

## Q&A: The 2014 Emerging Leaders

The purpose of the Emerging Leader Mentorship Award (ELMA) Program is to develop future leaders of the Society, and the fisheries profession as a whole, by providing selected candidates an opportunity to participate for one year in activities of the Society Governing Board. Participants in the program are selected based on their level of involvement in AFS, as well as their potential for assuming leadership of Society units in the future. This year four emerging leaders were chosen: Patrick Cooney, Justin Davis, Cari-Ann Hayer, and Steve Midway. We interviewed them to find out their thoughts on what this position means to them.

### Patrick Cooney



pcooney@smith-root.com  
 Certified Fisheries Scientist with Smith-Root, Inc.  
 Cofounder, [www.thefisheriesblog.com](http://www.thefisheriesblog.com)

#### How did you get interested in leadership?

Everyone in AFS understands the role of being a leader, whether it is leading a research project or leading people to understand the value of conservation and stewardship. Therefore, leadership is part of the daily lives of every member. I became interested particularly in leadership through AFS when I understood that it is the ultimate way to serve the society that has served me so well for more than a decade.

**Since I became an AFS member, I have met every subsequent boss and advisor at an AFS meeting.**

#### What do you see as some of the challenges AFS faces that you, as the newer generation, can help conquer?

AFS members are leading experts in managing and conducting research on the number one source of global animal

protein and the number two most popular outdoor recreational activity in the United States (freshwater, saltwater, and fly fishing), yet AFS is currently delivering information on these resources and activities almost exclusively to its members. Younger AFS members are accustomed to using evolving and innovative forms of communication and should be relied upon to help deliver and promote the research and scientific information of all AFS members to a wider audience.

#### Give your top three bulleted items from a list of what you hope to accomplish.

- Serve the society that has served me for a decade and explore additional avenues for leadership and involvement.
- Increase awareness among AFS membership and the AFS Governing Board members of additional communication avenues to further our scientific information.
- Empower underutilized members to contribute to, benefit from, and serve in AFS and encourage them to become AFS Certified Fisheries Professionals.

#### What do you hope this experience will do for you?

I hope this experience helps me further develop my leadership capabilities, extends my professional network, and widens my knowledge of ways to serve the society.

#### Why did you join AFS and, more importantly, what keeps you here?

I joined the American Fisheries Society when I realized that it was the best way to meet and learn from fisheries scientists and researchers from around North America and the world. Since I became an AFS member, I have met every subsequent boss and advisor at an AFS meeting. I remain a member of AFS to maintain professional relationships and foster new ones.

# Justin Davis



justin.davis@ct.gov  
Fisheries Biologist  
CT DEEP Eastern District Headquarters

## How did you get interested in leadership?

I got involved in AFS leadership through equal parts curiosity, optimism, and a pathological inability to say “no.” Curiosity about what went on behind the scenes, optimism that I might be able to make a positive contribution, and then, when new opportunities arose, I just kept saying, “Sure, why not?” That’s the great thing about AFS: if you want to get involved, there are absolutely no barriers—all you have to do is ask, “How can I help?”—and then just say “yes.” It can be time consuming, but ultimately it’s very rewarding and gives you the chance to create lasting relationships with other fisheries professionals.

## What do you see as some of the challenges AFS faces that you, as the newer generation, can help conquer?

We live in a hyper-connected world. E-mail, smart phones, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vine...there’s probably some new thing that came out while I was typing this. Professional societies like AFS, which historically served as primary catalysts for information exchange and collegiality, are struggling to maintain relevance—particularly to younger people who have grown up online. Part of the solution is embracing new technologies so we’re speaking to the next generation in their native tongue (something that I think AFS has made great strides toward over recent years). But the sales pitch should also stress the timeless benefits of Society participation: opportunities to interact in person with others in your field (no amount of e-mailing is a substitute for sitting down and talking with someone over lunch...

or a beer!), opportunities to foster and display leadership ability (see first question), and the sense of belonging to a community.

## Give your top three bulleted items from a list of what you hope to accomplish.

Over the next year in the ELMA program:

- Learn about new initiatives and projects that various AFS units are working on.
- Contribute to the Governing Board in any way that I can.
- Come up with at least one idea of how the ELMA program can be improved.

In life:

- Help conserve fish and the places they live for future generations.
- Raise my kids well.
- Catch a 60-pound striped bass ... (probably in that order).

**These days, I think of AFS meetings as my battery charger.**

## What do you hope this experience will do for you?

I hope it gives me a better understanding of how AFS governance works, opens the doors to new opportunities in AFS leadership, and gives me a chance to meet some new and interesting people.

## Why did you join AFS and, more importantly, what keeps you here?

I joined AFS because on my first day of graduate school, my advisor said, “You absolutely need to join AFS. Now.” So I did. It was some of the best advice I’ve ever been given. AFS has been instrumental to achieving my dream of a career in fisheries and has given me the opportunity to meet and form lasting relationships with other fisheries professionals. These days, I think of AFS meetings as my battery charger. I get a chance to discuss my work with other professionals and get their feedback, learn about interesting work that others are doing (some of which may give me new perspectives on what I am doing), and catch up with friends I probably haven’t seen since the last meeting. I always walk away feeling reinvigorated, rededicated, and fortunate.

