



# FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

## In This Issue

### FOCUS ON FELLOWS

Melanie Perello  
Ben Sweeney

### WHAT'S NEW

Coastal Management Fellowship  
Program Taking a Pause  
GeoZone Blog  
Coastal GeoTools  
Is Going Virtual

### UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Fall 2020, Issue 86



## FOCUS ON FELLOWS

### MELANIE PERELLO



Fellow Melanie Perello grew up outside of Youngstown, Ohio, and spent many days of her childhood at Cedar Point and at the beach on Lake Erie. The Great Lakes were Melanie's "ocean" and that, paired with her time in 4-H learning about reducing our impact to the environment, started her interest in working on the coast.

When she headed off to college at Westminster College in western Pennsylvania, she decided to

focus on water and coastal issues with a major in biology, and further refined that in graduate school at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire where she got a master's in environmental science and policy. Her master's research focused on lake water quality in New Hampshire and community engagement. She wrapped up her schooling with a doctorate in applied earth sciences at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, where she studied monsoon rainfall using lake sediments in Tibet.

During that time, she learned about the fellowship program through a mentorship program offered at the American Geophysical Union's annual fall meeting. Her mentor worked at NOAA's Education Office and highlighted many of the great programs for students and graduates, including the Coastal Management Fellowship, which Melanie promptly applied for.

Melanie's fellowship is with Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program within the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Her fellowship project is centered on the issue of coastal erosion, a pressing issue for Minnesota as Lake Superior has reached near-record high water levels. The project has three main goals: 1) map coastal erosion hazards on Minnesota's coast, 2) establish a community of practice around coastal hazards, and 3) develop outreach for property owners.

Melanie has been working with partners to develop methods for mapping erosion hazards and putting it into practice at pilot sites along the coast. She launched a community of practice called Coastal Hazards of Superior (CHAOS) that has engaged over 180 coastal professionals in learning and sharing about hazards. At the end of her fellowship, she will have several

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

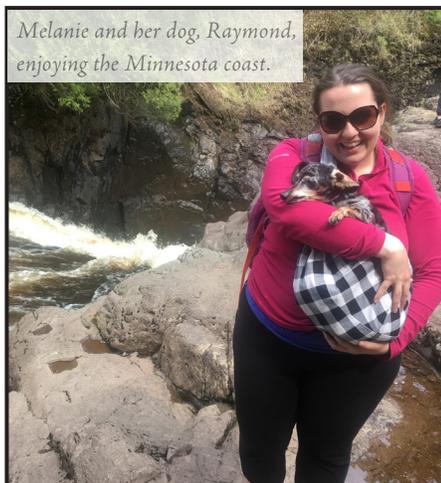


products to help the coastal program and its partners support Minnesota's coastal communities and property owners in addressing the impacts of coastal erosion, including standards for assessing and mapping erosion hazards, an established community of practice, and outreach and training materials on erosion.

When asked about the best part of her project, Melanie says, "I am most excited about meeting the needs of our communities and property owners. When I can deliver something, whether it's a resource or training, and I get positive feedback about how this helped them address a need or answered their questions, that makes my day."

The biggest challenge has definitely been restrictions associated with the pandemic. She is working from home, but the plans for the community of practice and its public outreach had to be adjusted to a virtual setting. The upside is that these virtual alternatives have resulted in more people being able to participate, and the team has decided to keep a virtual option even if in-person meetings can resume.

This fellowship has given Melanie numerous opportunities and taught her a great deal about coastal management. Her project work has given her experience in community engagement and



Melanie and her dog, Raymond, enjoying the Minnesota coast.

facilitation, while also building her GIS skills. She's been able to attend several professional training events, including a career development workshop and other NOAA-sponsored trainings. The most valuable part of the fellowship for Melanie has been making connections with other coastal professionals, through her project and the fellowship program activities.

When not working, Melanie enjoys hiking with her dachshund (although she often ends up carrying him most of the way!). She has been working her way through all of the public access sites along Minnesota's coast and hopes to get started on Wisconsin's coast next year. When the weather gets colder, she plans to stay home and curl up with a good book or a fun craft.

