



FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

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FOCUS ON FELLOWS

LEAH FELDMAN



CLASS OF
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Fellow Leah Feldman was born in Brooklyn, New York, but considers Port Washington, a coastal suburb on Long Island's North Shore, home. She lived there from the time she was eight until she went away to Colgate University in upstate New York, where she double majored in English literature and environmental studies.

Leah was always fascinated by the ocean and coastline and was a competitive sailor growing up,

but she had no idea a field like coastal management existed until her junior year at Colgate. She participated in a program called Williams-Mystic, which teaches students about America's coastlines and all the activity surrounding them.

She took classes in maritime history, maritime literature, marine law and policy, marine ecology, and biology, all while living and working in Mystic Seaport. Leah was able to visit coastlines in the Mississippi Delta and the Pacific Northwest, and sail aboard a tall ship in the Caribbean Sea. This program also led her to the University of Rhode Island's Marine Affairs program.

The fellowship program was widely advertised during her graduate experience, and as soon as she heard about it, she knew she wanted to apply. "There were actually several applicants from my graduating class interested in the fellowship and two of my classmates were placed as fellows in my class!" says Leah.

Leah is working with the New York State Department of State in its Office of Planning, Development, and Community Infrastructure on the Coastal Lakeshore Economy and Resiliency Initiative, or CLEAR. The project focuses on the coastal communities of Lake Ontario, which had been severely impacted by record flooding and coastal erosion over the last 10 years.

The CLEAR project aims to reinvigorate the area with community-based resilience and rehabilitation efforts using policy, planning, and resilience concepts. Leah's focus was scenario planning and working with Lake Ontario communities to help them visualize a better future using the values, priorities, and local knowledge of the community members.

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Leah (right) and fellow Kelsey McClellan donned Steve-Harvey-inspired mustaches to host a coastal-themed game of Family Feud at the closing plenary of the Social Coast Forum.

To Leah, the most gratifying part of working on a project like this is hearing directly from the residents and community members about their hopes and dreams for the future. “Knowing that, in some small way, I might be able to contribute to these aspirations is enormously gratifying,” says Leah.

Of course, the COVID pandemic required the project team to shift its methods to mostly virtual community gatherings and figure out ways to authentically connect with individuals, while acknowledging the more immediate issues they are facing, like job loss and health.

“This fellowship has provided me the firsthand knowledge and understanding of the way coastal management works in New York State, which has been invaluable to my career at large,” notes Leah.

She has been able to attend conferences and workshops where she met influential professionals

in the field and learned an enormous amount about coastal management and development. She’s also been able to present on various topics and hone her presentation skills.

“Most importantly, however, the fellowship has provided me with a cohort of like-minded, passionate, and focused co-fellows, who I hope will remain friends and colleagues for the remainder of my career,” says Leah.

When Leah’s not at work, you can find her hiking and running with her dog, Phoebe. She also enjoys sailing, pottery, reading, and writing.

Leah is whole-heartedly planning to continue her career in coastal management, with a focus on coastal access and inclusion in coastal management. She hopes to return to Rhode Island, where she has a deep sense of connection to the coast. [@](#)

CLASS OF
2018-2020



FOCUS ON FELLOWS SABRINA PEREIRA

Fellow Sabrina Pereira is from Coventry, Rhode Island. Growing up in “the Ocean State,” she was close to the coast and Narragansett Bay, where summer beach outings and fishing trips with her family got her interested in coastal environments.

Sabrina stayed close to home for college, attending the University of Rhode Island for both undergraduate and graduate studies. While she majored in applied mathematics and secondary education as an undergraduate, she shifted gears in graduate school to study marine and coastal policy in the interdisciplinary Marine Affairs program.

The more Sabrina became aware of coastal issues like climate change and marine debris, the more she wanted to get involved in protecting marine life and the communities that rely on the coast for a living. She heard about the fellowship program while in graduate school

from her professor and then-director of Rhode Island Sea Grant, Dennis Nixon, and decided to apply.

Sabrina is working for New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection within its Climate and Flood Resilience Program. For her project, "Equitable Resilience," she is creating guidance for resilience planners on how to integrate social equity and justice into climate resilience planning processes and projects.

Her project will help planners include the state's socially vulnerable and frontline communities in planning, so that teams include local experts who can speak to pre-existing conditions and historic inequities, and who are demographically representative of the community.

