



# Job Application and Interview Guide

2018 Annual Meeting

Provided by:

**Idaho**

**Chapter**

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## A student's guide to the job application and interview process

Applying for jobs can be a daunting, even confusing experience. Many students have never applied for a professional fisheries/wildlife job, and therefore don't know where to start when looking for jobs, developing their application package, and preparing for an interview. This reference guide was developed to help you through the process: from where to look for job announcements, to writing a compelling cover letter, putting together a top-notch resume, and learning how to handle the interview process like a true professional.

We hope you find this guide helpful, and wish you the best of luck in your job search!



**Conducting sturgeon research on the Snake River in Hells Canyon**

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### More information

A more detailed version of this guide can be found on the Idaho Chapter AFS website at: [www.idahoafs.org](http://www.idahoafs.org)



*American Fisheries Society*

**Idaho Chapter**





**Chinook spawning ground surveys - Selway River wilderness**

### **Pro Tips:**

- *When applying for jobs, be sure your email address and voicemail are professional. Anything crude, rude, or suggestive sends a negative message. If unsure, consider setting up a new email that you use just for your job search communications.*
- *If you aren't sure you meet the requirements for the position, or it's unclear what they want in the application package, call the hiring supervisor and ask!*

## **Step 1: The Job Search**

The first step towards a job is usually a Job Search. This involves finding suitable job announcements on the internet, school job boards, and especially personal communication with professionals.

Here is a list of job resources to help you get started!

- American Fisheries Society - <https://fisheries.org>
- Federal Jobs (USFWS, USFS, etc) - <https://www.usajobs.gov>
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game - <https://idfg.idaho.gov>
- Texas A&M University Job Board - <http://wfscjobs.tamu.edu/job-board>  
Probably the biggest job board outside of AFS.
- Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission - <http://www.psmfc.org>  
Fisheries related jobs throughout the Western states. Works cooperatively with many state/federal agencies.
- Nez Perce Tribe - <http://www.nptfisheries.org>
- Coeur d' Alene Tribe - <http://www.cdatribe-nsn.gov>
- Colville Confederated Tribes - <https://www.colvilletribes.com>
- Michigan State University - <http://www.fw.msu.edu/employment>  
Excellent resource for information on employment, graduate school, etc. No direct job listings, but has links to many state/federal fish and wildlife sites.

## **Step 2: Job Applications**

Most job announcements will specify exactly what documents they want in an application package. This usually includes:

- Company Application Form
- Cover Letter/Letter of Interest
- Resume
- References

If nothing is specified, include the items listed above, or call and ask. Generally, do not include transcripts or letters of recommendation unless they are specifically requested. Be sure to follow the instructions on the job announcement! Failure to do so can lead to your application not being considered.

Your cover letter and resume are the primary documents you will use to convey information to potential employers. The cover letter should address how your values, interests, and professionalism relate to the job you are applying for, and how that makes you a great candidate for the job. Resumes typically focus on your skills, abilities, education, and experience.

## Cover Letters

Cover letters are simple but often difficult to write. Many people find it difficult to write about themselves. However, the cover letter is just as important as your resume. It is your opportunity to write something personal and meaningful. This is where you can express your values, interests, and level of professionalism, as well as your knowledge of the company and/or the job. Don't simply re-write the information on your resume. Instead, highlight the skills or information about you that may not be obvious from your resume. You can use the cover letter to convey specific examples of your accomplishments and experience. Because of the opportunity the cover letter presents for conveying additional information, be sure to include one with every resume that you send, even if one is not required.

### Cover Letters - format

A cover letter should be one page, 3-5 paragraphs, and formatted in the Block Letter style (see example at end of guide). Use single space, with double space between paragraphs.

- **Header** - standard header (your address, their address, date, and salutation).
- **First Paragraph** - Use this paragraph to briefly introduce yourself. Identify the job (job title, announcement number, etc.) you are applying for. You can also include information on how you heard of the job.
- **Middle Paragraphs** - Explain why you are right for this job. Describe relevant work, school, volunteer or life experience. Describe how you would be a valuable addition to the team and what makes you different from every other applicant. Mention non-professional work if you can describe it in terms of the transferable and applicable skills ("As a customer service rep, I learned to communicate effectively with the public."). Explain why you want this job or want to work for this employer/supervisor, and why you think the job/project is important in terms of conservation or management. Be specific and demonstrate your knowledge of the job or organization.
- **Last Paragraph** - End on a positive note, and be sure to thank them for considering you for employment. State that you would like to communicate further, then follow up!
- **Bottom** - Use a standard closing ("Sincerely,"). Type and sign your name.

