



WATERSHED

CONSERVATION RESEARCH CENTER

ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

April 2025 Newsletter

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The People of the WCRC

As the WCRC enters its fourth year of existence, we want to step back and take a look at the students and staff who have been instrumental in the important work we have done over the years. In this newsletter, we check in with some familiar faces from the past and introduce our newest group of students and staff. Finally, we highlight a couple of our current students and learn about the amazing research they have performed alongside the WCRC.



Ribbon Cutting Ceremony in 2021

Mission Statement

Our mission at the WCRC is to engage in strategic conservation activities and train future watershed stewards to protect, restore and enhance our land and water resources for future generations in the upper Allegheny River basin, focusing on the French Creek Watershed.



2024 Summer Research Crew



WCRC Alumni Spotlight: Where Are They Now?



Eva Kerr graduated from Allegheny College in 2023 and started a master's program at the University of Georgia focusing on the metapopulation dynamics of Gopher Frogs in Georgia. She has wrapped up fieldwork and is on track to finish by December 2025.

When asked about how the WCRC has helped prepare her for her career she responded: "Working with WCRC prepared me incredibly well for grad school. The WCRC team encouraged and pushed me as both a writer and reader, introduced me to RStudio, and provided a great foundation to pursue projects in amphibian conservation. Most importantly, they challenged me to think about the bigger picture and the broader implications of my work, which continues to influence how I write."



Grace Hemmelgarn graduated from Allegheny College in 2022 and is currently finishing her M.S. and transitioning to a Ph.D. program at University of Minnesota. She is using paleolimnology to connect subfossil zooplankton remains to historical fish communities. Through this, she is hoping to identify individual resilient walleye populations by examining how they have responded to environmental changes over the last few hundred years in some important Minnesota walleye lakes.



WCRC Alumni Spotlight: Where Are They Now?



Brody graduated from Allegheny College in 2024 and is now earning his M.S. at Texas Tech University. He is doing his M.S. research on the influence of environmental thresholds on freshwater assemblages with consideration of land use and climate change stressors.

Brody was heavily involved in numerous projects of the WCRC since its inception. The WCRC allowed Brody to develop his skills and knowledge in the aquatic sciences, and the WCRC team shared his passions and interests as a fisherman, resource user, and environmental steward. Brody credits the WCRC experience with opening the doors for his professional career.



Jake Folaron graduated from Allegheny College in 2024. After graduation, he has been employed as the Fishing Program Coordinator for Venture Outdoors, a Pittsburgh-based non-profit where he is responsible for planning events, specifically related to fishing, that help promote connection with the outdoors.

When asked what being a part of the WCRC meant to him, Jake said, “In a word, everything. Just about all of my knowledge when it comes to research can be attributed to my time with the WCRC. Even now as I transition into post-college life, I find myself learning more from Kelly, Casey, and Mark about how to be successful in the ‘real world’ and their support has made all of the difference for me.”



WCRC Alumni Spotlight: Where Are They Now?



Briana Sebastian was our first assistant research scientist with the WCRC. After her departure in 2023, she began a Ph.D. program in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Texas A&M where she is studying benthic diatoms in salt marshes.



Meredith Barney graduated from Allegheny College in 2021, prior to the founding of the WCRC. She returned in 2023 to fill the role of assistant research scientist. She departed in 2024 to pursue her M.S. at Stephen F Austin State University. She is currently a graduate research assistant documenting changes in demographics, life history and ecology of imperiled fish species of the Red River in Texas.

When asked about her time with the WCRC, she responded, “Working with the WCRC gave me early experience in my professional career within the field of aquatic and terrestrial ecology. I was able to gain experience in fish sampling techniques, fish identification, camera trapping, and other work with amphibians. I also gained vital leadership experience.”



Welcoming our New Assistant Research Scientist



Please join us in welcoming our new Assistant Research Scientist, Bryan Winston, to the WCRC. Bryan joined us at the end of March after making the big move from sunny Florida.

Bryan spent 12 years working for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission after receiving his degree in Marine Science from Eckerd College. Bryan's primary research interests have been in marine and freshwater fish conservation genetics and fisheries monitoring, but he is very excited to expand his knowledge of stream ecology and to join us in our mission of performing conservation activities and training future generations of watershed stewards! When not at work, you can find Bryan hiking the trails of Northwest Pennsylvania with his two black labs, Jack and Harry.



Science, Sun and Stream Work: Meet our 2025 Summer Research Team



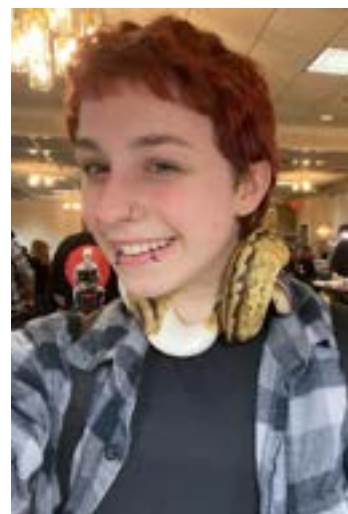
Name: Kisanet Tekle
Year: Sophomore
Hometown: Mekelle, Ethiopia
Major/Minor: Undeclared
Clubs/Activities: WCRC



Name: Liam Shields
Year: Junior
Hometown: Allison Park, PA
Major: Environmental Science and Sustainability
Minor: Biology
Clubs/Activities: Students for Environmental Action (SEA), Allegheny College Bird Club, Allegheny Outing Club, Newman Catholic Campus Ministry, Soccer Club and a Class of 2027 Senator for the Allegheny Student Government
Favorite Animal: Osprey