Melanie hopes to continue working in federal or state government in the future, focusing on coastal hazards and providing communities with resources to become more resilient. Her plans are flexible, but she's hoping to stay either in the Great Lakes or East Coast. 

CLASS OF  
2018-2020



## FOCUS ON FELLOWS BEN SWEENEY

Fellow Ben Sweeney grew up in Pembroke, New Hampshire, just outside of Concord. His passion for the environment began during summer vacations on Grand Manan, a small island off the coast of New Brunswick, Canada. He and his family returned to the same cottage every year, and Ben remembers sitting on the back porch, hoping to catch a glimpse of the white spray from a whale's blowhole. He carried those childhood memories with him to college at the University of New Hampshire, where he studied environmental engineering.

During his final year of undergrad, Ben had the opportunity to work with the New Hampshire Coastal Program on his senior capstone project to develop a structural condition rating methodology for shoreline protection structures in the state.

The project lead, Kirsten Howard, had been a Coastal Management Fellow and told him about her experience. Learning about the fellowship solidified his desire to pursue a graduate degree related to coastal management, and he headed off to the University of Rhode Island to study marine affairs and apply for the fellowship program.

Ben is working with the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services' Coastal Program and the Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership. His fellowship project has two parts—first, Ben is advancing community understanding and implementation of alternative funding strategies for stormwater management and flood resilience. He is working directly with one of New Hampshire's coastal communities to establish a committee of diverse stakeholders that will assess the community's current and future funding needs, evaluate various funding strategies, and determine which strategy has the greatest potential for providing secure, adequate, flexible, and equitable funding. Ben and the committee members will be providing recommendations to elected officials in the community on the best ways to address current and future stormwater and flood resilience funding needs.

Second, Ben is facilitating a collaborative process to investigate and recommend state coastal resilience policy options. Ben created an inventory of policy options that aim to increase coastal resilience in New Hampshire and



*Ben (right) and a colleague during the New Hampshire Coastal Program's biannual beach cleanup at the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge.*

a policy analysis framework that will be applied to those policy options. He plans to hold a series of stakeholder workshops to prioritize which options should be considered for further development and implementation. Ben will use the results of this workshop to develop a short list of policies, which will then be shared with state legislators for further consideration.

Ben says, "It's been a rewarding experience to build trust with coastal communities and develop a strong working relationship with their staff and elected officials. Building trust has been essential for reaching a point where we're able to work directly with the community to provide guidance and help them make significant progress on advancing their resilience and stormwater management goals."

Like so many others these days, his biggest challenge has been the COVID-19 pandemic. He was planning an in-person workshop in April and was forced to rethink this strategy. He quickly took training on facilitating virtual meetings and

workshops, and was able to leverage his newly acquired skills to pull off a successful and engaging virtual workshop with about 50 regional stakeholders. "I think I'll always prefer an in-person workshop when that option is available, but it was a valuable lesson in learning how to be flexible and adapt when unforeseen circumstances derail your plans," says Ben.

When he's not at work, you can find Ben backpacking and hiking in the mountains of New England, trail running on local land trust preserves, and taking his dog, Juneau, to the beach.

Ben absolutely loves the work he's doing and feels his decision to pursue graduate school and the fellowship program were exactly the path he was meant to take. He likes that the field of coastal management is constantly and rapidly evolving, and plans to continue a long career in this field. He'd like to stay in the Northeast after the fellowship ends, but wouldn't rule out a move somewhere else for the right opportunity. [@](#)

---

# WHAT'S NEW: COASTAL MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM TAKING A PAUSE

The Coastal Management Fellowship program is taking a one-year pause and will not select a new class of fellows in 2021. This very tough decision was driven by a number of significant factors, including budget uncertainties and other impacts from the COVID-19 crisis.

Since the first class in 1996, the program has produced 135 fellows who supported high-priority projects for 29 state and territory coastal management programs. These fellows have gone on to do great things in the field of coastal resource management: heading up international nonprofit organizations; establishing businesses based on their fellowship project concept; and serving in leadership roles at the state and federal levels in agencies such as Sea Grant, state coastal programs, national estuarine research reserves, NOAA, and other federal agencies. Their work has won state and regional awards, has resulted in new ordinances being passed, and has even been featured in climate preparedness and resilience recommendations made to the White House.

