Dean’s Message

We are very pleased in Logan that the atmospheric river from the Pacific is working to end our drought. We look forward to a large runoff year and hope that the melt is gradual enough to fill reservoirs but keep our basements dry. The spring melt will be a great backdrop to the Spring Runoff Conference held on the Logan campus on March 28-29. We plan to bring speakers with both local and national perspectives to discuss water management, conservation, economics, and future climate projections. Details can be found at: water.usu.edu

Students are back at school, working on courses, and celebrating two rare USU snow days. In this issue we celebrate the contributions of one of our donors (p.2), the success of extension programs (p. 3) and highlight the research of a number of our undergraduate students who presented posters at the Capitol to kick off the 2017 Utah Legislative Session. We look forward to the continued success of our students and faculty, and the continued prosperity of our academic, research and extension programs. We thank you for your contributions to our endeavors.

Chris Luecke, Dean

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Alumni Profile – Jeb Stuart: An Alaskan Aggie Gives Back

The Quinney College of Natural Resources is fortunate to have many alumni who have gone on to success in their careers and continue to remember their roots in Logan. James E.B. (Jeb) Stuart is one such caring and generous individual. Jeb graduated from the College of Natural Resources in 1968 with a degree in Game Management and a minor in Range Management.

He entered school in his mid-twenties after serving in the Army Reserves. With the help of scholarships from previous alumni and support from faculty and staff, he completed his education and went on to a rewarding career. During his undergraduate degree, Jeb studied the interaction between jackrabbits and poisonous plants with the help of the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources and a grant from the National Science Foundation. In 1969 he married Linda Gurr, an alumnus of the USU College of Education. Jeb’s career spanned thirty-plus years working for the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the Bureau of Land Management, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service from which he retired in Anchorage, Alaska. Jeb still resides in Anchorage but comes back to visit us in Logan almost every year.

Jeb Stuart’s five scholarships for Natural Resources students are his way of giving back to the institution that helped him so much. He also provides two scholarships to honor his late wife’s career in education. Jeb believes that a quality education is the key to launching careers. He enjoys supporting students who are struggling financially and who work hard to get ahead. His generosity has supported over 15 scholarship recipients during the past five years. We thank Jeb for his contributions and for helping us in our efforts to promote the sustainability of ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. We join Jeb in being Naturally Engaged.
QCNR Awards

Dr. Eric Thacker was awarded the 2016 Range Manager of the Year Award by the Utah Section of the Society for Range Management. Eric's interest in range management began when he was a student in Duchesne County. Since accepting his faculty position at USU in 2014, Eric has been instrumental to cultivating and supporting a network of landowners, wildlife managers, and rangeland specialists.

Dr. Thacker was recognized in 2015 by the Six County Association of Governments for his impact on range management. He has worked with the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to implement the Sage-grouse land-use planning. He has assisted these agencies in the development of the Utah Range Monitoring Manual. In addition to his land management efforts, Eric has worked to integrate the range programs at USU and Snow College so that rural students can begin their academic work at Snow and complete their degrees at USU.

As stated by his colleague, Dr. Terry Messmer, “In brief time, Eric has become the face of contemporary range management in Utah. Under his leadership, the USU Extension Range Programs has reached thousands of diverse stakeholders. His innovative use of social media has created a new forum for the discussion of the emerging science, policy, and management issues.”

Professor Mike Kuhns is the 2016 recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Utah Community Forest Council and Utah Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture. Mike is head of USU’s Department of Wildland Resources and director of USU Forestry Extension. He was recognized in a Jan. 24 ceremony during the 2017 Green Industry Conference.

Professor Terry Messmer, Wildland Resources Department, was awarded the 2017 Governor’s Medal for Excellence in Science and Technology. Terry works to bring communities together to restore habitat for Greater Sage Grouse. Utah Gov. Gary Herbert presented the award, saying “I commend the winners for excellence in their fields and for their important work, which will benefit Utah residents for generations.”
In late November, USDA Forestry Chief Thomas Tidwell announced the recipients of the 2016 Chief’s Award, the highest distinction conferred by the Forest Service. One of the 2016 awardees is a collaborative group working to improve forest carbon monitoring and management on Forest Service lands. Dr. Sean Healey, research ecologist with the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Ogden, accepted the award on behalf of the Forest System Carbon Assessment Team. The research represents a method for understanding how forest carbon is affected by different types of natural and human disturbances.

Researchers and students in Dr. Doug Ramsey’s Remote Sensing/GIS Laboratory were elated to hear about this year’s Chief’s Award. In 2011, Healey had reached out to the Lab asking for help in supporting this project. Specifically, Healey wanted the QCNR Lab to create a spatial database containing a 22-year history of natural and human disturbance on Forest Service land. Disturbances included fire, insect outbreaks, harvests, and non-biological sources of damage as well.

