

# Essential and Professional

## Being an Outdoor Environmental Employee

by Jillian Clemente

Outdoor professionals have always been essential. It just took a global pandemic for most to realize that fact.

With commutes changing from driving to an office to trudging downstairs to the computer, people are seeking to get outside in a safe and healthy way.

On the Schuylkill River Trail (SRT), managed by Schuylkill River Greenways, users of the Greater Philadelphia Area have more than doubled since Memorial Day. Compared to July 2019, trail usage has increased 68 percent in July 2020. One Board member said that the trail was as crowded on a steamy Tuesday afternoon in 2020 as a regular weekend would be in 2019.

Right now, the SRT is currently on its way to becoming a completely connected trail from Frackville, Pennsylvania, to Philadelphia. This is just one way that people on the eastern side of the state can feel and become more connected, especially in this time of social distancing.

The federal government is recognizing how important trails and outdoor access are now, too, reminding the people that the outdoors are essential and necessary. The Great American Outdoors Act is a bill that would send billions of dollars to the National Park Service's backlog of maintenance and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. As of August 2020, President Trump is expected to sign this bill into a law.

These rail trails are created for the people and maintained for the people. If animals had their way, basic foot paths would be all that is necessary. But people can walk or bike along these trails and socially distance properly, all while breathing in fresh air close to their homes.

With such an increase in people using the trail, there is also an increase in the types of people using the trail. With such an increase in diverse types of trail users — many inexperienced trail users and bikers are now flocking to trails — it is more necessary than ever to uphold professional standards within the outdoors community.

As a recent college graduate, I was aware that I would be interacting with the public often within the natural resources field. However, I did not recognize that professionalism exists and is necessary when outdoors. Being professional is not limited to those professions with suits and ties; it is needed, especially for those in the younger age bracket such as myself.

1. While on the job, it's important to remember you're at a job. Even if your office is a mountain, it's still your workplace, and it's necessary to treat it as such.
2. Wear branded clothing as often as possible, even if it's a T-shirt and nice pants.
3. Speaking of pants, wear those on any conference video calls. No one needs to see your cartoon pajama pants, and, if they do, your colleagues will not forget.
4. When in that branded clothing, remember what organization you're representing, even if you're off the clock.
5. Set an example of how to act. While leading a walk, don't just tell visitors to pick up trash — do it yourself and remind others to do the same. While on video calls, treat them as important as an in-person meeting, even if they are not as formal.
6. Try to not compromise professionalism in lieu of dealing with the elements. Invest in lightweight khaki pants for warm weather and flannel-lined pants for wintertime. At outdoor events, I wear thin olive pants and SRG-branded T-shirts for the summertime.
7. It's OK to be passionate and excited about working outside with others. Take your work seriously but still have fun with it. Let your personality shine.
8. Some visitors may want to tell you their life stories. Don't feel obligated to tell yours. Too many visitors told me about foreign food consumed that led to unhappy endings or life-threatening illnesses. I'm glad they felt comfortable sharing, but I don't need to reciprocate.
9. When telling your own life story on the internet, please keep it private, watch what you're tagged

in, and remember that your social media presence truly does affect the hiring process.

10. Join a professional society. PRPS is a good one for sure.

These professional society tips are not just a plug for PRPS. Joining and being active is key for building relationships within your field, just as it's important for trail users to volunteer and give back. I maintained a few memberships in college to student societies to get a taste for each type of profession. This helped me narrow down my future career plans. Since then, I maintain memberships further than the yearly fees.

The main point of these societies is to build community, so don't be afraid to make the first step to building that. Continue to read the newsletter, but take a step further. Intentionally email people you met at a conference once a month to check in and make sure they are happy and healthy. If not, reach out a helping hand. Keep attending conferences, even if they're virtual. These relationships are key when job searching, but, more importantly, when a problem arises, you can lean on the knowledge and wisdom of a seasoned worker. If not for excellent mentors within my university doors and outside of them, I would not be on the right path.

### About the Author

Jillian Clemente is the AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer working with Schuylkill River Greenways as the sustainability coordinator to alleviate poverty and increase capacity through several projects in the Greater Philadelphia area. She has a B.S. in wildlife and fisheries management and a B.S.J. in journalism from West Virginia University (2019), and resides in Berks County, Pennsylvania, where she enjoys shooting archery, writing and crafting.



Left: Scene shot of the Schuylkill River from Jillian Clemente's kayak.



Right: Jillian Clemente demonstrates in this photo a properly branded shirt of AmeriCorps VISTA and nice pants, an appropriate way to dress for a bike ride with her boss to view parts of the Schuylkill River Trail.