



PRACTICAL ADVICE ON BEING A WILDERNESS FELLOW

1. *Refuge Manager perspective, from Elaine Johnson, Manager of the SW Arizona National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Kofa, Imperial and Cibola National Wildlife Refuges)*

- Keys to a positive experience:
 - Persistence – with a level of diplomacy
 - Independence – under the guidance of your primary contact/supervisor
 - Flexibility – while staying on task with your wilderness character monitoring responsibility
 - Communication – with all (up, down, sideways; bottom line is “no surprises” for anyone)

- Find out who your primary contact person is at the refuge and work through them.

- Talk with the manager about what you are doing and the goals of the project:
 - It needs to be useful so explain how it is a benefit to the refuge.
 - What the refuge will and won't be able to do with the gathered information.
 - What the management implications might be.
 - What the end product will look like.

- Hold an initial meeting with all staff (ideally); in the least, hold meeting with staff that will play a substantial role in gathering information. Maintenance staff is important to include because they are often the folks out and about as well as having some historical knowledge of the refuge.

- Be prepared to encounter different views of wilderness; wilderness may not be high on the priority list for some or many staff:
 - Manager/staff may not know much about the wilderness as it is only one of many aspects of their land management responsibilities.
 - On refuges, there is no one person who has responsibility for wilderness stewardship.
 - Because wilderness character monitoring is a national project, it may not have the same level of support as a local project.
 - Share your knowledge about wilderness.

- Set regular meetings – ask for a specific day and time to meet:
 - Managers and staff have many other obligations and wilderness is just one component of refuge management. Don't take it personally if staff tell you they cannot meet when you want; be persistent and ask when they can meet and get it on their calendar.
 - Have questions prepared to facilitate communications.

- Ask questions; you may not be receiving sufficient direction so don't hesitate to ask if you need something.

- If an issue arises (example: not receiving needed cooperation from a staff member):
 - Go to primary contact first, then the manager
 - If not receiving response you need, contact us! Don't let an issue persist.

- Work on other than wilderness character monitoring projects – you will be asked/expected to assist with miscellaneous projects and be sure and volunteer for projects; let staff know that you are interested and willing to work with them. This will:
 - Give you a better overall understanding of the refuge.

- Provide you an opportunity to see what other staff do.
- Build relationships and show you are a team player.
- Be more stuff to put on your resume!
- Be flexible:
 - This is field season and there may be many other new staff and lots of things going on.
 - A change in personnel could occur (even your primary contact person) which always presents a challenge.
 - There are many different management styles; try and go with the flow.
 - There are many differences between wilderness areas – size, access, staff approach. Wilderness character is unique to EACH wilderness.
- Be professional:
 - Conduct yourself with the utmost professional attitude both at work and when you're not working (because how you act outside of work will affect how you're perceived by others at work when you're working in a remote setting where everyone knows what everyone else is doing).
 - Generally, if there's a question in your mind about whether you should or shouldn't do something, don't do it.
- Identifying measures:
 - Take into account limited resources of the refuge to implement this monitoring.
 - Think big AND be grounded in practicality.
- End of the season:
 - Make sure you give the manager enough time to review your report.
 - Find out what level of review the manager would like for the report – just them, biologist, who else to involve in the review?

HAVE FUN! YOU'RE DOING COOL STUFF IN VERY COOL PLACES!

2. *Wilderness Fellow perspective, from Monica Patel, a Wilderness Fellow with the NPS in 2010 and the FWS in 2011.*

- What to do in your first weeks at the refuge:
 - First day: Meet with your supervisor at the refuge – figure out project goals, final products, steps to be taken to reach your goals.
 - Establish who is going to be the point person for when you leave – keep this person/persons heavily involved at all points.
 - Make a plan for yourself – what you need to accomplish each week to successfully complete all the expectations.
 - Read documents – start your list of references for anything you find useful; this helps when you start writing the final report.
 - Find out what training modules you'll have to take for computer access – be aware that you are able to take the test at the end as many times until you get a passing score.
- When you talk with the staff:
 - Take this opportunity to give background on the project; learn about their background and their job responsibilities; and to connect what they are doing to how it impacts/relates to wilderness character monitoring and wilderness stewardship.

