

# Evaluating Sources of Job Satisfaction: A Survey of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge Managers and Biologists

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USGS/BRD/BSR--2003-0004



U.S. Department of the Interior  
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# Evaluating Sources of Job Satisfaction: A Survey of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge Managers and Biologists

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## Introduction

The following summary consists of revised excerpts from the thesis study that was conducted in 2000—2002 by Ayeisha Brinson, Colorado State University (Brinson, 2002). The purpose of this report is to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with additional findings related to sources of job satisfaction. Because this is a report of additional findings from a lengthy study, the information in this report is condensed and presented without references from the original research. The literature review, methodology, and discussion from the original thesis are not presented in this report. Any questions concerning the thesis should be directed to Ayeisha Brinson, who may be reached by e-mail ([abrinson@rsmas.Miami.edu](mailto:abrinson@rsmas.Miami.edu)).

The purpose of the report is to examine differences and similarities between National Wildlife Refuge managers and biologists on a selection of independent variables related to job satisfaction occupational status (being either a manager or a biologist): are managers more

satisfied with their jobs than biologist? If so, what are the components of that satisfaction? What are the sources of dissatisfaction?

To further assess the attitudes and perceptions of refuge biologists and managers we attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the differences and similarities between refuge biologists and managers on their perceptions as professionals?
- What are the differences and similarities between refuge biologists and managers on their level of job satisfaction?
- What are the differences and similarities between refuge biologists and managers on their level of job dissatisfaction?

## Method and Variables

The original study employed a self-administered survey with open- and closed-ended questions to gather the data. The participants for this study were drawn from the 240 physically staffed USFWS refuges in the continental United States (staff duplications and unstaffed refuges were removed from the survey sample). A manager and refuge biologist were identified at each

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refuge (n = 480). A total of 314 (65.4%) respondents [managers (174; 55.1%); biologists (133; 42.4%); and other (8; 2.5%)] returned the survey. A modified Dillman (2000) technique was used to administer the survey; and finally the data were analyzed using SPSS 11.0.

### *Selected Study Results*

The results show that of the 314 respondents who answered the survey, 75% were male, 23% female, and 2% did not respond to the question. The average age of the respondents was 44.5.

Forty-seven percent of the respondents had a BA or a BS degree in biological sciences. Another 47% had graduate degrees (MS or MA) in either biological or ecological sciences and the remaining 6% reported having a Ph.D. in ecological sciences or related studies. The majority of the respondents were self-reported as either a GS 11 or 12 (56%). In order to understand the dynamics of people's sources of job satisfaction it is important to understand the factors that make people different. One factor that we used, as a general measure to test these differences, was political ideology. When asked about their political orientation, respondents reported being more liberal than conservative: 40% reported having more liberal political orientation than slightly conservative or conservative orientations, 22% reported moderate orientation, and 32% reported having slightly conservative or conservative political orientations. A description of all respondents is displayed in Fig. 1 (also see the Appendix).

Correlations were run to determine whether age, gender, ideology, number of years in service, grade level, and educational level were significantly related to occupational status. As seen in Table 1, gender and educa-

tional level were both positively related to occupational status. Additional significant socio-demographic summary statistics included age, ideology, number of years in service, and grade level. These findings are consistent with the view that gender and educational levels are key factors in determining occupational status (McCormick, 2000). Other socio-demographic data were not significantly related to occupational status.

We also performed an analysis of the correlations between refuge managers and biologists and with several subscales (sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and perception as a professional). Of interest between the biologist and managers was the fact that the perception as a professional had a weak but significant correlation with our measures concerning job satisfaction (Table 2).

### *Perception as a Professional*

When managers and biologists were asked to indicate how they would like others to perceive them as a professional, the most frequent response overall was that they wanted to be perceived as a good land steward and wildlife biologist (n = 103; 39%; Table 3).

When viewed independently, managers highest preferences were to be perceived as good land stewards (n = 68; 45%). However, among the biologists, being perceived as a good scientist (n = 38; 33%) and wildlife manager (n = 40; 35%) were considered to be the most important professional qualities. Interestingly, being considered as a good scientist earned zero responses from the managers. The managers rated being a good program administrator (n = 20; 13%) and good people manager (n = 9; 5%) higher than being a good scientist (Table 3).