Name: Taryn Laplatney
Year: Senior
Hometown: Springfield, MA
Major: Environmental Science and Sustainability
Minor: Dance and Movement Studies
Clubs/activities: Alpha Delta Pi sorority and on the board of Orchesis Dance Company
Favorite Animal: Deer



Name: Riley Pegher
Year: Senior
Hometown: Pittsburgh, PA
Major: Psychology
Minor: Environmental Science and Sustainability
Clubs/activities: Orchesis, Students for Environmental Action
Favorite Animal: Their cat, Sage and snakes

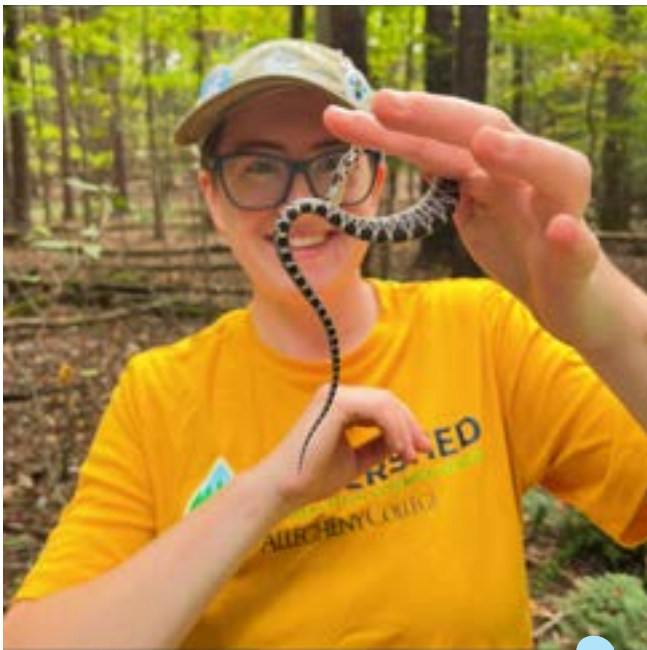


Highlighting our Senior Comp Students

Pete Siebler:
Salamanders and
Stream Surges

Pete recently defended his senior comp investigating the rates of extinction and recolonization after catastrophic streamflow events in the salamander populations of a headwater stream at the Bousson Environmental Research Reserve (BERR).

Pete has been volunteering with the WCRC since his sophomore year, and has been a dedicated part of our team since then!



Anthony DeMarco:
Salamanders and
Forests

Anthony recently defended his senior comp investigating the relationships between forest management strategy and terrestrial salamander populations in Northwestern Pennsylvania. He found highest species density and richness in unmanaged environments. Anthony said, "It was also an awesome experience to feel like a part of a team that was doing research that will make a difference in the future."





A Symphony of Watershed Stewardship: Biodiversity Beyond the Eye

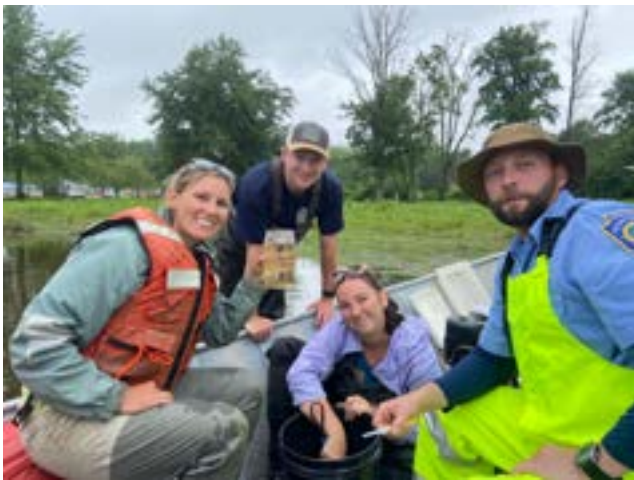
The WCRC supports students from across disciplines through its mini-grant program, which funds faculty-student projects in the French Creek Watershed. One of these grants was awarded to Adrienne Hanas ('25) to develop a series of paintings that highlights being a good steward to a watershed. The series provides a "zooming in" effect of seeing diversity at different scales. These paintings, titled, "*A Symphony of Watershed Stewardship: Biodiversity beyond the Eye*" can be viewed in the upper level of Carr Hall at Allegheny College.





Ongoing Projects

- Round Goby Distribution Using eDNA
- Instream Habitat Restoration and Monitoring
- Mammal Diversity on Protected Properties Using Camera Traps
- Amphibian Migration Monitoring and Restoration
- Trout Population Monitoring and Conservation









A Note from our Co-Directors

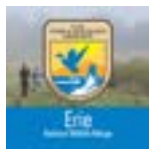
So many individuals, past and present, have made a lasting impact on the Watershed Conservation Research Center. We're continually inspired by the incredible students, dedicated staff, and passionate community partners who bring knowledge, energy, and heart to our mission of conserving the French Creek watershed and training the next generation of watershed stewards. This month, we're especially excited to welcome a new team member: Bryan Winston, our new Assistant Research Scientist. Bryan brings a wealth of aquatic experience to the table, and we're thrilled to have him on board.

In other exciting news, our educational signage has officially been installed along the new French Creek walking trail, near the Bessemer Street Corridor!

These eight interpretative signs highlight the rich history and extraordinary biodiversity of French Creek. We hope they spark curiosity, foster appreciation, and inspire more people to become active stewards of this incredible watershed.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

- Casey and Kelly



Find us on social media

 [instagram.com/wcrc_allegHENY/](https://www.instagram.com/wcrc_allegHENY/)

 [facebook.com/WCRCAllegHENY/](https://www.facebook.com/WCRCAllegHENY/)

 sites.allegHENY.edu/WCRC/

