



**USDA Forest Service**  
**Presidential Management Fellows**  
**2015 Cohort**

*Future Leaders Growing Future Leaders*





## **Lisa Fong**

*Hydrologist, Cooperative Forestry  
Washington D.C. Office*

Lisa is a Hydrologist on the Washington Office Cooperative Forestry staff (State & Private Forestry), and works on the cross-deputy area Ecosystem Services and Markets team. A native of the San Francisco bay area, she holds a B.S. in Marine Biology from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA); a M.S. in Biology (Marine Ecology focus) from California State University,

Los Angeles; and a Doctor of Environmental Science and Engineering (D.Env) degree from UCLA. Prior to her graduate studies, Lisa taught Spanish and Science as a middle and high school teacher. During graduate school, she researched mussel population biology on the west coast of British Columbia, Canada; carried out wetland bio-assessment studies to assist watershed management in California as science staff at the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project, a joint powers authority that conducts research in regional coastal ecosystems from watersheds to the ocean; and supported agency integration at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration headquarters as a Knauss Marine Policy Fellow. Outside of work, Lisa likes to spend time with friends, travel, and participate in outdoor activities and sports including surfing, snowboarding, and soccer.



## **Michelle Lazaro**

*Natural Resource Specialist, Resource Monitoring and  
Assessment  
Pacific Northwest Research Station*

Michelle grew up in Mililani, Hawai‘i, and is currently a natural resources specialist at the Pacific Northwest Research Station, summarizing and communicating results of forest inventories conducted in Hawai‘i and the U.S. affiliated islands in the Pacific. She earned her

master and undergraduate degrees at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa in natural resources and environmental management. Her research focused on optimizing a baseline soil carbon inventory of Hawai‘i and identifying specific mechanisms of carbon sequestration in volcanic ash derived soils. She also worked as research assistant for the Pacific Island Climate Change Cooperative and the U.S. Geological Survey expanding a climate change vulnerability assessment model of all 1086 native Hawaiian plant species to integrate key species trait information. She has also worked as a project coordinator on a collaborative project with the Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Rapid Carbon Assessment collecting and processing soil inventory data for Hawai‘i. She has also interned with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S Army Corps of Engineers, and is now looking forward to contributing to the Forest Service’s work in island ecosystems.



## **Emily Lauderdale**

*Natural Resource Specialist, NEPA Planner  
Willamette National Forest*

Emily is originally from northeastern Wisconsin and has enjoyed touring the Great Lakes states for work and education. She received her bachelor's degree in German and Environmental Policy and Culture from Northwestern University. After working in land management and prairie restoration in Madison, WI, Emily returned to school to pursue a masters in Landscape Architecture at the University of Michigan. Through studio design projects and internships, Emily focused on sustainable design techniques to foster healthy communities. She is passionate about using urban agriculture and neighborhood planning to reshape the health of cities. Following graduation, Emily worked for an architecture firm specializing in sustainable design in Appleton, WI. As a Natural Resource Specialist / NEPA Planner on the Willamette National Forest, Emily is combining her skills in policy and design to make a positive impact on the Forest and surrounding communities. Emily is excited to be in the state of Oregon and is taking full advantage of the trail running, hiking, and nature photography opportunities that the Pacific Northwest has to offer.



## **Kristen Pelz**

*Research Ecologist  
Rocky Mountain Research Station*

Kristen is a Research Ecologist with the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Reno, Nevada. Before becoming a PMF, she worked at the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute on collaborative forest restoration projects in the state. Kristen completed a PhD in Ecology and a MS in Forest Science at Colorado State University where her graduate work focused on the effects of mountain pine beetle in the southern Rockies. She also holds a BA in Geography/Environmental Studies from Middlebury College. Kristen was born and raised in Denver, Colorado. For fun she loves exploring by car, train, foot, bus, bike or ski and hanging out with her husband, friends, family, and ill-behaved dogs.



## **Joe Otts**

*Recreation and Lands Planner  
Deschutes National Forest*

Joe is currently working on the Deschutes National Forest (Bend, OR) as a Recreation and Lands Planner. His projects include coordinating the Human Ecology Mapping regional pilot project to collect place-based information related to public values and uses on national forests, completing an outfitter-guide needs assessment, and assisting NEPA planning efforts. Joe is also

assisting at the Regional Office level to prepare guidance for efficient and regionally-consistent community engagement in Forest Plan revision processes. Joe's past experience includes 3 years as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji. He also completed two AmeriCorps tours, performing trail work in Nevada and coordinating a collaborative natural history park planning effort in Seaside, OR. Joe recently completed a fellowship with Portland State University, where he researched and documented the value of parks, trails and natural areas to the Portland metro region's economy. He also served a brief stint with the California Coastal Commission, reviewing Coast Development Permit decision appeals for consistency with state and county environmental and land planning laws. His pastimes include hiking, SCUBA diving, and bouldering. Joe earned his BS from the University of California-San Diego and went on to receive his Master of Science in Natural Resources and Environment: Environmental Policy and Planning from the University of Michigan.



