



FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

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FOCUS ON FELLOWS: Sara Polgar



Coastal Fellow Sara Polgar, who now works for the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) in California, previously spent years on a career trajectory far removed from environmental science. But growing doubts about her chosen path, and a budding interest in marine and coastal issues, led Sara to change course.

Sara spent her childhood in Connecticut and New Jersey and then moved to California to major in biology at Stanford University. Her curiosity in marine and coastal issues was piqued as an undergrad when she spent a few months at the school's Hopkins Marine Station researching a protein that contributes to muscle contraction in tuna.

"Unfortunately, I didn't act on this interest at that point," says Sara, who went on to a career in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries for nearly six years. In the process, she met some wonderful people and learned a tremendous amount, particularly while working for a small start-up biotech company. But something was missing.

"The environmental bug 'bit' me around this time when I read a few books and articles that changed my thinking and forced me to question my assumptions about the pharmaceutical and biotech industries, human rights, and the impacts of my life choices on other people and the environment," she says. Some of the books that heightened her introspection were *In Our Own Best Interest* by William F. Schulz, *Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken, and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy.

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She eventually quit her 85-hour-per-week job and began volunteering with environmental organizations and agencies, including the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, where a few months later she took a full-time position running an educational program. After 18 months working at the refuge, Sara headed to the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at the University of California–Santa Barbara to complete an M.S. in coastal marine resources management.

As part of her fellowship duties at BCDC, Sara has led state and regional organizations in a collaborative effort to develop a plan for the San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail. This trail is being designed for use by people in non-motorized small boats, such as kayaks. Sara reached out to agencies, organizations, and concerned Bay Area residents by organizing a stakeholder steering committee and a series of public meetings addressing trail issues and policies.

At times, Sara was surprised by the passion of the stakeholders. “Before working on this project, I had been to public meetings where there was yelling, and I was even the recipient of a tirade on one occasion, but the issues in those cases seemed dire—people’s livelihoods were on the line,” says Sara.

Sara and her planning partners had barely introduced themselves at the first water trail public meeting when someone in attendance let forth an angry outburst. Sara was startled but maintained her composure. “I reminded everyone

that they would have plenty of opportunities to discuss trail issues, and then our facilitator laid down the ground rules for appropriate participation.”

Thankfully, those sometimes-fiery meetings generated a productive public discussion that has informed Sara’s first draft of the water trail plan. She has sent the draft out for review and will soon present the revised plan to the decision-making board of the BCDC and the board of the California Coastal Conservancy.

“The most gratifying aspect of this whole process has been working with the water trail planning partners,” says Sara. These partners include Joe LaClair, senior planner and Sara’s supervisor at BCDC; Ann Buell, project manager with the California Coastal Conservancy; Gina Bartlett, meeting facilitator with the Center for Collaborative Policy; and Laura Thompson, Bay Trail project manager with the Association of Bay Area Governments.

“Getting to work with our staff, and people in other agencies and organizations, has been a great opportunity for me,” notes Sara. “BCDC is intimately involved in all sorts of planning issues around the bay, so I now have a much better grasp of the coastal issues, including the environmental, social, and political aspects. After the fellowship, I hope to continue working here in a climate change-related position. My husband and I are definitely planning to stay in the Bay Area,” she adds. *PH*

FOCUS ON FELLOWS: Petra MacGowan



Coral Fellow Petra MacGowan, who has lived in exotic destinations across the globe, senses that life has come full circle in her fellowship with Hawaii’s Department of Land and Natural Resources. Petra, who works in the department’s Division of Aquatic Resources, is no stranger to the ecological richness and importance of the islands.

“I never knew what an ordinary family vacation was like, because my father taught marine science and brought his high school students to the Hawaiian island of Maui every summer for hands-on education,” says Petra, who grew up in Seattle, Washington. “With my parents as chaperons, my brother and I had wonderful experiences learning about Maui’s environment, and we’re a very close family, partly because of those trips.”

Petra completed a B.A. in economics and environmental studies from St. Lawrence University in New York State and an M.A. in marine affairs from the University of Washington–Seattle. However, as in childhood,

many of her life lessons have been acquired through hands-on educational experiences.

Those experiences include one year in Brazil helping to establish an environmental stewardship program for young people; undergraduate sojourns in Costa Rica and in Spain; three years living an outdoors existence on Santa Catalina Island, off California's coast, while teaching marine science to schoolchildren; and six months conducting graduate research on marine tourism in the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, an African nation just south of Senegal.

As a result of her travels, Petra has learned that community vitality depends upon balancing both environmental and economic concerns.