### Cover Letters - additional guidelines

- Generally, only include information about your extracurricular activities if they directly relate to the skills/abilities needed for the job ('I am an avid backpacker and frequently navigate to remote lakes using a map and compass').
- If you use a sentence such as "I look forward to speaking with you about the position", then the employer will be expecting you to call them. An employer is not going to call you to let you know more about the job. It is your responsibility to gather information about the job/projects/company.
- Proofread! Spell check won't pick up all errors. Be sure to have someone else proof-read your cover letter and resume. Ask a supervisor, co-worker, professor, or utilize the IDAFS resume review service!  
<http://www.idahoafs.org/freeResumeEvaluation.php>
- Sign your letter carefully and professionally.

### **Pro Tip:**

*Don't use the same cover letter for each job you apply for.*

*Write each one separately and tailor it for each individual position. Using the same cover letter for each job can result in mistakes such as forgetting to change the name/job/employer. These mistakes show a lack of attention to detail and can prevent you from being considered for a job.*



**Alpine lake surveys - Frank Church "River of No Return" wilderness**



**Rotary Screw Trap - collecting juvenile salmonids**

### **Pro tip:**

*If you don't have much (or any) experience, try to find volunteer opportunities with companies you are interested in applying to in the future. Many times, a volunteer opportunity can turn into a job later, because the supervisor/company had the chance to get to know you and see your work performance first hand.*

## Resumes

A resume is a synopsis of your credentials. Resumes are often the first contact you will make with potential employers and should be tailored specifically to each position. It should be clear and concise while providing enough relevant information to capture their attention. In general, a resume should include:

- **Header**
  - \* Include your full contact information.
- **Objective statement (optional)**
  - \* Tailored to the specific position.
- **Education**
  - \* Name, city, and state of college; degrees earned; year of graduation (or anticipated graduation). GPA is optional.
- **Work Experience**
  - \* List jobs in reverse chronological order.
  - \* Include job title, company, city/state, dates of employment, and supervisor's name.
  - \* Provide concise descriptions of your duties and responsibilities.
- **Volunteer Experience**
  - \* Provide a concise description of your duties and responsibilities.
- **Other certifications, licenses, skills, training, etc.**
  - \* List only current certifications; include date of expiration
  - \* Relevant training or skill sets (GIS, Wilderness First Aid, etc.)
- **References**
  - \* Include complete contact information: full name, title, company, address, phone, and email.
  - \* Include at least 3 professional references (or whatever is requested).

### Resumes - key concepts

- Use the same format and style throughout your resume. Use 11 or 12 point fonts.
- Don't use clip art, "busy" fonts, pictures, or personal information.
- You do not need to limit your resume to one page; Fish/Wildlife resumes are often longer because of the seasonality and complexity of these jobs. However, try to keep your resume to no more than 4 pages. If you have numerous previous jobs, consider eliminating the oldest ones unless they are directly relevant.
- Use achievement/action verbs to better describe your work and accomplishments (supervised, coordinated, performed, analyzed, trained, etc.).
- Be specific ('identified fish species and gender, measured snout-vent length and assessed reproductive condition' instead of 'collected data on fish').
- Include key words that are directly applicable to the job, especially if they are used in the job announcement. (e.g., if announcement mentions creel surveys, be sure to highlight your creel survey experience).
- List the supervisor and employer with each job description. This helps the reviewer match your jobs with the references you provided.

## Resumes - don't sell yourself short

One of the biggest issues we see in resumes is not giving yourself enough credit for the level of responsibility you had, and not showing an understanding of why you were doing the work you conducted. Here are a few examples of the types of wording that really add to a resume.

