

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Description of Field

Over the past 100 years, environmental policy analysts have tracked the general environmental movement. Early efforts were targeted at conservation and preservation, eventually growing into the pollution regulation and mitigation focus of the 1970s through the mid-1990s. Today's environmental managers and policy makers are focused on pollution prevention and the integration of environmental considerations into economic and social decision making.

Population and economic growth pressures are creating complex environmental problems that directly impact all aspects of human society. Sustainable development, once the cutting edge of environmental issues, is now expanding to incorporate education, governance and democracy, poverty reduction, public health, security, and economic strategy along with traditional environmental fields of agriculture, natural resource management, pollution abatement, and conservation. For example, waste management cannot be addressed with simply landfill policies, but must incorporate smart growth, recycling, emission capture, and the creation of markets to turn waste into a useful commodity.

Challenges for today's international environmental policy analysts include: controlling global climate change, considering environmental regulations in treaties and trade agreements, creating environmentally and economically sustainable development, and helping the private sector find ways to incorporate environmental concerns into business planning. In much of the world, basic environmental management such as water resources, wetlands protection and restoration, and environmental health are also very important developments as economic progress puts stress on existing systems.

Career-related activities within this field include policy and scientific research, environmental education and advocacy, regulatory and legislative design, technical assistance to government agencies for planning and management, regulatory compliance and enforcement, and entrepreneurial development in environmental products and services.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

Entry level positions in international environmental policy can be found in government, private industry, international organizations, and research, nonprofit and non-governmental organizations.

The US federal government is the largest single employer in the environmental career world. While the Environmental Protection Agency is the agency traditionally associated with environmental policy development in the US, including international environmental policy, many federal agencies pursue international environmental activities, including the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Food and Drug Administration, USAID, and the State Department. One program that provides entry into the federal government and work with such agencies is the Presidential Management Fellowship Program.

The private sector has both traditional businesses and consulting firms involved with environmental sustainability. Traditional businesses seek qualified managers to work in environmental compliance programs, incorporate environmental concerns into business strategies, improve performance through waste reduction and energy efficiency, and develop sustainable strategies. Environmental consulting firms provide technical assistance to both domestic and foreign government agencies as they work on environmental

problems and solutions. They need both administrative managers to write and manage the contract proposals and technical experts to provide the research for various tasks in an awarded contract. Starting as a contract employee with a consulting firm might provide an entry point into environmental consulting. While starting salaries are not unusually high, income is often complemented with supplements for staff that regularly travel overseas.

Employment opportunities within nonprofit, non-governmental, and international organizations are highly competitive and not as numerous as within the other sectors mentioned. According to a survey by the Environmental Careers Organization, the 30 best-known environmental nonprofit organizations employ less than 5,000 employees, and approximately half of those employees are with The Nature Conservancy - the largest environmental nonprofit group. While salaries are sometimes lower in nonprofits than in government or private organizations, nonprofit boards are showing more willingness to reward hard work with increased compensation in order to maintain organizational stability.

Demand

While the need for understanding global environmental issues is great, jobs in the field are very competitive as many students are interested in international environmental careers.

Positions in the federal government are being privatized to increase flexibility; networking is therefore important to determine the appropriate contractors for specific policy areas. International organizations also hire contractors through personal and professional connections. Even nonprofit and non-governmental organizations receive a glut of applications for program positions.

Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

In most cases a graduate degree is essential for success in the international environmental field. Programs in public policy, environmental management, international relations, public health, or law can provide some of the necessary skills. Some institutions offer joint degrees, allowing students to get skills in both policy analysis and environmental science. Expertise in regional politics and economics are helpful in understanding the economic, political, and social consequences of environmental policy decisions. An environmental science or water engineering background is also valuable in those positions in which specialized knowledge is important.

In addition to educational credentials, a demonstrated commitment to environmental issues is critical to success in this field, shown through both volunteer and paid experiences. While these experiences also provide essential networking opportunities, passion and commitment will not be sufficient for a career in environmental advocacy. Nonprofit organizations look for staff with management, analytical, communications, and fundraising skills. Coursework in nonprofit management or social entrepreneurship is important for a career in nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations. Prior international experience, such as with the Peace Corps, or prior experience in a domestic setting that is transferable to an international issue, like rural water distribution, is critical to a successful career search.

Multidisciplinary education and experience are also important for international environmental positions. The field has now expanded beyond strictly environmental issues to also include economics, politics, negotiation, and management. The ability to incorporate other disciplines into the solutions for environmental problems is important, as most jobs will require more than one type of skill. In addition, the ability to translate science into policy will be highly regarded.

As in all international careers, foreign language skills and overseas field experience are desirable to potential employers; organizations such as the World Bank require a second language. GIS and information technology skills are also valuable.