- Ask where you can find the data.
- Ask if there's monitoring they plan on doing in the near future, which might be something to consider/put under the "Measures not used" in the final report.
- Challenges:
 - Your status as a "fellow" – don't let that limit you in any way; people will have their preconceived notions and may think of you as an "intern" who needs to be told what to do; always act as a "fellow" who is professional and independent; most likely you will be the resident expert on wilderness and be proud of this; let your professionalism and work speak for itself; more often than not, people will take notice.
 - Take the initiative to meet with your supervisor every week or biweekly to discuss what has been accomplished and what the next steps are; talk about timeline and progress.
- Miscellaneous:
 - I would suggest begin writing the report as you go – don't wait until the last two weeks; same goes for the database – do as much as you can before the final weeks.
 - The report is a reflection on you and your work – something concrete you can cite on your resume and use as a writing sample so make sure it makes the right message about your work (one refuge manager told me "Any work you do, make sure you take pride in it.")
 - This report is tailored to meet the needs of the program but the refuge may also want this report – and require some additional information like boilerplate language on the background of wilderness character and other information so anyone can pick it up anytime and it will be understandable and relevant for them.
 - Keep a journal about your experiences – there might be opportunities to write a blog or short article for publication about what you are doing.

3. *Wilderness Fellow perspective, from Molly McCarter, a Wilderness Fellow with the FWS in 2011 and 2012.*

- First weeks
 - Introduce yourself:
 - Get to know staff and try to understand each person's job and responsibilities. This will make your job easier when you're seeking data.
 - Take any opportunity to give a little presentation about your project to all the staff, perhaps via conference calls, meetings/trainings
 - Come up with a short "elevator speech" to describe what you're doing when people ask.
 - Read refuge documents:
 - Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP)
 - Wilderness Preservation Plans (if available)
 - Annual Reports; these will all give you an idea of what's going on in the refuge and will give you things to consider when developing your monitoring measures.
 - Get involved!
 - Go on field work with others, attend trainings and meetings; even though they may not be wilderness-related, this will let other staff meet you, give you an opportunity to use your elevator speech about what you are doing, and may give you insight about what's going on in the refuge.
 - Meetings will also give you an opportunity to connect with refuge staff which will make future meeting about wilderness more comfortable.

- If you go out to the field with staff it will give you a great opportunity to discuss wilderness-related issues in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.
 - Ask about data that is already collected at your refuge – try to incorporate these data in your measures if they have it.
 - The refuge has to consider the public and partnering state agencies in what they do, so use your first weeks to try to better understand different agencies' roles in your refuge, including hunting and fishing rights.
 - Ask questions! Nearly all refuge staff want to help and if you don't ask questions they won't be able to help; also, if you don't ask questions some people may assume that you are a "no-it-all" even if this isn't true.
- Talking with refuge staff
 - Scheduling meetings with staff:
 - When you want to schedule a meeting to talk about something with refuge staff, send them an email giving some times that you're available for them to choose from. This is better than just saying "can we meet sometime" because this is too open ended.
 - Let them know ahead of time what you want to accomplish from the meeting, such as "I hope to learn more about fire management in the wilderness" or "I would like to see your data on invasive species control in the wilderness."
 - Keep your supervisor at the refuge up to date on your progress – let them know what data you're lacking, how they can help, and anything else.
 - Make your project easy to understand:
 - Use spreadsheets or tables that show what you're putting in the database, what your measures are, and highlight the cells that you still need data on.
 - Provide handouts that summarize what you are trying to accomplish, such as the one sheet summary of the wilderness character qualities, indicators, and potential measures.
- Challenges
 - Your project will be highly independent from other activities going on at the refuge:
 - Managing your time is crucial.
 - Understand that this job is independent work – you won't have someone there to guide you along.
 - There is "support team" at the refuge.
 - Your support team is the other Wilderness Fellows, Nancy, Peter L, Peter D, and Suzy to bounce ideas off of and discuss concerns with; this is your support team; use them!
- General
 - Splitting up time between the two refuges you will be working at:
 - The first refuge will be more difficult and may take longer.
 - By the time you go to your second refuge you'll be a seasoned Wilderness Fellow and it will be a much smoother process!
 - Take many photos throughout your time at the refuge, especially in the wilderness. You may be asked at some point to share these photos for publications.
 - Take all the opportunities that you can to learn and get involved with field work. That was probably the most fun part – I got to participate in some really interesting field work and learned a lot along the way.