**Table 1.** Correlation coefficients describing the significant relationships between occupational status and selected socio-demographic variables.

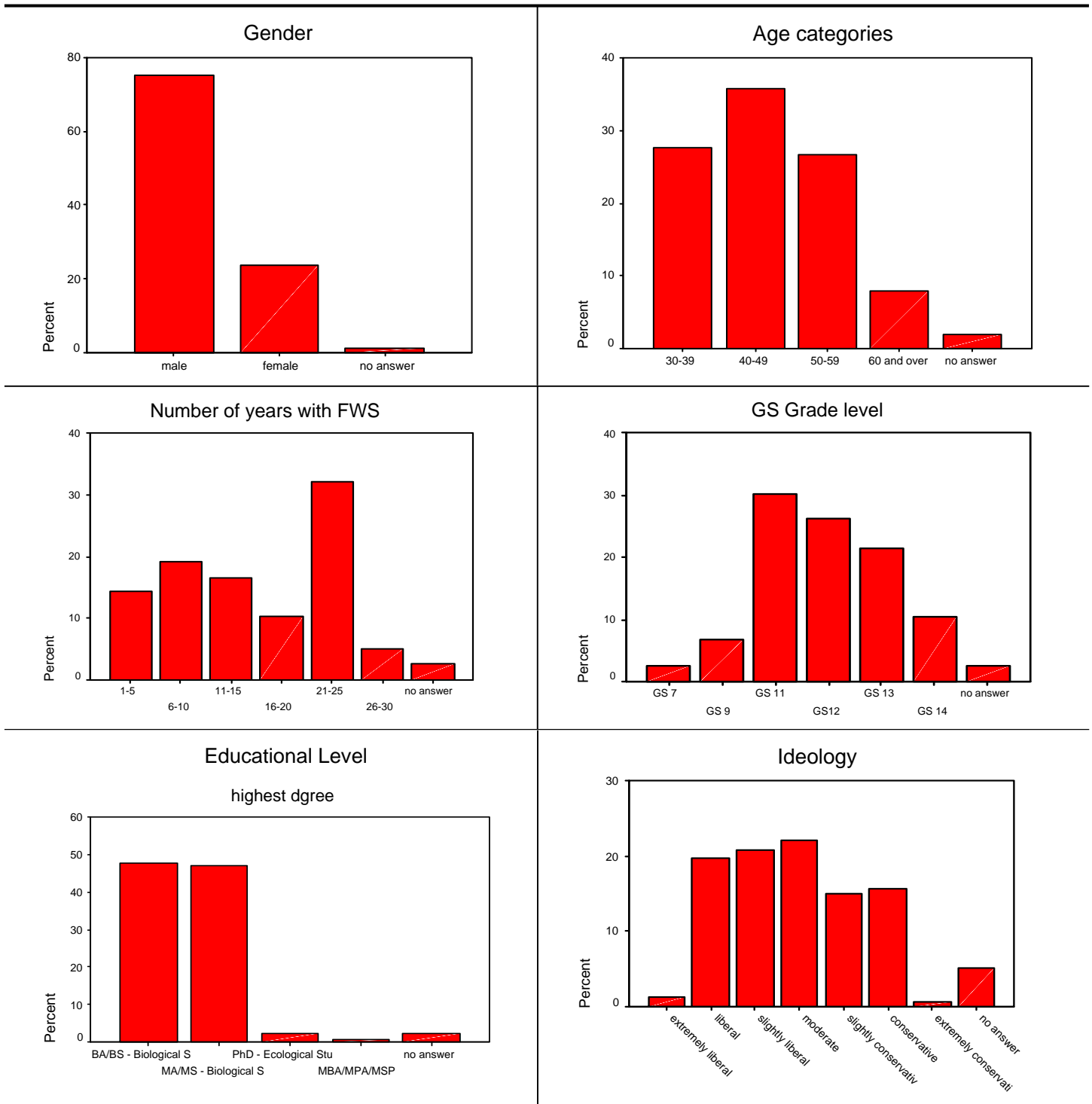
Variables	Refuge manager/biologist	
	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Gender	.242	.000
Age	-.114	.047
Ideology	-.108	.060
Number of years	-.081	.157
Grade level	-.042	.463
Level of education	.271	.000

<sup>a</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2.** Correlation coefficients describing the significant relationships between occupational status and selected variables.

