uT&index=4&pp=iAQB).

### Park interpreter

Park interpreters help visitors to state parks, and other locations like fish hatcheries, learn about Michigan’s natural resources and unique places.

“My job is to take people on guided walks and tours of the falls and connect them with nature,” said Teresa Neal, who at the time the video was filmed was an interpretive ranger at Tahquamenon Falls State Park and has since become the DNR’s northern interpretive field manager. “We're in a place where it's a beautiful location that draws folks from all over the world. One of the aspects of my job is to just make people feel comfortable in a place that they don't normally visit or maybe a place they've never been to like it before.”

Part of a park interpreter’s job is to lead school groups on tours – at Tahquamenon Falls in the springtime, for example, that means a busload of 50 or 60 kids per bus multiple times throughout the day every day.

“They'll learn about natural resources, and they get a chance to see Michigan's largest waterfall,” Neal said. “The fact that I opened someone's eyes to something that they normally wouldn't have seen, and I can feel the energy come off them about what a life-changing experience something might have been, that feeds my soul.”

The DNR is now [hiring field trip leaders](https://links-1.govdelivery.com/CL0/https%3A//forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx%3Fid%3Dh3D71Xc3rUKWaoku9HIl0Uap4IwH96xAsSnMDBcIsGJUOThBVVhIR1A2NENYMTM2VFVaMldSNFdYSy4u%26utm_campaign%3Dnews%2Bdigest%2Bsept2024%2Bweek1%26utm_medium%3Ddigest%26utm_source%3Dgovdelivery/1/01000191bd6c7144-d9c25a5d-6975-4466-8c3e-f77f79a7edfe-000000/Tg_KMfS0vuSfGoZPkx_h3VKYop6HSmSrbxr5z-smUoA%3D369) for the fall cycle of the Nature Awaits program, leading fourth grade school field trips through natural resource-based educational hikes and activities in state parks.

[Watch the park interpreter video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3oo2N4zGuo&list=PLAt8-P23ZJgugokiD4XXA80EMkbVXF8uT&index=5&pp=iAQB).

### Harbormaster

The DNR operates 19 state harbors serving Great Lakes boaters.

The job of harbormasters at these facilities is to run the day-to-day operations, assign the boats to their slips and help dock the boats.

“Having a good-run facility, clean and safe, people having a good time – they'll come back year after year,” said Derrick Horn, harbormaster at Mackinac Island State Harbor.

Horn explained that while Mackinac Island State Harbor, which has 80 slips, has a lot of transient – that is, first-come, first-served – customers and those who do day boating, the majority of harbor users arrive with reservations.

“I've been growing up all my life on the island, and I like being around boats and stuff, so after high school I joined the United States Navy. Then after my service there in the Navy, I was looking for a job in the DNR and I got a job here at the Mackinac Island State Harbor started off as a summer ranger,” Horn said. “Once you ride the ferry boat and get over here, you’ve got great scenery, and it's a unique place to work.”

Horn eventually became assistant harbormaster at Mackinac Island, and since 2010 has been the harbormaster.

“So, I just worked my way up through it,” he said.

[Watch the harbormaster video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NeL85QbC2zc&list=PLAt8-P23ZJgugokiD4XXA80EMkbVXF8uT&index=6&pp=iAQB).

For more information about DNR job opportunities, including current full-time, part-time and seasonal positions, job benefits and potential career paths, visit [Michigan.gov/DNRJobs](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/about/careers).

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