



# How to write effective cover letters in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences

## I. Remember that the whole point of a cover letter is to...

...make the case that you will excel in this specific job, by using your past experience as proof. So, focus on what you can do for the organization, not on what it can do for you. You should always send a resume along with your cover letter, so, these two should complement rather than repeat each other.

## II. To draft your cover letter, work through these 4 Steps...

- Reread job announcement & determine what they want. Do background research on the organization's website. Look up the LinkedIn of the person whose role you are replacing.
- Explain why you'll be great in the role, based on what they want. Don't repeat your resume by simply listing past experiences or skills. Instead, write about how you will excel at the main job duties because of X and Y past experience. (Ex. "I am an avid nature photographer and could set up permanent photo points to document your restoration projects."). Highlight accomplishments and what they meant to you ("I was proud of my team which surveyed more miles than any other group")
- Add intro + conclusion. Make sure the writing shows your personality and enthusiasm for this position. It should convince the employer that they must interview you to learn more, because you're obviously a good match for this job.
- Add headers & proofread. Address your letter to a named individual; never use "to whom it may concern." Break any long paragraphs into two. Spend the time to get it right and have ZERO grammatical or spelling errors.

## III. Once you have a draft...

- **Ask yourself**, could I use this same cover letter to apply to several jobs? If so, then it's not tailored nor specific enough. Rewrite the letter for each job application, so that it shows that you understand the duties of this specific position, and that you will excel in those duties based on your previous experience.
- **Read it aloud and have a friend read it. A small error in grammar or spelling can cost you the job**, so spend the time to get it right!
- Use active voice and strong verbs. ("I adapted my experience from field sampling class to develop a better survey technique," instead of "my experience from field sampling classes was used to develop a better survey technique.")
- **Edit to remove all wordy phrases** such as "in order to." Make every word count.
- **PRO TIP** – save your cover letter and resume in one .pdf document. Your cover letter should be one page and 3-5 paragraphs.

## IV. For ideas, review the following outline (pg. 2) and example cover letters (pgs. 3-8)

## EXAMPLE OUTLINE

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Your Name  
 Address  
 City, State, ZIP  
 Month, Day, Year

Employer Name  
 Position Title  
 Organization  
 Street Address  
 City, State, ZIP

Dear Mr/Ms/Dr \_\_\_\_\_, or "Hiring Team at (employer)",

### First Paragraph: Who am I and Why am I Writing?

- Introduce yourself and why you are writing. This can be like your summary statement from your resume.
- Share if you have any connection to the employer, such as knowing someone who works there, a previous collaboration, or a personal story such as frequent visits to the place.
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the organization by mentioning how your skills and experience match the position/organization interests. This will give the employer a preview of the rest of your letter.
- Communicate your enthusiasm about the position and the opportunity to apply

### Second & Third paragraphs: Why Should You Hire Me?

- Mention specific qualifications listed in the job posting and explain how you meet those qualifications, whether through work, volunteer, academic, or personal experience. Remember that you can show this with transferable skills you've gained even from unrelated positions (ex. "I would be meticulous in data collection and cleaning, given my experience managing inventory for Albertsons grocery for the past year.")
- Be specific about your qualifications and skills. Describe how you gained important skills and provide examples of when you have used them in a related position.
- Do not (!) simply restate your resume by listing your past experiences and skills. You instead need to prove that you'll excel at X and Y job duties given your past experiences.
- Explain how you would fit into the position and organization. Be as specific as possible so you demonstrate your knowledge of the job/organization and indicate your respect for the work/organization. ("As an avid hiker in Oregon, I appreciate ODFW's management of \_\_\_\_\_, and I would be eager to contribute to the mission of \_\_\_\_\_")

### Closing Paragraph: Summary & My Next Step

- In one sentence, summarize why you make an excellent candidate for the position.
- In one sentence, explain how this job will advance you towards your career goals.
- Express your interest in further discussing your background and the position, and state your plan to contact them ("I will email you next week to answer any questions you may have; in the meantime, you may reach me at 999-9999"). Always follow-up as you said you would.
- Thank the reader for their time and consideration.

