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Rebecca Zeiber
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DURHAM, N.H. – Erika Washburn, who received her Ph.D. from the University of New Hampshire in 2009, has been awarded a John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship for 2010. Sponsored by the National Sea Grant College Program, the year-long fellowship matches current and recent graduate students with hosts in the legislative and executive branches of government.

Beginning in February, Washburn will spend one year in Washington, D.C., working in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for International Affairs. Washburn will have opportunities to contribute to the development of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) international policy positions, participate in foreign policy discussions and negotiations, analyze international NOAA program activities, as well as draft policy briefings and NOAA negotiating positions.

“I am interested in the land/sea interface and the social landscape of how people make decisions about that type of ecosystem,” Washburn said. “Specifically, what are the impediments and opportunities to move towards ecosystem-based planning? What framework is already in place that we can take advantage of?”

At UNH, Washburn studied with professor of natural resources Andrew Rosenberg. Her research dealt with the 14 towns within the Lamprey River watershed in New Hampshire and mapping the social landscape of land use decision making and examining the possibilities for ecosystem-based, watershed-scaled land use planning. This included discussions about upstream and downstream land use decisions, communication within the watershed and the challenges of spatial scaling.

As a result of Washburn’s research, a conference was held in 2008 to allow the members of land-use planning boards from the towns within the Lamprey River watershed to network with each other about watershed issues. Washburn said it was the first time all 14 towns came together for that purpose and she hopes it helped them realize how their planning decisions impact the surrounding communities.

Washburn, who is originally from Kalamazoo, Mich., received her undergraduate degrees in biology and archaeology from Boston University and her master’s degree in anthropology from Texas A&M University. She cites her Fulbright fellowship in the Netherlands during 1998-99 as the turning point in her professional career, one that sparked her interest in environmental policy and planning. Washburn spent a year abroad learning about the history of Dutch coastal and water management and how they plan for their future water resources.
"The Dutch are decades ahead of the U.S. in terms of watershed perspectives, land use planning and the role of the public becoming involved in the planning boards," she said. "They think hundreds of years ahead to incorporate aspects of spatial planning, ocean sciences and climate change."

The next phase of Washburn’s career as a Knauss fellow will help her learn about the inner workings of planning decisions and funding pressures that impact watersheds and spatial planning.

"I am looking forward to contributing to policy decision-making, to help move the issues on the ground forward," Washburn said.

The Knauss Fellowship Program is named in honor of John A. Knauss, a former administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and a founder of the Sea Grant program. Sea Grant is a national network of more than 30 programs that provide support, leadership and expertise for university-based marine research, extension and education.

N.H. Sea Grant is now accepting applications for the 2012 Knauss fellowship. The program is open to graduate and professional students in the marine- or aquatics-related fields. The deadline for applications is Feb. 28, 2010. For more information, visit http://www.seagrant.unh.edu/fellowships.html.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

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UNH alumna Erika Washburn received a Dean John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship for 2010.

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