

The Coastal Waters Consortium Presents:

# Scientist Spotlight



## Erick Swenson

### What is your educational background?

1975 B. S. in Geology, University of New Hampshire  
1978 M. S. in Earth Science, Oceanography Concentration,  
University of New Hampshire

### What inspired you to become a scientist?

When I was a Boy Scout, I became interested in nature and the environment. Our Scoutmaster (a Science teacher) encouraged me to pursue my environmental interests. At the University of New Hampshire I took courses in Chemical and Physical Oceanography both of which had a strong emphasis on Coastal and Estuarine processes. I decided that working on Estuarine and Coastal Ecology was what I really wanted to do. A decision I have not regretted.

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

I enjoy interactions with other scientists during planning, collection and data analysis. These open discussions lead to new ideas on how to analyze data or new questions about our environment. I like to get involved in the logistics of how to make measurements or collect samples. I have a workshop at home and love to design and build sampling devices. I find the creation and analysis of long term environmental data sets to address ecological issues to be both challenging and rewarding.

### What is your role as a scientist for CWC?

I assist with the field sampling for the Marsh Health component of the project. My role includes field sampling, laboratory analysis, and maintaining the data sets. I have also worked on compiling long-term environmental data sets (salinity, water levels, climate) that will be used to categorize the environmental conditions during the oil spill.

### Can you summarize your oil spill research and describe any surprising findings you have come across?

We have 7 years of salt marsh substrate data (collected twice a year) that is giving insight into short-term variations. We have already seen a peak in soil bulk density as a result of sediment deposited during a storm event. As analysis continues we will investigate relationships with other environmental parameters as well as the general characterization of these marshes in relation to the oil spill.



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.