

# PSI Career Profiles!

Meet PSI Staff, learn how we became marine scientists and discover what we do on a typical day.





**Name:** Aimee Christy ([aimee@pacshell.org](mailto:aimee@pacshell.org))

**Job Title:**

Research Biologist, Outreach & Education Coordinator

**Education:**

MS Environmental Studies, The Evergreen State College  
BS Zoology, University of Washington

**Career Path:**

As a kid, I loved the ocean – gazing into tide pools and pouring over Jacques Cousteau books. I went to college and studied zoology, marine biology and environmental studies. I worked in various laboratories and seasonal field jobs prior to working on the Shellfish Crew for WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife. The WDFW job led me to my

current position at PSI where I've been for 20 years!!

**Typical Job Responsibilities:**

During the spring/summer: Monitoring water quality and plankton; measuring shellfish growth rates and mortality, surveying invertebrates and algae. During the fall/winter: analyzing data, writing reports and grant proposals. I also visit many classrooms throughout the year and participate in field trips teaching kids about marine science, job skills and actions we can take to protect our oceans.

**Best part about my job:** Working with great people; constantly learning; looking at plankton under a microscope; protecting water quality for shellfish and all the marine inhabitants that call Puget Sound home!

**Frequently used equipment:**

Phytoplankton net, Olympus microscope, YSI Instrument, Secchi disk, quadrats, Rite in the Rain paper, boots, wetsuits, rain gear, gloves.

**Favorite place to work:**

Budd Inlet (right in our own back yard); Hood Canal – the scenery, the whales, the warm water!; Little Skookum Inlet; really, anywhere by the water (or IN the water is even better!)

**Career Advice:**

Be curious and ask questions! It's how we learn. In this field, there is NO way to know everything about everything! Never be afraid to ask.



**Name:** Daniel Cheney ([cheney@pacshell.org](mailto:cheney@pacshell.org))

**Job Title:** Senior Scientist

**Education:** B.S. and Ph.D. Fisheries, University of Washington; M.S., Zoology, University of Hawaii

**Career Path:** I started with summer work on streams and lakes in Alaska, and then shifted to the tropical Pacific with teaching and field studies in Hawaii, Guam and the Cook Islands. Had assignments with various government and private groups in the middle east, central and south America, the western Pacific and Asia, and here in the Pacific Northwest. Joined PSI when it was first organized around about 1997.

**Typical Job Responsibilities:** Now semi-retired, I mostly help in reviewing and commenting on reports submitted to scientific publications and project funders. But, have worked with our PSI team in field sampling, lab work and report and grant writing, and various tasks needed to pull these pieces together.

**Best part about my job:** Doing amazing marine science with a creative and friendly team of colleagues, striving to assist shellfish farmers and environmental organizations, and having opportunities to work in many unique parts of the world.

**Frequently used equipment:** Various types and small craft, SCUBA diving equipment, videos and still cameras for above and in-water photography, a variety of computer types and software, microscopes and related tools, all sorts of field and laboratory equipment and supplies.

**Favorite place to work:** Beaches and nearshore areas, and rivers lakes and streams of the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, and tropical Pacific islands.

**Career Advice:** Be flexible and adventurous, and it can help to work a little outside your comfort zone. A wide range of skills can be helpful, even when you are looking at a narrow career path. Probably, most important, ask questions and seek answers from a good mentor who can guide you through your early career choices.



**Name:** Evie Fagergren ([evie@pacshell.org](mailto:evie@pacshell.org))

**Job Title:** Administrative Assistant & Technician

**Education:** BA in Biology, St. Mary's College of Maryland

**Career Path:** During the summers in college, I dug clams on my family's shellfish farm in South Puget Sound. After college, I interned at Battelle Marine Sciences Laboratory in Sequim, WA and learned about eelgrass and phytoplankton. But I have many interests including music. So I started teaching private viola lessons to kids so that I could keep

playing music on a weekly basis. That led me to many different part time jobs to supplement my teaching income: working at a church, a law office, a mental health counseling office, and an eldercare business. Now I am working year-round on my family's shellfish farm and for PSI!

**Typical Job Responsibilities:** I track the money that comes in and the money that goes out at PSI. I help the research biologists know how much money has been spent on their projects so that they know how many hours and expenses they have remaining to spend. I also help with field research, lab work and education & outreach when the research biologists need an extra hand.

