

Transcript of Shelly Denny, Biologist

The coolest part about my job is... I get to play, and I get paid for it!

I've been hired by the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources as the biologist and research coordinator for the Five First Nations in Cape Breton.

So my job is a bit different. I do active research on the Bras d'Or Lakes on a food social ceremonial species and some of the environmental issues we have here. I am also an educator; I work with, kind of, the stewardship approaches and how we can help our environment and how we can help some of the issues we have here in the Bras d'Or.

So my field work varies year to year. This year I am working a lot with the American Eel in the Bras d'Or. Right now we don't have any type of biological information. The only information that we do have is from our elders and our resource users which is very helpful in how we conduct our research.

A typical day in my job is really not typical at all; it depends on the time of year. Most of my field work is done in the spring, summer and fall. So something in that time of year would be, for eels, would be going out in the morning, driving maybe an hour or an hour and a half to check my gear to see if there are eels. If we get eels, great. We take them back to the lab and that's another hour or two, depending on how many eels we have to process. So, then my day really isn't over because I still have to enter the data and make sure all my numbers are in check.

The lab component of my job is probably the one I least like. It involves standing for long periods of time on your feet. It's making sure your instruments are calibrated. You have to make sure your scale has been on for a certain amount of time before you can use it, making sure you don't screw up in recording of the numbers and that is often hard to do because once you take something off a scale and put it back, it often doesn't give you the same measurement.

A lot of the time is spent analyzing data and that's a really fun part because you can see what everything means. You get to let the numbers talk to you and, you know, and once you get to that point, you're able to tell people what you learned and what you found out to put in a report, and also to, you know, make it into a useable friendly form. You don't want everything to be just for scientists; you want, you know, people on the ground to know what you're doing and what it means.

If you have traits such as an interest in the environment, interest in reading and learning—continuous learning I guess would be the word—technology and general curiosity, I think, you know, a career in biology might be for you.

I would say that if you are considering a career path—in any type of career, not just biology—just to go with what you love. I think a lot of people get trapped in trying to find a career where there is a lot of money or, you know, they're not really interested—I think interest is a big key into your happiness and in your career for sure; so, go with what you love.