Professional Standards for an Interpretive Naturalist

Developed by the Iowa Association of Naturalist, in 1988
Revised in 2010

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 one other area including astronomy, geology, insects, nonflowering 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 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.  
Ability to use social media like Facebook, Twitter, etc.

### 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 and grant writing 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.
Ability to assess and evaluate program effectiveness.

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 (1st Aid, CPR, AED, Wilderness 1st Aid);
Outdoor recreation skills training (i.e. ACA canoe and kayak, etc.);
American Camping Association certification;
Department of Natural Resources safety instructor’s certification (hunter ed, fur harvesters, boating ;atv)
Wildlife rehabilitation certification;
EE Curriculum training (Project WILD, Project Learning Tree).
Ability to operate hand and power tools safely.

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 a local school principal.