The program will use this pause constructively to investigate program improvements, particularly when it comes to increasing minority representation, streamlining processes, and making enhancements to the professional development and mentoring aspects of the program. Key program partners will be asked for input on these topics and other ways to improve this wonderful program.

Although this will be the first time in 25 years that the program has not placed a new class of fellows, the program remains a priority for the Office for Coastal Management. The office is looking forward to supporting a new class of fellows in 2022, with an enhanced and even stronger program. [@](#)

---

## HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE GEOZONE BLOG?

The staff at the Office for Coastal Management get a lot of technical questions and provide a lot of answers, but they didn't have a place to publish the solutions to common issues so that others could access them. Instead of creating a static page of frequently asked questions, the office decided to create a blog where users could add comments, clarifications, and new ideas. The GeoZone blog was born.

The blog posts are often authored by internal staff members, but we're always looking for interesting posts from partners outside the organization. Posts typically focus on geospatial topics, including programming tricks, trends for dealing with geospatial data, and other technical issues, but the topics can be pretty broad. In this case, the term "technical" is much broader than how to do something in a GIS. If the post is helping someone understand how to do (or not do) something on a topic, that's probably technical. If you've got something you'd like to share, but aren't sure if it fits, contact the blog administrator, Kirk Waters, at [Kirk.Waters@noaa.gov](mailto:Kirk.Waters@noaa.gov). He can help decide if it fits easily or might need a little twist.

To visit the blog, go to [geozoneblog.wordpress.com](http://geozoneblog.wordpress.com). While you're there, check out latest posts on [how to determine whether data are georeferenced incorrectly](#), or this one on [downloading multiple full datasets from the Digital Coast](#). 

---

## COASTAL GEOTOOLS IS GOING VIRTUAL!

Mark your calendars for the week of February 8, 2021, to attend the first-ever *virtual* Coastal GeoTools conference! You'll still experience all the familiar sessions, special interest meetings, tools showcase, plenaries, and exhibit hall, along with some fun additions to the program. The Association of State Floodplain Managers is hosting the conference. For more information, visit the conference website at [coastalgeotools.org](http://coastalgeotools.org) or email [info@coastalgeotools.org](mailto:info@coastalgeotools.org). 



NOAA Office for Coastal Management  
2234 South Hobson Avenue  
Charleston, SC 29405-2413



## UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### DECEMBER

**1 to 17:** American Geophysical Union  
Virtual  
[www.agu.org/Fall-Meeting](http://www.agu.org/Fall-Meeting)

### FEBRUARY

**8 to 11:** Coastal GeoTools  
Virtual  
[coastalgeotools.org](http://coastalgeotools.org)

### MAY

**9 to 13:** Association of State Floodplain  
Managers National Conference  
Raleigh, North Carolina  
[asfpmconference.org](http://asfpmconference.org)

## NOAA OFFICE FOR COASTAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING

### DECEMBER

**2:** Tools and Techniques for  
Facilitating Virtual Meetings  
[Live Webinar](#)

**8 to 9:** Social Science Basics  
[Live Webinar](#)

### JANUARY

**20:** Tools and Techniques for  
Facilitating Virtual Meetings  
[Live Webinar](#)

### FEBRUARY

**16:** OpenNSPECT  
[Live Webinar](#)

For more information on virtual and site-specific trainings, visit  
[coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/home.html](http://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/home.html)

## CREDITS AND INFORMATION

*Fellow News* is published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office for Coastal Management to relay information about the fellowship program and provide a forum for information exchange among fellows, mentors, Sea Grant, and the office.

Please send your questions and suggestions for future editions to [ocm.fellowships@noaa.gov](mailto:ocm.fellowships@noaa.gov)

Editor: *Margaret Allen* | Communications Director: *Donna McCaskill* | Copy Editor: *Gerald Esch* | Graphic Designer: *Daniella Fishburne*