



# FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

## In This Issue

### FOCUS ON FELLOWS

Rachel Bouchillon  
Abbie Sherwin

### FOCUS ON THE FELLOWSHIP

New Digital Coast Fellows

### UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

## FOCUS ON FELLOWS

### RACHEL BOUCHILLON



Born in Mississippi, Coastal Fellow Rachel Bouchillon has been a Floridian since the age of three, always knowing, somehow, that her future career would involve environmental science. It wasn't until her junior year at the University of Florida, however, that Rachel became fascinated by marine and coastal issues.

"That year I took a leap of faith and accepted a 10-week opportunity, 'Research Experiences for Undergraduates,' at the University of North Carolina's Institute of Marine Sciences," she says. "It's where I fell in love with this work, which I've followed ever since." After completing a bachelor's degree in environmental science, Rachel went on to obtain a master's degree in interdisciplinary ecology, with a concentration in fisheries and aquatic sciences.

With the help of her college Sea Grant program, Rachel discovered the NOAA Coastal Management Fellowship. She applied and was matched with the Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Rachel lives and works on the most populated island, Saipan, where she is developing a map-based decision-support tool for the agency's coastal permitting division. Her web application will enable staff members to get reports on environmental, social, and climate-related conditions just by entering a land parcel number in the "query" feature. The new application will also centralize permit-related data and streamline the application review process.

"Since the commonwealth is so small, my work could have profound and far-reaching effects on how coastal permitting occurs here," says Rachel. "It could easily be applied to other island jurisdictions, too, which is gratifying."

October 2016, Issue 71



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE





Rachel snorkeling at Ypao Beach in Guam

Thus far, Rachel's project has been well received by her agency colleagues. "I have to credit my NOAA partners in Honolulu and Charleston, and my local project mentors, with providing so much help," she says. "Before arriving here, I had never used ArcGIS. Now, thanks to excellent technical support from co-workers, I'll take that skill with me when I leave the fellowship."

Living in Saipan has given Rachel some great opportunities to travel, for both work and vacation. She attended an Esri training in Honolulu and presented highlights of her fellowship project at a conference in Guam. Working on this project also helps Rachel supplement her science background with valuable experience in the management side of coastal issues.

When not in the office, Rachel enjoys archery, and she has competed at state, national, and international levels. She enjoys trips to the beach, barbecuing with friends, and exploring sights on the island.

After the fellowship, Rachel plans to head back to the mainland. "I'd like to pursue a fisheries career with either NOAA or a state fish and wildlife agency," she says, "but the most important thing to me is to stay in the coastal management field and keep focusing on marine science." 

CLASS OF  
2015-2017



## FOCUS ON FELLOWS ABBIE SHERWIN

Born in the coastal town of Rye, New Hampshire, Coastal Fellow Abbie Sherwin has vivid childhood memories of family fishing trips in the Gulf of Maine and searching for marine critters in tidal pools.

These and other adventures fueled Abbie's early interest in the coastal environment and led to her undergraduate studies in biology and marine ecology. One particular moment stands out in Abbie's mind as the turning point in her future career direction.

"I saw a bumper sticker plastered to a pickup truck near my hometown's harbor that read, 'National Marine Fisheries Service—Destroying Fishermen and Their Communities Since 1976,'" says Abbie. "I was struck by the disconnect between environmental managers and resource users exemplified by that bumper sticker, and I'd witnessed the struggles of my own

community in trying to balance economic and social demands with environmental needs,” she says. “That experience really sparked my interest in coastal management.”

After graduating from Wheaton College in Massachusetts, Abbie went on to receive a master’s degree in integrated coastal ecosystem science, policy, and management from the University of New Hampshire. While in graduate school, she interned with the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve in Texas. The internship enabled her to study the relationship between freshwater inflows and estuarine health, and she worked to refine state freshwater policies protecting the health and productivity of estuaries.

Abbie first learned about the Coastal Management Fellowship Program from an advisor who encouraged her to apply. Matched with the Maine Coastal Program, her two-part project goal is to bolster the resilience of Maine’s coastal communities to flood hazards.

