Volume 1 | Issue 1
August 2017

National Coral Reef Management Fellows Newsletter

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A newsletter for and about the National Coral Reef Management Fellowship.

Fellowship Midterm Training in Kona, Hawai'i

The 2016-2018 cohort of National Coral Reef Management Fellows gathered in Kona, Hawai'i in March 2017, to check in on projects and work plans, share fellowship work experiences, and participate in resource management trainings.

The week's activities were facilitated by Kevin Doyle, professional development consultant at Green Economy. The training kicked off with presentations on work plan progress and project status by each fellow. The fellows had all developed their work plans with their jurisdictional supervisors at the fellowship orientation in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in January 2016. This provided fellows with the opportunity to discuss their progress on projects over the past year and plan for the remainder of their fellowship.

From left: Kelly Montenero, Florida; Malcolm Johnson, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; Whitney Hoot, Guam; Hilary Lohmann, U.S. Virgin Islands; Mariana León Pérez, Puerto Rico; Sabrina Woofter, American Samoa.

Mixed into the training were site visits to natural resource areas managed by The Nature Conservancy, the Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources, community partnerships, and the National Park Service. Later in the week, the fellows sat down to a career round table with professionals from these and other organizations to discuss career development in marine resource management, policy and academia.

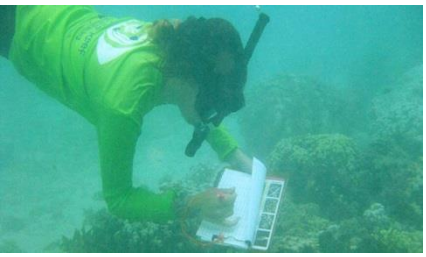
Some highlights for the fellows were a training by Kevin on setting management priorities via allocation of resources, a session with pointers on how to write better proposals to garner more resources, and an evening dive trip to observe the resident reef manta rays that feed off Kona's coast!

Meet the 2016-2018 fellows!

Focus on Fellows

In each newsletter edition, fellows from the 2016-2018 cohort will be featured. This month, we caught up with Whitney from Guam and Mariana from Puerto Rico.

Whitney Hoot



Whitney Hoot is the fellow based in Guam. Originally from Maryland, she completed her Bachelor of Art in Sociology and Environmental Science at Columbia University, and her Master of Science in Sustainable Development and Conservation Biology at the University of Maryland—College Park. Whitney's fellowship tasks are to craft an island-wide reef resilience strategy for Guam that incorporates stakeholder feedback. She also coordinates the island's coral reef response team and is developing standard operating procedures to address acute reef impacts. Whitney hopes to continue work on some of her tasks in Guam, and hopes to enter a Ph.D. program after the fellowship ends. She plans to study coral reef community ecology, with a focus on coral reef restoration, trophic dynamics on coral reefs, or the factors that drive coral reef resilience to climate change. After this experience working with Guam's Bureau of Statistic and Plans, she believes she is much better prepared to conduct scientific research that can be applied to management and better able to communicate the results of that research to managers.

How did you find out about the fellowship?

I heard about the fellowship via a posting on NOAA's Coral List serve. I was so, so excited to be selected for the fellowship.

How did you decide to accept the position?

I was finishing my Masters in December 2015 and this was the first (and only) job I had applied for. I knew I wanted to work in coral reef conservation and management, and I knew I wanted to be back in the Pacific (I previously lived on Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia). I had also been to Guam before and thought it would be a good place to live.

What task from your work plan are you most proud of?

The creation of the Guam Coral Bleaching Response Plan, which was a huge collaborative effort of the Guam Coral Reef Response Team. You can check it out at http://bsp.guam.gov/guam-coral-reef-response-plan . Other major projects in progress are the Guam Crown of Thorns Outbreak Response Plan and the Guam Reef Resilience Strategy.

What is your day-to-day like as a fellow?

Most of my day-to-day work involves writing – working on response plans and the reef resilience strategy. I spend a lot of time doing research and trying to get information from reef managers and scientists on Guam. There is a lot of stuff I can't find on the Internet, e.g. what's the history of Crown of Thorns Sea Star on Guam, and the people here have years of knowledge and experience in this region. Sometimes I get to do field work like bleaching surveys or assessing damage from a vessel grounding. I also go to meetings regularly, everything from the response team to local action strategy working groups to conference calls with the US Coral Reef Task Force climate change and ocean acidification working group.

Tell us about your recent professional development experience.

For my professional development this year, I was a benthic diver on the NOAA MARAMP (Mariana Archipelago Reef Assessment Monitoring Program). I spent three weeks on the ship, diving around Guam and the southern islands of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. It was awesome! I learned a ton. I now feel very comfortable with identification of Pacific corals and reef survey methods, and I think I'm a much better scientific diver. I also think I made some great contacts within NOAA and was able to learn more about the coral reef research that NOAA does. We definitely saw a lot of degraded reefs, but there were some beautiful, healthy coral communities too. My key takeaway is that our reefs our struggling, but there are still reefs that seem healthy and resilient enough to survive and we need to take urgent management actions (on local and global scales) to protect them.

Mariana León Pérez

Mariana is the fellow working in San Juan, Puerto Rico. A native Boricua, she completed her Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science at the Metropolitan University in San Juan and her Master of Science in Biological Oceanography at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez. Her master's research focused on estimating changes in seagrass habitat cover changes using historical aerial photography and multispectral imagery as a Graduate Researcher with NOAA Cooperative Remote Sensing and Technology Center. As a fellow, Mariana is tasked with writing an assessment of current coral reef monitoring efforts in Puerto Rico, developing a report on recommendations and future methodology, and designing a coral reef monitoring data sharing system for Puerto Rico. Mariana has been accepted into a

Ph.D. program after the fellowship ends. She would like to conduct interdisciplinary research on socio-ecological systems, with the goal of contributing to the conservation of tropical marine resources.