Sincerely/Best Regards/Warmly,

Your Name

(resume enclosed)

## EXAMPLE 1 – relates to position

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Amanda Kino  
University Boulevard  
Corvallis OR 97331

Sandy Van Le  
State Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Agency OR 99999

September 26, 2021

RE: Stream Surveyor position, Hines Oregon

Dear Ms. Van Le,

The professional background, experience and skills listed in your advertisement are only the beginning of what I can bring to this position and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). While my resume shows previous experience integrating private lands access with effective data collection (Stream Surveyor, Ecotrust Inc., Summer 2018) it does not fully reflect the role I served on our survey crew. My crew preferred to have me make all initial landowner contacts because 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 as a Stream Surveyor with ODFW in Hines, Oregon.

Another reason I am the best person for this position is that I grew up in Hines. I can relate especially well to local private landowners, including ranch-owners, because I lived in the Hines 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 Malheur basin thus am familiar with the landmarks, landscape and habitat.

I am interested in working for ODFW as a stream surveyor in Hines because of the type of data you are collecting and the positive effect this data can have on maintaining native desert fish species. I recently read your report “Stream Habitat Data from Southeastern Oregon 2017”. I was surprised to see the limited amount of habitat occupied by redband trout 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 fish and look forward to returning home to work with “neighbors”.

I plan to be in Hines during Spring Break, March 10-15. I will call you early next week to see if you have additional questions about my application and to see if we can meet while I am at home. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda Kino  
(resume enclosed)

## EXAMPLE 2 – career changer

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Casey Patel  
Address  
Phone

November 10, 2020

Departmental Administration - ONE USDA  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Nolan Sizel,

I am writing to express my interest in the Student Trainee in Biological Science position. I am currently a junior E-campus student at Oregon State University majoring in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences. As a fisheries and wildlife student, I would love the opportunity to be a part of the USDA's mission to effectively manage, preserve and conserve our countries natural resources for the benefit of all Americans.

I am not a typical college student and therefore not a typical applicant. I have returned to college after several years in the work force as a nurse. Many years of experience in the nursing field give me some substantial advantages. I am well adapted to working under high pressure situations as a part of a multidisciplinary team. I have experience with inventory of biological and chemical materials and although the materials may be slightly different in the medical field the techniques are the same. A major part of nursing is obtaining, recording, and collecting measurements and samples. I can keep a neatly organized records like no other.

Along with the skills I have learned as a nurse I have gained invaluable knowledge as a student. I have demonstrated the ability to implement scientific inquiry while designing a field study to observe wading birds and waterfowl feeding behavior in relationship to man-made infrastructure as a part of my coursework. I also have experience conveying scientific information as I presented a talk on ocean acidification to a small group of people who were not in the scientific field.

I have a passion for community outreach and education related to wildlife which led me to volunteer as a docent at Pittsburgh Zoo. During my time at the zoo, I was able to sharpen my skills as a leader and public speaker through managing the zoo teen day program and giving educational demonstrations to zoo visitors. Not much excites me more than inspiring even one youth to get involved in conservation.

My passion for nature has led me to this career change and that passion along with a strong work ethic and an eagerness to be involved in the advancement of conservation make me a great addition to your team. I would love the opportunity to discuss my experiences and attributes with you further. I plan to follow up with you next week to ensure your receipt of my resume. I thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Casey Patel

### EXAMPLE 3 – needs some work

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**Jane Doe**

address  
email, phone

March 10, 2020

Jose Biologist  
USFWS  
Hawaiian National Marine Reserve  
Hilo, HI 96720

Dear Mr. Jose Biologist,

I am writing to express my interest in the Sea turtle/ Biological intern position. As a senior student in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences at Oregon State University I am very interested in enhancing my knowledge and gaining unique hands-on experience studying marine ecology. I would be eager to apply the skills I've gained in the classroom and at the Hatfield Marine Science Center (HSMC) Visitor Center to excel in the duties of this position.

