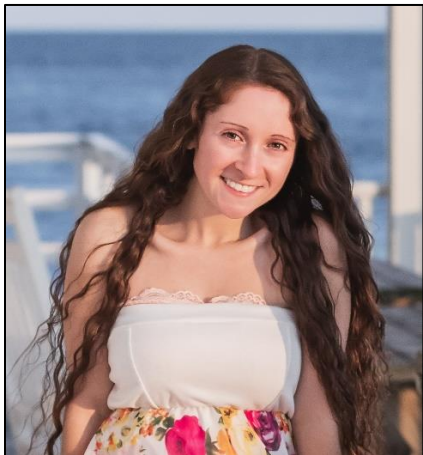


## Young Professional Spotlight

Young Professional members of AIFRB represent the next generation of leaders in fisheries science and management. Through *Briefs* and our social media platforms we will be highlighting our Young Professionals as a way to introduce them to the full membership and create opportunities for collaborations. AIFRB's Young Professional Representative, Connor Capizzano ([connor.capizzano001@umb.edu](mailto:connor.capizzano001@umb.edu)), will be showcasing new Young Professionals throughout the year using a series of biographical interviews. This month's Young Professional Spotlight features **Dr. Jessica Valenti, Keystone District and Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Rutgers University and the NOAA James J. Howard Marine Sciences Laboratory in Tuckerton, NJ.**

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### *Dr. Jessica Valenti – Keystone District*



***What is your current position, with what company/organization, and what is the focus of your research/work?***

I am currently a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Biology working with scientists at Rutgers University and the NOAA James J. Howard Marine Sciences Laboratory. My postdoctoral research will use the Rutgers University Marine Field Station's long term (30+ years) larval fish collection to investigate past and present microplastic intake into the base of marine and estuarine food webs.

***Where did you receive your education, and what helped pave your way to your current position?***

In 2014, I completed my B.S. in Marine Science with minors in Chemistry and Biology at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (now Stockton University). In 2020, I completed my Ph.D. in Oceanography at Rutgers University. Several excellent mentors and the various research, teaching, and outreach experiences I participated in as a student helped shape my path and led me to my current position.

***How does your work apply to, or influence, fishery management (e.g., stock assessments, sportfishing, commercial regulations, habitat protection, etc.)?***

The four study fishes for my project include important prey species of recreationally and commercially targeted fishes (i.e. Atlantic silverside and bay anchovy) and two species managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (i.e. Atlantic menhaden and Atlantic croaker). Further, microplastics accumulate in higher trophic levels of the marine food web. Given the diversity of larval fish predators, including many fishery relevant species, the intake of microplastics by larval fishes could have negative ramifications for numerous recreationally and commercially harvested species.

***What is your professional outlook for fisheries management? In other words, what will the future of fisheries management look like 10-20 years from now. What are we doing correctly, what needs to be improved (e.g., in research, policy, education)?***

In the future, I believe fisheries management will have furthered the incorporation of ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) principles into standard assessments and evaluations. Although progress has been made on this front in recent years, and acknowledging



the complexities involved with this process, I do believe this is an area where improvement is needed. Collaboration across disciplines and state/federal/international jurisdictions, and with industry stakeholders, will be key to furthering EBFM practices in the future.

***What is the importance of young fishery professionals today and for the future of fishery management?***

Young fishery professionals are a critical component of the fisheries workforce. These individuals learn from the current experts while also bringing new and innovative ideas forward. Young fishery professionals also serve as role models and a source of inspiration to younger students, which are important factors for continued recruitment into the field.

***What drew you to AIFRB, and what does AIFRB do for you and what can it do for other young professionals in this field?***

I joined AIFRB at the American Fisheries Society 2017 Annual Meeting in Tampa, Florida after visiting the AIFRB booth at the trade show. I was drawn to AIFRB due to their interest in recruiting and retaining new members, the multiple student awards offered, and the networking events that would connect me to professionals and students in the field. AIFRB can provide these opportunities and more for other young professionals in the fisheries discipline.



**Please contact Jessica ([valenti@marine.rutgers.edu](mailto:valenti@marine.rutgers.edu)) to continue the conversation!**