WOMEN DIVERS HALL OF FAME™

# Women Divers Hall of Fame™ congratulates the 2026 Scholarship/Training Grant Winners

The Women Divers Hall of Fame™ (WDHOF®) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring and raising awareness of the contributions of outstanding women divers. WDHOF provides educational, financial, career and mentorship opportunities to the diving community throughout the world. Each year, WDHOF awards scholarships and training grants that provide financial and educational support to individuals of all ages, particularly those who are preparing for professional careers that involve diving.

The Women Divers Hall of Fame scholarships and training grants are awarded yearly in the spring at Beneath the Sea in Secaucus, New Jersey. The program began in 2002 with three scholarships. This year we had a record number of applications and we are awarding $90,500 to 61 individuals who are passionate about our water planet and looking to grow in their knowledge and skills. As a result of the generosity of our scholarship and training grant sponsors, as well as those who donated to our fundraisers, we have awarded more than $1,000,000 since 2002!

A special thank you goes out to Shirley Pomponi, our Scholarship Chair, and her committee members for all of their hard work and many, many hours spent on our program.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

### Captain Wayne Hasson Memorial Fellowship for Climate Change Research

$10,000, sponsored by **the Hasson Family**/WDHOF Member **Anne Hasson**



**Isabelle Nelson**
Texax, U.S.

Isabelle is a Ph.D. student at the University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute and specializes in toxicology. She became interested in studying the intersection of ecosystem and human health through her undergraduate research. As a graduate student, her project works to advance our understanding of how climate change can affect mercury transport and subsequent uptake in marine organisms, which directly impacts public health. With the support of this award, she will be able to continue her fieldwork in Kachemak Bay, Alaska.

### Ocean and Human Health Graduate Scholarship

$2,500, sponsored by **Michael Gower**



**Paige Powell**
South Carolina, U.S.

Paige is passionate about our oceans and marine life, especially sharks! She is a toxicologist particularly concerned with the chemical contamination of our waters and the impacts on marine ecosystems. As the President of the Environmental Toxicology Graduate Student Association at Clemson University, she is spearheading the revival of an outreach program that engages local K-12 students in performing a variety of water quality tests and presenting their findings. She is planning to use the WDHOF grant to continue research that will inform her physiologically-based toxicokinetic model. This model will serve as a non-lethal way to estimate contaminant burdens in sharks and allow for toxicological assessment methods that can eventually be applied to other marine predators. This project aligns with Paige's passion for conservation as shark health and success directly correlate with the health and success of the ocean as a whole.

### Ocean and Human Health Graduate Scholarship

$2,500, sponsored by **Michael Gower**



**S. Carter Oleckna**
Florida, U.S.

Carter is a second-year Ph.D. student at the University of Florida studying how environmental stressors such as ocean warming, excess nutrients, and herbivore grazing affect the defensive chemicals in turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*). Growing up fishing in Southwest Florida inspired his pursuit of marine research and conservation. With the support of this scholarship, he will conduct fieldwork along Florida's coast to track how these environmental factors influence the seagrass's defensive compounds and to explore how these defenses can be manipulated to improve seagrass restoration techniques.

### Laurel Clark Sea to Space Extreme Environment Physiology Research Grant

$5,000, sponsored by **Jonathan Clark**



**Sarah Crawford**
Louisiana, U.S.

Dr. Sarah Crawford is a board-certified internal medicine specialist currently pursuing a fellowship in undersea and hyperbaric medicine at LSU New Orleans. Trained as a civilian diving medical officer, technical diver, and scuba instructor with a Master of Science in diving medicine, Dr. Crawford remains committed to advancing the field of diving medicine through enhanced safety, education, and research. Her current research initiative involves analyzing the effects of various nitrox gases on scuba divers' neurocognitive performance.

## Laurel Clark Sea to Space Extreme Environment Physiology Research Grant

**$5,000, sponsored by Jonathan Clark**



### Abel Vargas

California, U.S.

