The Coastal Waters Consortium Presents:

Scientist Spotlight

Logen Pietraroia

What is your role as a scientist for CWC?
My role is a research assistant in Dr. Rabalais's lab. I am involved in our lab's study of benthic infauna (small organisms that live in sediment) in the subtidal areas adjacent to salt marshes at sites in Terrebonne Bay, LA, where oiling occurred in 2010.

Can you summarize your oil spill research and describe any surprising findings you have come across?
Benthic infauna are important parts of the estuarine ecosystem because they provide food for bottom dwelling organisms like shrimp and crabs and since they basically stay in one place (sessile), they are good indicators of ecosystem health. We are investigating the effect of various environmental factors, such as sediment hydrocarbon, sediment total organic carbon, sediment grain size, and salinity, on infauna distribution patterns and community composition.

What is your educational background?
I recently graduated from Nicholls State University in May 2016. I earned my Bachelor's degree in Biology with a concentration in Marine Biology.

What inspired you to become a scientist?
When I was a little girl, my dad and I spent a lot of time together watching the Discovery Channel and our favorite time of the year was Shark Week. Although I enjoyed any show involving animals, I seemed to gravitate toward shows about marine life. The scientists and their research amazed me. I was fascinated by the underwater world that we knew so little about. That curiosity never faded and I knew that when I grew up, I would be a marine biologist just like the cool scientists on TV.

Can you describe what you enjoy the most about conducting scientific research?
My favorite part about conducting scientific research is that my work environment is so versatile. Although the scientific goal remains the same, my daily tasks vary drastically. Some days, I can be found sorting infauna samples at the microscope. Other days, I am covered in mud while collecting samples in the marsh. It is easy to stay excited about your work when each day is different.

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.

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