



FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

In This Issue

FOCUS ON THE CENTER

DIGITAL COAST FELLOWS

FOCUS ON THE COASTAL FELLOWSHIP

2013 State Projects Selected

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

AND EVENTS

January 2013, Issue 56



FOCUS ON FELLOWS

Zach Singer-Leavitt



Cresting the waves of a windswept Chesapeake Bay—such vivid childhood memories of weekends spent sailing with his dad stand out for Coastal Fellow Zach Singer-Leavitt, who grew up in Norfolk, Virginia. Although summer camps and hiking and sailing filled his early days, Zach’s interest in the natural world was mostly “emotional—

not until college did I realize that there was this scientific discipline called ecology,” he says.

Working on a B.A. in geography at Vermont’s Middlebury College, Zach “got hooked” on how his course of study brought together people and their environment. College was also where Zach learned the basic GIS skills that led, post-graduation, to a job in the Biogeography Branch of NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) in Washington, D.C.

For two years, Zach’s spatial analysis skills helped answer questions about the locations and types of benthic cover so that his NCCOS colleagues could build predictive models of seafloor habitats.

“That job turned me on to the potential of statistics and modeling for answering questions about coastal and marine environments,” says Zach. He attended graduate school to learn more, receiving an M.S. in aquatic science at the University of Michigan.

Zach’s fellowship is with the New York Department of State’s Division of Coastal Resources, and his project will support the development of a spatial management plan for competing offshore uses. “I worked with seafloor habitat data in my previous job, which is a definite advantage in developing this product—I’m even

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



collaborating with some people I knew back then!” adds Zach.

While an anticipated offshore wind industry is the main impetus for the project, the ocean is a crowded place and quite a few sectors have vested interests, such as fisheries and recreation, to mention a few.

“People are realizing that we can’t have a free-for-all—we have to plan,” says Zach. “My job involves searching for and describing patterns in ecological data, then using these patterns to create informative visuals and predictive models.” Managers will be able to apply Zach’s products to their planning and resource management needs.

The data analysis covers everything from whales to fish to seabirds and more. “If we can get out in front of the curve by identifying and mapping biodiversity hot spots,” emphasizes Zach, “offshore wind developers will have that information to consider when scoping out sites.” To that end, he has completed spatial predictive models for 14 species of groundfish. In addition, he is using a variety of methods to describe the offshore biological community.

Zach’s longtime interest in becoming a better science communicator is also getting a workout. “It’s a challenge to write documents that are technically sound but also informative for

the general public,” says Zach. “I’m learning how to think strategically about the social, economic, and political relevance and sensitivity of results. We want to involve stakeholders early on and get their buy-in, so we try to communicate in ways that make everyone feel heard.”

Jeff Herter is Zach’s mentor and an assistant bureau chief in the New York Coastal Management Program. Jeff has provided great support and feedback on Zach’s writing, presentation, and project planning skills. Two NCCOS marine spatial ecologists, Brian Kinlan and Charles Menza, have also helped out by guiding Zach on the finer points of statistical modeling.

The opportunities afforded by the fellowship are greatly appreciated. “The funds provided for professional development are a real benefit these days and have allowed me to present our work at conferences for GIS users, NOAA flatfish biology specialists, and The Coastal Society,” says Zach.

What does the future hold? Zach would like to continue living on the East Coast where he and his wife have family, but he’s open to other places. “I’ve found my niche and plan on staying within the aquatic ecology realm,” Zach says, “and if I could continue creating relevant products for resource managers, that would be ideal!” 



FOCUS ON FELLOWS

Sarah Latshaw

A self-described “military brat” whose childhood kept her on the move, Coastal Fellow Sarah Latshaw learned well to adapt to different settings and cultures. Now she feels a deep attachment to one place—the South Carolina Lowcountry, the setting for her fellowship. The golden marsh and winding creeks of coastal South Carolina first captured her heart years ago and have never really let go.

