

Reflections on the Sacramento-Davis Student Subunit's Participation in the 2018 AFS California-Nevada Chapter Annual Meeting

By: Sean Luis

President – Sacramento-Davis Student Subunit

Graduate Student - University of California Davis, Dept. of Land, Air, and Water Resources



Members of the Sac-Davis student subunit pose for a group photo [From L to R – TOP ROW: Alyssa Alfonso, John Liu, Sean Luis (President), Jim Hobbs (Faculty Sponsor/Cal-Neva Treasurer), Abigail Alfonso BOTTOM ROW: Nicole Aha (Vice President), David Hernandez, Rachel Fichman, Gabe Saron]

Back in March of 2016, I had the honor of attending the annual California–Nevada Chapter meeting for the first time. It was my first real exposure to AFS, and until that point, I did not really have a good sense of what the organization was all about. I expected to see some interesting breakout session presentations, take in some compelling plenary talks, and hoped to make a few new professional connections. When I arrived, I immediately recognized some familiar faces – colleagues from other agencies that I had interacted with on field projects, collaborative efforts, and stakeholder meetings. I was working for the National Marine Fisheries Service at the time, and as a young professional only having finished my B.S. in fisheries science five years prior, I hoped to learn as much as I could about the current happenings in California fisheries, and to expand my professional network. At the 2016 meeting, I approached Executive Committee (‘ExComm’ for short) officer Ramona Swenson (then Past-President) and asked how I could get involved with the Chapter. She mentioned that the Chapter Historian position was vacant and that they were looking for someone to fill that role – I said ‘*sign me up!*’ I began attending monthly ExComm meetings regularly and worked on archiving Chapter documents. Having that kind of face time with the other ExComm members allowed me to learn more about Chapter operations, and the AFS mission as a whole. I was able to attend the 2017 meeting last year as well, and as a result of my involvement, I recognized even more attendees, grew my

professional network even further, and got a lot more out of the experience in general.

Last year, I was accepted into a fulltime graduate school program at the University of California Davis, and I participated in a couple of activities that were hosted by the Sacramento-Davis student subunit last spring. Through that experience, I began to realize just how beneficial AFS involvement can be for student members. In an exceedingly competitive job market, it can be difficult for students to navigate the intimidating world of applications, interviews, networking events, resume building, and all of the other things that come with a job search. As a student, one of the biggest things you can do to set yourself up for professional success is to get involved with an organization like AFS – make personal connections with leaders in the industry, and show that you have energy, passion, and competence that sets you apart from the pack. Last summer, I agreed to be nominated for the 2017/2018 subunit President position, primarily out of a desire to help other students make those critical professional connections.

The annual Chapter meetings are important opportunities for students to interface with professionals. If the student membership of the California-Nevada chapter represents its future leadership (and future regional leaders in the industry), then the annual meetings represent critical instances in which current experts and influencers in the field can impart their wisdom and experience onto the next generation. Sometimes a smile, handshake, business card exchange, or constructive

comment on a student poster or presentation can be enough to make a difference. Our subunit was lucky enough to send 9 student members to the 2018 meeting, and I truly believe that they made the most of it.

Student Presenters

Four of our student attendees were able to present their research at the 2018 meeting. Nicole Aha (Sac-Davis subunit Vice President) gave an impressive oral presentation on her graduate research in looking at how different habitat types in Suisun Marsh influence juvenile Chinook salmon growth, and what resource and water quality characteristics of those habitats were drivers of those differences. Nicole has an uncanny ability to synthesize complex concepts into a digestible format. This makes her an excellent communicator and as a result, her talk had the entire audience on the edge of their seats.

"I received thoughtful questions after my presentation and enjoyed valuable conversations during the break with people interested in my research. I hope to return to the Cal-Neva AFS Meetings for years to come!"

-Nicole Aha

Arthur Barros gave a very impressive oral presentation as well on variation in the structure of fish communities and habitat quality in San Francisco's reconciled saltmarsh complexes. Arthur has extensive field experience as a fisheries biologist which has helped make him a great science communicator. When you see Arthur present (and look at his awesome photos from the field) you feel like you are right there with him on the boat. He was recently accepted to the Graduate Group in Ecology at UC Davis, we are excited to have him join the program.

David Hernandez put together a fantastic poster describing his graduate research investigating the habitat preference of blue rockfish (*Sebastes mystinus*) and how that preference shifts throughout the life history of the species. David had tons of interested meeting attendees approach him during the poster session, and was able to answer lots of great questions. This was David's first AFS conference and he took full advantage of the opportunity.

"The mentorship lunch offered at the meeting was incredibly helpful. Having mentors with experience in diverse job sectors opened my eyes to possible career paths that I had not previously considered. Overall, I felt that this guidance was invaluable and I hope that the mentorship lunch continues at future meetings."

-David Hernandez

As the fourth student presenter, I put together a poster describing my graduate research investigating physical drivers of straying behavior in hatchery-origin adult Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) through

ecohydraulic analysis. Although I am still at an early phase in my graduate research, it was a great opportunity to synthesize my ideas and get lots of great feedback from other meeting attendees.

Student Contributions

Throughout the meeting, our student members contributed to the logistical and operational aspects of the event as volunteer photographers, merchandise salespeople, IT technicians, and general laborers (those poster display boards are heavy!). Hosting the annual meeting each year involves a tremendous amount of work by the ExComm and by student volunteers. I was pleased to see our student members make such an important contribution to the effort.

In addition to the physical contributions that were made to the event by our student membership, it is also important to recognize the less tangible contributions that were also made. Each time a student attendee works up the courage to give a presentation, ask a question during a Q&A session, or even just approach a senior-level scientist, it benefits the entire Chapter as a whole. Having students actively participate in the event is key to its success. Throughout the 2018 meeting, I saw each and every one of our student members go out on a limb and interact with industry professionals. I was especially impressed with John Liu – he is a freshman in the Wildlife, Fish and Conservation Biology major at UC Davis. He has helped us out tremendously and is showing maturity and initiative well beyond his years!



Student subunit presidents (from L to R): Kat Dale (SCMBAS), Sean Luis (Sac-Davis), Aubrey Arevalo (HSU)

Subunit Interactions

Our student members benefitted tremendously by having the opportunity to interact with students from other participating subunits. It was great to hear the exchange of student ideas and perspectives from across the California-Nevada region. It was also a pleasure to meet Kat and Aubrey (student subunit presidents from the Santa Cruz-Monterey Bay Area, and Humboldt State University, respectfully). We were able to share ideas and strategies for subunit leadership, and we already have a fun cross-subunit event in the works for the summer!