Sabrina's fellowship will result in an equitable planning guidance document that provides a step-by-step guide to resilience planning rooted in the principles of equity and social justice to encourage more inclusive, diverse, and community-driven planning processes with vulnerable populations. The guide introduces concepts that are central to achieving equity and justice, defines which groups of people are most vulnerable to climate change impacts, and explains why these groups experience disparate impacts.

The guidance also describes the importance of planning teams forging relationships with and empowering socially vulnerable and underserved people to lead community-driven, resilience planning that holistically considers

all sectors and people of a community to craft appropriate resilience solutions. The guidance concludes with a framework of planning actions for planners, community organizations, and residents to take during each step of a typical resilience planning process that will enable meaningful inclusion of vulnerable populations in thoughtful development of solutions.

She also will create an equitable evaluation toolkit that helps planning teams check that their planning processes and proposed adaptation and resilience projects are on track to achieve equitable outcomes. The toolkit is composed of questions to get planning teams thinking about improving community resilience by improving community conditions across sectors, such as public health, ecological health, and economic opportunity, as they develop a community-centered plan for resilience.

Finally, Sabrina is integrating the research and lessons learned throughout her project into the state's first Climate Change Resilience Strategy, Coastal Resilience Plan, and local hazard mitigation guidance to help the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection achieve its equity goals.

The most gratifying aspect of her fellowship so far has been learning from New Jersey's community leaders who have



Sabrina with her sister, Tabitha, hiking Diamond Head in 2019.

been at the forefront of resilience and environmental justice initiatives. She has also learned more about topics such as land use, economic development, and flood insurance. "I have also really enjoyed the professional development opportunities that NOAA has afforded us fellows, like the Social Coast Forum, various virtual trainings, and coastal career workshops," says Sabrina.

When not working, Sabrina enjoys getting outside in nature and is looking forward to traveling again. In the meantime, while things are locked down due to COVID, Sabrina has enjoyed exploring the local parks, hiking trails, and beaches around New Jersey, and spending time at home painting, reading, and bingeing on Netflix.

Sabrina does not have any plans for the future just yet, but she would love to continue working in coastal management and building relationships directly with coastal stakeholders to address their needs. "I love the Mid-Atlantic and would be happy to continue working in this area, but I am also excited by opportunities along the East and West Coasts and with island communities. Having grown up in New England, with my fair share of snowy winters, I would love to live somewhere warmer or tropical someday!" she says. 🌴

CONGRESS PASSES THE DIGITAL COAST ACT

Senate Bill 1069 was passed and signed into law in December 2020 as the Digital Coast Act. [The Digital Coast](#) is a constituent-led information platform that provides data, tools, and training to the nation's coastal management community. The content originates from a variety of authoritative sources, but each piece is vetted by NOAA and is provided in an easy-to-find, easy-to-use format. This legislation will pave the way for increasing Digital Coast content, reaching underserved audiences, and strengthening the partnership and constituent-based approach that represents the foundation of the program.

The Digital Coast Partnership includes the American Planning Association, Association of State Floodplain Managers, Coastal States Organization, National Association of Counties, National Estuarine Research Reserve Association, National States Geographic Information Council, The Nature Conservancy, Urban Land Institute, and NOAA Office for Coastal Management. These organizations are all eligible to act as hosts for the Office for Coastal Management's Digital Coast Fellowship Program. [@](#)

UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

MAY

10 to 14: Association of State Floodplain Managers National Conference
Virtual
asfpmconference.org

JUNE

8: Capitol Hill Ocean Week
Virtual
marinesanctuary.org/capitol-hill-ocean-week-2021

NOAA OFFICE FOR COASTAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING

MARCH

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

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

30 to 31: Virtual - Facilitation Basics for Coastal Managers
[Live Webinar](#)

APRIL

21 to 22: Virtual - Facilitation Basics for Coastal Managers
[Live Webinar](#)

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

MAY

11 to 12: Virtual - Facilitation Basics for Coastal Managers
[Live Webinar](#)

18: OpenNSPECT
[Live Webinar](#)

AUGUST

18: OpenNSPECT
[Live Webinar](#)

For more information on virtual and site-specific trainings, visit coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/home.html. Browse the course calendar at coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/calendar.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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