Sarah’s introduction to living on the coast began at age 11, halfway around the world, when her mother took a position as a systems analyst at a U.S. military base in the Azores, an archipelago off the coast of Portugal.

“The island where I lived was tropical, with hydrangeas everywhere, lots of green,

and cliffs where we would sit and look out at the ocean,” says Sarah. The island had only one TV channel and no malls or fast-food restaurants. She and her classmates at a military base school “had to learn how to make our own fun. This is where I grew into myself and became an explorer.”

Returning to the states at age 16, Sarah moved to Georgia and later attended the University of Georgia, where she received a B.S. in forest resources with a concentration in wildlife biology. Following a three-year stint as a 4-H specialist for the University of Georgia Extension Service, Sarah took a position as a naturalist on South Carolina’s Kiawah Island, which is south of metro Charleston.

Sarah fell in love with the beauty of the barrier island as she led biking and kayaking tours, cared for animals in the nature center, and managed children’s education programs. It was there that she learned about the vulnerable habitat of the painted bunting, a multicolored bird often described as one of the most beautiful avian species in North America.

Sarah began to study the painted bunting, first through a pilot project and later, more comprehensively, for her thesis as a master of science in environmental studies student at the College of Charleston. Assisted by a team

of biologists, Sarah put radio transmitters on the birds’ backs so she could figure out where the birds were visiting, nesting, and getting food. With the research findings, Sarah was able to recommend extra plantings of certain types of trees and vegetation that could support the life cycle of the painted bunting.

Sarah’s research was awarded a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship—the first ever received by a College of Charleston student—which provided \$45,000 per year for a stipend, tuition, and books. “It was quite an honor, and I was very grateful for the support!” she adds.

Sarah considers herself lucky to have been selected as a fellow for the South Carolina Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, and not just because she gets to stay in the Lowcountry that she loves. She is excited to develop a beachfront vulnerability index that will help communities lessen coastal hazard risks.

Sarah is collecting and digitizing coastal data—on land features and elevation, shoreline erosion, and more—and then running an ArcGIS program to determine the vulnerability of parcels that make up the first “row” of the state’s beachside homes. With data results in hand, communities will be able to craft resilience plans lessening their vulnerability to storm surge and erosion impacts.

“We hope to take the index results ‘on the road’ to coastal communities as an interactive presentation,” says Sarah. “Audience members can ask questions about specific areas, and we can show the data and maps answering those questions.” The index also will be featured on the agency’s website.

In the first year of Sarah’s fellowship, Braxton Davis and Matt Slagel (two former mentors now working for the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management) provided strong support and guidance. Matt still is willing to share his expertise whenever Sarah calls him to discuss her technical challenges. And Marian Page, Sarah’s current mentor and a coastal services project manager, “has given me important information about the projects and research done by our agency so I have a base of knowledge to work from.”

“My fellowship with the state is great because it’s teaching me how to act as a communication ‘bridge’ between science and policy, and to translate these distinctions clearly to communities,” says Sarah. Once the fellowship ends in 2014, Sarah knows one thing—she would like to stay in the Lowcountry. “I love this area. It’s my home.” 

FOCUS ON THE CENTER

MEET OUR DIGITAL COAST FELLOWS

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

In 2012 the Center chose three additional fellows who, for the first time, are hosted by members of the Digital Coast Partnership. The Digital Coast (www.csc.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.



Elizabeth Felter is working on behalf of the American Planning Association (APA) and the Coastal States Organization. Elizabeth is assessing state and local policies concerning coastal planning and resource management, and her findings will appear in the partners' planning advisory report. She is based at the APA office in Chicago, Illinois.



Alyssum Pohl is working on behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National States Geographic Information Council. Alyssum is helping to improve coastal community resilience by making geospatial data more accessible and useful to state and local decision makers. She is based at the NACo office in Washington, D.C.



