



Erin in her survival suit surveying Washington's outer coast

**TYPE OF WORK**

I conduct boat-based surveys of Washington's inland and coastal marine waters collecting data on marbled murrelets, seabirds, and marine mammals.

Erin Parsons  
**Seabird and Marine Mammal Biologist**  
*Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife*



# Seabird and Marine Mammal Biologist



**TYPICAL DAY:** A typical day for me involves waking up before the sun, loading up with fellow teammates and heading to a predetermined launch point to put our 26-foot research vessel in the water. With first light, we head to our first survey location. With the naked eye and binoculars we are scanning for all seabirds and marine mammals we may encounter. Once a bird or mammal has been spotted, we call out what we have seen into our headsets, what they're doing, and how far away they are. The surveys are always fun because we never know what we are going to see each day.

## CAREER PATHWAY:

I began at a very young age with an insatiable interest in marine biology. I loved killer whales. I pursued a general biology undergraduate degree and began volunteering my summers with a nonprofit in British Columbia that monitored the northern resident killer whales. Over 6 summers, I moved into a supervisory role and was able to expand my skill set to all me to build report writing and statistical analysis skills, as well as learn the ropes of hiring and managing a team.



All smiles conducting inland water surveys from our vessel.

## IMPORTANT SKILLS

Working knowledge of Washington seabirds and their different plumages, marine mammal ID, vessel driving, data entry, bird handling, as well as strong communication and writing skills.

## EDUCATION

Bachelor's Degree

## SALARY RANGE

\$25,000 - \$50,000

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

I use a motorized boat, custom tracking software, GPS, wireless headsets, and marine radio. My favorite tool are binoculars - a simple but amazing tool that allows me to get a look at fast-moving animals at a distance.

"What I love the most is that I am outside every day observing my favorite animals. Being on the ocean conducting surveys, I never know what I'm going to see." - Erin Parsons