



## Meet The Team: Jason Newman

*Lots of the people who are covered in this profile series have worked with the National Park Service for years. Some started as volunteers while still in college; others planned a future with the Park Service as early as their high school or college years. This issue's team member breaks the rules: to his knowledge, he never visited a national park until he started working in one.*

While many people come into the National Park Service having planned their education and career track, Jason “Jay” Newman will readily admit that he arrived at the NPS “kind of by chance.” Jay is the new guy at the WASO offices Transportation Branch, and after only six months, he’s assembled quite a list of tasks.

“I came to the job through the Park level,” says Jay. “I was working at the Statue of Liberty (STLI) before I came to WASO. Interestingly, the only means of accessing that park

**Jason Newman now works with the WASO NPS transportation division in Washington, DC**



is through alternative transportation. It's kind of fitting that now I'm in the Transportation Branch here."

Jay very quickly found himself working with the Transportation Scholars Program (see this month's Project Profile) through the National Park Foundation. "I attended one Transportation Scholars meeting with Jim Evans, and from there I've been working with the program pretty much solo," says Jay. "I've just returned from a week in Colorado, working with this year's scholars during their orientation."

"I'm pretty excited about the Scholars program," Jay says. "You get a lot of great people who do great things in a short amount of time, and then move onto other opportunities in transportation, whether with the Park Service or in other areas of transportation."

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"I've been spending a lot of time diving into the Federal Lands Transportation Program, which guides all this, Jay said. "Things that relate to Alternative Transportation Program (ATP) and Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) projects. I'll be doing some project reviews, and also some closeout work on the Transit In Parks (TRIP) program because that's going to be ending."

"If you interviewed me six months from now, my job responsibilities may be a little different," Jay says.

Jay did not initially have a goal of working in transportation planning. "As an undergrad at the State University of New York (SUNY) Stony Brook, Jay started out as an Environmental Geo-Science Major. "I really thought that Geology and Geo-Science was where my passion was," says Jay. "And then I found out that I can't add, I can't do physics or calculus, and I realized that maybe this was not the best fit for me."

He ended up changing over to Political Science, and spent a semester in England studying Poli-Sci. "When I returned to the States, I realized if I stayed in Political Science, I wasn't going to be able to graduate in 4 years. A counselor pointed

out that I had a bunch of sociology courses, so I ended up graduating with a Sociology degree, with a minor in Environmental Studies. But I'm certainly not a sociologist."

Jay's next career turn was toward law school. "After graduating, I initially really wanted to go to law school. I took the LSATS and then decided this also isn't for me. I talked to a couple of lawyers, and they counseled me to really think about it before I committed to law school. I ended up not going that route, and went into planning instead."

That career turn occurred when a representative of the Federal Highway Administration spoke in one of Jay's graduate courses at SUNY Albany. "I ended up staying after class and talking with him a little about the agency," Jay said. "He suggested that we stay in touch, and that I contact him when I was ready to graduate. He wound up interviewing me for the FHWA two-year Professional Development Program."

Jay's initial placement was in the Michigan Division of FHWA, where he worked for two years doing developmental assignments, working with the DOT and the MPOs. "My permanent placement was with the Connecticut Division office," Jay said. "I was working with the DOTs and MPOs to see that they were meeting their requirements for the Federal Aid Highway Program. It was all pretty interesting."

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It was also great background for what I'm doing now with the NPS Transportation program," Jay added. "Those connections at Federal Highway have been useful in the new WASO job, because I feel comfortable calling someone at Federal Highway and asking them questions about how programs work together, without having to worry about the formalities of asking questions within another agency."

In 2008, Jay left Federal Highway to work in the private sector, doing commercial real estate project management. "I really enjoyed the work, but then the economy tanked, and I saw the writing on the wall. I knew I didn't want to be unemployed, so I started looking around."

On the USAjobs web site, Jay by chance saw a job posting for the Statue of Liberty. “It was a posting for a “community planner,” which is a sort of generic term that the government uses,” said Jay. “Now you’ve got to remember that I’m from Brooklyn, and somehow I had never been to the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island. You could throw a rock from the Verrazano Bridge and hit it, but I had never been to the Park. So I go and interview, take a tour of Ellis Island, and I get hired. It was a little bit of chance, a little bit of luck.”

