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The Fellow Newsletter is published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program, the United States Department of the Interior, and Nova Southeastern University to relay information related to the fellowship program.

National Coral Reef Management Fellows Newsletter

Meet the 2022-2024 Coral Reef Management Fellows!



Screenshot of virtual fellow get together/check-in (Zoom)

Focus on Fellows - Fellows Get Together!

In early March, the fellows, along with supervisors, points of contact, and fellowship supporters met virtually to officially kick off the 2022-2024 National Coral Reef Management Fellowship (NCRMF). During the two-evening orientation, the fellows learned about the history of the fellowship, the resources available to them, and what to expect for the next two years!

Since then, the fellows have gotten together on Zoom to check-in on each other. They spoke about how the first few months have been, fun stories about life at their respective jurisdictions, what the process of developing a Work Plan has been like, how they are very much looking forward to finishing their Work Plans, and potential Professional Development opportunities. Some fellows have even started looking into attending professional development opportunities together!

Visit the next pages to learn more about the fellows, their decision on accepting this position, what their day to day looks like, and more!



Tilali Scanlan - American Samoa



How did you find out about the fellowship?

The previous Fellow, Valentine Vaoso reached out to me to let me know about the position if I would be interested. I am glad she did!

Why did you decide to accept the position?

I recently graduated from college and was looking for positions back home (American Samoa) that would allow me to gain experience in the real world and give back to my community. When the previous Fellows urged me to apply, I went ahead and did so.

What task from your work plan are you most excited to take part in?

I am most excited to help build local capacity and aid in bringing up local community leads that will also take an interest in the marine science field like I did. Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers are not fully explored like they should be in the territory and I would like to help encourage youth from the islands to explore the different fields in STEM, mainly marine science. I am also super excited to explore different coral restoration techniques in the Aua Pilot Study. I think the outcomes of this study will give our coral reef managers a better idea of how we can go about restoring our coral reefs in the future in more sustainable manners.

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

No day is exactly the same, which I enjoy. When the conditions are nice, fieldwork is usually prioritized. This includes visiting Aua to check up on coral fragments, collecting field notes and data, and monitoring surrounding areas for signs of stress (diseases and bleaching). Although I much prefer the field, office days are not so gloomy. I am able to attend important working group meetings for coral reef and watershed management, help out with special research projects and assist my agency with other related work.



Elly Perez - Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

How did you find out about the fellowship?

The job posting was brought to my attention by a supervisor from a previous position. After looking further into the program, I found the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) fellowship, which seemed to fit me perfectly, so I decided to apply.

Why did you decide to accept the position?

This fellowship seemed like a great opportunity to dip my toes into the resource management field. Working primarily as a field biologist the last few years, resource management was something I had always seen myself going in too - I just needed the right opportunity. All and all, this position stands to push me outside of my comfort zone and offers potential for both personal and professional growth.

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

Most tasks from my work plan somehow relate back to the development of a CNMI-wide Coral Bleaching Response Plan, so once my fellowship is over I believe it will be something I can look back on and be really proud of. I hope that it is something that will genuinely benefit the territory as a whole and that I can walk away from these next two years knowing I left my mark!

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

I've spent the past few months becoming familiar with and adjusting to life on Saipan along with preparing myself for the rest of the fellowship. I am heavy in the research phase of developing a Coral Bleaching Response Plan, so you can always find my computer with 10+ tabs open. Apart from this, you can find me doing other office work, like attending meetings, taking online courses, inputting field data or attempting to learn identification of the 200+ coral species found here in the CNMI. Days spent in the field consist of snorkeling in the lagoon conducting benthic surveys - where we identify different algae, seagrass and coral species. With being new to Saipan, driving all over the island to different survey sites has really given me a good lay of the land.



Spotted eagle ray (*Aetobatus narinari*) sighting while conducting benthic survey at San Antonio Beach in Saipan. (Photo by Elly Perez)



Sam Cook - Florida

How did you find out about the fellowship?

I've been involved in Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) research since 2018, so the fellowship had been on my periphery since then via the fellow's role in Florida's Coral Disease Advisory Committee (DAC) calls. When I saw that applications were being accepted for a new batch of fellows, I thought it would be a good way to apply my research background while also getting out of a lab!

