The Coastal Waters Consortium Presents:

Scientist Spotlight

WENDY MORRISON

Q1. What is your educational background?
I have a B.S. degree in Biology

Q2. What inspired you to become a scientist?
I would have to characterize it as a "happy accident". When I was filling out my college application I had to designate a major. I was so young and didn't really know what I wanted to do. I knew that most of my first year's core courses would be the same for any major and I could change my mind later, but I had to write something down. I still remember very vividly thinking, "Well, I enjoyed my Biology class in High School…". When my major courses began, I knew I had made the right choice and I have never regretted it.

Q3. What is your role as a scientist for CWC?
I am assisting with the analysis of long term historic offshore phytoplankton data in comparison with the year of the oil spill to see how that event might have affected that aspect of the food chain. This involves microscopic analysis of samples that haven't been processed yet for phytoplankton community composition, entering and organizing the data to be sent to another CWC scientist for analysis, then collaborating with interpretation and dissemination of results.

Q4. What do you like most about doing scientific research?
Put simply: I like figuring things out. I find satisfaction in planning, organizing and implementing tasks that go toward answering big picture questions. I like focusing on the *details* of a project, helping to figure out the best way to sample, to do an experiment, then constructing the items needed to implement those aspects. Basically, I love the challenge (which translates to fun) of figuring out the "how" of a project. This is one of the reasons I decided not to pursue a PhD: it would eventually have taken me away from the hands-on, behind the scenes work that I enjoy most.

Q5. Can you describe any surprising findings you have come across so far?
The CWC phytoplankton data analysis is still in its early stages, but any information gleaned from that effort will be an important piece in the bigger puzzle of the effects of the Deep Water Horizon oil spill event.

The Coastal Waters Consortium's mission 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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