Puget Sound Institute
2025 - 2026 Washington Sea Grant Hershman Fellowship Description

Host Organization

Center for Urban Waters – Puget Sound Institute
University of Washington Tacoma

Location

326 East D St.
Tacoma, WA 98421

Primary Mentors

Aimee Kinney, Policy Lead
aimeek@uw.edu

Marielle Kanojia, Stakeholder Engagement and Science Communication Manager
marlars@uw.edu

Overview

Puget Sound Institute (PSI) provides analysis, research, and communication to advance the science of ecosystem protection. We receive major funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to provide technical support for Implementation Strategies aimed at improving the health of Puget Sound. In addition to applied research that promotes science-based solutions to Puget Sound recovery, we synthesize results of Puget Sound Program grants to support adaptive management and publish independent journalism about the science driving Salish Sea ecosystem recovery. We often work on emerging natural and social science with significant policy and management implications.

This fellowship will provide experience in research, collaborative planning, and science communication. Our small but multidisciplinary team consists of policy analysts, chemical engineers, ecologists, journalists, modelers, and GIS specialists. The primary mentors will be intentional about engaging other PSI staff members and agency partners based on the Fellow's specific interests. We operate in a hybrid work environment, with 3-4 days per week remote and 1-2 days in our Tacoma office, on-site with partner agencies, or at the UW Seattle campus.

Project Title

Science to Policy for Puget Sound Recovery Planning

Project Description

The Fellow's primary project will involve research on one of the critical uncertainties identified during the development of an Implementation Strategy. These questions span a wide range of topics—marine shorelines, estuaries, floodplains, shellfish, water quality, land development patterns, toxics in marine life—and disciplinary orientations including policy, law, economics, public administration, and natural sciences. Based on the Fellow's unique skills and interests, they will select a topic from the provided list, scope and conduct research, and communicate results. Support and guidance will be provided by PSI staff, but the Fellow will have full ownership of their research project.

Our 2024-2025 fellows tackled uncertainties about the use of metabolomics to better understand the impacts of contaminants on shellfish and how to communicate shoreline management trade-offs associated with sea level rise to property owners.

In addition, the Fellow will have opportunities to contribute to other PSI ongoing projects such as:

Feasibility Study for Small-Scale Wastewater Treatment Systems
Key PSI staff: Raye Evrard, Andy James, Marielle Kanojia, and Aimee Kinney
Many of the Puget Sound region's estimated 600,000 septic systems were installed in the 1960s and 1970s and now are nearing the end of their lifespan. Aging systems are more likely to fail, which can expose people to untreated sewage, contaminate nearby bodies of water, and lead to closures of shellfish beds to harvest. Many septic systems are vulnerable to flooding and sea level rise. This study will seek to identify areas that are not suitable for septic system, then evaluate benefits and barriers for alternative community-operated systems, such as Large Onsite Sewage Systems and small-scale wastewater treatment plants.

Networking and Professional Development Opportunities

PSI's role as a boundary spanning organization means our work is highly collaborative. Depending on the focus area(s) the Fellow selects, they will have opportunities to expand their network by engaging with:

- State agencies including Puget Sound Partnership, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Ecology, Department of Commerce
- Local jurisdictions including the City of Tacoma and King County
- Federal agencies including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Other research collaborators including Tribal staff; UW, OSU, WWU, and WSU scientists; and non-profit organizations

The Fellow will also have unique opportunities to engage in regional forums, scientific conferences, and state training including a course on respectful engagement with Tribes.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

We are proud to be a part of the most diverse University of Washington campus, where 61% of undergraduates identify as a person of color and 51% of undergraduates are the first in their families to go to college. As a unit of the University of Washington, Puget Sound Institute is guided by the overarching framework provided in the University's Diversity Blueprint. We are working to create a welcoming environment where people of all backgrounds are valued, heard, and supported. We are committed to learning about diversity, equity, and inclusive practices both as individual contributors and in our collective work to recover a complex socio-ecological system. We enthusiastically welcome staff and collaborators with diverse perspectives and experiences. As highlighted in the project descriptions, we strive to meaningfully incorporate equity considerations and collaborators with lived experience into our research. Some recent examples include:

- Leading a wastewater fee study that revealed hardship for low-income households
- Preserving and promoting collaborative natural resource policy making in Washington state
- Elevating research by Front and Centered that highlighted inequities in the administration of Washington's Model Toxics Control Act during development of the Toxics in Fish Implementation Strategy