

Professional Standards for an Interpretive Naturalist

Developed by the Iowa Association of Naturalist, 2001

Definition of Position of Interpretive Naturalist:

The person in this position plans, develops, coordinates, and presents environmental education and interpretive programs for schools, youth and adult groups, and the general public; develops related written, audiovisual, and display materials; and performs related duties as required.

Education and Experience Requirements:

A person in this position should have a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with major coursework in environmental education interpretation, natural resources, outdoor recreation, or a related natural science; and three months experience in development and presentation of environmental education or interpretive programs, such as an internship or equivalent work experience.

Knowledge and Skills:

The following is a list of skills and traits that naturalist should possess. These are arranged with those skills and traits that a beginning naturalist should possess listed first and marked with an asterisk, and those skills and traits acquired through experience and professional development listed second. A beginning naturalist is defined as one who is beginning her or his first professional position.

I. Knowledge of natural and cultural history and recreation:

*Basic field identification and natural history of native plants and animals;

*Knowledge of ecological principals;

*General outdoor recreation skills in one or more areas including canoeing, backpacking, biking, hiking, spelunking, orienteering, archery, firearms safety, hunting, trapping, boating, etc.;

*Knowledge of organizations and agencies concerned with conservation, education, and natural resources;

Knowledge of and ability to provide proper care of live animals for educational purposes;

Knowledge of at least on other area including astronomy, geology, insects, non-flowering plants, etc;

Knowledge of local cultural history including archaeology, art, music, anthropology, history, folklore, etc;

Knowledge of current, historical, and local environmental issues and the ability to distinguish between an opinion and a fact;

Ability to comprehend, analyze, interpret, and explain conservation laws, principals, and practices;

Knowledge of environmental hazards and associated issues concerning safety of program participants, including Lyme disease, poison ivy, illegal drug residue and waste, etc.

II. Program Development and Educational Skills

*Knowledge of Tilden's six principles and ability to integrate them into interpretive programs;

*Ability to plan, present, and evaluate programs appropriate for the motor skills and learning abilities of the audience;

*Ability to effectively present a program and maintain control and interest for a variety of audiences;

*Ability to write program goals and objectives and how to integrate awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and participation;

*Knowledge of where to find resources to expand knowledge and program delivery skills;

Ability to work within the school community, including school employees, Area Education Agencies, school boards, and colleges;

Knowledge of educational principles, teaching methods, learning styles, and trends;

Familiarity with an ability to use appropriately environmental education curriculum such as Project WILD, Project Learning Tree, etc;

Knowledge of school curricula, National Science Standards and Benchmarks, and how to integrate interpretive and environmental education programs with them.

III. Communication Skills

*Ability to communicate orally and effectively to groups and individuals in both formal and non-formal situations in one or more of the following areas: indoor and outdoor presentations, campfires, trailside talks, classroom presentations, public meetings, storytelling, etc;

*Ability to handle visitor complaints or emergency situations courteously and responsively and to be tolerant and respectful of differing opinions;

*Ability to prepare news releases, fliers, bulletin boards, and other basic publicity;

*Ability to operate a slide, video, or overhead projector, and a 35-mm camera or a digital camera;

*Ability to communicate effectively in writing to people of various ages and educational abilities including writing for display text, brochures, newsletters, letters, reports, and press releases;

Ability to design and maintain educational displays and exhibits;

Ability to operate computer and program accessories (i.e., PowerPoint, scanners, etc.), audiovisual, photographic, and other equipment necessary for program delivery;

Ability to make radio and television presentations.

IV. Administrations Skills:

*Ability to work within a budget;

*Ability to manage time effectively;

*Ability to establish and evaluate long-term goals and objectives for the education/interpretation program and to communicate needed changes to others;

*Ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with groups, organizations, the general public, and colleagues;

Ability to develop and implement a budget;

Ability to organize and conduct fundraising activities;

Ability to create and coordinate the efforts of citizen support groups;

Ability to market programs, including the planning, pricing, placement, and promotion to meet the needs of specific target groups;

Ability to oversee and coordinate the recruitment, training, supervision, and scheduling of interns and volunteers;

Ability to supervise daily operation of a facility including maintenance of buildings and grounds, hiring and supervision of other workers, and coordination of program, public relations, and other activities;

Ability to suggest and implement policy change regarding either program or facility management.

V. Personal Attributes

*Creativity;

*Enthusiasm;

*Initiative;

*Flexibility;

*Poise and Confidence;

*Willingness to grow and stay current in the field;

*Sense of humor;

*Sincere love of the out-of-doors and the desire to communicate about it to the public;

*Organized;

*Personable;

*Patience and Tolerance.

VI. Other certification and training that might be considered useful:

Teaching certification and classroom experience;

Red Cross certifications;

Outdoor recreation skills training (i.e. Iowa Women in Natural Resources, etc.);

American Camping Association certification;

Department of Natural Resources safety instructor's certification;

Wildlife rehabilitation certification;

EE Curriculum training (Project WILD, Project Learning Tree).

Salary Guidelines:

Because of the education, experience, responsibilities, and duties of an interpretive naturalist are comparable to those of a classroom teacher, a naturalist's annual salary should be comparable to the full-year salary of a local teacher. For the same reason, the salary of a nature center director should be comparable to at local school principal.