

KNAUSS FELLOWS:

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

BY REBECCA NAGY

Each year, several North Carolina graduate students land the opportunity to work in the crux of critical coastal and ocean policy. As participants in the prestigious national John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship, they gain unique educational experiences that reach far beyond Capitol Hill and the Beltway in Washington, D.C. North Carolina fellows have worked with a congressman on a bill regarding oil spill response, headed to Spain to represent their host offices in international negotiations on bluefin tuna, and worked with the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council on defining essential fish habitat.

“I feel so fortunate to have had this experience — it is one that you cannot replicate anywhere else outside of Washington, D.C.,” says Ashley Erickson, a former fellow from North Carolina who now is the leadership development and education manager for the Center for Ocean Solutions at Stanford University.

Established in 1979, the 12-month Knauss fellowship honors one of the founders of the National Sea Grant College Program. The fellows are assigned to a home office within the executive or legislative branches of government in the Washington, D.C., area.

State Sea Grant programs recruit potential fellows from universities across the state as nominees for the national program. Since 1979, North Carolina has provided 67 fellows.

“The Knauss fellowship provides a strong developmental foundation for future leaders at the local, state, national and international scales. Regardless of where these individuals find their niche in life, the diverse skill sets and expanded self-awareness that is developed during the fellowship result in individuals better prepared to address a variety of life and work

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LEFT: THE 28-FOOT KELP FOREST EXHIBIT AT MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM IS ONE OF THE TALLEST AQUARIUM EXHIBITS IN THE WORLD.

WALUSSES FLOWERS

MARGARET

challenges,” notes Susan White, executive director of North Carolina Sea Grant.

“These individuals have a lot to offer our state and program, from their experiences and perspectives. It’s wonderful to see North Carolina Sea Grant’s relationships with these individuals, both current as well as previous fellows, continue to grow,” White adds.

Asked if they recommend that others apply for the Knauss fellowships, past fellows interviewed for this story all responded with great enthusiasm and the same word: absolutely.

This fellowship is valuable beyond the experience it provides, notes Sara Mirabilio, North Carolina Sea Grant fisheries specialist and former Virginia fellow.

“Fellows offer a system of support, opportunity and exchange among each other, many of whom are now leading environmental practitioners throughout the U.S. and in numerous foreign countries,” she says.

Margaret Spring, a former North Carolina fellow who now works for the Monterey Bay Aquarium, and Erickson currently collaborate through a partnership between the aquarium and the Center for Ocean Solutions. Spring also serves on the management committee for the center.

Knauss fellow comradery does not just stay within state lines. While working for Congressman Farr, Erickson met Dan Reineman, the outgoing Hawai’i Knauss fellow in Farr’s office. Erickson and Reineman are now married.

In this first installment of a new occasional series, Sea Grant checks in on three past North Carolina fellows, Margaret Spring, Matt Kendall and Ashley Erickson to ask, “Where are they now?”

The following interviews have been condensed and edited.

MARGARET SPRING

A 1991 Knauss fellow, Margaret Spring is vice president of conservation and science, and chief conservation officer of the Monterey Bay Aquarium in California. She directs research programs involving sea otters, great white sharks, Pacific bluefin tuna and other species. When not attending meetings and conferences for her job, Spring enjoys giving tours of the aquarium, visiting with researchers, watching veterinarians attach tracking devices to sea otters, and seeing children get excited about the ocean.

Before joining the aquarium in 2013, Spring worked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, including roles as chief of staff and then principal deputy undersecretary for oceans and atmosphere.

Spring also worked as the senior Democratic counsel for the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, her fellowship host office. She has worked as the director of the California Coastal and Marine Program at The Nature Conservancy, and as an environmental attorney at Sidley and Austin in Washington, D.C.

A native of New York City, Spring earned her bachelor’s degree in classical archeology from Dartmouth College and is a graduate of Duke University Law School.

• WHAT WAS THE GENERAL FOCUS OF YOUR KNAUSS FELLOWSHIP?

I worked on issues dealing with NOAA and the Coast Guard, including reauthorizations and oversight concerning satellite funding and failure problems, weather service operations, coastal zone management, enforcement of the high seas drift net act — basically all legislative oversight issues relating to NOAA and the Coast Guard.