I have had a variety of experiences in ecology both in the field and in the classroom. During my time at Oregon State University, I have taken many ecology and biology classes that have introduced me to a broad spectrum of ecological topics including community ecology, biodiversity, conservation, and population dynamics. The many facets of ecology intrigue me and encouraged me to get my hands dirty (quite literally in some cases) and pursue opportunities doing fieldwork and volunteering at HSMC. I've had the opportunity to work and conduct research in intertidal zones, estuaries, mudflats, at a wildlife refuge, and even 80 feet up in a tree while lugging a chainsaw. All of these unique and challenging experiences allotted me a diverse range of skills related to research. I also dedicated time volunteering at HMSC where I learned a great deal about the inter-workings of marine science research, natural history of local species, and how to interact with and educate the public in a scientific setting.

I am an extremely hard-working person with strong leadership skills. I feel, given the opportunity, that my skill set, background knowledge, and positive and friendly personality will allow me to contribute to your mission to save the sea turtles. I look forward to speaking with you further and I thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe

This cover letter needs some work. Here's why...

Notice how the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph here reiterates the resume and does NOT directly mention any duties from the intern position. This is a problem. This letter needs to be rewritten with the focus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph being the main duties of the internship position, with Jane then explaining how her past experiences at HMSC will make him excel at those duties.

Similarly, the closing paragraph is general and does not address the position duties. The mission of "saving the sea turtles" is too broad and simplistic – I'm sure their mission statement is much more specific.

This letter doesn't demonstrate that Jane understands the details and duties of the internship position. And, the letter is general enough that it could be used in several different applications. As is, this letter wouldn't get Jane an interview.

## EXAMPLE 4 – shares stories

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Trey Akwabo  
Street, Town, State  
Phone Email

July 22, 2020

The Virginia Aquarium Research and Conservation Division  
ATTN: Volunteer Resources Office-Intern Applicant  
Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center  
717 General Booth Blvd.  
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

To The Virginia Aquarium Research and Conservation Division:

I recently learned that the marine stranding team at the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center is seeking a highly motivated and dynamic person with a strong nose and stomach; while this is not for everyone, it is the perfect position for me! I am specializing in marine wildlife conservation at Oregon State University, and I am seeking to receive college credit for this internship as part of my graduation requirements. I am inquiring about this opportunity at the Virginia Aquarium because I feel that the Research and Conservation Division would be a good fit for my skillset in marine biology, my eagerness to learn, and my commitment to marine conservation.

I am a responsible 28-year old with more life experience than most. The most recent experience was my three-year deployment in Okinawa, Japan. In my free time, I became open water certified and dove the beautiful waters of the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea. Not everyone can say they have had the pleasure of swimming with lionfish, sea snakes, and sea turtles while listening to humpback whales sing to each other! My experience overseas presented me with opportunities to conquer diverse challenges, such as adjusting to cultural differences and overcoming a language barrier. It also provided me the opportunity to look at conservation of marine life from another culture's perspective.

My experience working in an assisted living home has provided me the necessary skills to respond quickly in emergency situations. I am trained to handle high volumes of tasks simultaneously while remaining organized. My experience as a supervisor has allowed me to lead individuals toward excelling in their positions. I am always looking to improve my skills while using my knowledge to help others. I work well in groups as well as independently.

My education experiences coupled with my work experiences make me well rounded and suited for this position. I look forward to speaking with you to discuss my qualifications for the internship with Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center. Thank you for your time in reviewing my application and your consideration in assessing my ability to excel as part of the marine stranding team.