### Highlight your level of responsibility:

- Responsible for training field crew on proper protocols and sampling techniques.
- Successfully managed multiple projects, including prioritization of projects and fieldwork when scheduling conflicts occurred.
- Communicated effectively with my supervisor, other biologists, and field crews to ensure projects were completed correctly and in a timely manner.
- Routinely worked unsupervised, and was responsible for making independent decisions in the field to ensure the projects were completed while maintaining crew safety.
- Responsible for planning and execution of all fieldwork activities, data collection, and data entry.
- Assisted with data analysis, development of tables and graph, and writing the annual report.

### Show you understand of the purpose of the work you were doing:

- Effectively interacted with the public while conducting creel and angler opinion surveys to evaluate the effects of a reservoir drawdown project on the fishery and angler satisfaction.
- Assisted with amphibian, fish, and limnology sampling of alpine lakes for a long-term project assessing the potential impacts of historic fish stockings on amphibian populations.

*“The one biggest thing a candidate can do to improve their chances is to call me and ask good questions about the position and the project. This shows they are truly interested. Since <10% of applicants ever ask anything about the job (even during the interview), this is a huge factor when I decide who to hire.”*

**- Robert Hand  
Regional Fisheries  
Biologist, IDFG**

## Resumes - references

Employers contact references to verify your employment history and to learn about your work performance in previous jobs. This is very important, as your references let a potential employer know if you are capable of performing the job. Conversely, it can also bring to light issues in previous jobs that would prevent you from being able to perform the job to the expectations of the hiring supervisor.

- Always include references with your resume. Do not write “references upon request” on your resume. Make it easy for the employer!
- Do not use personal references unless asked for (i.e. your mom, friend from school, etc.).
- If space does not allow references on your resume, include them on a separate sheet.
- Ask permission to use someone as a reference; provide each reference with a copy of your resume.
- Do not assume someone will provide you with a good reference! When you ask them for permission, be sure to specifically ask if they are willing and able to provide a positive reference. If you don't ask, they have no obligation to tell you what kind of reference they will provide!



**Conducting creel surveys on the Clearwater River**



**Habitat  
restoration -  
Corral Creek**

**What if you  
know someone  
on the interview  
panel?**

*In this situation, don't assume the interviewer already knows everything about you. Often, candidates don't provide in-depth answers to the questions, and omit important information because "they already know me, or know I can do this work". They might, but not answering the questions fully gives the impression you don't know how to answer the questions.*

## Improve Your Odds

One of the most important things you can do to improve your odds on being offered an interview (and to help you prepare for an interview) is to call the hiring supervisor and ask for more information about the position. Why? It will provide you with valuable information you can use during an interview, and help you decide if this job is right for you (you might learn that the job is not what you thought it was). Additionally, it shows that you are serious about the position and about being prepared. Develop some questions beforehand depending on how much information is provided in the announcement:

- Can you tell me more about the duties and responsibilities of the job?
- What project(s) will this position be involved with?
- What is the company trying to learn from this project?
- How will these data be used to manage/conservate this fishery?
- What are the qualities and/or skills you are looking for in a top candidate?

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## Step 3: The Interview

Congratulations! You got an interview! However, you still have work to do. Never show up to an interview without preparing. Even some basic preparation can greatly improve your chances of being offered a job. This means ensuring you understand the expectations of the position you are applying for, what projects the position works on, and why/how the work is being conducted.

- Always research the employer, position, project and supervisor so you know as much as possible about the position, and can show why you are the best person for the job.
- Find annual reports/journal articles about the projects. These can often be found on the company website. If you can't find any, then ask for copies when you call the hiring supervisor.
- Hopefully you have already called the hiring supervisor to discuss the job! If not, do it now. Either way, don't hesitate to call again for more detailed information about the job. Ask for copies of recent annual reports if you couldn't find them on your own.
- Practice for the interview! Have someone ask you interview questions and practice answering them.

## Interviews - attire

What you wear to an interview is extremely important. Even for an entry level position, this is still a professional job, not a summer job at a burger joint. Dress appropriately! This means your attire should be “business professional” or “business casual”. If you aren’t sure, call the hiring supervisor and ask if business casual or professional would be appropriate. General guidelines for these styles are:

- Women
  - Business professional = professional dress or dress slacks w/ blouse and jacket; dress shoes
  - Business casual = dress slacks with blouse/collared shirt/sweater/cardigan; dress shoes.
- Men:
  - Business professional = suit and tie; dress shoes.
  - Business casual = dress slacks with collared shirt, sweater, tie optional; dress belt and shoes.