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Jay was hired as a Park Planner, with the task of replacing the bridge at the backside of Ellis Island that connects Liberty State Park in New Jersey to Ellis Island. “The bridge is a connection to a land mass for operations and to keep costs down,” Jay explained. “It was a temporary bridge, and it needed to be replaced. I started going through the motions for replacement, but there was no money for a major rehab or new facility.

“So I wound up doing everything but what I was hired to do at the Park. I was involved with the safety committee, working with our fire management people; I did project management for specific projects at the park; I helped with the review of concessioner project plans and specifications. I became a jack-of-all-trades related to operations at the park level. It was great, but it was stressful, too.”

One of those quick assignments led to one of Jay’s best moments in working with the NPS. “I was given a Student Conservation Association (SCA) summer intern to help with some of the work I was doing at the park. Part of their responsibility was also to help set up a one-day cleanup event at the Statue of Liberty with a corporate sponsor. The both of us organized the event and it was a success. All these people showed up with their kids, and they wanted to do something good for the park. It was just a great day, and everyone did a fine job with cleaning and mulching.

I felt a real sense of pride to contribute to building a relationship with another group, and do something good for the

park. I thought that was it for me but then I was contacted two subsequent summers to set up similar events with the SCA, both worked out really well. I really enjoyed organizing the events and meeting new people.

A question often asked in these profiles is, 'What's the first National Park you visited, or the first time you remember being in a National Park?' For Jay, his first "official" visit to a National Park was his arrival at the interview for the Statue of Liberty job. But he also recalls that he learned to drive at Floyd Bennett Field, New York City's first municipal airport, now in the Gateway National Recreation Area. "Well, you could call it learning to drive," Jay said. "It was more like driving at 80 mph on the abandoned runways, before they were blocked for such joy riding. So technically, I was in a "park" before STLI."

"I grew up in New York City; we didn't go anywhere or do a lot of travel. City parks were the big thing for kids growing up there; it's a city experience," said Jay. "And it's interesting that I ended up going into urban planning, that those experiences shaped my interests. Those interests as a kid are amplified now that I'm an adult."

"Now I'm learning stuff every day, either about the national parks, or about other recreational opportunities that I didn't know about before. It's a good position to be in. I hope that while I'm employed with the NPS, I'll get a chance to see these places that I didn't get to see when I was a kid. For example, I'd love to see Yellowstone. I've seen the pictures, and I've read about it, but I've never been there."

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When asked about mentors at the Park Service and Federal Highway, Jay said that he's gotten lots of helpful advice from a lot of people.

"Good supervisors just tend to play the role of a mentor," Jay said. "Specifically, John Hnedak, my last supervisor at the Statue of Liberty, was someone who took the time to explain things to me, how things operated." (Hnedak was Deputy

Superintendent at STLI when Jay was there). “Based on his advice, I changed the way I did things at the park level, and I thought that was really beneficial. And I’d certainly have to say that Jim Evans is serving as a mentor here at the WASO office. I’ve only been here a few months, but he’s doing what he needs to do to bring me up to speed.”

Along with enjoying his work in the transportation field, Jay likes a good prank as much as the next guy. One he pulled as he was departing Federal Highway still gives him a smile. “I had all of these business cards, and I thought to myself, ‘What can I do with these cards other than just trash them?’