"Parts of Brazil are very poor, and while there I saw that people cannot be expected to protect the environment if they don't have enough to eat," notes Petra. "The first town where I lived was in the Amazon, accessible only by boat or plane. People there worked in a bauxite mine, but the mining company was pretty responsible—they had an environmental certification and an active reforestation program, and they were providing some of the best jobs around. People working at the mine could live decently and educate their children, which was so important for the area."

Guinea-Bissau offered a different object lesson. This nation includes an archipelago of 88 islands and islets that encompass the Bolama-Bijagos Biosphere Reserve, a top sportfishing destination for tiger sharks, barracuda, and tarpon. "Sportfishing tourists in Guinea-

Bissau pay 1,000 euros a week [more than \$1,200 U.S.], but virtually all of it goes to international tourism companies and almost nothing to the citizens of the country," explains Petra. "Guinea-Bissau is one of the ten poorest countries in the world, and its environment is being demolished because the government doesn't have the resources or stability to enforce regulations."

Petra returned to the U.S. and finished graduate school and, three weeks later, came across a posting on the coral fellowship. "It all felt very serendipitous to me. Having recently been in Guinea-Bissau, I was thinking a lot about native land rights and was glad to see that the fellowship included community-based work," she notes.

Petra's fellowship duties are wide-ranging, from helping schoolchildren create paper "reef creatures" at an outdoor booth to visiting the mayor's office in Maui to discuss 2008's International Year of the Reef. "I've really been impressed by the innovative way that groups in Hawaii address issues of marine resource management, and I have learned so much already," says Petra.

Hawaii's coral program has six local action strategies (LAS) to address threats to coral reefs—land-based sources of pollution, fisheries, recreational impacts to reefs, lack of public awareness, climate change and marine disease, and aquatic invasive species.

"I support all LAS programs in various ways, and I'm in charge of the 'lack of awareness' LAS for Hawaii, which involves networking with 40 outreach coordinators to strengthen the message and pool resources,"

notes Petra. "I also have the opportunity to work with local nongovernmental organizations such as the Community Conservation Network, helping local communities increase their capacity to manage marine resources."

Petra is still considering future career steps but suspects she will continue working on marine resources in the Pacific region. "Right now, I'm gaining so much experience, and it has been invaluable to see, up close, the internal workings of a natural resource agency, which I'm sure will benefit me in anything I choose to do," she adds. 



FELLOW UPDATES

May 2007

Maria del Mar Lopez-Rivera, coral fellow in Puerto Rico, has been coordinating and participating in a variety of activities as part of her role in the Coral Reef Initiative Program of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. In April, the first Coral Reef Symposium was successfully held in San Juan, at which Marimar acted as a coordinator and presenter. She also helped coordinate a workshop on identification of regulated marine species and common corals, with the purpose of enhancing the education of environmental law enforcers (rangers). Marimar continues to work on developing the marine protected area management plan, constantly meeting with stakeholders and visiting the sites.

Romina King, coral fellow in Guam, launched Guardians of the Reef this semester. Thirty Guardians have visited approximately eight elementary schools, or approximately 50 third-grade classrooms, with homemade presentations on coral reef conservation. During the 2007 Earth Day/Island Pride Festival, the Guardians performed a critically acclaimed puppet show, "Protect Our Watershed," written by Romina and produced by the Guam Coastal Management Program. Romina is also assisting with the development of Guam Environmental Education Partners, Inc., a local nonprofit organization dedicated to environmental education. The group's main project was Hidden Haggan.

Haggan is the Chamorro word for the green sea turtle. Twenty-two fiberglass life-sized adolescent green sea turtles were painted by local artists and schools in celebration of the International Year of the Sea Turtle 2006.

Karlyn Langjahr, coral fellow in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), has been moving forward with joint projects to bridge information gaps on existing marine managed sites with the Nature Conservancy and the Ocean Conservancy. Her main role is to research socioeconomic data for these areas and develop socioeconomic surveys to be conducted within communities. After participating in a community marine resource monitoring workshop in Tela, Honduras, Karlyn is now assisting NOAA in planning the agenda for a USVI socioeconomic monitoring workshop. This July course will also address management effectiveness of marine parks. She continues to plan and coordinate a capacity-building workshop for environmental educators in the USVI, as well as activities for the International Year of the Reef 2008.

Lihla Noori, coral fellow in Rota, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, is continuing with the implementation of the Coral Reef Initiative Talakhaya Revegetation Project. She recruited 30 local community members to help plant 10,000 grass and tree plugs. This

effort will complete the first phase of this land-based pollution local action strategy. The ongoing development of the Sasanhaya Bay Fish Reserve was propelled by a recent fishermen's meeting. Twenty-five fishermen participated in an information-gathering and threat-analysis process to aid Lihla in developing priority actions for the next year. She will use the problems and solutions brainstormed by the fishermen to develop her upcoming annual work plan. Lihla is also looking forward to an upcoming professional development opportunity at the University of Guam (UOG). She will attend UOG for three weeks to learn about recent developments in coral reef taxonomy and management.

