

# Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks – Park Ranger

By: Zach Whalen

## Background

This past summer I worked for Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks as a seasonal park ranger. I patrolled Sharon Woods Metro Park and Inniswood Metro Garden, both located in Westerville, Ohio. I started working in early June which is a month later than seasonal workers usually start, because of Covid-19. I was a seasonal employee until September at which time I was offered a part-time position at Sharon Woods.

The mission of the Metro Parks is to conserve open spaces, while providing places and opportunities that encourage people to discover and experience nature. Within the parks, a few positions we have are maintenance, park rangers, naturalists and resource managers.

I found out there was a position available by checking the Metro Parks website and selecting the job opportunities link. I heard from the H.R. department a short time later that they wanted me to come in for an interview. The entire process was very easy and straightforward.

Apple Ridge Road at sunset after a few hours of rain.



## On the Job

During our day to day operations, the job of a park ranger varies day to day. Park rangers patrol their respective parks by foot, golf cart, bike, and truck. We carry with us emergency equipment, tools, vehicle lockout rods, and most used tool, grabbers, for picking up litter. We typically work 2 shifts, either opening the park or closing the park. Our job requires us to be extremely visible to the public and are held accountable for our time while in service.

Myself holding a grey rat snake (Chico), cared for by Sharon Woods naturalists.



## Typical Duties

It can be difficult to list all the duties that a park ranger fulfills. Below are listed a few of the many duties. What is most important is that we are a team and help each other out to accomplish goals and maintain an efficient park.

- Answer visitor's questions.
- Clean up litter.
- Ensure park rules are being followed.
- Give warnings to visitors if rules aren't being followed.
- Respond to emergencies in the park.
- Assist maintenance staff and naturalists with tasks.
- Maintain a duty log.
- Perform radio communications

## Customer Service/Visitor Interaction

By far the most important role of a park ranger is our interactions with the public. We label each interaction with a visitor as a PVC (positive visitor contact) or a verbal warning.

I learned a great deal of tact and how to effectively communicate with visitors. Most of the learning was done through trial and error with how to approach visitors, especially in instances where the visitors need a verbal warning. The two phrases that we stand by are: make the situation better and everyone goes home safe at night. Keeping these phrases in mind when dealing with a situation will allow for the best possible outcome.

Occasionally, outside agencies are needed to assist with situations. We are able to dispatch medics, fire, and law enforcement to our location if needed. It is important to be able to stay calm under pressure because we are most likely the first on the scene when responding to a situation.

Rules vary between Sharon Woods and Inniswood so it is important to know what is allowed versus not for whichever park I am at.

Myself posing for a picture for a photoshoot our naturalists were having with these bears.



Sunset over Sharon Woods, one of the perks of working the closing shift.



## Park Operations During Covid-19 Pandemic

Since the start of the pandemic, there have only been a handful of positive cases of Covid-19 throughout all of the hundreds of Metro Parks employees. Measures were put in place early to keep employees safe and to limit spread if someone were to contract the virus. Some of the measures that were put in place were:

- Employees to wear masks when indoors and in same vehicle
- Provide hand sanitizer, gloves, and other disinfectant spray

For the park itself, sanitation efforts were increased in bathrooms and playgrounds. We limit group sizes to a maximum of 10. If groups were above 10 people, we asked that they break into smaller groups and each group must stay socially distanced from each other. Occasionally, this was tough to enforce because there are language barriers, cultural differences, and visitors that simply do not want to adhere by the rules.

## Reflection

This experience as a park ranger with the Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks has been exceptional. It solidified that I was on the right career path of being a park ranger/environmental law enforcement.

In the future, I will look to seek employment with other organizations simply to gain more experience in the field.

For those looking to work for the Metro Parks, keep checking the website for openings and apply early. If you're hired, the best way to learn is by learning from the mistakes you make on the job. Be professional, assertive, and respectful to visitors and you will have a great time in this job!



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