

Scientist Spotlight

Hillary Sullivan



Q1. What is your educational background?

I received my B.A. in Environmental Science: Conservation Biology from Clark University in 2013, and my M.S. in Biology in 2014 from Clark University.

Q2. What inspired you to become a scientist?

What first inspired me was a trip I took in high school to the Galapagos to study giant tortoises. That unique opportunity allowed me to discover my passion for research and discovery and ever since, I knew I wanted to be a scientist.

Q3. What is your role as a scientist for CWC?

I am a Research Assistant in a biogeochemistry lab. I am involved in various projects that assess how salt marsh nutrient cycling has been affected by the oil spill. My main responsibilities include assisting in field work, processing and samples, and analyzing data.

The Coastal Waters Consortium's mission is to assess the chemical evolution, biological degradation, and environmental stresses of petroleum and dispersant within Gulf of Mexico coastal and shelf ecosystems.



Q4. Can you describe what you enjoy the most about conducting scientific research?

The part I enjoy most about research is the discovery and application of results. I enjoy developing questions about something unknown and figuring out how to answer them. I enjoy learning about how systems work and bringing them together to form a big picture understanding of an ecosystem.

Q5. Can you summarize your oil spill research and describe any surprising findings?

We are finding less of a negative response to oil response than we might have expected. The effect of oil depends on various factors such as the location of the marsh, salinity, soil and water characteristics, microbial activity, and more. Salt marshes appear to be fairly resilient ecosystems apparent by their recovery from and resistance to the oil spill.