Sharon Gulick, coral fellow in American Samoa, has been assisting with planning education and outreach activities for the 18th U.S. Coral Reef Task Force meeting being hosted by American Samoa in August 2007. Projects include coordinating a community mural highlighting the territory's natural resources and planning cultural events for the task force meeting. Sharon is also working on publishing a couple of Coral Reef Advisory Group education and outreach books illustrated by local artists.

FOCUS ON THE CENTER

The NOAA Coastal Services Center and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have developed a new course, Coastal Community Planning and Development, which can refine your knowledge of strategies for managing coastal growth while sustaining resources, quality of life, and economic vitality.

The two-day course will help you to

- Understand current coastal growth and development patterns and the primary drivers that influence these patterns
- Recognize the social, environmental, and economic impacts and benefits of various development patterns
- Learn about current strategies for establishing integrated and comprehensive growth
- Assess your community's current growth and development
- Increase your ability to communicate with stakeholders and foster a collective vision of how and where the coastal community grows

Optional one-day learning modules, to be offered beginning in late 2007, will focus on related topics such as water quality, hazards and community resilience, and conflict management and resolution.

Instructors' time, travel, and manuals are provided at no charge. A local host sponsors the training and is responsible for obtaining the training facility and inviting participants. If you are interested in learning more about this course, contact Kelly.Dickson@noaa.gov.

FOCUS ON THE COASTAL FELLOWSHIP:

2007–2009 Coastal Management Fellows Selected

Five fellows were matched with five state coastal zone management programs at this year's matching workshop, which was held April 16 to 20, 2007, in Charleston, South Carolina. The topics to be addressed in these two-year fellowships include promoting effective ecosystem-based management, developing a coastal hazard plan, developing a comprehensive beach and inlet management plan, integrating ocean management products into a coastal atlas, and assessing the condition of the coast.



California

Dan Robinson, from the University of Rhode Island and nominated by Rhode Island Sea Grant, was matched with the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission to promote effective and collaborative ecosystem-based management for San Francisco Bay.



Connecticut

Joel Johnson, from the University of Maine and nominated by Maine Sea Grant, was matched with the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Office of Long Island Sound Programs to develop a coastal hazard plan for Connecticut.



North Carolina

Lauren Theodore, from the University of Michigan and nominated by Michigan Sea Grant, was matched with the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management to develop a comprehensive beach and inlet management plan for North Carolina.



Oregon

Andrew Lanier, from Oregon State University and nominated by Oregon Sea Grant, was matched with the Oregon Coastal Management Program to expand the Oregon Coastal Atlas to include ocean-related data and information.



South Carolina

Matthew Slagel, from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and nominated by Maryland Sea Grant, was matched with the South Carolina Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management to examine and assess erosion control devices and beachfront structures, baselines and setbacks, and beach renourishment projects.

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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UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

JULY

13 to 17: **National Association of Counties Annual Conference and Exposition**
Richmond, Virginia
www.naco.org

22 to 26: **Coastal Zone 07: Brewing Local Solutions to Your Coastal Issues**
Portland, Oregon
www.csc.noaa.gov/cz/

AUGUST

20 to 23: **Urban and Regional Information Systems Association Annual Conference**
Washington, D.C.
www.urisa.org/conferences/aboutannual/

SEPTEMBER

2 to 6: **American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting**
San Francisco, California
www.fisheries.org/sf/

For more information on upcoming events, please visit www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/conferences.html.

NOAA COASTAL SERVICES CENTER TRAINING

Project Design and Evaluation
July 9 to 10
University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program

Public Issues and Conflict Management
July 11 to 13
University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program

Coastal Community Planning and Development
September 10 to 13
Indiana Lake Michigan Coastal Program

Remote Sensing for Spatial Analysts
July 17 to 18
Texas Geospatial Extension Program

July 19 to 20
Texas Geospatial Extension Program

Introduction to ArcGIS
July 17 to 18
California Sea Grant

July 24 to 25
NOAA Headquarters

July 31 to August 1
Oregon Sea Grant

August 13 to 14
King County GIS Center

August 27 to 28
NOAA Coastal Services Center

Coastal Applications of ArcGIS
July 19 to 20
California Sea Grant

July 26 to 27
NOAA Headquarters

August 2 to 3
Oregon Sea Grant

August 15 to 16
King County GIS Center

August 29 to 31
NOAA Coastal Services Center

For more information, please visit www.csc.noaa.gov/training/.

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