RISE DECLARATIONS

Sharing the experience & insights of Recent Involuntarily Separated Employees working in place-based conservation

REBECCA TRINH RESEARCH SCIENTIST, NOAA

"There were so many obstacles placed in my path each time I tried to make headway"

1. Describe your career trajectory from your education to your last position held.

I graduated from the University of California Berkeley with undergraduate degrees in marine science and ecology. After graduation, I worked as an intern at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory as a satellite oceanographer before going to Columbia University for graduate school. For my PhD work at Columbia, I studied the Antarctic marine ecosystem and how the ecosystem as a whole impacts the biogeochemistry of the ocean and carbon dioxide drawdown from the atmosphere. After finishing my PhD, I went on to work as a contractor for NOAA as a research scientist.

2. What do you consider to be the most important achievements of your career (including through partnerships across and outside government)? Why?

Throughout my academic and professional career, I have been fortunate enough to travel and live in some of the most astounding ecosystems as I was conducting my field research. This type of work and experience is central to really learning about the ecosystems we study and try to protect and is central to meeting and getting to know the local communities that live in and depend on these ecosystems and the wealth of knowledge they can offer to help increase our understanding. I think being able to live in these communities and immerse yourself in these ecosystems is incredibly important.

3. What were the greatest challenges you faced? How did you overcome them, or not? If you weren't able to overcome them, why not?

[Left blank by respondent]

4. What are your views on how your career served the public, the environment, our cultural heritage, or the greater good, as applicable? Do you feel proud of what you accomplished, or frustrated, or both?

I became a scientist because I wanted to better understand the world around us and thought that more knowledge about how the environment, ecosystem, and people work and are interconnected would allow us to make smarter decisions as a population. In many ways, this enthusiasm turned into a disillusion. I thought leaving the university academic science trajectory and joining the federal science community would allow my science to make a more direct impact on conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. There were so many obstacles placed in my path each time I tried to make headway with collaborators, local stakeholders, and policy makers. It was deeply frustrating. But I try to remain hopeful and find creative ways to continue to work with community members, publish our data, and make an impact. There are instances where my scientific analysis was taken seriously by local decision makers, and in partnership with other local stakeholders, we were able to work together to close down contaminated beaches and protect the local community. This was an example of when the pathways between science, community, and decision

I thought leaving the university academic science trajectory and joining the federal science community would allow my science to make a more direct impact.

What is a RISE Declaration? >>> https://doi.org/10.5070/P5.62005

making were clear and operational and efficient. It was a beautiful thing and was something I was very proud of. The other proud moments of my scientific career all center around outreach—the smile on a child's face when they touch a sea anemone for the first time or the smile on a student's face when their data analysis code generates a plot for the first time is a such a rewarding experience. Working with local communities to teach them about the environment and give them the tools to understand the world around them is something I find really inspiring. I wish there were more opportunities to do this type of scientific outreach, working with students and the local community to share our stories and inspire environmental conservation.

5. What's the coolest thing that you've seen a government (local, state, federal, or another country) do for place-based conservation that you'd want to replicate or expand? What would make it easy to implement? How hard would it be to achieve?
[Left blank by respondent]

6. What advice would you give to successors in positions you've held? What perspectives have been important to you in your career, and which can be passed on to young people contemplating a career in public service or academia?
Resilience is key. There will be countless obstacles put in front of you that slow down completing your project and helping the people you are aiming to help. Some of the obstacles are more easily understandable, such as paperwork and permitting. Some of the obstacles will be personal and hurtful, such as advisors or potential collaborators dismissing you because they misjudge your skillset or background. Some obstacles will be disguised as necessary to cover up malevolent intentions to keep you from succeeding and helping others. It is going to be difficult, but staying resilient and grounded in the purpose of the work you do and the positive impact your work can have on the community will help you overcome these obstacles.

7. Please share anything else you think would be of value to fellow RISEs or to the general public.
[Left blank by respondent]