Variables	Refuge manager/biologist	
	Pearson correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Sources of job satisfaction	-.032	.576
Sources of job dissatisfaction	.028	.627
Perception as a professional	-.331	.000

<sup>a</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).



**Fig. 1.** Overall statistics of all respondents (n = 314).



**Table 3.** Frequency distribution of comparing perceptions as a professional by selected socio-demographic characteristics.

Perception as a professional	Refuge manager/biologist <sup>f</sup>		Gender		Educational level		
	Manager or	Biologist or	Male	Female	BA/BS	MA/MA	Ph.D.
	Acting manager	Acting biologist					
Good scientist	0	38	25	14	11	23	5
Good wildlife manager	55	40	78	21	49	49	0
Good people manager	9	0	7	2	5	4	0
Good program administrator	20	1	17	4	17	4	0
Good land steward	68	35	8	22	52	47	2
Total	152	114	207	63	134	127	7

<sup>a</sup>X<sup>2</sup> statistic shows a significant difference between managers and biologists at  $P < .001$  ( $X^2 = 73.197$ ;  $P < .000$ )

### *Sources of Job Satisfaction*

The original question regarding the greatest sources of job satisfaction was an open-ended question that asked the respondents a number of questions about their level of job satisfaction (satisfaction with work on the present job, supervision, co-workers, and satisfaction with the job in general). However, for the purposes of this report, responses were categorized and grouped. Overall, more than half of the respondents ( $n = 185$ ; 61%) reported that accomplishing projects for wildlife/habitat protection (i.e., working outdoors, participating in interesting projects, and having a challenging job) was the most important source of their job satisfaction (Table 4). This was the highest priority for both men ( $n = 148$ ; 63%)

and women ( $n = 42$ ; 57%) (Table 4). When comparing biologists and managers, there were no significant differences in sources of job satisfaction (Table 4). On average, managers were slightly more likely than biologists to report that accomplishing projects for wildlife protection, land stewardship, and teamwork all impacted their sources of job satisfaction. However, none of these had more than a slight impact. The findings in this section suggest that intrinsic or personal philosophies contributed greatly to the sense of job satisfaction.

### *Sources of Job Dissatisfaction*

Respondents were asked to give an account of the things in their jobs that were considered the most impor-

**Table 4.** Frequency distribution of sources of job satisfaction by refuge managers/biologists, gender, and educational level.

Sources of job satisfaction	Refuge manager/biologist <sup>a</sup>		Gender		Educational level		
	Manager or	Biologist or	Male	Female	BA/BS	MA/MA	Ph.D.
	Acting manager	Acting biologist					
Accomplishing projects for wildlife/habitat protection	107	78	148	42	89	98	2
Land stewardship/future generations	30	20	36	14	23	21	3
Dream job/enjoy this work/personal satisfaction	8	19	16	11	16	9	2
Results for visitors/visitor appreciation	6	7	10	2	7	6	0
Working with other groups/professionals	7	3	9	1	4	6	0
Teamwork/leadership	14	4	14	4	10	8	0
Total	172	131	233	74	149	148	7

<sup>a</sup>X<sup>2</sup> statistic shows a significant difference between managers and biologists at  $P < .05$  ( $X^2 = 12.949$ ;  $P < .024$ ).

tant source of job dissatisfaction. Because this question was open-ended, the results were coded into five categories (Table 5): bureaucracy and red tape ( $n = 131$ ; 43%); staff conflict ( $n = 54$ ; 18%); lack of funding and staff ( $n = 52$ ; 17%); ineffective leadership ( $n = 40$ ; 13%); and public mistrust ( $n = 18$ ; 6%). Overall, the biologists ( $n = 81$ ; 61%) felt that they were overburdened by bureaucracy and red tape to a far greater degree than did managers ( $n = 50$ ; 29%; Table 5). It is interesting to note that male respondents ( $n = 107$ ; 45%) were more likely than female respondents ( $n = 25$ ; 34%) to report dissatisfaction by bureaucracy and red tape associated with their jobs. Staff conflicts and lack of funding and staff were collectively considered slightly higher sources of job dissatisfaction for female ( $n = 35$ ; 47%) respondents than for males ( $n = 73$ ; 31%) (Table 5).

