



FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

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Spring 2020, Issue 84



FOCUS ON FELLOWS

RICH BUZARD



Fellow Rich Buzard grew up in Kirkland, Washington, and stayed in his home state to pursue a bachelor's degree in environmental science at the University of Washington, Bothell. During his undergraduate years, the courses he took in natural hazards highlighted how certain environmental management practices could minimize impacts of natural disasters, and he became

interested in improving mitigation practices in vulnerable areas, especially along the coast. He went on to earn his master's degree in geology and remote sensing at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. While in Alaska, he completed a fellowship with Alaska Sea Grant and was encouraged to apply for the NOAA Digital Coast Fellowship.

Rich's fellowship is with the National States Geographic Information Council, where he works with its member organization, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources' Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys.

His project is working to define flood risk categories for several remote coastal communities in Alaska that currently have no formal flood analysis. His work involves gathering any and all available information on past flood events, estimating the height those floods reached using geospatial techniques, and determining the risk of coastal flooding that current infrastructure faces.

Rich will complete this project with a few different products. He will produce a publication of the methods for estimating heights of coastal flooding in Alaska communities. Two communities, Golovin and Hooper Bay, now have complete storm histories. These are accompanied by maps that show flood risk zones, categorized as minor, moderate, or major flooding. Analysis has begun for several more communities that will be completed over time by the division. He is also developing an online tool to visualize flood risk and share photos of flooding.

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Rich setting up GPS for an aerial mapping survey over the Alaska Native Village of Golovin.

The goal is for residents of communities to use the maps and online tool to visualize flood risks. Weather forecasters can use the language of the maps to more easily communicate flood risk, while planners and statewide hazard assessors can reference the methods paper for ways to improve their own risk analyses.

Through the fellowship, Rich has had the opportunity to travel to several conferences, learn from a number of professionals, and also have a lot of fun. The most gratifying aspect of his work has been filling critical data gaps for communities, and dispelling some uncertainty about their risk to flooding. When Rich is not at work, he likes to go on hikes and bike rides, play games, and talk people's ears off about his work.

Rich recently accepted a position with the Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys as a coastal geologist II in Anchorage, Alaska. He will continue the work he started with the fellowship and is expanding to more coastal hazards projects. Down the road, he plans to finish his doctorate at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. When asked about future plans, Rich explained, "I will definitely be staying in my current profession, and on the West Coast where the volcanoes are." 

CLASS OF
2018-2020



FOCUS ON FELLOWS ALEXIS CUNNINGHAM

Fellow Alexis Cunningham's love for the coast started on the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland, where she spent time exploring and kayaking in local rivers and streams. It wasn't until high school, after discovering Rachel Carson's 1962 classic *Silent Spring*, that she realized her passion for coastal and environmental issues.

Alexis obtained her Bachelor of Science in political science and environmental sciences at Cabrini University. She then earned her Master of Science in water science and policy at the University of Delaware, where she studied the effects of adaptive management on the Chesapeake Bay's total maximum daily load. Following her master's degree, Alexis became a NOAA Digital Coast fellow with the Association of State Floodplain Managers and the Coastal States Organization.

Alexis' fellowship was a partnership between these two organizations, where her project focused on the Community Rating System—a voluntary program of the Federal Emergency Management Agency that incentivizes communities through lower flood insurance rates to reduce flood risk by engaging in mitigation activities. While the Community Rating System creates many opportunities for resilience in coastal communities, evidence suggests that many communities are neither participating in the program nor advancing their rating scores. The cause may be the lack of local government resources, low community socioeconomic status, or a lack of federal support to coastal communities.

Furthermore, floods affect communities and social groups differently. By building on existing literature and data analysis, Alexis was able to assess socioeconomic impacts in coastal counties and the barriers to participating in the Community Rating System in the more vulnerable communities. She was also able to assess the reasons for the lack of adequate resources to mitigate flood risk, as well as the lack of federal support and interagency coordination across the U.S. regarding coastal resilience.

Alexis' fellowship research culminated in policy recommendations and a policy analysis report on the Community Rating System on behalf of her host organizations. The



Alexis and a colleague at the 2019 Coastal States Organization meeting in South Padre Island, Texas, on a site visit to SpaceX.

recommendations are intended for national agencies and organizations, as well as state and local governments and nongovernmental organizations. Ultimately, these recommendations provide insight into where these entities should focus on implementing resilience to improve the Community Rating System and general flood mitigation efforts for communities.

Alexis says the most gratifying aspect of her work has been the engagement piece. “Having the opportunity to connect and engage with a variety of stakeholders has been rewarding for me, because I’ve learned that listening to and acknowledging diverse

viewpoints and inputs from stakeholders and team members is essential to improving coastal resilience,” says Alexis. “I think—

personally—that is what is so unique about the Digital Coast Fellowship: I had the ability and opportunity to reach any Digital Coast partner and beyond that, their respective memberships. I was able to tap into different realms of expertise to advance my knowledge on flood mitigation efforts here at ASFPM and CSO.”

During her free time, Alexis enjoys long runs, being on the water, hiking and camping, and spending time exploring the city with friends.

Alexis recently accepted and started a position with the NOAA Office of Response and Restoration as a program and policy analyst. There, she is supporting all divisions within the agency on communications and legislative affairs. We wish her the best of luck in the future! 

