



FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

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FOCUS ON FELLOWS ELIZABETH FELTER



Digital Coast Fellow Elizabeth Felter, born and raised in Livermore, California, spent much of her childhood outdoors and came to appreciate the natural environment. The coast always played an important part in her life—not just the West Coast but also the East Coast beach of Narragansett, Rhode Island, where she spent every August with extended family.

“People would always find it amusing that these Californians would travel across the country for their beach vacation, but the Atlantic is so much friendlier!” says Elizabeth. “You can actually swim in it and not freeze.”

Elizabeth stayed in California to earn her bachelor’s degree in applied mathematics from the University of California–Los Angeles. Then she headed to the Great Lakes region, earning a master’s degree in urban planning and policy from the University of Illinois–Chicago.

Elizabeth’s fellowship involves working jointly with the American Planning Association (APA) and Coastal States Organization (CSO) to write text, complete research, and coordinate contributing authors for a “planning advisory service” report.

ffer guidance on coastal zone management and the use of geospatial technologies in coastal planning. It will also feature guiding principles for resilient coastal planning and include seven local and regional case studies. The publication will be disseminated to over 600 subscribers, many of whom represent local governments, private urban planning firms, and academic institutions.

The fellowship has been an educational experience for Elizabeth, both in the material she’s learned and the insights she’s gained.

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NOAA Coastal Services Center
LINKING PEOPLE, INFORMATION, AND TECHNOLOGY



That learning curve includes a better understanding and appreciation of coastal resilience planning efforts at local, municipal, and state levels; a deeper knowledge of how state coastal zone management programs differ; and insights into both the geospatial needs of planners and the usefulness of Digital Coast resources.

Elizabeth began the fellowship at the Chicago APA office but was able to relocate midway through her fellowship to the APA office in Washington, D.C. That move enabled her to be in close contact with both CSO and APA personnel, which helped to improve communication and collaboration among all the major players.

In her spare time, Elizabeth is involved with Back on My Feet, a running group and nonprofit organization that uses running to help those experiencing homelessness change their lives through employment and independent living.

Elizabeth has also enjoyed exploring the museums, performances, and other cultural amenities that both Chicago and D.C. have to offer.

“I loved going to the beach in Chicago. It’s so rare to have such extensive beach access in such an urban environment,” notes Elizabeth. “I even loved walking along the Chicago beach in the winter, because it is so beautiful and transcendent.” She also loves backpacking and is looking forward to spring on the East Coast.

After the fellowship ends, Elizabeth hopes to stay in our nation’s capital to take advantage of various professional and educational activities. A return to the San Francisco Bay Area would be ideal in the long term, because it is where her family still resides. Elizabeth would be happy to stay in the coastal management field or in the environmental field in general, finding a position that brings together a technical-analytical component with a social equity focus. ®



FOCUS ON FELLOWS LAURA FLESSNER

Stephens City, a little town in the Shenandoah Valley of Northern Virginia, is where Digital Coast Fellow Laura Flessner grew up and gained her love and appreciation for the outdoors. When it came time for college, Laura decided to remain in her home state to attend Virginia Tech, where she studied graphic design. After graduation, she traded in mountain views for the beach life and a few years in the workforce in Wilmington, North Carolina.

During Wilmington’s boom of residential development, Laura noticed that many coastal and barrier island residents and developers seemed unaware that their actions had negative impacts on the very investments they were trying to protect. This is when she became interested in using GIS to help people clearly “see” the complex costs and risks of continuing development in this manner.

Furthering her education at the University of North Carolina–Wilmington, she earned a master’s in environmental science with a focus on coastal management and geographic information systems.

During graduate school Laura applied for and received her fellowship, which consists of a joint project between two Digital Coast partners: The Nature Conservancy and the Association of State Floodplain Managers. Stationed in Washington State, her work aids multiple states through projects that aim to integrate floodplain and coastal strategies for disaster risk reduction, with an emphasis on using nature-based or hybrid solutions.

At the conservancy, she is developing outreach and technical documents, as well as online training and workshop curriculums for the Coastal Defense decision-support tool, an application that will communicate the role of green infrastructure in reducing risk to gray infrastructure.

A second conservancy tool—part of an initiative led by the Puget Sound Partnership—will help identify opportunities for restoring both floodplain and coastal functions through projects that integrate flood risk reduction, farmland protection, and salmon species recovery

goals. The project efforts will be written up as case studies by the conservancy and its partners.

At the Association of State Floodplain Managers, Laura is developing an easy-to-replicate framework that will guide stakeholders in choosing multi-beneficial wetland-restoration investments offering the “biggest bang for the buck” at both local and watershed scales.

Now putting this framework into action in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, Laura is developing maps for the Mullet subwatershed basin that prioritize recommendations according to their wetland-restoration benefits. Project results will be detailed in a case study for the Great Lakes Coastal Resilience Planning Guide and a Digital Coast “In Action” write-up on the Nonpoint Source Pollution and Erosion Comparison Tool.

The two-year fellowship has provided Laura with the time to develop projects and to see them implemented. “The most gratifying aspect of my work is to see a decision-support tool that I’ve contributed to influence an actual project on the ground or help guide the stakeholder decision-making process in some way,” she says.

Having experienced the powerful influence of data visualizations and interactive



Web tools in the decision-making process, Laura would love to stay in the field of spatial analysis and science communications. “After all, what good are innovative analyses or decision-support tools if the decision makers and stakeholders don’t understand them?” she says.