First, Abbie is developing the Maine Community Resilience Index. This simple and practical self-assessment tool helps communities understand their vulnerability to current and future flood hazards, evaluate preparedness for flood events, and gauge the resilience of

their social, natural, and physical systems. It includes a discussion process and guides communities in using results to identify specific flood resilience actions.

Second, she is working to boost community participation in the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s Community Rating System. This system is a voluntary incentive program that provides discounted flood insurance in exchange for floodplain management activities that go beyond minimum national requirements. Abbie is developing guidance materials to streamline the application process and annual documentation requirements.

“The most gratifying aspect of my project has been working directly with regional and municipal planners,” says Abbie. “I have learned about their challenges and needs for addressing coastal hazards, which helps me design products and processes to assist them.”

Abbie’s professional development opportunities have included becoming a certified floodplain manager. She also has attended trainings on project design and evaluation and the



*Abbie collecting bathymetric data in coastal waters for the Maine Geological Survey*

Community Rating System, and she’s participated in interagency efforts focused on living shorelines and flood hazards.

When Abbie is not at work, she takes advantage of all the outdoor activities Maine has to offer—exploring the beautiful and expansive coast, hiking the mountains, downhill skiing, biking local trails, and running.

After the fellowship, Abbie hopes to continue helping communities integrate science information and decision-making to prepare for the challenges that a changing climate presents. “I am particularly interested in social and economic vulnerability associated with sea level rise,” she says, “and would love to stay in New England, but am open to moving around for the right opportunity!” 

---

## FOCUS ON THE FELLOWSHIP: MEET OUR DIGITAL COAST FELLOWS

Since 1996, the NOAA Office for Coastal Management has placed NOAA coastal management fellows with state programs to help address some of the nation's most pressing coastal community challenges.

This year, for the second time, the office chose three additional fellows to be hosted by members of the Digital Coast Partnership. The Digital Coast ([coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast](http://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast)) is an online collection of data, tools, training, and information for those who work to preserve U.S. coastal communities and natural resources.

Each of the following Digital Coast fellows is working on a two-year project that advances the goals of the Digital Coast and its partner organizations.



**Jane Ballard** is working with the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association to determine the ecosystem-service valuation information decision-makers need for coastal wetland protection and restoration. She will also examine how Digital Coast tools can be used to analyze and communicate those ecosystem service values. Jane is based at the Wells Research Reserve in Maine.



**Morgan Chow** is working with The Nature Conservancy to help promote a nature-based adaptation approach to coastal hazards through participation in The Nature Conservancy's Coastal Resilience program. She is working to advance this approach across the U.S. by supporting and leveraging two local-scale efforts: the Community Rating System application process in North Carolina, and hazard mitigation planning in Michigan. Morgan is based at the conservancy's office in Seattle, Washington.



**Jake Thickman** is working with the Association of State Floodplain Managers to help manage coastal hazards and risk, as well as natural and beneficial functions, by reviewing and evaluating existing policies, increasing collaboration in coastal areas, and investigating the development of a national holistic coasts framework. The Coastal States Organization will also be a key partner in this effort. Jake is based at the association's office in Madison, Wisconsin.

The Digital Coast fellows follow the same policies and procedures as the fellows hosted by the state coastal zone management programs. While funding has been secured for this 2016-2018 class, future Digital Coast fellowships are not guaranteed. Learn more at [coast.noaa.gov/fellowship/digitalcoast.html](http://coast.noaa.gov/fellowship/digitalcoast.html). 

---

## NEWS ABOUT FORMER FELLOWS: REBECCA ELLIN – FELLOW, 2000 TO 2002

When Rebecca Ellin started her fellowship project on a wetland information system for the California Coastal Commission, she had a lightbulb moment about tailoring her services to specific needs.

“I worked with four spread-out counties with some big ecological and social differences, so I had to figure out what each community needed and how to get them that information,” notes Ellin. “This lesson really informs what I do today.”



Ellin manages the North Carolina Coastal Reserve, which includes the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve, comprising ten protected sites established for long-term research, education, and stewardship.

Puzzling out important differences and similarities between the reserves—and the distinctive communities that surround them—is a top priority for Ellin and her team, and it pays off in successful outreach and education to an expanding number of audiences.

State colleagues seek trainings on addressing coast-related issues from a regulatory standpoint. Students often can be found out in the field exploring or planting grasses to stabilize the shoreline. Planners and real estate agents learn about issues such as low-impact development and get professional training credits.