## Conclusions

Several conclusions about the state of USFWS managers and biologists can be drawn from these findings. First, the demographic data show that the USFWS refuge employees are overwhelmingly male (75%), "maturing" ( $\geq 49$  years old, 63%), and have been employed with the USFWS 15 years or more (56%; see Appendix). Second, more than 75% of all of the respondents felt that managing for the protection of wildlife is the most important source of job satisfaction. This is a significant finding, because it speaks directly to the fact that above and beyond dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy, red tape, and ineffective leadership, respondents are very committed to the job they set out to do—protect wildlife and natural resources for the next generation.

It is important to take a holistic look at the priorities and preferences that respondents indicated as sources of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. When planning workforce performance measures and strategic plans this is the type of data that is conspicuously missing from most planning processes and discussions. It was not surprising to find that gender and educational levels were the factors associated with differences between biologists and managers.

Until recently, the assessment of the factors that influence job satisfaction, workforce performance, and employee well-being for federal employees has been delegated to the offices of Personnel, Human Resources and Employee Opportunities [formerly Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO)]. However, changing demographics, restructuring, and internal reorganizations are requiring that managers, supervisors, and leaders understand and respond to issues related to job satisfaction, workforce performance, and employee well being. Bavendam Research (2000) identified six factors that influence job satisfaction.

### Opportunity

Employees are more satisfied when they have challenging opportunities at work. This includes chances to participate in interesting projects, jobs with a satisfying degree of challenge, and opportunities for increased responsibility.

### Stress

When negative stress is continuously high, job satisfaction is low. Jobs are more stressful if they interfere

**Table 5.** Frequency distribution of sources of job dissatisfaction by refuge managers/biologists, gender, and educational level.

Sources of job dissatisfaction	Refuge manager/biologist <sup>a</sup>		Gender		Educational level		
	Manager or	Biologist or	Male	Female	BA/BS	MA/MA	Ph.D.
	Acting manager	Acting biologist					
Bureaucracy and red tape	50	81	107	25	64	64	2
Staff conflict	26	28	39	16	29	23	2
Lack of funding and staff	29	23	34	19	15	35	2
Ineffective leadership	14	26	32	9	23	18	0
Public mistrust	7	11	15	3	13	5	1
Other	2	5	5	2	4	3	0
Total	173	133	236	74	150	150	7

<sup>a</sup>Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

with employees' personal lives or are a continuing source of worry or concern.

### *Leadership*

Employees are more satisfied when their managers are good leaders.

### *Work Standards*

Employees are more satisfied when their entire workgroup takes pride in the quality of its work.

### *Fair Rewards*

Employees are more satisfied when they feel they are rewarded fairly for the work they do.

### *Adequate Authority*

Employees are more satisfied when they have adequate freedom and authority to do their jobs.

These factors are similar to what we found in this study. Refuge managers and biologists reported that they are more satisfied with their jobs when they had chances to participate in interesting projects, jobs were challenging, and they were free from bureaucracy and red tape. Employees are also more satisfied when they believe effective leadership and teamwork to be present.

There is very little information about public sector professionals and their attitudes toward their work, managers, or employees. Weaver and Franz (1992) argued that the literature is varied and inconclusive. They stated that although the empirical studies concerning this subject are increasing, large gaps remain in the literature and there is almost no literature comparing the attitudes of employees in the public and private sectors. Therefore, we suggest another study should be done to under-

take a much broader survey of job satisfaction and attitudes of managers and professionals in the USFWS. Another study conducted to evaluate other agencies in the Department of the Interior to compare level of job satisfaction might be fruitful for workforce planners.