• PLEASE SHARE A HIGHLIGHT OR AN ACCOMPLISHMENT FROM YOUR TIME AS A FELLOW.

I worked for Senator Ernest Hollings, D-S.C., when the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite (GOES) — that basically is the eye in the sky for hurricanes — failed. Sen. Hollings was the chair of the committee and the chair of the subcommittee that appropriated funds for NOAA. I staffed him on a major oversight hearing held by the appropriations committee about how to fix the problem. The satellite failed after Hurricane Hugo, which had devastated South Carolina. These satellites were a huge investment and were needed for safety of life and property. It was a major national crisis. I was able to help get the background information to help Sen. Hollings pull together a hearing.

I also was able to represent the committee at the negotiations on tunas in Madrid, Spain, when bluefin tuna were being proposed for listing on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. I was able to be involved in negotiating major tuna treaty questions and consult with major negotiators. We’re still working on it today, even here at the aquarium.

When I returned to the U.S. Senate in 1999, my experience helped me lead efforts to create the U.S. Ocean Commission and reauthorize U.S. fishery law.

• HOW DO YOU APPLY THE EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS YOU GAINED AS A KNAUSS FELLOW TO YOUR CURRENT POSITION AND OVERALL CAREER?

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- TOP: SAL JORGENSEN, RESEARCH SCIENTIST FOR THE AQUARIUM'S PROJECT WHITE SHARK, TAGS AN ADULT WHITE SHARK.
- MIDDLE LEFT: THIS SOUTHERN SEA OTTER PUP IS PART OF THE AQUARIUM'S SEA OTTER RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION PROGRAM.
- MIDDLE RIGHT: STAFF TRANSPORT TUNA TO THE OPEN SEA EXHIBIT.
- BOTTOM LEFT TO RIGHT: MARGARET SPRING.
- THE AQUARIUM'S HUSBANDRY STAFF RELEASES A JUVENILE WHITE SHARK.
- VISITORS CAN SEE TUNA ON EXHIBIT AT THE MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM.
- SEA OTTERS ARE ONE OF THE AQUARIUM'S MOST POPULAR EXHIBITS.

T SPRING



TOPPP/Monterey Bay Aquarium



Angela Hans/Monterey Bay Aquarium



Randy Willaer/Monterey Bay Aquarium



Courtesy Monterey Bay Aquarium



Randy Willaer/Monterey Bay Aquarium



Randy Willaer/Monterey Bay Aquarium



Nikki Dilsmore/Monterey Bay Aquarium

MATT KENDALL

In law school, I learned to be a lawyer. What I learned as a fellow was how to get out of your comfort zone and serve in the legislature. I learned about the legislative process in a way that you would never have learned by reading about it. We got a chance to work with the agency very closely but also have a very strong impact on choices that were made to ensure, in the long run, the stability of the federal enterprise.

• WHAT HAVE BEEN THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES THAT HAVE COME OUT OF THE KNAUSS FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE?

The trust you gain and the relationships you make really give you some opportunities you would not have known existed had you not been there. The fellowship changed the trajectory of my career. A lot of the work that I've done has teed off of the experience I had and the trust that I built in my job there.

• WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT OTHERS APPLY FOR THIS FELLOWSHIP? WHY?

I absolutely recommend it. It's a unique fellowship. It's hard to find your way into what a job would be like if you are interested in marine policy. The fellowship opens up a window into what it is like to work in science and policy and how they interplay. I would have never worked on Capitol Hill given my personal interests — not that I didn't like it but because I didn't know it. You have a lot of responsibility, whether you want it or not, and you definitely work hard. You get to meet people that you will know for the rest of your life.

MATT KENDALL

Matt Kendall is a marine biologist with the NOAA National Center for Coastal Ocean Science's Biogeography Program — his fellowship host office in 1998. On any given day, you can find him conducting a scuba survey to monitor fish, analyzing remote-sensing data to create a habitat map, advising managers on how best to use his scientific findings or writing journal articles for scientific publications.