How did you find the fellowship?

A colleague forwarded me an email with the announcement of the Coral Reef Management Fellowship positions… at first sight I thought, "I want to apply to all the positions!", because they all seemed to be very fun and challenging. After analyzing it thoroughly, I decided to apply to the Puerto Rico and American Samoa positions. However, I had experience with coral reef monitoring and geographic information systems (GIS), which made me a good candidate for the Puerto Rico position… and that position was the one that I really wanted!

What made you decide to accept it?

I said yes immediately! Although accepting the position would imply some changes in my life, such as moving to the capital and finishing my thesis during nights and weekends, I knew I had a lot to gain and the experience was going to positively impact my professional future.

What task from your work plan are you most proud of?

It is gratifying to serve as an intermediate between coral reef scientists and managers, and to see how the communication between them has improved. Through my task in assessing needs and future focus, the Puerto Rico Coral Reef Monitoring Program (PR-CRMP) is on the way to becoming more inclusive and better aligned with the current management needs. I feel proud to have the opportunity to assist in the beginning of this process.

What is your day do-to day work like?

My position is mainly an office job based at the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources central office working for the Puerto Rico Coral Reef Conservation Program (PR-CRCP). My day-to-day tasks include analyzing the results of interviews that I conducted, gathering and organizing information about coral reef monitoring sites, or meeting with coral reef monitoring staff about ways to optimize the monitoring efforts. Regularly, I assist in other tasks of the PR-CRCP for example, coordinating meetings and workshops and creating outreach material. Every now and then, I visit other offices in San Juan and travel to the west side of the island to meet with coral reef scientists and to conduct interviews.

What are the major milestones you've completed or will complete during the fellowship?

So far, I have begun the process of making the PR-CRMP data more accessible. For example, I have compiled all of the PR-CRMP reports from 2001-2016, mapped all sites visited during that period, created a summary table of the data, and created a

template to organize and archive the field data collected in the PR-CRMP. Simultaneously, I have completed a series of exercises for collecting information from primary sources. This included creating online questionnaires sent to other U.S. coral reef jurisdictions regarding the effectiveness and challenges of their coral reef monitoring programs. It also included creating an online questionnaire to evaluate how accessible the PR-CRMP data is for resource managers and scientists and to identify the strengths and needs of the PR-CRMP. I also completed one-on-one interviews with key informants to validate the previously identified needs and to get their feedback on the changes proposed to the PR-CRMP. Further steps include presenting a list of options and recommendations for improving the PR-CRMP to the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources Coral Reef Committee, and writing a report with all of these findings and recommendations for the PR-CRMP.

What are your plans for this year's professional development, and how was your professional development last year?

This year I want to be more confident and fluent while speaking and writing in English. I always wanted to take an intensive English course in an English speaking country, and thanks to the fellowship's professional development opportunity, in October I will travel to Santa Barbara, California for this purpose.

Last year, the International Coral Reef Symposium was one of the best conferences I have ever attended. People were happy and relaxed, dressed in colorful clothes and flip-flops! However, there was so much going on that it was difficult to select which session to go to at any moment. I really enjoyed the remote sensing sessions since I was amazed by how fast the technology is advancing for mapping and monitoring marine ecosystems. The herbivore overfishing session was also very informative, as researchers presented several case studies about the observed improvement in coral reef health after the implementation of parrotfish fishing bans. It was also great to participate in the Getting Published Workshop, where I learned from recognized scientific researchers about their techniques to be most efficient in publishing scientific papers. In general, I appreciated the opportunity to learn and interact with so many international researchers and managers in this field.

Former Fellows: Where are they now?

Anne Rosinski served as fellow in Hawai'i in 2013-2014. For her, the most rewarding experience of being a fellow in Hawai'i was working with a wide array of management partners and stakeholders. Her tasks allowed her to work with researchers, community members, conservation enforcement officers, conservation practitioners, and policy makers. She especially enjoyed watching how these various perspectives fit together and contribute to coral reef management in Hawai'i.

Since the fellowship ended, Anne has worked for the University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i Coral Reef Initiative on projects that support local management initiatives, including

mapping marine debris, a reef restoration pilot study, and building capacity for resilience-based management, including working with a team to write the Hawai'i Coral Bleaching Recovery Plan. In addition, she began a Ph.D. program in Marine Biology at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in 2016 and very recently accepted a new role position with the Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources as the Marine Managed Area Planner. Anne's upcoming work will include identifying areas where herbivore reserves could be most effective in promoting coral recovery and producing maps that will support implementation of effective coral bleaching recovery strategies for Hawai'i.

The National Coral Reef Management Fellowship was established in 2003 to respond to the need for additional coral reef management capacity in the U.S. coral reef jurisdictions in the Pacific and Atlantic/Caribbean. The fellowship is a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coral Reef Conservation Program, the U.S. Department of Interior's Office of Insular Affairs, the U.S. All Islands Coral Reef Committee and the Nova Southeastern University's Halmos College of Natural Sciences and Oceanography. The program's vision is a thriving collaborative fellowship program that builds excellent next generation leaders and capacity for effective local coral reef ecosystem management.

Fellow News is published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program and Nova Southeastern University to relay information about the fellowship program and provide a forum for information exchange among fellows, jurisdictions and program partners.

Please send your questions and suggestions for future editions to kmontenero@nova.edu

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