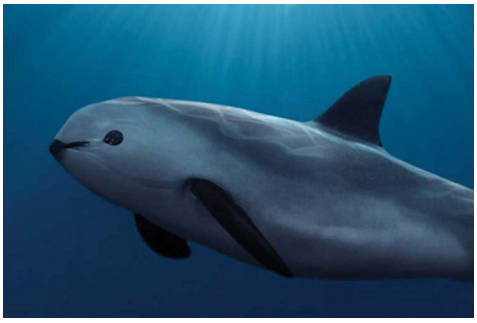
University of New Hampshire
UNH TODAY

Professor with a Porpoise

Improving fishing techniques may help save an endangered marine mammal

Monday, December 5, 2016



Chris Glass wouldn't blame you if you've never heard of the vaquita. The small porpoise is so secretive that it wasn't discovered as a species until 1958. Plus, there are only about 60 of them in existence, all in the upper Gulf of California, making the vaquita the world's most rarest marine mammal.

In July Glass, director of the Northeast Consortium and a research professor in UNH's Ocean Process Analysis Laboratory, was tapped to lead an international committee of experts committed to saving the vaquita by improving fishing techniques. His appointment, announced by Mexico's National Institute of Fisheries and the World Wildlife Fund, follows a bilateral agreement by President Barack Obama and Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto to protect the vaquita.

"We need to develop ways that fishermen can continue to earn a living without endangering the vaquita," Glass says. "My work has been based on reducing bycatch and discard in global fisheries —

SERIES:
UNH MAGAZINE
WINTER 2017

SUBSCRIBE TO THE UNH TODAY NEWSLETTER

SUBSCRIBE TO UNH TODAY RSS

RELATED LINKS

Steelhead Trout Making a Splash

Salt of the Earth

A Hole in the Bottom of the Sea

The Right Place, the Right Time

developing ways we can catch what we want to catch and release everything else untouched underwater."

"We need to develop ways that fishermen can continue to earn a living without endangering the vaquita."

Gillnets, nearly invisible fine nets that entangle and capture target fish, are by far the largest threat to vaquitas, which get trapped and, as mammals, drown. Mexico has made a two-year ban on gillnets permanent, so Glass and his committee aim to improve vaquita-safe fishing technology to support shrimp and other fisheries in the upper Gulf of California.

The presidential agreement will also put teeth into a crackdown on illegal gillnet fishing of another endangered species, the totoaba, whose swim bladder is prized in Chinese herbal medicine. "The illegal fishing has been rampant," says Glass. "International trade in totoaba has been banned for a number of years, but fishermen receive $4,000 per pound of swim bladder, equivalent to half a year's salary for legal fishing."

While Glass says he's honored and excited to chair this committee of international experts, the work is sobering. "It's a double-edged sword," he admits, noting that the vaquita's population numbers have plummeted by one-third in just two years. "If we're not successful, it's pretty devastating. But if we can reduce bycatch and discard to zero, I think there's hope."

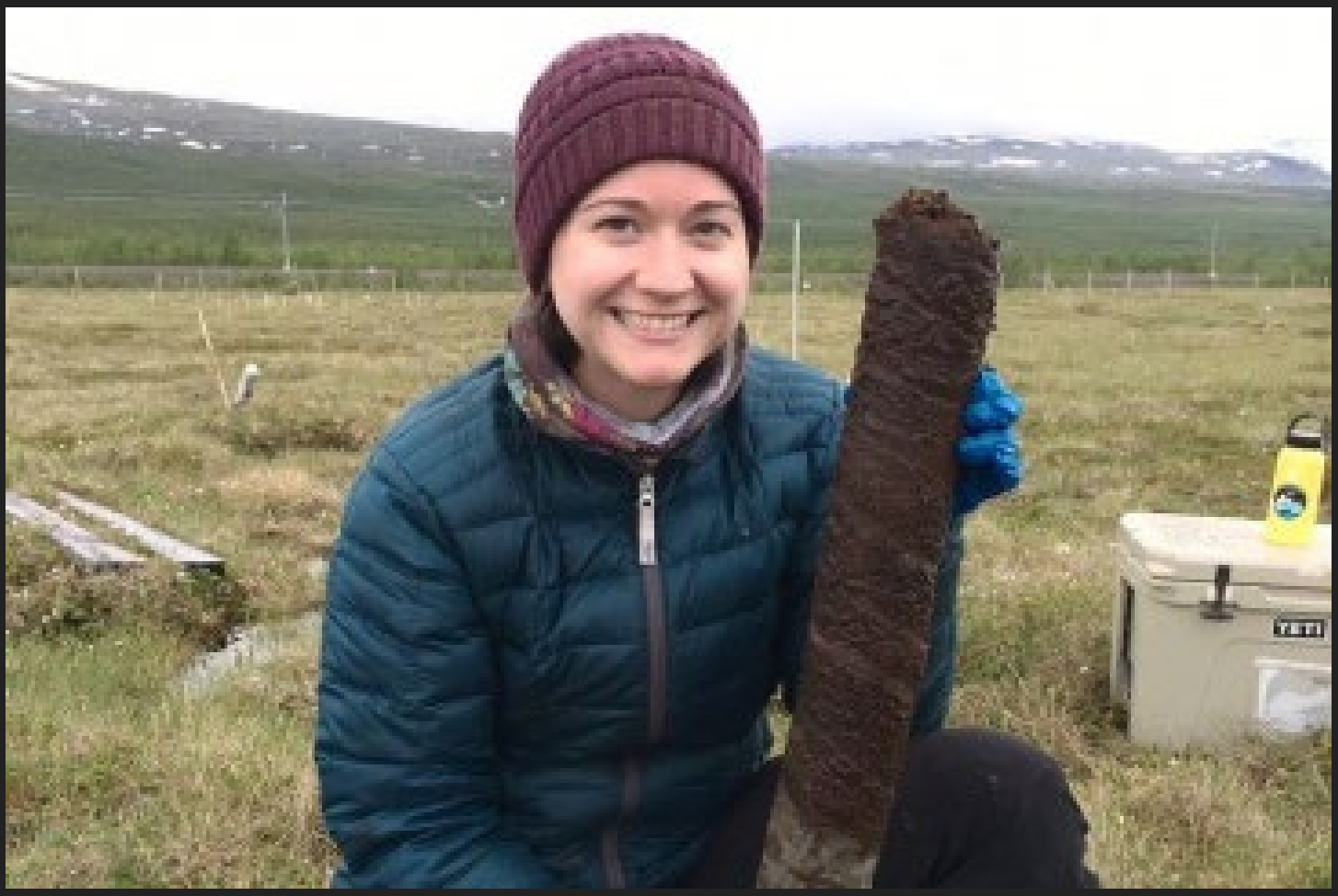
Originally published in UNH Magazine
Winter 2017 Issue

