

# STEM Career Interviews

*School Leadership in Urban Runoff Reduction Project*

*"To do great things  
you must keep on  
striving to improve.*

*It is when we  
become complacent  
and accept the work  
as "good enough"  
that we fail  
ourselves."*

*-Chris Guy*



*Introducing...*

## **Chris Guy**

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist**

Meet Chris Guy. He is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist. Originally from Philadelphia, Chris moved to Maryland in 2001. He spends his time working on conservation and habitat restoration issues in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Born and raised in Philadelphia, Chris and his three brothers were always reminded about the importance of receiving a good education. His father was a truck driver who never went to high school and his mother was a secretary, who never went to college. Even though his parents did not model the example of continuing education beyond the required, Chris credits this constant message and support as the motivation that has led him to his professional success today.

Chris received a Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology and Environmental Science with a minor in Chemistry from Millersville University, in Lancaster Pennsylvania. He then continued his education later to receive a Master's of Science in Marine biology and Biochemistry from the University of Delaware.

“As a child, I used to play in the riparian buffer that ran between the highway and the industrial park. It was a narrow strip only a few hundred meters wide and about 3 miles long. Although small it had wildlife including deer and occasional pheasant. The stream had fish in it. I always wondered how they got there. We would vacation at the New Jersey beaches and I would see fish caught on the piers and along the beach and they fascinated me. We would camp in the state parks and I would wander in the streams and attend the environmental education programs at the park. To me, these were as foreign and exotic of creatures as tigers and lions in the zoo, yet here they were in the wild not a cage.” Chris decided to major in marine biology, due to his love for the ocean and his experiences from his family vacations at the beach. Chris chooses to jump at every opportunity that will help keep his job “fresh and exciting” after nearly 30 years.

“I have moved from a field biologist to a supervising biologist. While I still do some field work, I spend most of my time supporting my team in making sure they have the resources they need to be in the field. The remainder of my time is spent mentoring younger people in this field. This has become my favorite part of the job. The enthusiasm and joy that young people bring to this career always rekindles my passion for what I do.”

Growing up in a working-class neighborhood without the support or mentorship of people who went to college proved to be tough for Chris. His parents could not afford to save any money for their four boys to go to college. His parents were unknowledgeable on how to apply or what college entails. Only a few kids in Chris's neighborhood went to college. On top of this, Chris did not care for school nor did he have a desire to go to college.

“It is only through the constant and persistent expectation of my parents that I maintain good grades in school and that I try college that I ended up in college. Because I did not work hard in school, I was not as prepared for college as I would have liked. I really struggled my first two years. This is where the second lesson from my parents, ‘work hard’ helped me. While many of my friends would be at parties on a Friday or Saturday night, I could be found in the library struggling with the concepts of Calculus and Physics. My poor attitude toward school in elementary and high school had cost me, and it took me two years to learn how to study. Finally in my third year I began to catch on and get straight A's. Truly to this day, I can say that persistence and hard work paid off.”

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When Chris finished undergraduate school, he did not want to go to graduate school to further his education. He believed that working was more “palatable”. Chris had already run up a lot of student debt and still did not enjoy going to school. This ended up being problematic because wildlife biology is a field where, without an advanced degree you can easily float around from temporary job to temporary job, with the possibilities of being unemployed for a while.

After 2 years, Chris landed a job as an environmental consultant and then as a temporary biologist with U.S. Fish and Wildlife. While in the temporary job with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chris began to get his graduate degree which ultimately led to a full time job and the career he has today.

Although Chris credits this experience as what has shaped him into the person he is today, he goes on to explain, “It also was a long evolutionary process, and had costs. I did not receive my Master’s degree until I was in my 30’s and I spent so much time in school and between jobs that I did not have much of a social life. Because of this, I started my career a little later than most, got married, and had kids a little later than most. Ultimately, It has helped me to define work/life balance and appreciate both my career and my family.”

Working to restore the Chesapeake Bay has been a noble and rewarding effort for Chris. “Civil Service often gets dismissed as bureaucratic with a lack of understanding and empathy for the community that we serve. It does not have to be that way. I work hard every day to stay connected to the communities I serve. I never forget that at the end of the day, my job is to serve the American People. Government is a large bureaucracy, but it also has a lot more resources to bring to the communities it serves. When done right, bringing the right resources to the Chesapeake Bay community is the most rewarding thing I can do. I say this not only from the job, but as someone who consciously chose to move to the Chesapeake Bay area and has been a part of this community for almost 20 years. I expect that I will continue to work on this goal for the remainder of my career and into retirement.”

When Chris was a child his mother always said “when you are asked to do a job, always do a little extra, that way you will always be asked back”. Chris has interpreted this in ways that has had different meanings over the years.

“When I was a young teenager, I took this quote literally, and would do a bit more. Later I realized it meant that if you care about the work you do, you will always want to do a little more and be a little better; improve and do better each time. To do great things you must keep on striving to improve. It is when we become complacent and accept the work as “good enough” that we fail ourselves. Please remember as you start your career to do a little extra, celebrate your success, while looking for ways to make it better. Never stop analyzing what you could have done better. Have fun and enjoy the ride.”