From Punta Gorda, Fla., Kendall received his bachelor's degree in marine science from the University of South Carolina, a master's in reproductive ecology from North Carolina State University and a doctorate from the University of Maryland in marine science.

• WHAT WAS THE GENERAL FOCUS OF YOUR KNAUSS FELLOWSHIP?

I landed in a group at NOAA that does biogeographic analysis of marine organisms and their habitats. I fell in the "try something completely new" category of fellows since I had no background in biogeography. I guess it worked out however, because I've been in the same office ever since.

• PLEASE SHARE A HIGHLIGHT OR AN ACCOMPLISHMENT FROM YOUR TIME AS A FELLOW.

At the time, our office was helping the National Marine Fisheries Service define Essential Fish Habitat, or EFH. As a fellow, I found myself in charge of working with the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council to identify what information was available to meet the EFH mandate. As a result of that early interaction, our office at NOAA now has a lead role in benthic mapping, reef fish monitoring and habitat modelling throughout the U.S. Caribbean. Of course it takes a huge team to do all that, but I felt instrumental in getting the ball rolling during my fellowship year.

• WHAT HAVE BEEN THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES THAT HAVE COME OUT OF THE KNAUSS FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE?

The most obvious opportunity is my present job. I jumped at the offer of a federal position shortly after the fellowship ended and I am now in the midst of my 15th year in service. From that beginning, the opportunities snowballed with a promotion within the biogeography group, flexibility to complete a doctorate while working, and now the ability to shape the types of projects conducted by our program.

• HOW DO YOU APPLY THE EXPERIENCE AND SKILLS YOU GAINED AS A KNAUSS FELLOW TO YOUR CURRENT POSITION AND OVERALL CAREER?

The list is too long. I didn't appreciate until that year how important it is to cultivate relationships in your professional life. I used to think that science and management decisions could be boiled down to just the hard facts. Every day I'm reminded now that it's also the development of personal relationships that make it easier to push more of our science into making good management decisions.

• WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT OTHERS APPLY FOR THIS FELLOWSHIP? WHY?

Absolutely! You will never have the opportunity to interview for a wider variety of jobs in your life. The intensive placement week makes even the novice into a pro at handling tough interview questions after a few days. Even positions that you are probably not qualified for, you have a real shot at landing so you can test the waters in a new field for a year. Everyone knows that Knauss fellows are motivated, intelligent and ambitious, and can be trained to be productive members of any team doing just about anything. Fellows are often treated as part of the team, not some transient assistant. There are always fewer fellows than there are agencies that want to use them. This means that agencies are competing for you! Half of our staff is made up of former Knauss fellows. It's a great network to be a part of.

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• TOP: MATT KENDALL PREPARES FOR A DIVE. • TOP MIDDLE: EVERY TWO YEARS OR SO, KENDALL FINDS HIMSELF IN A COMPLETELY NEW COASTAL AREA. • TOP RIGHT: KENDALL TAKES AN UNDERWATER SELFIE DURING FIELDWORK. • BOTTOM: WHILE MAPPING CORAL REEFS IN MAJURO IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS, KENDALL, LEFT, SPEAKS WITH LOCAL CHILDREN.

DALL



Courtesy Matt Kendall



Courtesy Matt Kendall



Courtesy Matt Kendall



Courtesy NOAA Biogeography Branch

ASHLEY

ASHLEY ERICKSON

Ashley Erickson is the leadership development and education manager for the Center for Ocean Solutions at Stanford University. At the center, Erickson focuses on strategic engagement and outreach with primary decision-making and research audiences. Before accepting her permanent position, Erickson was a law and policy fellow at the center. During her Knauss fellowship in 2010, Erickson worked as a legislative staffer for U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Calif.

Originally from Elizabeth City, Erickson earned her bachelor's degree in psychology and English from the University of Virginia and a Juris Doctor from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Law, where she focused on ocean and coastal law, and international and federal fisheries regulation.

• WHAT WAS THE GENERAL FOCUS OF YOUR KNAUSS FELLOWSHIP?