Regards,

Trey Akwabo

## EXAMPLE 5 – career changer

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Kam Schotman  
Street, City, State, Zip  
email | phone

May 14, 2021

Washington Fish and Wildlife Region 4 – North Puget Sound  
16018 Mill Creek Boulevard  
Mill Creek, WA. 98012-1541

Dear Mr. Biles,

I am writing to express my great interest in the recent job posting for the position of Fish and Wildlife Biologist 2 through the North Bend WDFW Habitat Program. As a senior finishing up my undergraduate degree in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences at Oregon State University, and with my experience in habitat restoration, I believe I am an excellent candidate for this position. The values of the WDFW, which emphasize the importance of professionalism, accountability, empathy, integrity, and respect, are ones that I closely follow in my own career development as both a highly motivated individual and a solid team member. I have an immense passion and respect for our natural environment and possess the skills and knowledge that would benefit the WDFW goals of improving resource management and conservation while working closely with landowners and partner agencies.

Although I have a myriad of work experiences, from teaching, to arboristry, to working as the lead cook in a fast-paced restaurant, my most relevant skills are related to riparian restoration and fish and wildlife surveys that I obtained working for our local watershed. It took two years of having my own preschool classroom to learn that I am truly the happiest out in the woods or waist deep in a stream. And even though switching my majors set me back a few years for obtaining my BS, I believe it speaks to my determination and dedication to finding a fulfilling career in the field of natural resources. In addition to my restoration experience, I have a strong educational background in ecology, watershed processes, and statistics, including interpreting data and translating results in lab write-ups. I have also had the opportunity to conduct salmon and bird surveys, which has taught me valuable skills in patience, positioning, and self-management, as well as furthering my appreciation for our native wildlife.

My past positions in customer service and as a teacher taught me important skills for working and effectively communicating with the public, through both spoken and written form. It also afforded many opportunities to exercise problem-solving skills and learn to work under immense pressure (you try coordinating an impromptu fire drill with 14 toddlers!). Even though I chose a completely different path for myself, I still believe these experiences helped me develop the strong work ethic that I exhibit today. And because of this variety of work experience, I meet your required qualifications for the position, as well as offer the additional perks of having a true passion for wildlife, strong ambition, and a pleasant personality.

Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Kam Schotman

## EXAMPLE 6 – shows personality

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Maria Sanchez  
Street  
Town, State, Zip

May 11, 2020

Conservancy South Florida  
Street  
Town, State, Zip

To the Hiring Team at Conservancy South Florida,

My name is Maria and I am writing to express my deep interest in a position as a Guest Experience Naturalist with Conservancy of South Florida – a position for which I am an excellent candidate. First, the core values of your organization – protecting Florida’s natural beauty and wildlife habitat -- match closely to those of my own, which I believe is pertinent to having a happy and successful career. Second, the job duties discussed in the job posting will utilize my knowledge, skills and abilities while simultaneously allowing me to do what I love – which is to work with nature and wildlife and to educate people about it. Finally, a position at your organization will allow me to expand my knowledge of the natural world – and knowledge is something that I love and I strive to increase every day.

So what exactly do I possess that would make me the perfect fit? Well, first and foremost, I believe my greatest asset is my personality. An ability to engage people and entertain, to be able to diffuse tense situations with humor, to be capable of relating to people young and old and make them feel at ease - now *that* is something that you either have or you don’t. And I have it! Aside from that, I am majoring in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences at Oregon State University, and thus have strong background knowledge of natural resources, something that is important to the position. My previous classes in community ecology, plant systematics, and park management have all prepared me for the duties of this Naturalist position. This position would advance me towards my career goal of working for Florida State Parks in wildlife biology and community outreach.

Additionally, I have several years of customer service experience in both office and retail settings, where I gained proficiency in communication, teamwork, problem solving and leadership. Here’s an example: a previous employer allowed me to take control of our marketing designs, which had been lacking at the time, and gave me free reign (within 3 months of employment) to do a complete overhaul of our marketing material. The new marketing materials led to greater attendance at our events than in previous years.

I’m very excited to meet to discuss my candidacy further with you, and I sincerely appreciate the time you took to read this letter. Please refer to my resume for a complete outline of my qualifications for this position. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Maria Sanchez  
(resume enclosed)

