

# NRT Conservation Science Newsletter



Spring/Summer 2024

## Finishing Strong

Greetings esteemed colleagues! As the academic year closes, our program's final year is coming to a strong conclusion as well. It's hard to believe how quickly these past six years have gone by! Over that time, we have developed so many wonderful connections among faculty, partners, and trainees through courses, research, internships, and retreats. We will continue our momentum into the summer as trainees remain engaged in important research and internship projects with partners throughout the state. Four more trainees have completed their thesis defenses during the past few months, and several more are preparing to do so soon. Please join us once again in congratulating and cheering on our fantastic trainees!

As our program wraps up, we continue to work collaboratively toward our goal of advancing conservation solutions that will ultimately lead to enhanced resilience of socio-ecological systems and stronger capacity to respond to changes. We are also finding ways to ensure the sustainability of key elements of our program to help us continue building relationships and forging ahead on research while learning from one another. We see our program's conclusion not as an ending but as a beginning to future endeavors. Many thanks to all of you for your ongoing support, enthusiasm, ideas, and overall inspiring participation in our program. We wish you a great summer, and we look forward to continuing our work together in the years ahead!

*~~ Dr. Sandra De Urioste-Stone,  
Program Leader*

## Congratulations!

Congratulations to the trainees who defended their theses recently:

-  Allison Foster, MS Forest Resources
-  Annie Stupik, MS Wildlife Ecology
-  Carrie Loomis, MA Communication
-  MacKenzie Conant, MS Forest Resources



These outstanding individuals bring our growing list of NRT Conservation Science alumni to 17 graduates, and we look forward to hearing about their future endeavors.

We also offer congratulations to NRT faculty Dr. Sandra De Urioste-Stone (School of Forest Resources) for her promotion to Professor and Dr. Jay Wason (School of Forest Resources) for his promotion to Associate Professor with tenure.

# Collaboration in Action

## Water Quality Monitoring Project

In an exciting example of the kind of collaborative endeavors our NRT program encourages and supports, the Penobscot Nation and NRT trainees are pushing ahead with field work for their project funded by a grant from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund. The work involves water quality monitoring and education related to public health and Wabanaki sustenance fishing practices.



The team of trainees (Christy Carovillano, Allie Foster, Rachel Hale, Holland Haverkamp, Carrie Loomis, Gab Venne) brings together diverse academic backgrounds including Forest Resources, Anthropology & Environmental Policy, Ecology & Environmental Sciences, and Communication & Journalism. Some have already been involved in field work, accompanying Penobscot Nation Water Resources staff out on the water for a sampling trip. They plan to continue assisting with future sampling efforts and project communications.



Rachel Hale (left) and Water Resources Program Manager Dan Kusnierz.



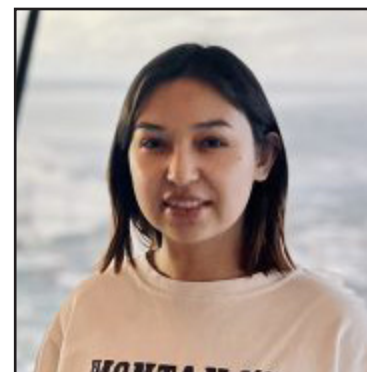
Allie Foster (left) and Water Resources Field & Lab Technician Shantel Neptune.



In the coming months, the project will progress as dragonfly mercury test kits are used in the Penobscot Nation Watershed. Assessing mercury levels in dragonfly larvae, which are important ecological indicators, will further the understanding of water quality and potential risks to wildlife and humans. Additional sampling will be conducted at each location to gain a more holistic picture of water and ecological health.



## Future Sustainability Leaders



To further advance the water quality project, trainee Holland Haverkamp (left photo) and the Penobscot Nation's Angie Reed, Dan Kusnierz, and Jan Paul secured funding from the Mitchell Center's Future Sustainability Leaders program for an undergraduate intern to work on the project this summer. The intern, Zahra Farahmand (right photo), will help with mercury testing, the creation of K-12 educational materials, and communication efforts.

## Sharing & Networking

We have been happy to support many trainees in attending conferences and workshops this year. These events offer trainees opportunities to share their research and interact with professional networks.

Carrie Loomis presented her work on communicating risks of polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) at the annual meeting for the Society for Risk Analysis.

*"...attending the annual meeting of the SRA was a great way to synthesize some of my experiences as a researcher and student in the NRT program."*



Annie Stupik presented her work on the role of landscape in the moose winter tick system at the annual conference of The Wildlife Society.

*"I left feeling invigorated about the future of conservation science and excited about the role I might play."*

Gab Venne attended The Qualitative Report Conference where she and fellow MS student Molly Bogner jointly presented their project on "Building Sustainable Transdisciplinary Networks to Support Research and Teaching".

*"Overall, this conference has helped me become more informed...as well as learn skills that can be shared..."*



Peter Breigenzer attended the Association for Fire Ecology's congress, presenting a poster on using relationships between forest structure, understory microclimate, and dead fuel moisture to inform restoration of fire-excluded forests of the northeast US.

*"I came away...feeling empowered to apply my transdisciplinary training to a career using fire management as a mode of promoting social and environmental justice."*

Visit <https://umaine.edu/conservationscience/> to learn more about our program.

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