**Best part about my job:** Feeling like I am part of a team that is doing important work to support shellfish growers, regulators, researchers and the broader community.

**Frequently used equipment:** The computer for QuickBooks and Excel.

**Favorite place to work:** The tideflats of Puget Sound.

**Career Advice:** It's okay to have many interests. Don't worry too much if they don't align with one career path that seems clear and straightforward. You will figure it out and you will be a great asset to any team if you bring many skills to the table.



**Name:** Andy Suhrbier ([suhrbier@pacshell.org](mailto:suhrbier@pacshell.org))

**Job Title:** Senior Biologist

**Education:** Bachelors of Science, Texas Lutheran University

**Career Path:** My path was very indirect, from WA, TX, OR, AK and back, but I'm glad I got here. First job was picking strawberries and cucumbers with my mom, siblings and grandmother in Oregon as a kid. Next was washing dishes, working at the college lab and library, and painting Washington State Patrol buildings. After getting a B.S. in molecular biology I worked at a Texas Emergency

Room as a technician, a timber surveyor in the woods with my dad, a salmon creel checker in Oregon, a NOAA Observer in the Bering sea before I landed at PSI about 22 years ago. At PSI, I started counting phytoplankton for an oyster mortality study; now I lead and collaborate on multiple projects.

**Typical Job Responsibilities:** I maintain a group of water quality sensors in Washington state that supply real time data used by shellfish growers, regulators and scientists. I lead research on sea cucumber farming, enhancement and their role in recycling nutrients from shellfish. I conduct shellfish and vegetation surveys for farmers and land owners either by myself or a large crew. Also collaborate in the field and office for projects that study rainfall shellfish closures in Alaska, environmental interactions in the intertidal zone, and new farm development.

**Best part about my job:** Exploring different areas of west coast whether its remote, urban or in between. This allows me to interact and learn from many different types of shellfishy folks. I guess in summary, the best part about my job is the people, stories, views, unique challenges and side trips to new hikes that extend the day.

**Frequently used equipment:** My cheap road laptop gives me the flexibility to remotely calibrate instruments, troubleshoot and understand current data. A good headlamp is a must in the winter and Trimble Geo7x helps document shellfish populations and vegetation and put me in the right place. And of course the 'ol phone is key for important conversations and taking pictures in the field.

**Favorite place to work:** It's hard to get there but working the late night/early morning tides in more remote areas are the best. Turning off my headlamp to check out the stars and returning home when the sun rises is something else!

**Career Advice:** Don't be afraid to leave home and hop onto new adventures that challenge yourself.



**Name:** Bobbi Hudson ([bobbi@pacshell.org](mailto:bobbi@pacshell.org))

**Job Title:** Executive Director

**Education:** Masters of Environmental Science, The Evergreen State College; Bachelors of Science, The Evergreen State College

**Career Path:** My interest in ecology and fisheries stem from my upbringing in a commercial fishing family, working the waters of SE Alaska. As a teen I branched out from the family business to work as a deckhand on other commercial fishing “tenders” transporting salmon, herring, black cod and halibut to coastal processing facilities. During college I landed a summer job at a mussel farm, which was my introduction to shellfish aquaculture. I later worked as a fisheries technician for

USFWS (in the Grand Canyon!) then returned to Washington and served a state agency as a public information officer while I completed my MSc. Shortly afterwards, but almost ten years after my introduction to shellfish farming, I was hired as a research biologist at PSI. Today I’ve moved into a leadership role managing the organization.

**Typical Job Responsibilities:** I spend a lot of time writing, everything from emails and progress reports to peer-reviewed publications and million-dollar grant proposals. As director I manage people and projects, timelines, and budgets. There are a lot of moving parts, so managing change has also been critical. Relationship building, and coordination for collaborative research and applied science projects, are also key to my day-to-day activities.

**Best part about my job:** I sincerely enjoy the people I work with. PSI’s variety of research and interdisciplinary projects has facilitated relationships literally around the world. Collaboration with shellfish farmers, regulators, academics, and NGO scientists has enriched my life in ways I never could have imagined.

**Frequently used equipment:** Hands down, my computer! Software, cameras and always my hands. Field work methods vary from environment to environment, but observation skills and a ‘get ‘er done’ attitude are indispensable for on-water and nearshore work.

**Favorite place to work:** Any remote marine environment, but especially in Alaska. Combining my lifelong love of Alaska and PSI research has been a joy!

