SP²ARK FELLOW

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Postdoctoral Fellow
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Describe your work or studies.
I am a postdoctoral fellow with Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, hosted by the Great Lakes Toxicology and Ecology Division of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Duluth, Minnesota. I am an interdisciplinary social-ecological scientist, and I study connections between communities and waterfront ecosystems to try to inform better and more equitable decision making. My current research focuses on cultural ecosystem services, or the less tangible human well-being benefits associated with nature. My focus is on Great Lakes waterfront ecosystems, especially in Areas of Concern like the St. Louis River estuary. My postdoc research project explores how mapped ecosystem service potential—for activities like fishing, boating, and bird watching—relate to realized benefits for different sociodemographic populations. Our interdisciplinary team of scientists is applying mixed qualitative and quantitative methods and community-engaged approaches for this work.

What inspired you to enter this work?
Earlier in my career, I worked as a habitat restoration project manager. I noticed how environmental decision making is intended to benefit people and communities, but tools and methods for the explicit consideration of people or communities were not built into our restoration work. I decided to go back into research to help address that gap and find ways for environmental decision makers to incorporate community considerations directly into their work, with the intent of ultimately making outcomes more equitable and beneficial to all.

What are your professional aspirations?
I am currently looking for a permanent position with a government agency or NGO where I can apply my skills in both research and science communication! I would love to find a position where I can continue to apply interdisciplinary community-engaged research approaches to locally identified needs to improve environmental decision making.

How is science communication important in your work?
Communication is the foundation of everything we do, from collaborating with close colleagues to making sure our research finds the right audience out in the broader world. For our research to ultimately improve decision making, we must be able to effectively communicate research results to decision makers and those who influence decision making. I am excited to apply what I'm learning in the SP²ARK Fellowship to do just that.

What is something about yourself that you'd like to share with other IAGLR members?
My excitement for communication overflows into the rest of my life as well—I love creative writing also, and read dozens of books every year for fun.

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