I worked in the House of Representatives as a legislative staffer to Congressman Sam Farr, who represents a district along the central coast of California. I was his primary staffer for all things marine policy, science and Native American affairs. I was required to meet with constituents, agency staff and representatives from nongovernmental organizations and brief the congressman on the important ocean issues of the day. Capitol Hill was a fast-paced and demanding environment, exhausting and exhilarating all at once. I worked to advance his environmental and ocean agenda via policy drafting and analysis, issue research, letter and testimony preparation, and administration of the House Oceans Caucus. I also was responsible for coordinating with Congressman Farr on his position and activities for the Committee on Appropriations, focused on the Commerce, Justice and Science subcommittee, including organizing congressional support for NOAA's annual budget.

• PLEASE SHARE A HIGHLIGHT OR AN ACCOMPLISHMENT FROM YOUR TIME AS A FELLOW.

I worked closely with the congressman and other ocean champions in the House of Representatives on the CLEAR, or Consolidated Land, Energy, and Aquatic Resources Act. This bill contained a variety of oil-spill response provisions. It was introduced in the summer of 2010, immediately after the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster. My efforts on behalf of Congressman Farr were focused on a section devoted to a new governance structure for the nation's new National Ocean Policy, a champion issue for the congressman. The bill was polarized down party lines from the beginning, but after weeks of back and forth and negotiations and amendments, the bill passed the House with the National Ocean Policy provisions still intact. This was a huge success, reflecting a significant amount of effort from congressional staff, industry and the nongovernmental organization community alike. I was thrilled. Unfortunately,

it never made it through in the Senate before the close of the 111th Congress, but the experience of working with the committee on bill language, galvanizing support from members to support it on the House floor, and watching as the House passed the bill late into the evening was an experience I'll never forget.

• WHAT HAVE BEEN THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES THAT HAVE COME OUT OF THE KNAUSS FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE?

On a professional note, my exposure to the network of researchers and practitioners working on marine science and policy in California through my work as a staffer for a California congressman led me immediately to landing a job at my current organization. While working as a Knauss fellow, I met the Center for Ocean Solutions' Executive Director Meg Caldwell. She encouraged me to apply for an Early Career Law and Policy Fellowship with the organization. Almost three years later, I've now been hired on as a permanent member of the senior staff at the center, working on outreach, engagement, leadership development and educational components of the center's research. On a personal note, the best thing to emerge from my experience as a Knauss fellow is that I met my husband, Dan Reineman, who was in the Knauss fellowship class before mine.

• WHAT SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A FELLOW?

I was most surprised to learn how influential small groups of constituents, and sometimes even individual constituents, can be on members of Congress. The emphasis that members place on their constituents' views and opinions when making decisions for the country was astounding to me — it really put the old sayings of "power to the people" and "democracy for the people by the people" into a whole new light. I also learned that the power of the constituency can be both positive and negative, as you can imagine. On the one hand, the underserved and underrepresented can have their views heard, but on the other, the squeaky wheel always gets the grease.

• WOULD YOU RECOMMEND THAT OTHERS APPLY FOR THIS FELLOWSHIP? WHY?

Absolutely — I already have. I've submitted written recommendations for at least three graduating attorneys since leaving my fellowship. This was one of the richest educational experiences of my life. I learned more about policy and governance in 12 months on Capitol Hill than I ever imagined I would or could after graduating from law school. The life skills, the depth of understanding about how our country operates, the intense introduction to the federal budget and appropriations processes, and just generally learning how to communicate about issues with diverse audiences in a dynamic environment were all lessons I found to be both exceptional and unexpected. I feel so fortunate to have had this experience — it is one that you cannot replicate anywhere else outside of Washington, D.C. ☐

- TOP: ASHLEY ERICKSON AND CONGRESSMAN SAM FARR LOOK DOWN FROM THE CAPITOL DOME. • BOTTOM LEFT: ERICKSON MET HER HUSBAND DAN REINEMAN DURING HER TIME AS A KNAUSS FELLOW IN WASHINGTON, D.C.
- BOTTOM RIGHT: ACTOR TED DANSON, ERICKSON AND CONGRESSMAN FARR AT AN OCEANA EVENT.

RICKSON



Courtesy Ashley Erickson



Courtesy Ashley Erickson



Courtesy Ashley Erickson