FOCUS ON FELLOWS

SHANNA WILLIAMSON



Fellow
Shanna Williamson was born and raised in the Bronx, and that is where her interest in geosciences

started. At 11 years old, she watched a series of ocean and climate science-focused television shows, and decided then that she would pursue a career in the field. Although her first thought was that she'd be a storm chaser, when she started her undergraduate degree in the geosciences at Skidmore College, she quickly found her niche in oceanography. She worked on some coastal-focused projects, loved it, and has been focused on the coastal zone ever since.

Shanna went on to earn her master's degree in marine science from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. She found out about the fellowship program through the Virginia Sea Grant program early on during her time at VIMS, and as she neared graduation, thought the fellowship was the perfect opportunity to continue to explore the intersection between humans and the coastal environment.

Shanna's fellowship is with the National Association of Counties. The overall goal of her project is to get a better understanding of resilience efforts in the Gulf of Mexico region by assessing and raising awareness of county coastal management policies and disaster spending. Her project can be broken down into three dominant goals: (1) Figuring out what the counties do to address mitigation, mainly by pulling information from their county hazard

mitigation and comprehensive plans; (2) Calculating an estimated return on investment for a subset of those mitigation efforts to demonstrate the value of mitigation at the local level; and (3) Creating a communication tool that counties may use at the local, state, or federal level to highlight their resilience efforts and the economic return on some of those efforts.

"The most gratifying aspect of my work has been the people," says Shanna. "Through this fellowship, I have been able to make genuine connections with the members of my cohort, the Digital Coast Partnership, county officials and staff, and technical experts within coastal management. It has been really rewarding to be connected with so many people across so many different organizations committed to addressing coastal management issues with varying perspectives and expertise. I have been able to travel frequently and establish a network of colleagues and friends (that often feel like family) that I can reach out to for just about anything. I am so grateful for the Digital Coast Fellowship."

When not working, Shanna has enjoyed exploring the D.C. area and loves to catch a show at the Kennedy Center. She also regularly attends church, goes to the movies, and explores new fitness classes (usually with a Groupon, since she is on a fellowship budget). She also never misses a chance to go back to the Bronx to hang out with friends and family for the weekend.

During her fellowship, Shanna feels like she has gotten more clarity on how she wants to move forward in her career. At the Social Coast Forum, Shanna attended a session on coastal and marine education, where one of the speakers emphasized the importance of education as a management tool for the coastal and climate issues we face globally. Shanna took that message to heart and has become increasingly invested in the many forms that this management approach may take, and how she can position herself to pursue this niche as a career. 



A network of people in the coastal management space that feel more like family than anything else.

FOCUS ON THE FELLOWSHIP: SEA GRANT ENDORSEMENTS

The NOAA Office for Coastal Management received 55 applications from 25 Sea Grant programs across the country for the 2020 Coastal Management and Digital Coast Fellowship Program.

Four criteria determined the selection of 18 finalists: academic performance and the diversity of educational background; endorsement by the applicant's Sea Grant director; support from two letters of recommendation; and the content of the applicant's goal statement.

A workshop to match fellowship hosts with fellows took place online from April 27 to May 1, 2020. Each host had at least one fellow mentor attend the placement workshop, and the 18 finalists attended. The workshop included an orientation, project proposal presentations, finalist presentations, finalist and host interviews, and fellow matching. Of the finalists selected, nine were placed with a host organization.

This year, the hosts are a combination of state coastal management agencies and Digital Coast partner organizations. They include the Association of State Floodplain Managers (in coordination with the Coastal States Organization), the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association (at Narragansett Bay Research Reserve), the Nature Conservancy, and the coastal management programs in California (California State Coastal Conservancy), Delaware, Guam, Maryland, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The new class of fellows will be introduced in the summer issue of *Fellow News*.

For more information on the 2020 state projects, please visit the fellowship website at coast.noaa.gov/fellowship/coastalmanagement.html, and for more information on the 2020 Digital Coast projects, please visit the fellowship website at coast.noaa.gov/fellowship/digitalcoast.html. 

WHAT'S NEW ON DIGITAL COAST?

Meeting Engagement Tools Quick Reference Guide: An effective meeting requires good planning, strong facilitation, and activities that help participants reach meeting goals. Follow the link below to explore planning and facilitation tools and activities that can help ensure meeting success.
coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/met.html

Digital Coast in Your State: The Digital Coast is a partnership effort and a community resource for organizations that manage the nation's coasts. These reports showcase usage statistics and top data, tools, stories, and resources for each state. They were recently updated with fiscal year 2018 data.
coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/about/about/in-your-state.html

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

JUNE

7 to 11: Association of State
Floodplain Managers Annual
National Conference
Virtual
asfpmconference.org/conference

9: Capitol Hill Ocean Week 2020
Virtual
marinesanctuary.org/capitol-hill-ocean-week

SEPTEMBER

29 to October 1: Restore America's Estuaries
and Coastal States Organization Summit
Virtual
estuaries.org/summit

NOAA OFFICE FOR COASTAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING

JUNE

16: Seven Best Practices for
Risk Communication
[Live Webinar](#)

AUGUST

18: OpenNSPECT
[Live Webinar](#)

For more information on virtual and site-specific trainings, visit
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

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