



# FELLOW NEWS

*Quarterly Newsletter for NOAA Fellows and Friends*



Join us in Wilmington, NC, from January 27 to 30, 2025, for the Coastal GeoTools Conference! This biennial event focuses on using geospatial technology to tackle coastal resource management challenges, bringing together professionals to share knowledge and innovative tools. Registration opens in November—[register here](#).

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## Editorial Note

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In our spring/summer 2024 issue of *Fellow News*, Carl Hendrickson, one of our outgoing fellows from the 2022 to 2024 class, was inadvertently left out of the farewell section. This section highlights the accomplishments and work of each fellow. The archived version of the spring/summer 2024 issue has since been updated to include Carl's accomplishments. Read the [archived newsletter](#) to learn more about Carl's impactful work during his fellowship.

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## Dates to Know

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### Program Timeline

- Friday, November 29, 2024: Projects selected
- Friday, January 24, 2025: Applications due from candidates to their local Sea Grant
- Friday, February 21, 2025: Endorsements due from Sea Grant

- Friday, March 21, 2025: Finalists selected
- April 2025: Matching workshop presentations - virtual
- April 2025: Matching workshop interviews in Charleston, SC
- Friday, August 1, 2025: Fellowship begins

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## Get to Know the Fellows

Class of 2023 to 2025

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**Patricia Valentin-Llorens**, nominated by Rhode Island Sea Grant, was matched with the **U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources** to inventory newly established parklands managed by the department's Division of Territorial Parks and Protected Areas for natural and cultural resources, and she will share the results with the community. Patricia has a master of arts in marine affairs from the University of Rhode Island and a bachelor of arts in physical and environmental geography from the University of Puerto Rico.

**Tell us about your project and what you're hoping to accomplish:**

There is currently no database for the purpose of adding government-owned properties—either purchased by or given by deed or gift to the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands—to the U.S. Virgin Islands' Territorial Parks system. My project will create this geodatabase and will include 1) researching property deeds and historical records; 2) developing a protocol that can be used consistently across all properties to create an inventory of the cultural and natural value of the land; and 3) assigning a conservation class to each property based on desired development, level of conservation, historical and ecological value, and uses.

**How will the community benefit from your project?** The creation of the Territorial Parks system relies on this project's geodatabase and will benefit residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands and its visitors in many ways. By creating the system, we are ensuring the preservation of this land, which holds great ecological, cultural, and spiritual significance for current and future generations of Virgin Islanders. This system will also provide opportunities for people to benefit from ecosystem services and recreational activities that enhance well-being, social integration, and environmental awareness.

**Who, or what, has inspired you to pursue this journey and why?** As a social scientist I was inspired by my goal to be prepared professionally to one day work with the communities back in my home of Puerto Rico. This fellowship was an excellent opportunity to achieve this goal, and it granted me the understanding of governmental systems and how those systems collaborate with communities to create and share knowledge to protect the environment. I want to work toward empowering communities by being a link that strengthens the collaboration between communities and governmental agencies.

**Describe a particularly challenging learning curve. How are you approaching it or solving it?**

This is my first experience working in local government, and some organizational structures and procedures were new to me. Additionally, English is my second language; although I am fluent in

English, some terminologies were unfamiliar to me when I began. My strategy for overcoming this involves engaging and connecting with multiple coworkers and partners and asking questions whenever I can. Ask away!

**What questions would you most like to ask former fellows who are now established in their careers?** 1) What specific resources or professional development opportunities do you recommend or find helpful in securing employment? 2) Can you share the challenges you faced in transitioning from the fellowship to a professional role, and how did you solve them? 3) What are your tips for building a network during and after the fellowship?

**What words of wisdom can you offer to people currently applying for the fellowship?** I kept a couple of things in mind through the process that might be helpful to others. Keep an open mind and heart and enjoy every step of the process, from preparing your application and being interviewed to carrying out your project from beginning to end. I found that I learned a lot about myself and how far I have come from each of these steps. Someone I care about deeply gave me a great but simple piece of advice when I was having second thoughts about applying: "If you are afraid, do it; with fear, but do it," and I can't thank them enough for that. My advice is to trust yourself, your abilities, expertise, and experiences, and be open to learn so much more. Do it!

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**Rachael Hamilton**, nominated by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Sea Grant, was matched with the **Maine Coastal Program** to help Maine's vulnerable coastal communities implement the state's climate action plan by designing, conducting, and evaluating an innovative municipal outreach and technical assistance program. Rachael has a master of science in urban planning and community development and a bachelor of arts in environmental science from the University of Massachusetts Boston.