Why did you decide to accept the position?

While I had originally wanted to move towards a career in marine policy, I found that management was what I was actually interested in. My background is research heavy, and I knew that I wanted to leverage that skillset into some type of actionable change. Resource management turned out to be the best way to do that! After interviewing for the fellowship position, I knew that my goals aligned well with the scope of work laid out and it was a no brainer to accept the position when offered.

What task from your work plan are you most excited to take part in?

My work plan is very intertwined with coordinating the research and restoration side of the disease response in Florida. I'm excited to meet members on both teams and learn about what all they are doing to better understand Florida's coral reef. As the point of contact for the SCTLD research team, part of my job also includes communicating updates to our Steering Committee and Executive Coordination Team and acting as a resource for any research-based questions they might have. It's exciting to see the process of how the research the team members are conducting is getting used to make management decisions.

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

Like most of the fellows, I feel as though no two days are the same! I spend them in front of my computer in Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Dania Beach Office, overlooking Port Everglades. I have the same routine of answering emails in the morning but after that the day is always a mystery. I've recently been helping with a SCTLD research proposal review, planning workshops for our disease response teams, and helping PIs develop new projects to answer SCTLD priority questions!



Sam's favorite place to eat lunch while at the office.

Camille Quichocho - Guam



How did you find out about the fellowship?

Although I have a background in agriculture, my parents know how passionate I am about marine conservation. When they saw the posting for the fellowship, they sent it to me and I applied immediately!

Why did you decide to accept the position?

I accepted this position because I would be the first Coral Fellow on Guam who is actually from the island. As an indigenous Chamorro woman, I have a strong relationship with the *tāno' yan tāsi* (land and sea) and have been on the hunt for a career that bridges my love for science with my love for Guam. This fellowship is just the beginning.

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

The task I'm most excited about is developing a coral reef restoration action plan for Guam because it will be a living document that will guide restoration efforts for years to come. This is the task I will be most proud of because as a local, I can see firsthand how coral restoration will benefit my island and community.

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

My days consist of catching up on emails, attending lots of different meetings, doing some independent learning, and making plans for the next two years of my fellowship. I'll be jumping into the deep end of my project soon, so my days will be a lot busier in the coming months.

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Badlands in southern Guam



Lara Noren - Hawai‘i

How did you find out about the fellowship?

I distinctly remember in college learning about the fellowship program and investigating the opportunity. I knew at the time I was not qualified, but I marked on my calendar to make sure I applied for the next application cycle (which was two years and one pandemic later!).

Why did you decide to accept the position?

I decided to accept this position as avenue to grow into my desired career path and make meaningful contributions to the well-being of coastal communities. Working at the intersection of people, science, and management has always been a career goal of mine, and I am looking forward to growing skills related to this intersection over the next two years. Additionally, ocean finance can be an invaluable tool to grow capacity for coral reef management, I am looking forward to learning more about this up-and-coming field and its utilization in the ocean conservation space.

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

I am really looking forward to coming back to this question at the end of my fellowship to see how I will answer! At this time, the most impactful aspect of my work plan is learning about the communities in Hawai‘i and the unique challenges they face related to natural resource management. Working on an archipelago with complex cultural and historical perspectives has been a wonderful and eye-opening experience so far. I am grateful to have an opportunity to work for the people of Hawai‘i to promote their priorities in coral reef management.

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

My typical day usually begins with a commute to downtown Honolulu to the Division of Aquatic Resources. Right now, my biggest priority is writing a feasibility report for the state on reef insurance, so I am hosting conversations with experts, doing research on state policies and governance frameworks, and researching reef resilience. I am also assisting the US Coral Reef Task Force and planning aspects of their upcoming meeting in Kailua-Kona this summer.

Sometimes I get to check out other places offline and travel to priority restoration sites (pictured right), visit the Hawai‘i Institute of Marine Biology, and visit the Ānuenue Fisheries Research Center.



He‘eia watershed, O‘ahu HI



Fabiola Torres - Puerto Rico

How did you find out about the fellowship?

It was shared on a Google Group I am a part of called Coral-PR. I looked at it, loved it and shared it to peers and applied myself!

Why did you decide to accept the position?