WRITTEN Beth Potier | Communications and Public Affairs |

BY: beth.potier@unh.edu | 2-1566

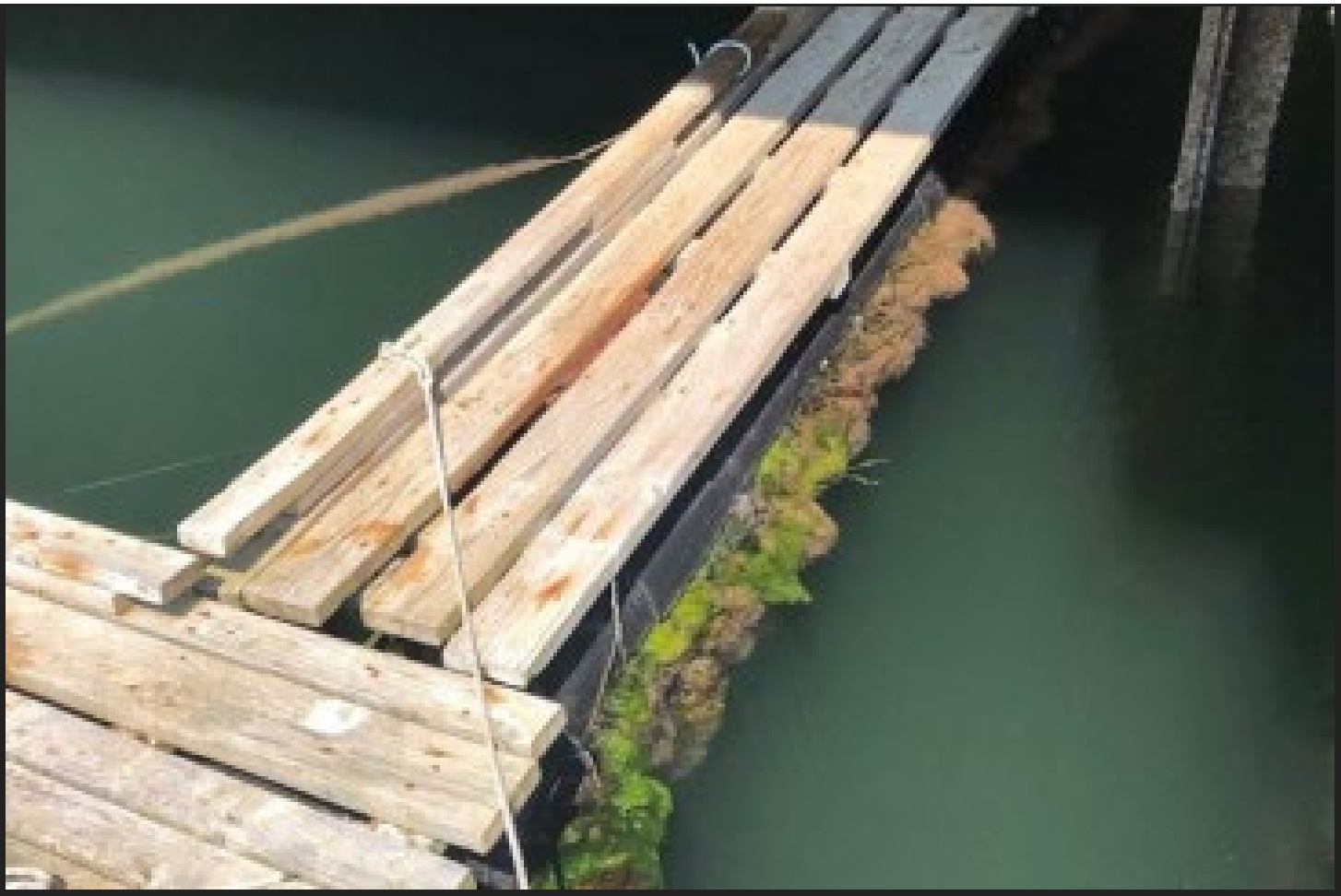
UNH MAGAZINE WINTER 2017

RELATED ARTICLES



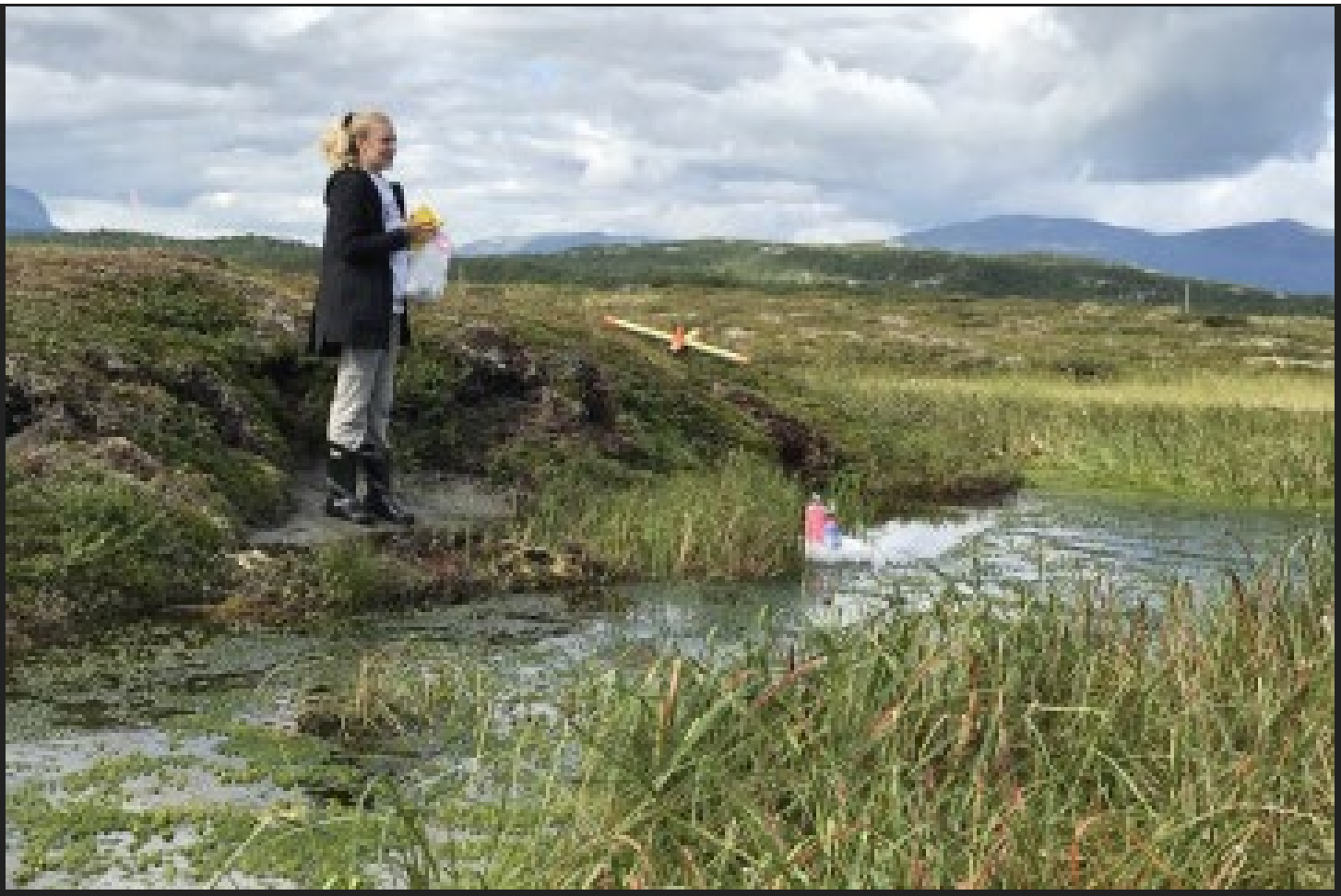
March 31, 2021 | NH AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

Randomness, not Environmental Selection, Key to Altering Bacteria in Arctic



May 20, 2021 | NH AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

UNH Scientists Aim to Solve a Million Dollar Problem for Aquaculture Industry



November 12, 2021 | GRANTS AND CONTRACTS NEWS

Transforming Students Into Climate Leaders

University of New Hampshire

UNH Today is produced for the UNH community and for friends of UNH.
The stories are written by the staff of UNH Communications and Public Affairs.
Email us: unhtoday.editor@unh.edu.