**Career Advice:** Take advantage of opportunities that arise, and anything that facilitates life-long learning. Don’t lose sight of how to share what you’ve learned too-- communication skills, including catering information to the audience, are especially valuable in the sciences.



**Name:** Steven R. Booth ([boothswa@comcast.net](mailto:boothswa@comcast.net))

**Job Title:** Senior Scientist

**Education:**

B.S., Zoology, University of Iowa; M.S., Biology, Western Washington University Ph.D., Entomology, Oregon State University

**Career Path:**

I became interested in freshwater ecology at Univ. of Iowa and stream ecology at WWU where my Master's thesis was on dragonfly seasonality. I was a research tech in tree fruit entomology at OSU and then did my Ph.D. thesis on the biological control potential of generalist predators in pear in Hood River, OR. That led to a very similar project in the Okanagan Valley, B.C. I studied insect parasitic fungi and nematodes in small fruits during two post-doctoral positions with WSU in southwest Washington. While in cranberry entomology at Long Beach, the oyster industry asked me to coordinate an Integrated Pest Management program for burrowing shrimp on commercial shellfish grounds. I started to collaborate with PSI and joined them part-time, eventually becoming full-time. As my role in the burrowing shrimp program ended, I became involved in other projects.

**Typical Job Responsibilities:**

Writing project proposals, reports, and articles; analyzing data; preparing figures and tables; conducting research in the field and lab; attending workshops and conferences; presenting project progress and results; collaborating with other scientists both at PSI and elsewhere.

**Best part about my job:**

Working with PSI people. Used to get out in the field more, which I miss.

**Frequently used equipment:**

Computers and all sorts of software; microscopes; cameras; hip boots.

**Favorite place to work:**

Chasing dragonflies up on Mt Baker or in the N Cascades a million years ago was a blast, but I couldn't get a real job doing that. So now it's out on a firm mudflat on a warm sunny day, but not on a soupy mudflat on a cold rainy winter night.

**Career Advice:**

If you are in a groove and enjoy what you are doing and who you are doing it with, then stay, but don't be afraid of change. Don't put up with too much B.S. and don't piss off too many people, either. Keep learning!



**Name:** Katie Houle ([katie@pacshell.org](mailto:katie@pacshell.org))

**Job Title:** Research Biologist

**Education:** B.S. Environmental Science; McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

M.S. Biology; Humboldt State University

**Career Path:** I grew up on a big lake in upstate NY surrounded by mountains, spending every summer at the beach. Inspired by family trips to the coast, I realized I would be happiest if my career was on the water! After HS, I earned my BS in Environmental Science from McGill University. In my final year, I studied in Barbados learning about marine and coastal issues. After earning my BS, I worked at Acadia National Park teaching families about marine intertidal life. Shortly after this, I pursued marine research at the Bodega Marine Lab in northern California

studying invasive species and population ecology. Excited about a career path in marine biology, I pursued a Master's degree in Marine Biology at Humboldt State University on the North Coast of California. It was here that I fell in love with tidepools and the secret lives of marine invertebrates. Not long after graduation, I found my new home in Olympia, WA at PSI studying shellfish and marine habitats.

**Typical Job Responsibilities:**

There are no typical days at PSI, which keeps life interesting and one of the things I love most about my job. As a field biologist, I spend a lot of time outdoors in the intertidal, wearing waders and getting stuck in the mud! Spring through summer, I work on shellfish farms collecting data on the ground, from boats and off docks. I use a variety of fishing methods, cameras and water quality instruments to learn how farm activities interact with the surrounding environment. I also work in our lab processing biological samples, entering data and analyzing the information. I spend a lot of time collaborating with other scientists to design studies, protocols and interpreting our data. I also get to teach students about the marine environment and water quality issues out on the beach each spring!

**Best part about my job:** I love getting to learn new things about our beautiful world each day and to share this joy and information with the public, students and scientific community. I appreciate that the work I do directly supports healthy marine ecosystems and working waterfronts. Being a marine biologist is fun, dynamic and challenging work, but incredibly rewarding!

**Frequently used equipment:** A sharp pencil! Field notebook, boots, 5-gal bucket(s), camera, YSI meter, GPS, quadrat, and computer.

**Favorite place to work:** Out on the tidflats or on a research boat, we get to work in so many beautiful places!

**Career Advice:** Taking opportunities that come your way or creating them for yourself! Being flexible and having an array of skills will take you very far. Don't be afraid to ask questions!