

Scientist of the Month



Grace Veenstra

Grace Veenstra is a fourth-year BLaST scholar and a senior at UAF. She is pursuing a bachelor of science (BS) in biological sciences with a minor in mathematics, with a second BS degree in interdisciplinary studies on climate, community and communication. Veenstra volunteers with Fresh Eyes on Ice, a UAF community-based ice monitoring system across Alaska, and works part-time at the Geographic Information Network of Alaska (GINA) as a science communicator. She plans to stay in Alaska after graduating in May 2025, and hopes to gain more work experience. Veenstra enjoys many creative pursuits such as drawing and creative writing and recently picked up an interest in rock climbing.

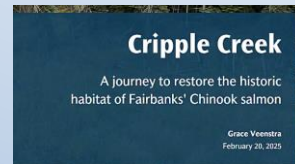
Research

Veenstra's BLaST research project focused on the Cripple Creek restoration project in Fairbanks, where local partners have worked to restore flow to a historic rearing habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon. Her research included sampling water chemistry to understand the impacts of the restoration and writing an ArcGIS StoryMap about the history of the creek (available at the QR code below). Previous volunteer opportunities Veenstra participated in was at the 2023 Barrow Arctic Research Center (BARC) Science and Culture Fair in Utqiagvik. In addition to her BLaST research, Veenstra was awarded the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Ernest F. Hollings Undergraduate Scholarship which

provided her a 9-week internship at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in summer 2024 in Seattle, Washington. During her internship, Veenstra developed an integral projection model to predict the growth of juvenile Chinook salmon in the Idaho Snake River. She continued this research thread in her biological sciences capstone last fall, where she used the same datasets to run a path analysis examining the direct and indirect relationships between temperature and species abundance.

Mentoring

Veenstra's research opportunities have been made possible by many mentors who introduced her to new aspects of science. They also helped her advance her skills and confidence. Her BLaST mentor, Christi Buffington, a Science and Education Specialist and Program Manager at GINA and an adjunct faculty with the Natural Resources and Environment Department, has provided enthusiastic and steadfast support and been a primary link across the entire Cripple Creek project. Jen Delamere, Veenstra's supervisor and mentor at GINA, encouraged Veenstra to write and publish articles to improve her science communication skills and to apply for the NOAA Hollings scholarship. The Hollings scholarship introduced Veenstra to her NOAA mentor Dr. Lisa Crozier, a fisheries ecologist at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center. Crozier helped Veenstra learn modeling and data analysis. Veenstra also thanks the many people at BLaST, past and present, who have provided support and guidance, to include but not limited to, Lori Gildehaus, Nikola Nolic, Hannah Robinson, Emily Sousa, and Theresa Vertigan.



Top left: BLaST Scholar Grace Veenstra during her NOAA Ernest F. Hollings internship at the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in Seattle, WA. (May 2024, Photo courtesy of G. Veenstra)

Left: Veenstra presenting at American Water Resources Association Alaska Chapter Meeting, Fairbanks, Alaska. (April 1, 2024, Photo courtesy of G. Veenstra)

Right: Veenstra with Susan Glade at Cripple Creek, Fairbanks, AK. (July 30, 2023, Photo Credit: C. Buffington)