Do not wear casual clothing (jeans, t-shirts, hats, sunglasses, tennis shoes, boots, flip flops). This sends a negative message about your professionalism and level of interest in the position. If an employer has several candidates that are equally qualified, the job offer may come down to who presented themselves the best. When in doubt, overdress!

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## Interviews - do’s and don’ts

### Interview “do’s”

- Be prepared! Have a notebook, pencil, copies of your resume, and a written list of questions to ask.
- Be on time (or early) for your interview!
- Go to the interview by yourself; don’t bring your family or friends.
- Display poise and good posture. Be attentive and listen. Use proper English. Use good eye contact with the interview panel.
- If you don’t know the answer or don’t have direct experience regarding the question, be honest, but try to answer it based on other work/life experiences. Show you can adapt and relate.
- Be enthusiastic and have a positive attitude.

### Interview “don’ts”

- Do not use tobacco products, gum, or food before or during the interview.
- Avoid nervous habits.
- Do not use slang or curse words, even if the interview is relaxed or an interviewer uses them.
- Do not ask about salary or benefit issues. This should only be discussed when a job offer is made.
- Do not project a "what's-in-it-for-me" attitude. Think "what can I do for the company?"
- Do not be negative about current or previous employers.

### **Pro Tip:**

*An interview works both ways. Part of an interview is determining if this company/job/supervisor is who you actually want to work for. Therefore, have relevant questions about the company, job, project, and interviewer to ask during, or at the end of, the interview.*



**Snorkel surveys -  
South Fork  
Clearwater River**



**Stocking hatchery fish to improve fishing opportunity**

### **Pro tip:**

*If given the option, make the effort to do an interview in-person whenever possible. You will make a much better impression, and it is easier for you and the interviewer to learn about each other and read body language. A phone interview may feel "safer" but only do this if the distance is too far for reasonable travel, or if work/family obligations prevent you from going.*

## **Interviews - telephone interview**

Telephone interviews are common in the fisheries/wildlife profession, and can often be the only interview option for internships or short-term seasonal positions. Expectations for a telephone interview are not much different from a face to face interview. However, in a telephone interview, your biggest asset will be your communication skills.

- Be ready at the arranged time. Make sure you have a good telephone and it is static free. Avoid using a cordless or cell phone whenever possible.
- Ensure you have a quiet space without interruptions (pets, kids, etc.)
- Have your resume and other documents you may need, paper and pen, and a glass of water.
- Answer deliberately and clearly. If you're smiling, you're likely sounding positive.
- Don't answer with only a "yes" or "no"; explain your answers.
- If you don't understand a question or didn't hear clearly, ask them to repeat the question or explain.
- Remember: the interviewer can't see you, so he/she can't read your body language.

## **Interviews - FAQ's**

The following is a short list of questions that are representative of those often asked by fish/wildlife employers. However, be prepared for questions directly related to the position, the projects you would be working on, and more complex fish/wildlife questions depending on the level of the job.

### **Examples of general questions:**

- What are your long range and short range professional goals, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them? How does this job fit into those goals?
- What do you consider to be your greatest professional/personal strengths and weaknesses?
- What makes you the best candidate for the position?
- Describe your experience leading others. What do you believe are necessary traits for a good leader?
- Describe your previous experience as it relates to this job.
- What did you do to prepare for this interview?
- If hired, what steps would you take to minimize the time it takes to familiarize yourself with this project?
- Discuss your experience managing multiple priorities.
- Discuss your experience with data analysis and writing reports.

### **Examples of specific/technical questions:**

- Our agency has received money to build a new reservoir. Describe the process you would take to determine what fish you would stock in this reservoir.
- Describe the basic function and purpose of a rotary screw trap.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of hatchery supplementation on anadromous fish populations?

## Interviews - after the interview

What you do (or don't do) after the interview can impact your chances of receiving a job offer.