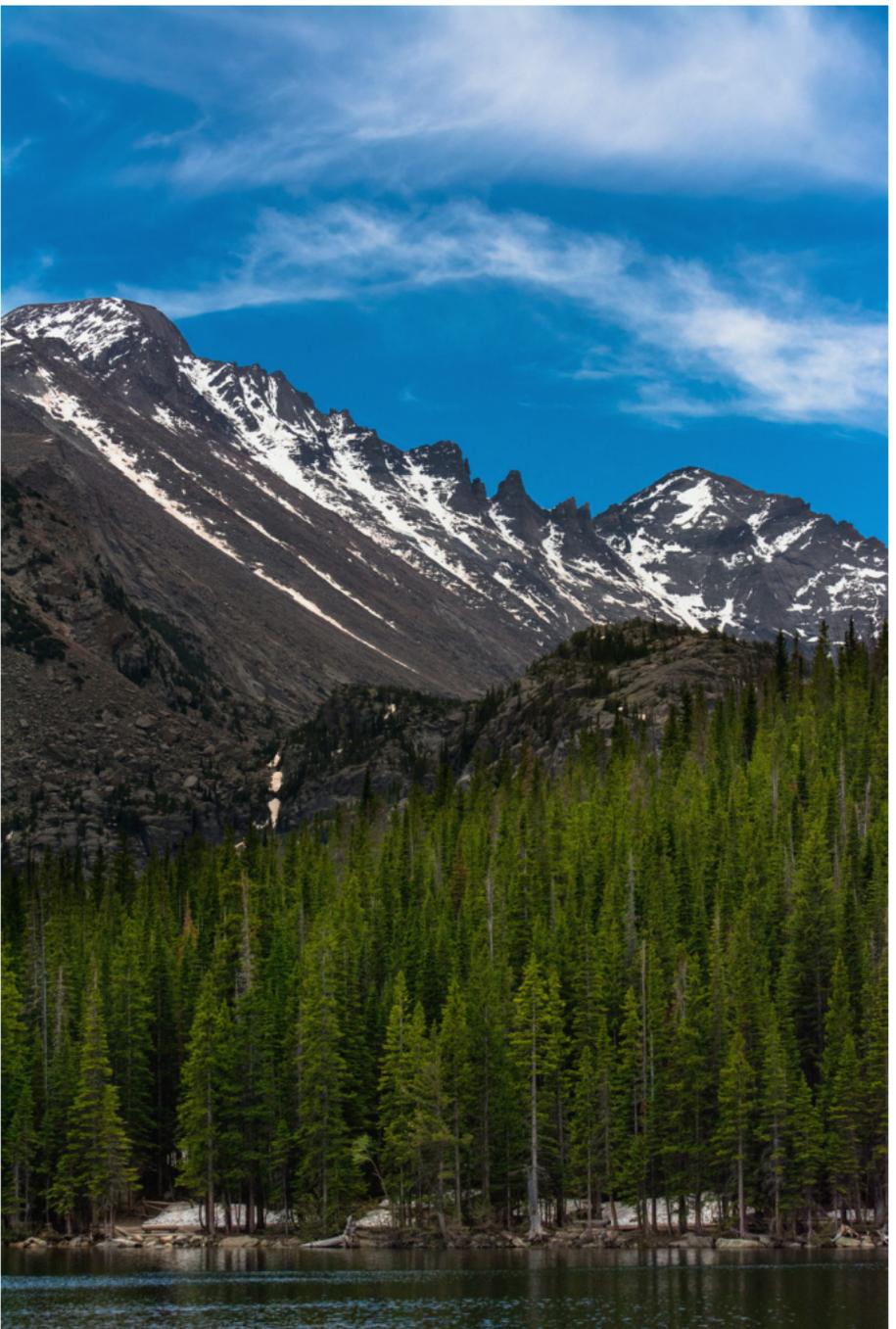
“One of my colleagues wasn’t in the office that day, and she had left her box of business cards out on her desk. So I took my business cards and inserted them in between her cards. You couldn’t really tell at a quick glance, because all the cards looked the same. I actually forgot about it, but she contacted me about six months later, and said ‘What the heck? I’m out at meetings, giving out my business cards, and every other card has your name on it!’ She said it was sometimes a good conversation starter, and I still think it was a pretty good prank.”

When he’s not at the WASO offices, Jay enjoys a number of other pursuits. “I think I have like 35 hobbies,” he says. “For example, I really like taking pictures. I don’t like to use the term ‘photography’ for my work, because it sounds a little pretentious. But I enjoy it.”

Jay picked up a high-end point-and-shoot camera, the Sony RX100, and describes it as “wonderful.” He also just recently added a Nikon 7100 to his photographic...er, picture-taking arsenal. He enjoys taking informal portraits, as well as macro shots of flowers.

Also since his arrival in DC Jay has gotten back into shooting pool. “I joined a weekly pool league, and picked up a decent cue,” he said.

Maybe Jay’s next career twist will take him on the road as a pool hustler. But right now he’d rather stick with transportation, and visiting some of those National Parks he’s been reading about for years.



The editorial staff has to disagree with Jay and call this example of his recent work "photography." Jay took this photo on a recent trip to Colorado to work with the 2013 Transportation Scholars group.

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