

Alumni Spotlight

Amy Cottrell



My name is Amy Cottrell, and I am currently working towards my Master's degree in Fisheries at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama. My Masters research consists of using radio telemetry to study the movement behaviors and habitat selection of Shoal Bass in two Chattahoochee River tributaries. I'm using ArcGIS and side-scan sonar to analyze the complexities of available vs. selected habitat for individuals. I'll be comparing abundance, daily growth, and hatch-date frequencies of age-0 Shoal Bass among creeks and seasons. Lastly, I am comparing macroinvertebrate communities between my two study creeks and two tributaries where populations have been eliminated. Shoal Bass are considered threatened, so we hope that this research can be used to first identify specific habitat types that support viable populations, and then in

turn protect and restore these areas. I am currently serving as the Auburn AFS Student Subunit president and I am the current Student Representative for the Southern Division of AFS.

My favorite professor at UWGB was Dr. Forsythe. I was looking to get experience in fisheries and was suddenly swept up into his lab helping graduate students do field work. I then became involved with a project partnered with the Shedd Aquarium looking at Northern Pike habitat use and responses to a dam removal on Duck Creek. This was all new to me, and Dr. Forsythe was more than willing to provide me with tips, advice, and professional guidance through it all. He was a great mentor and he is a large reason why I stayed in fisheries and was inspired to attend graduate school.

I am passionate about the conservation of native species at large spatial scales. There is a relatively new focus on taking watershed-wide approaches to conservation and restoration. A lot of times these efforts are carried out at smaller scales or focus on one species and fail to account for life history changes and species interactions. This new method looks at the bigger picture and is likely to be more effective and thus less costly. I'm also passionate about this because Shoal Bass are a focal species for ecosystem restoration in the southeast!

My best advice is to get involved with degree-related activities outside of the classroom as much as you can. The experience and research I was exposed to as an undergrad was pivotal in gaining the graduate research assistantship I am completing right now. My current advisor has told me that it was never my grades but my experience that caused him to hire me. In a field like biology, there are lots of taxon to study, so make time to explore and engage while you are still a student. You may surprise yourself with what catches your heart. There are lots of opportunities available at UWGB – go find them and take advantage.

