

Supplemental information for CSTWS letter to Trudeau

Jess Lang, M.Sc.

My situation:

Students and recent graduates that are just beginning their careers are currently facing the most uncertain job market since the Great Depression. Like many other recent graduates in the wildlife, natural resources and environmental sciences field, I recently lost my job as a result of COVID-19. In early March 2020, I had been offered a position as a wildlife technician for a consulting agency, where my primary responsibilities were to conduct wildlife and avian species surveys in Northern Canada. This position required me to relocate to a different province, which I happily accepted as it meant that I would begin a career in my dream job. However, shortly after arriving and beginning work, the impacts of COVID-19 became immediately apparent. Within a matter of days, the company I worked for was forced to temporarily cancel our travel plans. In efforts to protect communities in northern Canada against the spread of COVID, I wholeheartedly supported this decision to restrict travel throughout Canada and postpone our field season. However, as a result of being unable to travel to conduct the necessary fieldwork associated with my job, I was quickly laid off after only a few days and was forced to move back home to Montréal.

Since then, I have been actively searching for a position in a similar field of interest, and have also applied to several other jobs in agriculture to help support the province of Quebec during these difficult and unprecedented times. The environmental and wildlife job market has always been competitive, with high levels of job insecurity, but the added pressures of unemployment across the country have made for a truly discouraging situation. Like many others, I have not found a job after over two months of searching. I continue to check job banks and other relevant websites daily, and while there are many job opportunities, there have been very few available positions in the wildlife and environmental sector for young professionals. The transition period between school and employment marks a critical point in each of our careers, however, the given circumstances have made it extremely difficult to acquire the skills we need for future employment.

The immediate relief offered by the government in the form of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) has provided excellent temporary relief for students and recent graduates. However, there is still concern over what will happen in the next year and beyond. It is my growing concern that the longer we go without being able to find a job in our field, the harder it will be to find a job at a later date. I believe that additional job opportunities/internships, funding for tuition and professional development training, and funding for research assistantships will provide the best aid to students and recent graduates in the current situation.

Proposed Solutions:

Additional job opportunities and internships: Although many organizations, such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada, offer summer internships to help with this transition period, these opportunities have not only been indefinitely postponed but are often only available to recent graduates (i.e. within the previous semester), meaning that I will soon no longer be eligible to benefit from these positions. In spite of the immediate government relief (CERB and CESB programs), the benefits that come from gaining valuable job experience through internships and employment opportunities have been temporarily lost for many of us. Creating new jobs, such as conservation opportunities in federal and provincial parks, term employment with Environment and Climate Change Canada, as well as additional opportunities through well-known conservation non-profit organizations (Canadian Wildlife Federation, Wildlife Preservation Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Bird Studies Canada, etc.) will allow many of us who have lost their jobs to find relief in the upcoming months.

Funding for tuition and professional development training: In addition to creating more job opportunities and internships, funding to assist students with their tuition this fall and to assist recent graduates with skills development training would provide a significant financial relief as we face many more months of uncertainty. In addition to seeking a job during this time, I have reached out to many individuals in the wildlife community to inquire about opportunities to gain valuable skills through online courses and professional development training opportunities. Several excellent courses have been recommended to me (such as those offered through the Centre for Wildlife Studies) during this period, however many of them cost more than \$500 USD and are therefore presently inaccessible to many young professionals, like myself, who have lost their job. The provision of small grants, similar to the Early Career Professional Development Travel Grant offered by The Manitoba Chapter of The Wildlife Society would allow many early-career professionals to have these opportunities partially subsidized or covered in order for us to build our professional portfolio until employment opportunities become more readily available again.

Funding for research assistantships: There are currently several opportunities for young professionals to receive wage subsidies as an incentive to hire recent graduates who work in the environmental sector (for example, the *Eco Canada Youth Employment in Natural Resources* and *Science Horizons Youth Internship* programs). However, many of these opportunities are contingent upon the positions being both full-time and permanent. Since many positions in wildlife, natural resources and environmental fields are seasonal or short term contracts, we are often unable to access these funding opportunities. Providing funding to wildlife and environmental professionals to hire students and recent graduates for short term contracts as research assistants or technicians would be beneficial to both parties. For example, I believe that many university professors would benefit from having a research assistant for several weeks this summer to perform tasks that can be completed remotely (i.e. assisting with data analysis, organization and management, sorting through remote trail camera photos, conducting literature reviews, etc.), yet there is often a lack of funding to afford the expense of

hiring an additional technician or assistant. Allowing individual professionals to apply for partial funding or additional subsidized grants to cover the stipend and salaries of a research assistant/ technician will not only open more job opportunities, but will also allow recent graduates and students to gain valuable experience and skills that are easily translatable to any future position.