

Transcript of Maxine Westhead, Marine Biologist

The coolest part of my job is that I get to use science to protect the ocean!

Growing up, I always wanted to make a difference. I just think it's so important to have that element in my work that I can actually say I made a difference.

It's really important that we protect the earth that we live on. We are here for a short time and you know, we have the ability to do damage with the technologies we have.

My job really is to protect areas in the ocean.

I work with a lot of different people and it's essentially multi-disciplinary, so we put a lot of different pieces of a puzzle together. So, people that study birds, geology of the sea floor, corals, fish, sponges— all kinds of things and we put that story together in our protected areas and we learn more about them and why they are important and why they need to be protected.

Part of the work that we do to designate these areas involves paper work and making regulations. So making regulations takes a really long time – it takes between 2-4 years generally speaking, probably for just one site, but it's really important and you lay out sort of how you want these areas to be protected and how you want them to be managed for the future and the regulations basically put that into law.

My favorite protected area that I work with is called the Gully Marine Protected Area – about 250 kms off shore, close to Sable Island and it's home to a very big underwater canyon. We have bottlenose whales that live there year round, and we have huge fields of cold water corals that live at the bottom and in the middle, lots of fish, lots of squid and lots of weird and wonderful things.

I always wanted to be a vet and I knew exactly that I wanted to be a vet from a very young age and I then I worked in a vet clinic because I wanted to see what it was like. So in High School I worked in a vet clinic and I realized I didn't like it as much as I thought I would – it was very emotional.

So, I was lost for about a year. I had no idea what I wanted to do. I knew I still loved science, but wasn't sure where I was going to go with it. Then my father took me snorkeling in Hawaii and at that very instant I knew I wanted to be a Marine Biologist.

In high school, I focused heavily on math and science because that is what I loved. I didn't connect with the arts as much, so I focused on math and science. I found it really hard. There were a couple of moments during my math career in grade 12 that I thought I wasn't going to make it, but I had to work extra hard and just got through it.

In university, I focused on a Bachelor of Science. After my Marine Biology undergrad, I went on to get my Graduate degree.

If you are thinking about a career in Marine Science, my advice to you is to stick with it, even if you hit a bump in the road. Volunteer, try things out to see if you like it, and build a strong network of contacts.