



# Fish Biologist

## Job Description

Researches and identifies issues in the watershed and best practices to solve these problems. They do this by conducting experiments, field surveys, and projects to support the needs of their target species.

## Salary

Entry — \$69,000  
Middle — \$79,000  
Top — \$89,000

## Core Tasks

- Collects and analyzes data, and prepares reports on water quality, fisheries habitat and fish populations, and harvests fish eggs.
- Develops comprehensive management plans to maintain and restore fisheries and habitat.
- Coordinates with local, state, and federal environmental protection and resource management personnel waterway sources to ensure the protection of waters and other natural resources, and to ensure coordinated efforts toward goals.

## Workplace / Environment

- **Work hours**  
**Approx. 40 hours/week**  
(During key seasons, long days and overtime may be required)
- **Environment**  
Typically, **equal amounts of time** spent in the field and office environment.
- **Travel**  
**Often in the environment** for field surveys, sampling, and data collection.

## Education / Prerequisites

### Education Level

Typically a four-year degree is required

### Licensing

Valid WA State Driver's license required

### Pre-Job Preparation

Experience working in or learning about fisheries, biological sciences, and/or zoology.

## Experience

### Soft Skills

- Communication
- Technical Writing
- Detail-Oriented

### Technical Skills

- Lab Skills
- Statistical and Data Analysis
- Knowledge of target species



## Career Path: Nikolas Novotny

### About Me

Fish Biologist at Tacoma Public Utilities

Bachelor of Science in Biology

### Early Inspirations

"Steve Irwin and Shark Week were **definitely an inspiration** for why I became a Fish Biologist. As a kid I wanted to do exactly what I saw on television. When I was younger, I didn't really have a vision for what these people did. It started there, plus I have a general **passion for the outdoors**. I grew up in rural Western Wisconsin along the Mississippi River, so I like **bodies of water** and I like **being outside**. I was pretty certain what I wanted to do throughout high school, whether it was actually being a Fish Biologist or just being out in the woods or on the river. I was interested in the location, most of all."



### Internships in College



"I had a **few internships** in college. One of them was with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service working at **a fish hatchery**. It's not like the fish hatcheries that we have out here in Washington, it's an open air, open pond, fish hatchery that freezes every year because it's in cold Wisconsin. Requiring me to don a pair of waders and scramble in there and freeze my tush off, yet **I still enjoyed it through out**. Another position was with the United States Geological Survey, doing a lot of the data analytics that also interested me."

### Real World Challenges

"After I graduated from Wisconsin, I came to Washington. I had trouble finding positions that I **was passionate about**. I got a job working in a restaurant. After doing that for six months while I continued looking for positions, I landed basically a labor position with the Washington Conservation Corps, which afforded me the opportunity to be exposed to people in this field and continue learning. But all **those small steps** I took along the way **all built on each other**, and helped **develop me into the person that I am today**. It was essentially me continuing my education by getting these seasonal six months positions before I got this job. "

# About My Job

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"Find purpose in everything you do."

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## Pros

- "I love being able to provide this service. It's **not just protecting** or restoring the fish, even though that's a huge part of it. The reason why I love it is that **I'm providing water** that people go on to drink."
- "I think the biggest pro of this job is the **people I work with** and the dedication that we all bring."
- "**I feel like I'm making a difference every day.** If all you see and all you read is black and white, then you're not working hard enough to impassion yourself or impassion others about it."

## Cons

- "The con is **reading through legal documents**, and trying to figure out the complicated history of things can be taxing."
- "For example, **complications can arise** once you are telling somebody that there's this particular regulation that they've never heard about before, that we agreed to back in the 90s, and we need to start implementing that. That **might interfere** with their operation and operations they've been used to using."

## Fieldwork

- "So my work environment is 50% in the field and 50% in the office, but really, **during the field season, I'm out 100% of the time.**"
- "When I'm in the field, **I'm in the river on the water**, trudging through some swampy marsh to get to where I need to be, sometimes that is even **in the marsh.**"

## Office Work

- "When it's not the field season, I'm in the office 100% of the time **writing about what I did in the field.**"
- "My office is actually **pretty close to the dam.** I'm surrounded by water utility mechanics and people that operate the facility, as well as my team, which is **full of natural resource specialists like me.**"
- "I represent a unique position here. I tell people **within my own utility**, what we need to do to maintain these compliances and communicate with the external stakeholders."

## Skills

- "Swimming is a good one.
- "I think the necessary skills are **pretty fundamental to the person themselves**. Being a good communicator and passionate can get you anywhere and everywhere you need to go. All the smaller skills along the way, **you will learn.**"

## Education/Experience

- "**Higher education is extremely important**, I advise everybody to do it because I learned so much from it. It's not the end all be all and you can learn a lot by just being out there. But you also have to read, you have to learn, and you have to **dedicate yourself to it.**"
- "Go out with the fish biologist and **experience their work life** in the field. Had I not jumped into an internship and actually put on waders and gone into a freezing pond I may have not been aware of how cold and miserable this job can be at times. But that's **exactly what I was looking for**. And something that I was aware of prior to jumping in. Literally jump in the water and experience it before you dedicate your life to it."

## The Future of **Fish Biology**

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"Fish biologists in Washington State are experiencing a position of emergency management."

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"We are in the midst of a mass extinction event with a climate that is rapidly changing. How I envision this job changing, it's going to **change with the requirements of the time**. So everything that I'm learning today is going to be out the window in another decade, because of how much has changed, we are trying to hold the line as best we can. It's getting tough, but there are **hundreds of thousands of people who are dedicated** towards holding that line and making it better. And **I'm one of them.**"

# About Sustainability Ambassadors

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We support a year-round training program for over 60 highly motivated middle and high school youth, a Teacher Fellows Program, City-County CAP internships, and college-level interns, and work with hundreds of educators to design new models of problem-based, place-based learning around **a shared vision of educating for sustainability**.

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**See** Seattle's [Clean Energy Resources Map](#) to examine what the city is planning for a greener energy future.

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## Funder Acknowledgement



**King County**

Department of Natural Resources and Parks  
**Wastewater Treatment Division**