There are very few opportunities like this one available on Puerto Rico. I truly think this position will help in my professional and personal growth. Working with stakeholders, the community, and developing programs that can help coral reef management has been a goal of mine. I personally really enjoy engaging with community groups and strengthening partnerships. I have volunteered for the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources in Puerto Rico (DNER) for years. It is really nice to finally have a full-time job hosted at the department.

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

The citizen science program and Coral Reef Week are two things I've been working hard on and feel proud of. Developing the first citizen science program for collecting data on coral reef health of the DNER is really exciting, I can definitely see this being used for many years to come. Keep an eye out on our social media pages (Coral PR: @coral.puertorico) for updates on Coral Reef Week to see it all unfold on first week of June (June 5-11, 2022)!

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

Most of my work is done remotely from home, working on deliverables, conducting meetings, brainstorming, etc. I did get to go out to the "field" twice to talk with a dive shop owner near where I live to see if they would support SCTLD data collection efforts and they now are! For the first time, this dive shop is giving the DNER coral health monitoring team free boat rides to reef sites, free air for tanks, refreshments, and eyes in the field when the monitoring team is not there.



One of Fabiola's favorite spots to catch up on emails at La Parguera, Puerto Rico. (Photo by Fabiola Torres)



Erin Bowman - US Virgin Islands

How did you find out about the fellowship?

A few years ago while I was an intern working in coral restoration, I learned that a previous intern had gone on to do this fellowship in St. Croix. From there, I researched it a bit, saw what a cool opportunity it was, and decided that I would apply when I had some more experience and felt adequately qualified.

Why did you decide to accept the position?

The fellowship seemed like a great way to join the effort to combat Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) in the Caribbean and gain experience working with resource managers and local practitioners to protect vital marine ecosystems.

What task from your work plan are you most excited to take part in?

My goal for this fellowship is to contribute in a way that will genuinely benefit the territory. So far, in these first few months I've felt like I was mainly getting up to speed and adjusting to my new position. I'm looking forward to making it my own and finding ways to actively further the missions of the Division of Coastal Zone Management and the St. Croix East End Marine Park.

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

Most of my time is spent at the St. Croix East End Marine Park office. From there, I do office work such as data input, attending virtual meetings, working on documents or spreadsheets, and coordinating SCTLD treatment dives. Days spent in the field have consisted of outreach programs, beach cleanups, SCTLD treatments, shoreline monitoring, assisting research groups, and surveys for birds, urchins, corals, and more. Daily and weekly tasks and opportunities vary but I can always count on beautiful scenery and some sort of unexpected development keeping me and everyone at the office on our toes!



Erin treats an SCTLD-infected colony of symmetrical brain coral (*Pseudodiplora strigosa*) at Buck Island Reef National Monument off of St. Croix. (Photo by Kelcie Troutman)

Former Fellows: Where are they Now?



Emma Korein (Puerto Rico 2020-22)

I am now a first year PhD student at the University of Delaware, School of Marine Science and Policy. My PhD coursework focuses on the intricate overlap between science (biology, ecology), society (culture, economy), and marine management (government and Non-Governmental Organization). I'm also using the skills I gained under my fellowship. In Puerto Rico, I used interviews with key informants to determine optimal management strategies for dealing with coral disease outbreaks, and under my PhD I am using interviews with community members to improve environmental justice within offshore wind farm management.



Bert Weeks (Hawaii 2020-22)

I sadly had to say goodbye to the great people at The State of Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources at the end of last year (2020), but I'm off to my next big thing as a Marine Biologist for the Hawaii branch of Cardno, a large consulting company. It's been quite the transition going from state government to such a large corporation and I'm looking forward to learning the ins and out of the private sector. My first project this year (2022) took me to Guam to conduct scuba fish surveys in a local harbor. I managed to say hi to Cara, the Guam Coral Fellow, on an off day. I would not have gotten this job without the connections that I gained through the Coral Fellowship so I'm thankful every day for the people who helped me get here. Mahalo Nui!



Fellow Trivia!

How many scuba diving instructors are part of this cohort?

Did any fellows accept their new positions without ever having been to their designated jurisdiction?

Stay Tuned! The answers will be revealed in the next newsletter!

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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.