“Together, we look at how these various audiences and pieces of information can come together to support coastal communities. That’s a really exciting way to work,” says Ellin. “This grounding in particular places began in the fellowship, and I find it so rewarding that it’s part of my career today.” 

---

## WHAT’S NEW: 2017 COASTAL GEOTOOLS CONFERENCE

Mark your calendars for the 2017 Coastal GeoTools conference on February 6 to 9, 2017, in Charleston, South Carolina! Nearly 300 attendees from all over the U.S. and several foreign countries attended the Coastal GeoTools 2015 conference. Coastal professionals from many different sectors find the networking opportunities of the conference unique and important for furthering the goals of their organizations. Don’t miss out on sharing your geospatial expertise and experiencing the opportunity to learn from your peers. Anyone interested in the development and application of geospatial technology for management of coastal resources will benefit from this conference. To learn more or to register, visit [coastalgeotools.org](http://coastalgeotools.org). 



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



## UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### OCTOBER

**5 to 7:** Great Lakes Adaptation Forum  
Ann Arbor, Michigan  
[graham.umich.edu/climate/forum-2016](http://graham.umich.edu/climate/forum-2016)

**24 to 28:** National States Geographic Information Council Annual Conference  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
[nsgic.org/2016-annual-conference](http://nsgic.org/2016-annual-conference)

**26 to 27:** West Coast Regional Planning Body 2016 Annual Meeting  
Portland, Oregon  
[westcoastmarineplanning.org/16meeting](http://westcoastmarineplanning.org/16meeting)

**25 to 28:** American Shore and Beach Preservation Association's 2016 National Coastal Conference: Lighting the Way for the Coastal Future  
Long Branch, New Jersey  
[asbpa.org/conferences](http://asbpa.org/conferences)

### DECEMBER

**10 to 15:** 8th National Summit on Coastal and Estuarine Restoration and 25th Biennial Meeting of The Coastal Society  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
[estuaries.org/Summit](http://estuaries.org/Summit)

### FEBRUARY 2017

**6 to 9:** Coastal GeoTools  
Charleston, South Carolina  
[coastalgeotools.org](http://coastalgeotools.org)

### MARCH 2017

**20 to 23:** Pacific Risk Management 'Ohana  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
[coast.noaa.gov/primo](http://coast.noaa.gov/primo)

### APRIL 2017

**April 30 to May 5:** Association of State Floodplain Managers 2017 National Conference  
Kansas City, Missouri  
[asfpmconference.org/2017](http://asfpmconference.org/2017)

### MAY 2017

**9 to 11:** National Adaptation Forum  
Saint Paul, Minnesota  
[nationaladaptationforum.org](http://nationaladaptationforum.org)

### NOVEMBER 2017

**5 to 9:** Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation 24th Biennial Conference  
Providence, Rhode Island  
[erf.org/cerf-2017-biennial-conference](http://erf.org/cerf-2017-biennial-conference)

## NOAA OFFICE FOR COASTAL MANAGEMENT

### OCTOBER

**On-Site:**  
**5:** Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings  
Boulder, Colorado

**13:** Introducing Green Infrastructure for Coastal Resilience  
Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

**25 to 26:** Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings  
Oakland, California

**26 to 27:** Managing Visitor Use  
Smithfield, Rhode Island

### NOVEMBER

**On-Site:**  
**9:** Introducing Green Infrastructure for Coastal Resilience  
Huron, Ohio

**9:** Introducing Green Infrastructure for Coastal Resilience  
Daytona Beach, Florida

**29 to 30:** Coastal Inundation Mapping  
Cranston, Rhode Island

**Nov 30 to Dec 1:** Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings  
Lowell, Massachusetts

**Online:**  
**16:** OpenNSPECT

### DECEMBER

**On-Site:**  
**12 to 15:** Coastal Inundation Mapping  
Miami, Florida

**Online:**  
**6:** Seven Best Practices for Risk Communication

### FEBRUARY

**On-Site:**  
**7 to 8:** Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings  
Gloucester Point, Virginia  
**14 to 15:** Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

**Online:**  
**15:** OpenNSPECT

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

## 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