

Meet a Mentor

Joel Schlagel

Job: Researcher

Birthdate: April 22, 1965

Home: Norwich, Vermont

Pretend you're in charge of building the biggest mall in your state. Where could you put it so it won't harm wildlife? Joel Schlagel's job is to help people make decisions like this. Joel is a researcher in natural resources at the University of Vermont. He makes maps that help guide development projects and protect animal habitats.

Joel uses a computer to draw the maps. If you were looking at similar maps of your state, here are some of the things you could see: how big the area is; where people live (and what the human population is); what animals live in different areas of the state; where there are roads; where there are parks, mountains, and forests; and where there is water.

Each map is connected to a database on the computer, so Joel can click on different parts of each map for more information. He can click on a town to bring up a list of animals species there. He can find out the number of people, houses, and cars in an area, even the miles of road. (And he can click on those roads to see how many lanes they have!) He can ask the database to list all the towns that have bluebirds (or any other animal).

When Joel overlays the maps (puts one on top of another), he can see how one thing affects something else. Can people move into an area and not affect birds?

To answer questions like this, Joel asks the computer to show him different combinations of maps: areas with few people and lots of birds; areas with lots of houses and cars and few birds; areas with lots of people and lots of birds. This information helps researchers like Joel to understand how human population affects wildlife.

Now, let's say you used Joel's maps to research that mall site. You learned that two places you might build on are equal in all ways, except one has a greater variety of animals than the other. Which site would you develop?

BE A RESEARCHER!

Make a natural resources map of your town. Show all landforms, animal habitats, and open spaces.