# Cari-Ann Hayer



chayer@usgs.gov  
U.S. Geological Survey  
Columbia Environmental Research Center

## How did you get interested in leadership?

I first started thinking about leadership when I was asked, “What is a leader?” in my oral comprehensive exams for my Ph.D. I then started pondering the idea when dealing with my technicians and anyone that I had to work with. At the time I did not think I was a leader, but now realize that some people look up to me professionally, which in a sense makes me a leader. I started serving on committees because I was interested and wanted to be involved in AFS but not because I wanted to be a leader. Since I am done with my doctorate, the “leader” topic has weighed on my mind quite a bit. John Quincy Adams once said, “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, and become more, you are a leader.” I am going to strive for this personally and professionally.

**Inform student subunits of the Society and what it has to offer. Oftentimes the units don’t even know that the Society or the Divisions of AFS exist!**

## What do you see as some of the challenges AFS faces that you, as the newer generation, can help conquer?

A major challenge facing AFS is recruitment, particularly undergraduate students and new professionals, which has been a

topic at meetings I have attended over the past few years. Along with the Education Section and the Student Subsection of the Education Section, I have helped to chip away at this problem by awarding several undergraduate student travel awards to the Annual Meeting for the past three years (including this year). This award introduces undergraduates to the American Fisheries Society, maybe for the first time, and especially at such a high level, and hopefully will help to rein them in to AFS as my first meeting did to me! I remember seeing as many talks as I could and was in awe of all the interesting and smart research that was being conducted across the world. It was at my first Annual Meeting in Maryland that I decided to take the “fisheries path” and not the “wildlife path,” which I had been on for some time. I hope that through travel awards, student activities, and future ideas we, as a Society, can help to engage students in AFS and help them realize the benefits and rewards of belonging to such a Society.

## Give your top three bulleted items from a list of what you hope to accomplish.

- Help in continuing the undergraduate travel award through the Education Section (it is up for review this year).
- Inform student subunits of the Society and what it has to offer. Oftentimes the units don’t even know that the Society or the Divisions of AFS exist!
- Continue to help with the committees that I am involved with.

## What do you hope this experience will do for you?

First and foremost this experience will give me the chance to witness the highest levels of AFS in action. It will allow me to be a part of what goes on behind the scenes to not only keep the Society running smoothly but also to see how the decision process works.

## Why did you join AFS and, more importantly, what keeps you here?

To quote Steven Chipps from South Dakota State University, the American Fisheries Society has become like a family to me. I have made many friends that will be with me for a lifetime. I believe in what the American Fisheries Society stands for and take pride in being involved in such a prestigious community. I joined because I had to, but I stay because I want to and am very passionate about it.

# Steve Midway



srm30@psu.edu  
Postdoctoral Research Associate, Pennsylvania State University  
Cofounder, [www.thefisheriesblog.com](http://www.thefisheriesblog.com)

## How did you get interested in leadership?

My interest stems partly from seeing the great job that so many other AFS members do in leadership roles, in addition to wanting to better understand—and even assist with—the direction the Society takes in the future. Overall, my experience with AFS has been very positive, and I would like that experience to be repeated for new and future members.

## What do you see as some of the challenges AFS faces that you, as the newer generation, can help conquer?

Honestly, I'm still learning what AFS sees as its list of priorities. Of course there is always importance in recruiting new members; however, assuming that our core mission is solid, it would be nice to think that our message will always be relevant to prospective members. The other challenge—perhaps the larger one—then becomes how do we improve the value of membership. We're a diverse society in many respects, and I think it will be challenging, but rewarding, to consider how we can continually create value for AFS products—from meetings, to publications, to the science we stand behind.

## Give your top three bulleted items from a list of what you hope to accomplish.

As part of the Emerging Leaders program, my current goals are the following:

- Improve my understanding of how AFS prioritizes and makes decisions on the overall society direction.
- Understand what issues AFS may be dealing with 5 or 10 years in the future.
- Be able to contribute whatever insight and experience I have toward any relevant issues.

## What do you hope this experience will do for you?

In addition to making decisions on the specific answers above, my overall hope is that I leave with a better understanding of how the Society approaches a variety of decisions. My sense is that there is a lot to learn when it comes to a large organization like AFS, so perhaps my overall expectation is to simply gain exposure and create a foundation from which I can better serve the Society.

**Of my friends outside AFS, very few have anything professionally like we have.**

## Why did you join AFS and, more importantly, what keeps you here?

At the time, joining AFS was simply what we did as graduate students in a fisheries science program. Shortly thereafter, however, the value as a student was obvious through the potential for travel awards, conference opportunities, and other society products. What's kept me here is partly how I've come to rely on the events, membership, and science that AFS provides. But the people also keep me here—the vast majority of AFS members that I work and otherwise interact with have created a great sense of community and purpose through AFS. Of my friends outside AFS, very few have anything professionally like we have. 🐟