Abel graduated from UC Riverside in 2022 with a degree in Biochemistry. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Biomedical Sciences at UCR, researching the impacts of hypoxia on the immune system. He has conducted multiple human research trials at high altitude. He led a double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial, one of the first of its kind for UCR, investigating the mechanisms of altitude-induced inflammation. He plans to visit Peru to continue his research with residents of the Andean Altiplano to investigate the impact of chronic hypoxia on the immune system.

## Cecelia Connelly Memorial Graduate Scholarship in Underwater Archaeology

**$2,500, sponsored by the Connelly Family/ WDHOF Member Mary Connelly**



### Mieke Kassulke

New South Wales, Australia

Mieke Kassulke is an Australian maritime archaeologist and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Haifa, happiest underwater, in the laboratory, or immersed in historical archives. Her research focuses on ancient Mediterranean harbours, where she develops innovative approaches to mapping and interpreting archaeological assemblages on the seabed. The WDHOF award supports her work with the Salina Bay Project in Malta, where she contributes to the underwater excavation of an ancient anchorage and the study of its ceramic artefacts. With field experience across the Mediterranean, Mieke is passionate about collaborative, method-driven research and about sharing maritime archaeology with audiences beyond academia.

## Max Benjamin Memorial Graduate Marine Conservation Scholarship

**$2,000, sponsored by WDHOF Member Cecilie Benjamin**



### Miranda Manross

Florida, U.S.

Miranda is a second-year Master of Biology student at Florida Atlantic University, where she investigates the burrowing behavior of the Atlantic longarm octopus (*Macrotritopus defilippi*). Her research focuses on the behavior of burrow construction, sediment preferences, and how burrows influence environmental parameters. This spring, she will use scientific scuba diving to collect sediment cores and behavioral videos for analyses. The Women Divers Hall of Fame award will support the field components of this work and advance her career in animal behavior and marine conservation. Miranda aims to empower young women to pursue careers in marine science and scientific diving.

## Graduate Marine Conservation Scholarship

**$2,000, sponsored by WDHOF Member Meg Donat**



### Lauren Enright

California, U.S.

Lauren is a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate in the Burkepile Lab at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her dissertation explores how shifts in macroalgal abundance and stability shape coral reef ecosystems and the coastal communities that depend on them. She is driven to produce research that directly informs conservation and management. She is also a PADI Divemaster and an AAUS scientific diver.

## Rachel Morrison Memorial Graduate Marine Conservation Scholarship

**$2,000, sponsored by John and Jeanne Morrison**



### Isabelle Stapley

Derbyshire, England

Isabelle is a PADI Divemaster and CMAS Scientific Diver currently completing an MSc in Marine Systems and Policy at the University of Edinburgh. With a background in law and marine science, her work focuses on bridging conservation research, policy, and sustainable marine tourism. She has lived and worked in Indonesia for several years, supporting coral reef restoration and manta ray conservation. Her scholarship will support field-based research in the Nusa Penida Marine Protected Area, developing evidence-based strategies to balance reef conservation with community livelihoods and sustainable tourism.

## Rachel Morrison Memorial Graduate Marine Conservation Scholarship

**$2,000, sponsored by John and Jeanne Morrison**



### Haley Poppinga

Hawaii, U.S.

Haley is an M.S. student in the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, working in the Silbiger Lab. She also works with the community-based nonprofit Mālama Maunalua, supporting habitat restoration and long-term monitoring in Maunalua Bay, O‘ahu, where she grew up. Her research examines the physiology and community dynamics of native and invasive macroalgae, and compares manual invasive species removal with natural invertebrate herbivory as mechanisms for restoration. Haley is an AAUS Scientific Diver and aims to apply her research to advance community-driven marine conservation and resource management in Hawai‘i.