**Tell us about your project and what you're hoping to accomplish:**

My fellowship project designs and pilots a replicable technical assistance program on coastal hazards that increases climate resilience in coastal communities as per the recommendations of the state's climate action plan, Maine Won't Wait. The final product is the Natural Hazards and Land Use Planning series for municipalities that I am piloting now with state and regional partners!

**How will the community benefit from your project?** The Natural Hazards and Land Use Planning series consists of six different workshops, each on a different topic. Therefore, the series offers a variety of knowledge and skills-building opportunities from reading flood insurance maps to integrating county hazard mitigation plans into town comprehensive plans. The series also combines several of the most concerning natural hazards in Maine (e.g., coastal and inland flooding, sea level rise, erosion, wildfire, extreme heat) into one series, so decision-makers can think holistically about the interdisciplinary nature of hazards and the co-benefits provided by these solutions. More generally, the series' goals include communication of up-to-date science in a "usable" format, resource networking between municipal staff, committee members, and those who deliver technical assistance, and peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange.

**Tell us about a particularly rewarding day.** The kickoff session of the pilot series was a particularly rewarding day, because its success was a reflection of the time and effort I put in during the first half

of my fellowship by building relationships with project partners and listening to community needs to fill those gaps. The series came together with new partnerships, such as Maine's Emergency Management Agency and county emergency management agencies, that Maine's coastal program typically does not get to work with but are a critical component of hazard resilience. The first session clearly hit the mark with more than 100 folks registered and attending, and the feedback was quite positive.

**Who, or what, has inspired you to pursue this journey and why?** My mom! She has always supported me unconditionally. I have experienced quite a few people in positions of assumed leadership who have been the opposite of a leader or mentor. When folks told me that I made a wrong degree decision or was not cut out to pursue a master's degree, my mom remained my biggest cheerleader and go-to person of wisdom!

**Tell us about a particularly rewarding project experience.** This one may seem simple, but nearly a year into my fellowship experience I attended one of our Maine Climate Council in-person meetings, which was one of many I had attended. At this particular meeting, I noticed how networking had moved from introducing myself to everyone to recognizing my connections, who were spread across Maine in various state, regional, local, governmental, and nongovernment organization roles, and I hugged these individuals upon saying hello. Finding myself at a point where people were excited to see me and comfortable enough that they wanted to hug me made me feel seen and respected. Just a touching moment!

**Describe a particularly challenging learning curve. How are you approaching it or solving it?** One of the most challenging aspects to my fellowship has been learning about and experiencing competitiveness from others in the climate and coastal spheres. I had always assumed it was an altruistic field, but my learning curve is coming to terms with the fact that not everyone views the field that way. In response to this challenge, I have been practicing empathy by understanding that folks' experiences influence how they approach new situations. Thinking about what brings someone with a predetermined mindset to a meeting helps me come up with key points I know will be helpful. For example, sometimes I know to emphasize that I am not competing for funding sources, or I will ask folks what I can do to support them or make their work easier. This effort won't change who someone is, but it sure helps with de-escalation!

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## News You Can Use

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"Why reinvent the wheel?" is an old saying that still rings true, as learning from someone else's experience is always a good idea. NOAA wants to help you hear these experiences, which is one reason the organization's fellowship programs encourage fellows to communicate with each other as often as possible.

The Office for Coastal Management's website also has several sections devoted to information sharing among coastal management programs. The three most popular sections are profiled below. Information found at these resources may help as you work with your host program.

- **Digital Coast [Stories from the Field](#)** showcase how various organizations use Digital Coast data, tools, and training as they work to address coastal management issues.

- **Impact Stories** present stories from throughout the coastal zone. The focus is on how coastal management programs are making a difference. Stories are searchable by program, state, or topic.
- **Case Studies** offer a first-person account of how a coastal management issue was addressed and includes a helpful section devoted to lessons learned.

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## NOAA Training and Resources

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### Upcoming Offerings

A training curriculum devoted to coastal resource management. Courses are scheduled throughout the year.

### Additional Resources

You may also be interested in additional training resources from our Digital Coast partners and contributing partners.

[Course Calendar](#)

[Training Resources](#)

### About the Program

The NOAA Coastal Management and Digital Coast Fellowships were established to provide on-the-job education and training opportunities in coastal resource management and policy, and to provide project assistance to state coastal zone management programs and Digital Coast partners. The fellowship programs are administered by NOAA's Office for Coastal Management. Fellowships are open to postgraduate students. For more information, visit [this webpage](#).

