



FOREST BOOTS

In a series of articles, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is recognizing employees for the important work they do and highlighting a variety of U.S. Forest Service careers.



C.J. Woodard, Wildlife Biologist and Natural Resources Team Lead Spring Mountains National Recreation Area

“How did I get started in wildlife biology?” C.J. Woodard grins as he reflects on the question and his career with the U.S. Forest Service.

“I guess it goes all the way back to my childhood. I’m a country boy from Mississippi. I spent my summers feeding pigs, herding cattle, and fishing on my grandparents’ farm, so I’ve always loved animals!”



That love soon led to C.J. to his first job. When he was 16, he began working in catfish genetics for the Agricultural Research Service, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). While there, a researcher told C.J. about the USDA/1890 National Scholars, which is a federal scholarship program that promotes minorities studying agriculture and natural resources. “It sounded like a great opportunity, so I applied!” he said.

C.J. studied Natural Resources and Environmental Science at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama and the University of Florida in Gainesville. His program helped him try a variety of natural resource jobs, including recreation, botany, range management, wildlife, timber, and wildland firefighting. “I decided to focus on wildlife management because it was meaningful to me, and I thought I could make an impact,” he said.

Through the USDA/1890 National Scholars Program, C.J. was converted to a permanent full-time job after graduation in 2008. He served as a Wildlife Biologist on the Nebraska National Forest, stationed in Wall, South Dakota. There he had the most rewarding experience of his career.

“I was part of a team that helped protect black-footed ferrets and prairie dogs from an outbreak of sylvatic plague,” said C.J. It’s a fatal bacterial infection

related to bubonic plague, and likewise is transmitted through flea bites. Sylvatic plague affects several species of wild mammals, including black-footed ferrets and their primary prey, prairie dogs. The outbreak reduced the local prairie dog population from about 45,000 acres to 11,000 in just one year.

In 2014, C.J. took a temporary assignment on the Humboldt-Mountains National Recreation Area (SMNRA) in Las Vegas. The temporary assignment as the SMNRA Wildlife Biologist and Natural Resources Team Lead turned into a permanent job later that year.

“My team manages about \$3 million in natural resource projects. These projects address program areas such as wildlife, botanical, geographic

information systems (GIS), and vegetation management,” said C.J.

C.J. feels proud that the work he does makes a difference to people as well as animals. He’s always happy to share his experiences and advise others about careers in wildlife biology. “Remember that managing wildlife is 90 percent people and 10 percent wildlife,” he said. “You need help from your coworkers and support from the public to accomplish your work goals.”



From the office to the field, boots symbolize the work the U.S. Forest Service employees do caring for the land...

C.J. has boots for fieldwork, and he likes to tell the story of the first pair he had...

“When I was wrapping up my work in South Dakota, I had to ford the Cheyenne River. Of course my boots were soaked, so I hung them out to dry. A rainstorm soaked them again, so they never really had a chance to dry out. Soon after my wife and I had to pack for our move to Nevada, and I guess my boots were still wet when the movers boxed them up. While unpacking, my wife found them and threw them out, because they were covered in mold and smelled like rotten fish. I had to buy new boots for the field season that year. Those were my first pair of work boots and I loved them. Man, I miss those boots!”