## **Rebecca Rasch**

*Social Scientist  
Region 1 Office*

Rebecca is currently the Regional Social Scientist for Region 1, in Missoula, MT. Prior to her appointment with the Forest Service, Rebecca served as the Senior Project Manager and Statistical Consultant for the Social Science Research Council, conducting both quantitative and qualitative research and analysis for their Measure of America program. Rebecca has also worked for several non-profit organizations focused on sustainable development and environmental policy, including Global Giving, the Environmental Defense Fund and TechnoServe. Rebecca served as an agro-forestry and micro-enterprise development volunteer in the Peace Corps. Rebecca holds a B.A. in American Studies from Wesleyan University, an M.B.A. from the Darden Graduate School of Business at the University of Virginia, and a Ph.D. in Sociology and Certificate in Demography from the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. Her dissertation research explored the relationship between income inequality and vulnerability to climate change using advanced spatial statistical analysis. Born and raised in New Jersey, Rebecca has lived, worked, studied and/or travelled to over 70 countries and is always planning her next cross-cultural adventure. An avid rock climber, hiker and cross-country skier, Rebecca welcomes any and all advice on new, wild locations to enjoy with her 3-year-old Labrador/Rottweiler mix, Freddy.



## John Souther

*Natural Resource Specialist, Fire and Aviation Management  
Region 8*

Born and raised in the mountains of West Virginia, John earned bachelor's degrees from West Virginia University in Geology and German before serving in the Peace Corps as a beekeeper and agricultural extension worker in Paraguay. Inspired by his experiences living abroad, John earned an MA in Foreign Language Education and spent over three years teaching German and English as a Second Language. He also worked as a geologist, monitoring surface effects of longwall coal mining in Southwestern Pennsylvania, for two years. During the summers from 2006 to 2014, John could often be found in the forests of West Virginia and Wisconsin where he worked and volunteered

on several research projects related to management and conservation of American ginseng and other sensitive understory plant species. In 2014 John completed his MS in Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he researched successional changes in forest structure and tree community composition in post-agricultural forests of Puerto Rico. Since joining the Forest Service in August 2015, John has worked as a Natural Resources Specialist in Fire and Aviation Management in the Southeast Regional Office in Atlanta. His work in FAM has focused on partnering with federal, state, and private organizations across the Southeast to increase stakeholder involvement in, and improve outcomes related to, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. In his free time, John enjoys hiking, biking, swimming, foraging, skiing, camping, and watching as his 2-year-old daughter discovers the wonders of nature for herself.



## Melanie Pugh

*Management Analyst, Regulatory and Management Services  
Washington D.C. Office*

Melanie is a Management Analyst in the Office of Regulatory and Management Services located in Washington D.C. She recently graduated *cum laude* from Seattle University School of Law where she focused her studies on food law & policy and environmental law. In law school she interned with the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic, Earthjustice, the Washington State Supreme Court, and Washington Lawyers for the Arts. As a co-founder of the SU Food Law Society and a member of the Seattle University Law Review, she organized the 2015 symposium, titled "Re-Tooling Food Law," that brought together national leaders of food system reform. Prior to law school, she

received her B.A. from the University of Washington where she majored in Political Science and interned with state and federal Senate offices. She is originally from Salt Lake City, Utah, but spent the last ten years in Seattle, Washington, and just arrived in Washington D.C. to begin her fellowship. When not working, she enjoys running, reading contemporary fiction, and building her vinyl collection.



## **Logan Free**

*Landscape Architect, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources*

*Washington D.C. Office*

Logan is currently a Landscape Architect with the Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources staff unit at the Washington Office. He provides critical place-based information and resources to regions and forests that help in sustaining a range of recreational settings, opportunities and access, protect valuable scenic character, and foster a sense of place. His long-

term detail took place at the National Forests of North Carolina Supervisor's Office in Asheville where he worked as a Landscape Architect and also provided support on the wilderness evaluation phase of the Pisgah and Nantahala Forest Plan Revisions. Logan earned his bachelor's degree in Geography with a GIS concentration and Biology minor from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC, and a Masters of Landscape Architecture degree from North Carolina State University where he focused on evidence-based design for the creation of functional landscapes that conserve ecosystem services and enable active and passive uses. Outside of work he enjoys escaping the DC area to hike, backpack, and snowboard.



## **Alex Schlueter**

*Natural Resource Specialist, Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers*

*Washington D.C. Office*

Alex grew up hunting and fishing the forests of central Minnesota. He stayed near home to attend the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities where he earned a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management with minors in Forestry and Environmental Science, and graduated in December 2014 with a M.S. in Natural Resources Science and Management. In graduate school, his

research focused on the human dimensions of natural resources. Specifically, he investigated recreation area visitors' opinions of invasive species management. He has experience working for three federal land management agencies including one season as a wilderness ranger on the Superior National Forest in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, a semester as an unpaid intern for the National Park Service, and three seasons as a park ranger for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Alex joined the Office of Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers (WWSR) in October 2015 and enjoys collaborating with people across the country to work on a variety of projects. A few of these include managing a national Wilderness awards program, developing and distributing reports summarizing Wilderness Stewardship Performance results (the performance measure for Wilderness), and serving on multiple WWSR-related councils/committees/teams. In his free time, Alex loves to hike, binge watch TV shows on the internet, and explore the city on his old Honda motorcycle.