- When the interview ends, thank the interviewer(s) for their time. Also, thank any administrative staff/receptionist that assisted you upon your arrival at the office. Interviewers will notice how you treat the administrative/support staff.
- Conduct a self-evaluation soon after you leave. What did you do well? What could you do better?
- Write down as many of the interview questions as you can remember. These will help you prepare for future job interviews.
- Send a thank you email for the interview within 24 hours.

### What if I don't get the job?

- Don't become discouraged if you fail to get the job. Take steps to strengthen your potential – improve your application package/interview skills, find training opportunities, volunteer, gain more experience/skills/education.
- It's okay to be disappointed, but do not get upset or annoyed with the person who calls you. This could result in your never being considered for employment by that person (or even that entire company) again.
- Ask for feedback! This will help you better prepare for next time. Word your request like: "I would appreciate some feedback regarding what I could have done better so I can improve myself as a candidate in the future". Do not ask: "Why didn't I get the job". This comes across negatively.
- Be sure to thank them again for their consideration. It never hurts to be nice and professional.

## Social Media

It is important to remember that potential employers may be able to see your social media activity. While some employers have strict rules against looking at applicant's social media, some do not. This means social media could be used to help determine whether or not to hire you. With that in mind, what are employers looking for on your social media?

- Your social media is an accurate portrait of what you're really like. It can give employers a better feel for who you are outside of the interview. This could either help or hurt you.
- Does your social media match the information you've provided about your education, experience, previous jobs, etc.?

Main reasons employers are turned off by a candidate's social media:

- Illegal activity (drug use, criminal behavior, etc.).
- Anything that indicates you lied on your resume or during an interview.
- Posts that are provocative or of a sexual nature.
- Discriminatory comments related to race, gender, religion, etc.
- Excessive profanity, poor spelling/grammar, alcohol use, etc.

However, use common sense. There is a big difference between a picture of you with a beer at a restaurant vs. a picture of you passed out at a party surrounded by empty beer cans. The best advice is: think before you post!

*"During phone interviews, it can be easier to lose focus or become distracted since you are not in the same room with the interviewer. This can lead to rambling or difficulty answering questions. I recommend closing the blinds, turning off all other electronics, and finding a visual 'focal spot' (such as your note pad) to help you concentrate."*

**- Helen Neville  
President, Idaho  
Chapter AFS;  
Trout Unlimited**



**Backpack  
electrofishing -  
North Fork  
Clearwater River**

## Sample Cover Letter

Samantha Stevens  
1234 University Boulevard  
Boise, ID 83707

Sandy Smith  
State Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Lewiston, ID 83501

January 4, 2018

RE: Fisheries Aid in Lewiston, ID

Dear Ms. Smith,

The professional background, experience and skills listed in your advertisement are only the beginning of what I can bring to this position and the State Department of Fish and Wildlife (SDFW). While my resume shows previous experience integrating private lands access with effective data collection (Stream Surveyor, WDFW, Summer 2016) it does not fully reflect the role I served on our survey crew. My crew preferred to have me make all initial landowner contacts, as more landowners allowed access to their lands when I asked permission than when others on the crew asked. This ability to build trusting relationships with landowners is a trait I look forward to using on the Fisheries Habitat Crew in Lewiston, Idaho. Another reason I am the best person for this position is that I grew up in Deary, Idaho. I can relate especially well to local private landowners, including ranch-owners, because I lived in the community for 19 years. My background as a “local” offers opportunities to build lasting relationships of trust with private landowners. In addition, I have hunted, fished and camped extensively throughout the basin; thus, I am familiar with the landmarks, landscape and habitat.

I am interested in working for SDFW because of the type of data you are collecting and the positive effect these data can have on maintaining an important native fish species. I recently read your report “Stream Habitat Restoration in the Potlatch River, Idaho 2015”. I was surprised to see the limited amount of habitat occupied by steelhead and would like to play a part in identifying habitat that this species could occupy in the future. In addition, I enjoy working with people, as well as with fish and look forward to returning home to work with “neighbors”.