When she’s not working, Laura enjoys the many outdoor activities that Seattle and the Pacific Northwest have to offer. There is never a lack of things to do, whether she is visiting old-growth forests, hiking with her newly adopted puppy, kayaking, or tide pooling. And of course, living in Seattle, Laura has to indulge in a microbrew from time to time. “Coming from the Southeast where summers meant a heat index of 120 degrees, humidity that could ruin the best of hair days, and all the mosquitos you could handle,” she notes, “you just can’t beat a cold, locally brewed beverage on a mild, skeeter-less Seattle summer day.” ¹⁰

Alyssum's work with three different organizations enables her to see the strengths of each organization and act as a conduit to share those strengths. She's also been able to experience the local government perspective through the National Association of Counties, the state government perspective through the National States Geographic Information Council, and the federal government perspective through NOAA.

Other fellowship experiences both illuminating and enjoyable include Alyssum's many

opportunities to network and attend conferences and her ability to use professional development funds to gain an environmental collaboration certificate.

Following the fellowship, Alyssum plans to continue working on coastal and ocean issues, taking the human perspective she has gained to become more closely involved in ecological and conservation issues. Her passion still lies in international environmental policy, and she hopes to work internationally one day. "I haven't lived in the same place

longer than two years since I was in fourth grade, so the idea of settling down in a specific location is not something I'm against, but I'm not sure how it would feel! I'm rather a modern-day nomad," she says.

When not working at the fellowship, Alyssum spends most of her time performing and teaching nationally as a tribal-style belly dancer and contortionist. "I'm working on marrying my creative performance life and my day job," she adds, "because it's exhausting to have two full-time careers!" 📧

FOCUS ON THE COASTAL FELLOWSHIP: SEA GRANT ENDORSEMENTS

The NOAA Coastal Services Center has received the 2014-2016 Coastal Management Fellowship endorsements from Sea Grant. The Center received 46 applications from 24 Sea Grant programs across the country. Using four criteria—academic performance and diversity of educational background, endorsement by the applicant's Sea Grant director, support from two letters of recommendation, and content of the applicant's goal statement—12 finalists will be selected from among these candidates.

A workshop to match states with fellows will take place in Charleston, South Carolina, from April 28 to May 2, 2014. Of the finalists selected, six will be placed with a host state. Each of the selected host states will send its fellow mentor to the placement workshop, and the finalists will be brought to the workshop at the expense of the Center.

The workshop consists of an orientation, project proposal presentations, finalist presentations, finalist and host state interviews, and fellow matching. If a state does not find a suitable candidate during the workshop, it will be given the option to defer fellow placement for one year. States will only be allowed one deferment before they have to reapply.

This year, the host states are Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico. For more information on 2014 state projects, please visit the fellowship website at www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/fellows/stateprojects.html or contact the fellowship coordinator at csc.fellowships@noaa.gov. 📧

CLASS OF
2012-2014



Photo by RAVENWOLFE PHOTOGRAPHY

FOCUS ON FELLOWS ALYSSUM POHL

Growing up with a state park across the street and a national forest surrounding her family's land in Kentucky, Digital Coast Fellow Alyssum Pohl always loved exploring the outdoors. Her love of the ocean stemmed from a period in her childhood when the family lived on a sailboat. She credits her upbringing for instilling a passion about conservation issues.

"Nature is incredible, but not everyone has the opportunity to experience it as fully as I have," says Alyssum. "Whether or not they have been touched by the outdoors yet, I want to make sure that people now and in the future always have that option."

When it came time for college, Alyssum decided to study biology at the University of Kentucky. She spent a semester abroad studying wildlife ecology and conservation in Tanzania.

Alyssum later attended the Monterey Institute of International Studies to earn her master's in international environmental policy with a focus on marine conservation.

"No one had ever told me that the perfect marriage between science and the humanities was policy! This field is a great fit for me," adds Alyssum.

As a fellow, Alyssum works jointly with the National Association of Counties and National States Geographic Information Council to increase geospatial data use in coastal communities by increasing capacity of local decision makers to access data and tools.

Approaching the project from several angles, Alyssum identifies success stories to share with communities that have not yet implemented such data or practices into their decision-making processes. By bringing

together a network of coastal county officials and staff members, Alyssum also identifies common resilience concerns and holds webinars where experts address these issues. She gives lectures and demonstrations of relevant Digital Coast tools, and she enjoys watching the excitement of audiences as they see how these tools can make their work easier.

"I have had so many people thank me for providing them with a tool that means they won't have to reinvent the wheel," says Alyssum. When the fellowship ends, she will have published several white papers and anticipates that the foundations laid in building networks and raising Digital Coast awareness will bring benefits to these coastal communities well into the future.

Alyssum combining her two passions: dance and marine conservation



Photo by THATCHER HAYWARD

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

APRIL

26 to 30: American Planning Association's National Planning Conference

Atlanta, Georgia

www.planning.org/conference

MAY

8 to 9: Michigan Green Infrastructure Conference

Lansing, Michigan

http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3308_3333-312197--,00.html

JUNE

10 to 12: Capitol Hill Ocean Week

Washington, DC

<http://nmsfocean.org/CHOW-2014>

NOAA COASTAL SERVICES CENTER TRAINING

APRIL

On-Site:

16 to 17: Coastal Inundation Mapping

Daytona Beach, Florida

MAY

On-Site:

7 to 8: Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings

Prudence Island, Rhode Island

20 to 22: Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings

Beaufort, North Carolina

29 to 30: Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings

San Diego, California

JUNE

On-Site:

24 to 25: Planning and Facilitating Collaborative Meetings

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida

For more information on virtual and site-specific trainings, visit www.csc.noaa.gov/training.

CREDITS AND INFORMATION

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

Please send your questions and suggestions for future editions to csc.fellowships@noaa.gov

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