According to Chris McGinty, Assistant Director of the Remote Sensing and GIS Lab, over 16 undergraduate technicians, two graduate students, and three full-time professional researchers worked on the project. For many of them, this project was a springboard toward a post-graduate career. Graduate student Tommy Thompson described his experience so far: “I consider myself lucky to be a part of this massive undertaking. Working with true professionals and scientists has been a great experience for the students who got the privilege to work on this project.”

The maps and carbon information produced at the QCNR Remote Sensing/ GIS Laboratory will be used by regional and national forest managers all over the country. The information will provide a new context for forest management plans which will be revised over the next several years.
Climate Adaptation Science Begins at USU

Utah State University is the recipient of a competitive $2.7 million National Science Foundation Research Traineeship award. This will offer USU students in 20 STEM graduate degree programs an opportunity to pursue advanced interdisciplinary research training and a Climate Adaptation Science specialization.

“This is a remarkable opportunity for graduate students to be involved in a dynamic, cross-disciplinary research environment,” says Nancy Huntly, director of the USU Ecology Center and principal investigator and project director for the program. The project team anticipates training 80 master’s and doctoral students during the five-year grant period.

“This program focuses on preparing students for research-based careers that will integrate science with management and policy to understand and adapt to a changing climate,” Huntly says. “The program includes interdisciplinary training in data management, informatics and modeling, as well as communications, management and leadership skills.” Highlights of this program include unique research and internship partnerships to allow students to learn the opportunities, constraints, and science needs of work places where climate science will be developed and used to manage ecosystems.

Dr. Erin Brewer joins QCNR as the new project coordinator for the Climate Adaptation Science program. Erin will be the program advisor, coordinating courses and internships and serve as an advocate for students in the program. Welcome Erin.

Article excerpted from ecology.usu.edu
QCNR Undergrad Researchers among Aggies Headed to Utah’s Capitol Hill


Utah State University scholars Rylee Jensen and Gabriela Judd are among 30 Aggies selected to present projects during 2017 Undergraduate Research Day on Capitol Hill. The student researchers, both from the Quinney College of Natural Resources, will discuss their research posters, with state legislators and guests in the Capitol Rotunda.

The annual event, initiated by USU, coincides with the 2017 Utah Legislative Session. The gathering is designed to highlight the benefits of undergraduate research to state lawmakers.

As a Quinney Scholar and USU Honors student, Jensen became fascinated with killer whales as a high school student during a family vacation on Washington’s San Juan Island. She met retired college professor Bob Otis, who studies orcas at the island’s Lime Kiln State Park and he agreed to mentor Rylee on her whale studies. With additional guidance from Julie Young, associate professor in USU’s Department of Wildland Resources, the wildlife science major is investigating killer whale behaviors such as breaching, tail slapping and pec slapping.

“I’m examining behavioral preferences among individuals in the southern resident killer whale population of Washington state,” says Jensen, a USU Undergraduate Research Fellow. “I’m grateful for the grant and scholarship support I’ve received from USU that have helped me immensely in carrying out the research and pursuing presentation opportunities.”

Rylee Jensen with Bob Otis and family members.
Gabriela Judd, a Conservation and Restoration Ecology major, is studying a pesky, invasive plant known as phragmites with Watershed Sciences faculty mentor Karin Kettenring. The wetlands plant has spread throughout the Great Salt Lake and surrounding areas, where it crowds out native plants critical to migratory birds for nesting and sustenance.

“Phragmites make it difficult for Alkali bulrush and other native wetland species to thrive, which has made removal of phragmites and re-vegetation of native species a priority for Utah’s wetland managers,” Judd says.

The Provo, Utah native is scouting geographical locations of Alkali bulrush with the most effective seedling performance to provide wetland managers with information on where to find the best seeds for remedial planting.

“Phragmites present a challenge throughout Utah’s wetlands and throughout the nation,” Judd says. “We hope our research will support the state’s conservation efforts.”

Dr. Sarah Null, assistant professor in the Watershed Sciences Department, received a prestigious NSF Career Award. Sarah’s award “Robust aquatic habitat representation for water resources decision-making” will provide her and her graduate students funding to pursue research on improving environmental representation and decision-making in water resources models.

The NSF-Career Awards are presented to the early-career faculty who most effectively integrate research and education to serve the mission of their organizations. Sarah joins Drs. Claudia Radel and Peter Adler as QCNR’s other recipients of this recognition of outstanding performance. Congratulations Sarah!
March 20-25: NR Week
March 25: QCNR Awards Banquet
March 28-29: Spring Runoff Conference
April 22: Earth Day
May 5-6: Graduation Commencement

For details on these and other upcoming events please visit:

www.qcnr.usu.edu