## Richard Laurence Parish Foundation Graduate Scholarship in Marine Science

**$2,000, sponsored by the Richard Laurence Parish Foundation/ WDHOF Member Robin Parish**



### Alexandra Zelaya

North Carolina, U.S.

Alexandra is a Master's student in Marine Biology at the University of North Carolina Wilmington studying coral restoration science and coral physiology in the Florida Keys. Her research examines whether thermal preconditioning of sexually produced juvenile corals in the laboratory enhances resilience and recovery under natural warming and bleaching conditions following outplanting at NOAA Mission: Iconic Reefs sites. Supported by the WDHOF Graduate Marine Science Scholarship, she will conduct critical post-bleaching monitoring of outplanted corals. Alexandra integrates experimental research, field-based restoration, and marine education to advance coral reef conservation in a changing ocean.

## J. Berman Memorial Grant for Sea Turtle Conservation

**$2,000, sponsored by the J. Berman Memorial Foundation**



### Kirsty Magson

Surat Thani, Thailand

Kirsty is a marine biologist, ecologist, and marine conservationist with over 10 years of experience in the field. She focuses on diver and community education, highlighting the importance of marine conservation and the role of citizen science in protecting marine ecosystems. She works closely with the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources on projects including sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation, serving as a liaison and first responder for reported turtle incidents. The J. Berman Memorial Grant will support public education on appropriate sea turtle interactions, the development of educational materials for tourists, and the creation of a dedicated first-aid kit to support effective response efforts.

## Sherry Reed Memorial Undergraduate Marine Conservation Scholarship

**$1,500, sponsored by family and friends of WDHOF Member Sherry Reed**



### Branae Craveiro

Massachusetts, U.S.

From flipping over rocks in her backyard to pursuing marine biology, Branae's love for hidden ecosystems has shaped her path as an undergraduate biology student at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. In the Gignoux-Wolfsohn Lab, she studies coral-algal symbiosis, investigating how different symbiont partnerships influence coral resilience to rising ocean temperatures and bleaching events. Recently certified as an AAUS scientific diver, this award will enable her to collect post-bleaching samples in Belize for her honors thesis and see the reefs she loves studying in person for the first time.

## Undergraduate Marine Conservation Scholarship

**$1,500, sponsored by Oceanic Research Group/ WDHOF Member Dr. Christine Bird and WDHOF**



### Marian Meléndez López

Cartago, Costa Rica

Marian is a veterinary medicine thesis student at the Universidad Nacional (UNA) in Costa Rica. During her advanced years of study, she became actively involved in wildlife and conservation research projects, strengthening her interest in this field. Over time, she developed a strong interest in Marine Conservation Medicine, an underexplored area of veterinary science in her country, and is currently beginning her involvement in marine species research. Through this award, she aims to expand her experience working with rays and contribute to the advancement of marine wildlife conservation in Costa Rica.

## Undergraduate Marine Research Internship

**$1,500, sponsored by WDHOF Members Drs. Sue Shoemaker & Kathleen Dudzinski**



### Isabelle Jane Froerer

Utah, U.S.

Isabelle is an advanced scuba diver, Wildlife and Wildland Conservation student at BYU, childhood leukemia survivor and a member of volunteer scuba diving team at the Loveland Living Planet Aquarium in Utah. Since the time she was a little girl and had her Make-A-Wish trip to the Bahamas to swim with dolphins, she has had a dream of working with marine life. She will soon be traveling to Utila, Honduras, for a marine conservation internship with the Whale Shark and Oceanic Research Center where she will have the opportunity to learn from professionals in the marine conservation field, conduct research, and gain her Divemaster certification.

## Bonnie Cardone Memorial Scholarship for Ocean-Minded Content Creators

**$1,500, sponsored by WDHOF Members Michele Hall, Andrea Stockert, and Karen Straus**



### Mar Nester

Indiana, U.S.