Laura Flessner is working on behalf of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Association of State Floodplain Managers. Laura is integrating watershed and coastal strategies that support disaster risk reduction, encourage adaptation solutions, and enhance community resilience. She is based at the TNC office in Seattle, Washington.

The Digital Coast fellows abide by the same policies and procedures as other fellows chosen by the Center. While funding has been secured for this 2012-2014 class, future Digital Coast fellowships are not guaranteed. Learn more at www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/fellows/digitalcoast.html. 

FOCUS ON THE COASTAL FELLOWSHIP:

2013 STATE PROJECTS SELECTED

Six projects have been selected for the 2013-2015 Coastal Management Fellowship. Below is a summary of each of these projects for the coming year. Recruiting efforts are well underway, but we need your help to spread the word to eligible fellowship applicants. Remember that applications should be submitted to area Sea Grant directors and are due no later than January 25, 2013.

- Host Agency:** California Coastal Commission
Location: San Francisco, California
Project Goal: Integrate climate change and adaptation planning into the commission's planning and regulatory program
- Host Agency:** Maine Coastal Program
Location: Augusta, Maine
Project Goal: Provide a baseline characterization in the Gulf of Maine for developing Maine's Ocean Resources Strategy and implementing Maine's ocean planning efforts
- Host Agency:** Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management
Location: Boston, Massachusetts
Project Goal: Assess and promote beach and dune nourishment as a viable and cost-effective climate change adaptation tool for shore protection
- Host Agency:** New Hampshire Coastal Program
Location: Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Project Goal: Establish a GIS-based decision-support framework to improve spatial planning for New Hampshire's estuaries and use InVEST to inform priority restoration and management issues in the Great Bay Estuary
- Host Agency:** New York Department of State, Division of Coastal Resources
Location: Albany, New York
Project Goal: Develop a guide and methodologies for the application of geospatial tools for use in New York's offshore planning
- Host Agency:** Oregon Coastal Management Program
Location: Newport, Oregon
Project Goal: Create an improved data repository and framework for Oregon's ocean shore permitting process that can be used to plan for erosion impacts, improve storm response, protect the public interest, and other purposes

For more information on the 2013 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. 

NOAA Coastal Services Center
2234 South Hobson Avenue
Charleston, SC 29405-2413



UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

JANUARY

**21 to 23: Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystem
Science Conference**

New Orleans, Louisiana

<http://gulfofmexicoconference.org>

MARCH

**24 to 26: The Fourth National Forum on
Socioeconomic Research in Coastal Systems**

New Orleans, Louisiana

www.cnrep.lsu.edu

25 to 28: Coastal GeoTools 2013

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

<http://geotools.csc.noaa.gov>

NOAA COASTAL SERVICES CENTER TRAINING

JANUARY

Online:

16: CanVis

On-Site:

8 to 10: Introduction to Coastal GIS

Bristol, Rhode Island

15 to 17: Climate Adaptation for Coastal Communities

Wells, Maine

16 to 17: Public Issues and Conflict Management

Venice, Florida

23 to 24: Managing Visitor Use in Coastal and Marine

Protected Areas

Beaufort, North Carolina

29 to 30: Planning for Meaningful Evaluation

Charleston, South Carolina

FEBRUARY

Online:

13: OpenNSPECT

On-Site:

5 to 6: Public Issues and Conflict Management

Fairhope, Alabama

7 to 8: Planning for Meaningful Evaluation

Greenland, New Hampshire

11 to 12: Project Design and Evaluation

Seattle, Washington

25 to 26: Climate Adaptation for Coastal Communities

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

27 to March 1: Climate Adaptation for Coastal

Communities

Biloxi, Mississippi

MARCH

Online:

13: CanVis

On-Site:

4 to 5: Public Issues and Conflict Management

San Francisco, California

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

Co-Editors: *Margaret Allen, Kitty Fabey* | Communications Director: *Donna McCaskill* | Copy Editor: *Gerald Esch* | Graphic Designer: *Frank Ruopoli*