

Habits and Practices of Consistently High-performing Wildlife Professionals

Decker et al. ([2019](#), [2020](#)) identified 30 categories of habits and practices that contribute to reasoning and judgment of consistently high-performing staff of fish and wildlife agencies. This checklist of the habits and practices has been prepared for your quick reference. Details about each habit or practice can be found by hovering over the bold text associated with each below.

Critically Inquisitive and Continuously Learning
1. Be constructively critical/skeptical: Question assumptions, data, analyses or conclusions.
2. Be reflective: Apply a self-critical perspective and routinely evaluate performance for the purpose of adapting and improving.
3. Be open-minded: Take a fresh look at a situation and search for factors that may have been missed in the past.
4. Be flexible: Reserve the option to change one’s mind (and accept others doing so) if new evidence or understanding of a situation indicates that is prudent.
5. Be adaptive: Approach your work from the perspective of learning while doing; think of management as an experiment and take every opportunity to assess and learn from experience.
6. Be inquisitive/curious: Learn as much as possible about an issue in order to understand how the social-ecological system in which the management opportunity or problem is embedded works and to identify probable impacts of management; ask lots of “how” and “why”-type questions and seek new evidence to support (or refute) existing perceptions.
Multi-level, Integrative Systems Thinking
7. Be holistic and think comprehensively: See the whole situation by studying its parts, understanding how they fit together and identifying what’s missing. Every specific situation is embedded in a larger context that either affects or is affected by management actions at any level.
8. Be inclusive: Seek information about and try to include any primary and secondary stakeholders in a management decision or action; attempt to secure their input and involvement.
9. Be creative, divergent, and imaginative: Look for opportunities to create entirely new solutions to a problem without undue concern about diverging from conventional practice.

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Self-disciplined
10. Be scientific: Approach technical assessments by means of scientific methods and principles; evaluate the methods (data collection and analysis) used in research designed to address an issue to ensure the conclusions or recommendations are sound.
11. Be logical: Seek general understanding of a problem in a way that shows clear, sound reasoning and is obviously sensible to others under the circumstances.
12. Be systematic: Approach specific technical assessments following a pre-determined plan in a methodical manner (e.g., structured decision making), with clear focus on stated objectives.
13. Be analytical: Examine problems and opportunities carefully by taking an organized, thoughtful, and unbiased approach that helps describe components of complex issues and their connections.
14. Be economical and efficient: Work in a well-organized and competent way that gets intended results using no more funding, time, social capital and other resources than is necessary.
15. Be impartial and objective: Avoid being influenced by your personal beliefs or privileging particular stakeholders when doing so results in being unfair to others or undesirable effects on the resource.
16. Be ethical: Attend to at least two types of ethical situations: (a) operate in a morally good or correct manner that avoids or minimizes harm to people, the resource or the environment generally; (b) understand and consider disparate ethical positions held by stakeholders regarding a management issue.
17. Be patient: Endure delays and problems without becoming overly annoyed or anxious, and continue working on a project with a positive attitude despite difficulties encountered.
Balanced Approach
18. Be pragmatic: Operate in a sensible, realistic way that considers both practical and theoretical perspectives.
19. Be proactive and strategic: Anticipate and be ready to control a situation rather than just respond to it and do so in a way that contributes to the achievement of long-term or overall aims and interests.
20. Be purposeful: Orient toward achievement of established objectives (results- or outcomes-oriented); be sensitive to, but not mired in process (means).
21. Be politically aware: Build a clear understanding of and consider internal and external political ramifications of alternative choices, without allowing those realities to reduce integrity of the biological/ecological, social, and ethical assessments conducted to serve decision making.
22. Be adaptable: Make or accommodate change in process, protocol or program as needed to adapt to changing circumstances.

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Interactions with Others
23. <i>Be attentive and listen actively:</i> Relate to stakeholders, co-workers and partners as they share their thoughts; listen to unsolicited input, whether it comes from familiar or novel sources or represents views consistent or inconsistent with agency policy, professional convention or one’s own beliefs.
24. <i>Be collaborative:</i> Seek common ground; work in teams, populated with individuals from within and outside the agency who are willing to combine their efforts to achieve shared conservation goals.
25. <i>Be humble and respectful:</i> Demonstrate politeness, deference and humility when working with others, thereby avoiding appearing self-important or better than others.
26. <i>Be transparent, truthful and honest:</i> Use open and candid communication, lacking obfuscation or deceit, and behaving in a way that demonstrates honesty.
27. <i>Be compassionate, selfless and empathetic:</i> Comprehend and genuinely identify with other people’s beliefs, attitudes, difficulties and circumstances; assist others to overcome their problems and don’t fear revealing your own vulnerability.
28. <i>Be appreciative and supportive:</i> Encourage and show gratitude for contributions to conservation made by others.
29. <i>Be passionate about your work:</i> Openly convey strong feelings (emotions and beliefs) about conservation generally and your work specifically; show courageousness and passion for your work but do so without intimidating others or being off-putting to those who are just as committed as you are.
30. <i>Be optimistic and positive:</i> Take a favorable view of events or conditions whenever possible and work in a way that expresses hope and confidence about the future.