Mar is a student at Ball State University studying Media Production with three minors in Scuba, Biology, and Studio Art. They have deep passions for filmmaking and marine biology, which has led to pursuing a career as an underwater videographer. With this award, Mar will continue to fund their college education so they can work on advocacy-centric projects with a focus on aquatic conservation. By creating films that educate the public about the beauty and importance of the underwater world, Mar aims to help build a future where people are able to connect with and care for their local ecosystems.

# TRAINING GRANTS

## Instructor Advanced Education Dive Training Grant

**$2,000, sponsored by WDHOF Member Jeanne Bear Sleeper**



### Reese Hanifin

Florida, U.S.

Since 2018, Reese has volunteered with SCUBAnauts International, where working closely with teenage divers has shaped her commitment to diver safety and mentorship. Her goal of becoming a local scuba divemaster and instructor is to expand youth dive training opportunities. Reese is an active member of the Florida Marine Science Educators Association and holds a Master's degree in Environmental Planning from Arizona State University and a Florida state teaching certificate. A high school Zoology and Marine Science teacher in Tampa, Florida, she integrates real-world diving experiences into her curriculum. Beyond the classroom, Reese shares her passion for diving and conservation through her blog, ReeseHWanderWild.com, and creates sustainable shark-tooth necklaces, ethically collected while diving in Venice, Florida, to promote ocean stewardship. Dedicated to education and mentorship, Reese strives to inspire a lifelong connection to the ocean.

## Advanced Dive Training - Dive Instructor

**$1,000, sponsored by Girls that Scuba**



### Gabrielle Sleeman

Michigan, U.S.

Gabi is a divemaster, educator, and marine scientist from Grand Rapids, MI. Inspired by her father, a sailor and diver, she pursued a career in marine science and conservation. She earned a Bachelor's in Environmental Sciences and Sustainability and Marine Ecosystems Management at Michigan State University, serving on the scuba club's board, and completed a dive-intensive internship in Mozambique her senior year. At Florida Sea Base, she worked as a STEM educator and coral restoration technician, cultivating her passion for scientific diving and teaching. For five summers, she has led Jolly Madison Sailing Club, (a 501(c)(3) non-profit), in providing fully funded youth sailing and STEM programs, and aims to expand this mission to include scuba as an instructor. Gabi embraces diverse diving conditions worldwide and is honored to be supported by WDHOF and Girls That Scuba in this next step of her dive career! Go Green!

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Dive Instructor

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF Member Erin O'Neill**



### Maria Thomé Alvarenga

Santa Catarina, Brazil

Maria is a Brazilian marine biologist and Master's student in Marine Ecology. Her research focuses on the ecology and behavior of Atlantic octopus populations across oceanic islands in Brazil and the Caribbean. She combines scientific diving, conservation fieldwork, and science communication. Maria is actively involved in invasive species management, biodiversity monitoring, and outreach initiatives. Her goal is to become a scientific diving instructor, expanding affordable training opportunities for young scientists and inspiring more inclusive participation in marine research and ocean conservation.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Dive Instructor

**$1,000, sponsored by Wander Women Retreats**



### Jessica Garcia Pantoja

Baja California, México

Jessica is an oceanographer, AAUS Scientific Diver, and Regional Manager of Reef Check Baja California Program, where she leads community-based kelp forest monitoring to protect Baja California's temperate reef ecosystems. She holds a Master's degree in Coastal Oceanography from the Autonomous University of Baja California and has led research and diving expeditions along the coast and abroad. Passionate about connecting people to the ocean, her work bridges science, community action, and environmental education to strengthen stewardship. With support from WDHOF Training Grant, she will become a scuba instructor, expanding opportunities for women's leadership in diving and marine conservation in Mexico.

## Jim Leffard Memorial Training Grant for Underwater Photography

**$1,500, sponsored by Rosemary Kurtii**



### Imogen Parker

New York, U.S.