Sample Group of Employers

Private Sector

- Chemonics International, Inc. - www.chemonics.com
- Development Alternatives, Inc. - www.dai.com
- Environmental Resources Management- www.erm.com
- ICF Consulting Group, Inc.- www.icfconsulting.com

Research, Nonprofit and Non-Governmental Organizations

- Audubon International - www.audubonintl.org
- Conservation International - www.conservation.org
- Friends of the Earth - www.foe.org
- International Institute of Environment and Development - www.iied.org
- International Institute for Sustainable Development- www.iisd.org
- Natural Resources Defense Council - www.nrdc.org
- The Nature Conservancy - www.nature.org
- Research Triangle Institute - www.rti.org
- World Conservation Union - www.iucn.org
- World Resources Institute - www.wri.org
- Worldwide Fund for Nature - www.panda.org
- World Wildlife Fund - www.wwf.org

International Organizations

- European Union - www.europa.eu
- North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation - www.cec.org
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - www.oecd.org
- United Nations Development Program - www.undp.org
- United Nations Environment Program - www.unep.org
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization - www.unido.org
- World Bank Group - www.worldbank.org
- World Trade Organization - www.wto.org

US Federal Government

- Agency for International Development - <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/environment-and-global-climate-change>
- Department of Agriculture - www.usda.gov
- Foreign Agricultural Service - www.fas.usda.gov
- Forest Service - www.fs.fed.us
- Department of Defense - www.defenselink.mil
- Defense Environmental Network and Information Exchange – www.denix.osd.mil/portal/page/portal/denix
- Department of Energy - www.doe.gov
- Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration – www.fda.gov/oia/homepage.htm
- Department of the Interior International Affairs - www.doi.gov/intl
- Fish and Wildlife Service - <http://www.fws.gov/international/>
- Department of State, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs - <http://www.state.gov/e/oes/>
- Environmental Protection Agency Office of International Affairs - www.epa.gov/international
- House Committee on Energy and Commerce – www.energycommerce.house.gov
- House Committee on Resources - www.resourcescommittee.house.gov/
- Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry - www.agriculture.senate.gov
- Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources - www.energy.senate.gov
- Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works - www.epw.senate.gov

Future Challenges of the Profession

Through the hard work of many dedicated individuals, environmental issues have become more integrated into the thinking of all development issues. Taking that awareness and translating it into global action is the next challenge, particularly in countries where local officials are not accustomed to taking the lead in solving environmental problems. Many environmental problems will require multilateral solutions; creating and enforcing those agreements will be a key to the success of future efforts.

Resources for Additional Information

Internet Resources

Job Search Sites

- Bright Green Talent – www.brightgreentalent.com
- DevNetJobs.org - www.devnetjobs.org
- Environmental Career Opportunities - www.ecojobs.com
- Environmental Career Center- www.environmentalcareer.com
- Environmental Grantmakers Association - www.ega.org/index.php
- Environmental Careers Organization - www.eco.org
- Environmental Organization Web Directory - www.webdirectory.com
- Environmental Yellow Pages - www.enviroyellowpages.com
- Greenbiz – <http://jobs.greenbiz.com/>
- Green Directory - www.greendirectory.net/jobs
- Green Dream Jobs - www.sustainablebusiness.com
- Idealist - www.idealists.org
- International Career Employment Weekly - www.internationaljobs.org
- SustainUs - www.sustainus.org
- OneWorld - www.oneworld.net
- The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe - www.rec.org

Blogs

Bob Willard (Bob Willard) – sustainability news and career tips – www.sustainabilityadvantage.com/

Co.Exist (Fast Company) – Fast Company’s hip blog with multiple contributions on topics of sustainability, development, and others - www.fastcoexist.com

Ethical Corporation - Business Intelligence Corporation evaluation CSR operations- www.ethicalcorp.com

Marc Gunther (Marc Gunther) – business and sustainability news and analysis, both CSR and environment- www.marcgunther.com/

New Frontier (Nathan Laurell) – blog of investment firm focused on sustainable energy and agriculture- www.blog.new-frontier.com/

Toronto Sustainability Speaker Series (Eco-Opportunity Consulting) – different sustainability experts offer blog posts – www.ecoopportunity.net/

Publications

Careers in the Environment (VGM Professional Careers Series), by Michael Fasulo and Paul Walker, McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Books; 3rd Edition, 2007.

Conservation Directory 2004: The Guide to Worldwide Environmental Organizations, by National Wildlife Federation, Island Press, 2004.

Great Jobs for Environmental Studies Majors (Great Jobs Series) by Julie DeGalan, McGraw-Hill; 2nd Edition, 2008.

The ECO Guide to Careers that Make a Difference, The Environmental Careers Organization, 2004

Saving the Earth as a Career: Advice on Becoming a Conservation Professional by Malcolm L. Hunter Jr., David Lindenmayer, and Aram Calhoun, Wiley-Blackwell, 2007.

The Sustainable MBA: The Manager's Guide to Green Business, by Giselle Weybrecht, Wiley, 2010.