I plan to be in Lewiston next week. I will call you early next week to see if you have additional questions about my application and to see if there would be an opportunity to meet in person. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Samantha Stevens  
resume enclosed

## Sample Resume

# Terry Technician

111 Main St. Boise, ID 83707  
(208)-555-1234 [TerryTechnician@yahoo.com](mailto:TerryTechnician@yahoo.com)

## Education

### University of Idaho - Moscow, ID

Bachelors of Science, Fisheries and Wildlife Management

Expected Graduation: May 2017

### Lewis-Clark State College - Lewiston, ID

Major: Biology

August 2014 - May 2016

## Work Experience

### Fisheries Technician

*Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game, Lewiston, ID*

(April - December 2016)

Supervisor: Robert Hand

- Served as crew leader of three person crew conducting fisheries surveys throughout the Clearwater Region in Idaho.
- Responsible for training field crew on proper protocols and sampling techniques.
- Responsible for planning and execution of all fieldwork activities, data collection, and data entry.
- Successfully managed multiple projects, including prioritization of projects and field work when scheduling conflicts occurred.
- Communicated effectively with my supervisor, other biologists, and other field crews to ensure projects were completed correctly and in a timely manner.
- Routinely worked unsupervised, and was responsible for making independent decisions in the field to ensure the projects were completed while maintaining crew safety.
- Responsible for collecting data on a variety of resident and anadromous fisheries projects in reservoirs, rivers and streams, and alpine lakes.
- Effectively interacted with the public while conducting creel and angler opinion surveys to evaluate the effects of a reservoir drawdown project on the fishery and angler satisfaction.
- Assisted with amphibian, fish, and limnology sampling of alpine lakes for long-term project assessing the potential impacts of historic fish stockings on amphibian populations.
- Responsible for data entry and development of tables and graphs, and assisted with data analysis and writing the annual management report.
- Assisted with anadromous life cycle monitoring, recapture, and migration studies by conducting redd count surveys, stream snorkel surveys, and tending screw traps.

### Scientific Aid

*California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Hopland, CA*

(October 2012 - August 2014)

Supervisor: Steve Smith

- Conducted spawning adult salmonid surveys, watershed habitat inventory surveys, large wood recruitment surveys, stream grade and fish passage and barrier surveys, and other watershed and salmonid field surveys for the Bay Delta Regional Fisheries Restoration Grants Program.
- Assisted state and federal fisheries biologists in handling, sorting, and spawning native Coho, Chinook, and steelhead at Warms Springs Dam (in accordance with the Russian River Coho Brood Stock Program) and the Coyote Dam Fish Ladder.
- Participated in biological inventory surveys while employing the use of electrofishing equipment and seine-nets (in accordance with Watershed Habitat Inventory surveys), and successful fish relocations prior to restoration project implementation.
- Assisted in PIT tag mark and recapture study by monitoring Coho salmon and steelhead smolt migration via Fyke-net and screw trapping in Lagunitas Creek and the Russian River.
- Coordinate a community-based riparian restoration project and manage project implementation with 15 - 20 recruited volunteers.

## Sample Resume (continued)

- Conducted Watershed and Salmonid Science Education program for 5 different elementary school classes in Sonoma, Mendocino, and Marin counties.
- Compiled and analyze Watershed Habitat Inventory data using Microsoft Access, to further create and provide written Habitat Restoration Recommendations within watershed-wide habitat reports in accordance with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Fisheries Restoration Grant Program.
- Contacted and maintain working relationships with private landowners in order to acquire access agreements for seasonal field crews.

### **Park Interpreter**

*Yellowstone National Park, WY*

(June - September 2011)

Supervisor: Danielle Couch

- Coordinated guided nature walks and interpretive programs for Park visitors in order to educate and inform visitors of natural history of park resources an on-going protection of park lands.
- Created and coordinated Children's Environmental Education Program and Junior Ranger Program.
- Assisted park visitors with park information, visitor-related issues and emergencies, and reserving and purchasing campsites.
- Assisted Humboldt State graduate students in conducting corvid species surveys that included tagging, banding, and measuring individuals.

### **Volunteer Experience**

#### **Student Research Assistant**

Intern for Graduate Student at University of Washington, Seattle

January - April 2017

#### **California State Parks Volunteer**

Water Quality Monitor

October 2011 - August 2012

### **Certifications/Training**

First Aid/CPR Certified

(current)

ATV Safe Rider course Training

(May 2015)

Aquatic Invasive Species Training

(March 2014)

### **References**

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