Imogen uses art programming and marine science education to connect people and communities with the value of our oceans and the imperative to conserve them. She was the 2025 Our World Underwater Scholarship Society (OWUSS) Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) Intern, where she used her scuba certifications to support fish monitoring and coral regeneration. She has developed educational programs that leverage art to foster interest and inclusivity in marine science. Being awarded this WDHOF grant in underwater photography will support her fascination with macro and blackwater subjects and inform her practice in oil painting, ceramics, and education.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Photography

**$1,500, sponsored by WDHOF Member Erin Quigley**



### Mineris Figueroa Colón

Puerto Rico, U.S.

Mineris is a biologist with a strong focus on ocean advocacy. As a graduate student at the University of Puerto Rico–Río Piedras, she combines scientific diving and underwater photography to highlight the beauty and ecological importance of Caribbean seagrass ecosystems. Through the WDHOF award, she aims to strengthen her underwater photography skills to document the rarely seen flowers of Puerto Rico's seagrasses, using visual storytelling to connect science with the public and inspire ocean stewardship through education, outreach, and citizen science.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Photography

**$1,500, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Gintarė Huckeba

California, U.S.

Gintarė began diving in high school in Lithuania alongside her father, an experience that helped her feel at home underwater. She later continued diving through her graduate studies in freshwater and marine biology, gaining experience in scientific diving. Now in Northern California, she is exploring a new coastline while working as an environmental scientist for the State of California, helping protect marine habitats. Still at the beginning of her underwater photography journey, she enjoys slowing down beneath the surface, noticing small details, and letting curiosity guide each dive. Through this award, she hopes to continue developing her skills and share images that invite connection and care for the ocean.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Professional Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by Stream2Sea/WDHOF Member Autumn Blum**



### Violeta Martínez Castillo

Baja California Sur, Mexico

Violeta is a marine biologist and coral reef researcher at the Reef Systems Laboratory (UABCS), Mexico. She studies coral ecosystems in the Gulf of California to promote their protection and conservation. With the grant, she will improve her diving skills, enabling her to safely lead a team of young coral reef researchers into deep coral ecosystems.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Professional Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Nabila Fitriani

West Java, Indonesia

Nabila grew up in the big city of Jakarta, Indonesia. After graduating in marine science, she pursued her career in coral restoration on a remote island in eastern Indonesia. She now serves as a Marine Biologist at Luminocean Conservation in Banda Neira, Indonesia. Her work focuses on coral restoration through larval propagation and coral spawning monitoring. She loves night diving to witness the magical phenomenon of coral spawning. She carefully rears the gametes until they reach the larval stage and then releases them back into the ocean. Her passion and her dreams are not just for herself. She is dedicated to inspire and motivate local women. Through the WDHOF grant, Nabila hopes to inspire others to believe that we can achieve our dreams in the marine or diving industry not through wealth, but through diligence and perseverance. To her, a grant is more that just financial support. It is a pathway to empower others, to grow, and to give back.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Professional Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Katrina Whitlow

Indiana, U.S.

Katie is a biology professor, a NAUI dive instructor, and a co-founder of the Chicago Undersea Explorers Society (a non-profit group working to make diving more accessible and inclusive). She researches fish and teaches marine biology, utilizing snorkel and scuba during fieldwork. As a scientist, Katie is always asking questions and encouraging curiosity in those around her. Her teaching style emphasizes lifelong learning and meeting each student where they are - educators and instructors are always learning and growing, too!

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Professional Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Christine Roper

Queensland, Australia

Christine is a researcher with the University of Technology Sydney and the Coral Nurture Program on the Great Barrier Reef, Australia. Her fascination with reef ecosystems began in childhood, but witnessing their decline inspired her to pursue a career in research focused on tangible protection and advocacy for coral reefs. As the lead scientist of a local research–tourism partnership, diving is central to her work, enabling hands-on restoration and a close connection with the reef systems she studies. Beyond her profession, diving also reflects Christine's personal commitment to reef conservation and to understanding and safeguarding the reef's future. The support of the Advanced Dive Training Grant will allow her to obtain her occupational diving certification, strengthening her capacity to lead large-scale underwater projects and mentor other women passionate about marine science and diving.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Recreational Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by Bonnie Toth Advertising & Design/ WDHOF Member Bonnie Toth**



### Camille Harrell

Florida, U.S.

