

January 2018: *Katie Palubicki*



Background: I would like to introduce Katie Palubicki, Scientific Engagement Coordinator for The Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences for NOAA where she has been working for the past year. Please welcome our first person for the Profiles in Environmental Education feature.
- Kirsten

TPNC: Can you tell us a little about what you do?

Palubicki: I As with most environmental educators, my job description is quite broad and diverse (and seems to change

day-to-day). I primarily work with the public to help answer their questions about our environmental data. The department I work in at NOAA is one of the most significant archives for environmental data on Earth, so we are constantly working to make that data accessible for the general public. Besides assisting our users, I also write news articles and manage our social media. It's our job to take very complex scientific processes and make them easy to understand for the average person. I also attend conferences and outreach events to promote our data and products.

TPNC: What influenced you to choose this career?

Palubicki: I grew up in a family that went to National Parks on family vacations instead of theme parks. We were always outdoors, exploring our natural world, so I always felt a connection with it.

When I started college at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, I actually began as an English education major because I loved writing and teaching. However, I found myself drawn to the natural resource courses instead. I eventually changed direction and pursued a degree in environmental communication, allowing me to support my passion for the environment, while also combining my love of writing and teaching.

After my first "real" job post-grad as a naturalist at a Department of Natural Resources fisheries facility, I knew I wanted to advance my career in this field. I went back to graduate school to get my M.S. in Environmental Education. It was during this time that

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I discovered how diverse of a field EE truly is. I focused my degree on environmental communication and marketing, as I felt this was an undervalued and underserved skill in the field of EE. Being able to combine my passion for protecting and teaching others about the environment, while still being able to write and be creative was truly life changing. My career path since then has only gotten better and I can't imagine working in any other field.



TPNC: What do you like most about your career?

Palubicki: I love the diversity of tasks that I tackle day by day. I truly never know what the day is going to bring. When working with the public, I get a wide array of questions and requests, which I absolutely love. There's always a challenging request that tests my skills, and helps me grow professionally. I also love finding out what people are doing with our environmental data. Whether it's a teacher looking for information for a lesson plan or an architect using our ocean maps to design a pool that represents Lake Michigan, it's always eye-opening to discover the various ways the environment has reached people across the globe.

TPNC: What do you find challenging about your career or environmental in general?

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Palubicki: The biggest challenge for me (and many other environmental educators) is the threat of burn-out. In our current world, there are so many challenges and problems facing our environment. It's easy to feel hopeless and overwhelmed on a personal and professional level. There always seems to be a lack of hours in the day to get all of our goals and tasks accomplished and it's easy to focus too much on work. It's vital as a professional in EE to take some time for self-care.



TPNC: Can you describe a favorite environmental education moment?

Palubicki: There's so many big and small moments that I love to recount, but one of my favorites is from my previous position at the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education. My coworker and I worked with a charter school that focused on supporting inner-city students interested in sustainability, student-led learning and restorative justice. We coordinated a second-hand fashion show with the students that was put on at our state EE conference. We worked very hard to empower students to make the fashion show their own. We took them to a second hand shop to choose their clothes they would model. Some students modeled, others made up the choreography and

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script, another put together the music, and one student even made an environmental rap to debut at the end of the show. The excitement and passion the students demonstrated was inspiring and was the hit of the conference. It truly showed the power of belief and support in underserved populations and the difference they can make in the world.



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TPNC: Why do you feel environmental education is important?

Palubicki: “When the last tree is cut down, the last fish eaten, and the last stream poisoned, you will realize that you cannot eat money.” This Native American quote has always spoken to me as the most transparent way to describe the value of nature. Environmental educators open up a world to those that may have never realized their connection to nature and the impact it truly has on their lives. Helping future generations understand the value and importance of protecting our natural resources is vital to the success and happiness of our nation and our world.

TPNC: Who is your environmental hero and why?

Palubicki: Wendell Berry has always been my environmental hero and inspiration. If you’ve never picked up any of Berry’s works, do yourself a favor and start reading. Wendell Berry is a writer, environmental activist, cultural critic and author. Author Rod Dreher once wrote that Berry’s “unshakable devotion to the land, to localism, and to the dignity of traditional life makes him both a great American and [...] a prophet without honor in his native land.” His writings and words have pushed me to become a better person dedicated to our environment both professionally and personally.

TPNC: What is your favorite aspect of nature and why?

Palubicki: I love the peace that comes from every walk with nature. Whether I’m walking through an old-growth forest in the Wisconsin northwoods, kayaking on a glassy lake, or hiking to a mountain peak, I always am overcome with a sense of peace and connection to a greater meaning. Whenever I’m overwhelmed by the seemingly constant barrage of tragedy that comes from the news, I take an escape to the nearest piece of nature to cleanse myself and find my peace. I cannot imagine a better therapy.