

NMFS WCR Protected Resources Division Hershman Fellowship
Project Title: Marine Protected Species Management

Mentors:

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Position Overview:

The Protected Resources Division (PRD) is responsible for the oversight, policy direction, guidance and coordination of management programs mandated by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We manage protected species along the West Coast from blue whales— the largest animals to ever live— to invertebrates, such as abalone, that fit in the palm of your hand. These species are key elements of the ecosystem and are critically important for our culture, recreation, and economy. Within the Seattle branch of PRD, our work focuses on the conservation and recovery of protected species in the Pacific Northwest, including endangered [Southern Resident killer whales \(SRKW\)](#). We seek a fellow to work within the Seattle PRD team to support the SRKW recovery program.

The Fellowship Experience

In the NMFS West Coast Region, we aim to build an authentic and supportive culture for our students. This means that our mentors provide active supervision and coaching; set clear and attainable learning goals; and support growth and learning opportunities so that our interns and fellows can build meaningful careers. The fellow will be mentored by two PRD staff members; however, many members of PRD and the West Coast Region are passionate about educating early career professionals and are eager to share their experiences with students and recent graduates. Fellows can expect to integrate directly into the Seattle PRD team and be immersed in a rich learning environment with a supportive group of coworkers, mentors, and agency partners. The fellow will also have the opportunity to work closely with state and local government partners, Tribes, NGOs, and industry.

Fellowship Areas of Focus:

PRD manages a dynamic workload with lots of exciting opportunities for the fellow to participate in the policy process. While it is difficult to predict what projects may become available during their time with us, we work closely with our interns and fellows to determine where their interests lie so that we can best match them with projects that will help them achieve their goals. Two project areas in particular may serve as the basis of the fellowship's areas of focus:

1. Vessel Impact Reduction Coordination

Southern Resident killer whales rely on echolocation and communication to support their critical foraging and social needs; however, physical and acoustic disturbance from vessels can impair these functions. We have been working since 2019 to strengthen federal protective measures aimed at reducing vessel disturbance while also coordinating with state and Canadian partners to find parity across our three jurisdictions. NMFS is also a core partner of the Be Whale Wise program— a transboundary collaboration between NMFS, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Transport Canada, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), and the Whale Museum— which promotes voluntary guidelines for boating around marine wildlife. The fellow would contribute to these programs by: Working with Office of Law Enforcement and Northwest Fisheries Science Center staff to identify actions that NMFS may take to reduce vessel impacts; coordinating with DFO staff as they develop a proposed rule for new Marine Mammal Regulations limiting vessel activity near killer whales in B.C. waters; working with the other four core Be Whale Wise to update outreach materials for the 2025 boating season; and coordinating Be Whale Wise outreach events.

2. Assessing Impacts of Salmon Fisheries on SRKW Recovery

Southern Residents are fish-eating whales that rely on Chinook salmon as their most important prey. PRD works with state, federal, and Tribal fishery managers to ensure that salmon fisheries do not jeopardize the recovery of SRKWs through the removal of their prey from the ecosystem. The fellow may assist in tracking and monitoring of the Puget Sound salmon fishery during the annual salmon fishing season setting process to help monitor fishing activity and determine potential effects to SRKW. This will include helping to modify existing processes and frameworks for working with fishery managers for acquiring information that is specific to SRKW prey needs and potential effects. The fellow may also participate in existing working groups focused on methods for assessing impacts of fisheries to Southern Residents.

NMFS is also working to update our list of priority Chinook stocks based on multiple factors of importance for SRKW. This [priority prey list](#) is used to help support funding allocation for salmon habitat restoration that may also benefit SRKWs as well as input into hatchery management. The fellow may assist and/or lead efforts to factor in new scientific information into prey stock prioritization for SRKWs to update the existing priority prey list, working with scientists and managers from NMFS and WDFW to improve on the methods used in the 2018 analysis.

In addition to these two core projects, there will be opportunities for the fellow to take on other projects as they feel they are able. Potential additional projects include conducting ESA Section 7 consultations, developing education and outreach materials, and learning about other recovery programs in the West Coast Region, such as those for rockfish or sunflower sea stars.

NOAA Fisheries DEI Statement

Diversity and Inclusion

NOAA Fisheries is [committed to achieving diversity and inclusion](#) at all levels of the organization. We recognize that this is not a short-term goal but one that requires a deliberate, sustained effort.



Our Community

NOAA Fisheries is a multi-mission, geographically dispersed agency responsible for the stewardship of the nation's ocean resources and its habitat. Our workforce is made up of individuals with a wide range of characteristics and experiences who serve diverse communities across the nation. We maintain that the best scientific work is achieved through a community that values diversity and inclusion throughout the agency. We use the collective experience of all our staff to create a productive workforce that is a leader in creating and sustaining diversity and inclusion.

Our Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Understanding that diversity and inclusion are essential to fulfilling our mission, we will strive to cultivate a culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, fairness and belonging. We recognize that employees, supervisors, and leaders at all levels play a critical role in realizing this vision.

Defining Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity is the mixture of the unique attributes that shape an individual's identity which they bring into the workplace to help NOAA accomplish its goals. Diversity refers to demographic diversity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation), experiential diversity (e.g., affinities, hobbies, and abilities), and cognitive diversity (e.g., sensory processing and problem solving).

Inclusion is a culture that values the unique attributes of all team members. It is an environment which is respectful, collaborative, supportive, and one that allows for equal access. Inclusion requires active and intentional engagement on the part of everyone and provides a feeling of belonging.

Goals

- Be a vibrant and productive workforce
- Move the organizational culture to an inclusive environment where all employees are connected, respected, and have the opportunity to reach their full potential
- Ensure managers and supervisors foster employee engagement and promote diversity and inclusion in our workplace

Objectives

- Recruit qualified individuals at all levels who are reflective of our nation's diversity and whose diverse backgrounds, experience, education, and skills will advance NOAA's mission
- Provide a full and fair opportunity for all employees and applicants, regardless of race, religion, gender, color, age, disability, national origin, genetic information, and sexual orientation
- Strengthen employee engagement to cultivate an inclusive culture
- Ensure all employees have equal access to career development opportunities
- Expand leadership and accountability for managing diversity and inclusion across NOAA

We will make every effort to enhance and promote practices that encourage employee engagement and empowerment. We will factor diversity into recruitment and succession planning, and increase work-life balance and developmental opportunities to foster retention. We will ensure performance management and other policies and systems are aligned with our vision of diversity and inclusion.

In addition to sustaining a more ecologically diverse marine environment, we recognize the importance of accountability for sustainable growth and development as an organization. By focusing on employee engagement and embedding diversity into the culture, we are able to help sustain a healthy and balanced work life for all. To do this, we will work to strengthen leadership's commitment to a diverse and inclusive agency through accountability, data, and education. This in turn will help us institutionalize a culture of inclusion that can be sustained far into the future.