And finally, further analysis using age as a generational cohort may help understand changing demographic and expected workforce trends. This study could serve as a baseline for that analysis. These additional summary findings suggest the importance of further discussion about the attitudes and perceptions of USFWS managers and biologists in the context of job satisfaction. This discussion could improve understanding of workplace performance, position management, and the roles and responsibilities of a new generation of federal employees. It could also help identify leadership skills needed to deal with these issues.

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**Appendix.** Frequency distributions and percentages of selected variables.

	Gender (n = 314)				Age (n = 308)			
	Male		Female	No answer	Less than			
	(n = 236; 75%)	(n = 74; 24%)	(n = 4; 1%)	49 years old (n = 199; 63%)	Over 50 years old (n = 109; 35%)			
Refuge manager/biologist								
Manager or Acting manager	147	24	2	102	68			
Biologist or Acting biologist	87	46	0	94	38			
Other	2	4	2	3	3			
	Refuge manager/biologist (n = 314)				Gender (n = 314)		Age (n = 309)	
	Manager or Acting manager (n = 173; 55%)	Biologist or Acting biologist (n = 133; 42%)	Other (n = 8; 3%)	Male (n = 236; 75%)	Female (n = 74; 24%)	No answer (n = 4; 1%)	Less than 40 years old (n = 200; 63%)	Over 50 years old (n = 109; 35%)
Educational level								
BA/BS - Biological Sciences	100	46	4	119	30	1	96	53
MA/MS - Biological Sciences	67	79	2	107	40	1	95	51
Ph.D. - Ecological Sciences	0	7	0	4	3	0	5	2
MBA/MPA/MSP	2	0	0	1	1	0	2	0
No answer	4	1	2	5	0	2	2	3
	Refuge manager/biologist (n = 314)				Gender (n = 314)		Age (n = 309)	
	Manager or Acting manager (n = 173; 55%)	Biologist or Acting biologist (n = 133; 42%)	Other (n = 8; 3%)	Male (n = 236; 75%)	Female (n = 74; 24%)	No answer (n = 4; 1%)	Less than 40 years old (n = 200; 63%)	Over 50 years old (n = 109; 35%)
Number of years with FWS								
1–5	6	37	2	22	23	0	32	12
6–10	25	33	2	39	21	0	50	10
11–15	25	26	1	38	14	0	47	5
16–20	20	11	1	27	5	0	27	5
21–25	79	22	0	90	11	0	43	57
26–30	14	2	0	16	0	0	0	16
No answer	4	2	2	4	0	4	1	4

## Appendix. Concluded.

Grade level	Refuge manager/biologist (n = 314)				Gender (n = 314)		Age (n = 308)	
	Manager or Acting manager (n = 173; 55%)	Biologist or Acting biologist (n = 133; 42%)	Other (n = 8; 3%)	Male (n = 236; 75%)	Female (n = 74; 24%)	No answer (n = 4; 1%)	Less than 40 years old (n = 199; 63%)	Over 50 years old (n = 109; 35%)
GS-7	0	7	1	4	4	0	3	4
GS-9	3	18	0	11	10	0	14	7
GS-11	17	74	4	70	25	0	73	22
GS-12	52	30	0	61	21	0	55	26
GS-13	65	1	1	56	11	0	41	26
GS-14	33	0	0	31	2	0	12	21
No answer	3	3	2	3	1	4	1	3

Ideology	Refuge manager/biologist (n = 314)				Gender (n = 314)		Age (n = 309)	
	Manager or Acting manager (n = 173; 55%)	Biologist or Acting biologist (n = 133; 42%)	Other (n = 8; 3%)	Male (n = 236; 75%)	Female (n = 74; 24%)	No answer (n = 4; 1%)	Less than 40 years old (n = 200; 63%)	Over 50 years old (n = 109; 35%)
Liberal	63	65	3	76	55	0	95	35
Moderate	36	31	2	59	10	0	42	27
Conservative	63	34	1	91	7	0	54	43
No answer	11	3	2	10	2	4	9	4



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