Camille is an 8th grader living in Central Florida. She completed her Open Water Scuba Certification when she was ten years old, which sparked an intense fascination for marine biology and how the ocean works. The past three years she has completed summer mission trips performing coral restoration, studying reef health, and completed benthic surveys at the Mote Marine Institute with her science group SCUBAnauts International. She wants to complete more of these research and conservation trips in the future, expanding her knowledge, and giving inspiration to others around her.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Recreational Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Rebecca Krohman

British Colombia, Canada

Rebecca is working to increase her diving training by completing her Divemaster certification. She hopes to use her dive training to have the skills to research marine environments more closely. Rebecca has graduated with both an undergraduate and a Master's degree in marine biology and hopes to continue her schooling and research in the future. Her research focuses on how marine organisms respond to environmental stressors to better inform conservation and management on how to protect ocean ecosystems. The WDHOF Advanced Dive Training Grant will help Rebecca gain skills in diving with a dry suit, which will allow her to be better exposed to the ecosystems she is studying.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Recreational Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Breanna Hernandez

California, U.S.

Breanna is an Environmental Science major and an emerging scientific diver based in Southern California. She conducts ecological research through Citrus College and has been actively involved in local conservation and community beach clean-up efforts since 2018. Breanna is working toward AAUS Scientific Diver certification to support future fieldwork in marine ecology, coastal restoration, and environmental monitoring. Passionate about expanding access to science and diving for underrepresented communities, she aims to bridge research, education, and conservation. With support from the WDHOF Advanced Dive Training Grant, Breanna will complete her Advanced and Rescue Diver training, strengthening the skills needed for her scientific diving career.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Recreational Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Shreya Chandra

California, U.S.

Shreya is an undergraduate student double-majoring in Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering at the University of California, Davis, as well as minoring in Computer Science, Energy Science and Technology, and pursuing a Certificate of Entrepreneurship. She is also a 2026 Aviation Week 20 Twenties Awardee, 2025 National Space Security Association (NSSA) Moorman Scholar, 2024 Matthew Isakowitz Fellow, 2024 Goldin Research Fellow, 4x NASA Engineering Intern, and Summer 2025 Vast Intern. This grant will enable me to strengthen my understanding of human performance in extreme environments and prepare me for future space-related endeavors, all of which bring me one step closer to realizing my goal of becoming an astronaut.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Scientific Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by Blue Green Expeditions/ WDHOF Member Faith Ortins**



### Jillian Igoe

Massachusetts, U.S.

Jillian is a research assistant at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, where she applies molecular and imaging approaches to investigate developmental processes in invertebrates. Her research spans coral restoration in Florida, tropical seaweed aquaculture, and temperate coral–algal symbiosis, bridging applied conservation and biological questions. Committed to community engagement and education, she teaches marine ecology at the Children's School of Science and volunteers with local conservation organizations. This fall, she will begin graduate training focused on coral physiological ecology and responses to climate change. This award supports essential dive training for her field-based research.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Scientific Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF Member Caron Shake**




### Avicenna Wijayanto

Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia

Cenna is a coral restoration practitioner and a passionate leader in women empowerment from Indonesia, where she leads scientific diving, research, and reef restoration initiatives. Her work focuses on training the next generation of women ocean advocates through hands-on conservation programs and mentorship. With the support of the Women Divers Hall of Fame grant, she aims to advance her scientific diving skills, deepen her coral identification expertise, and invest in essential dive equipment. Cenna's long-term goal is to strengthen coral restoration efforts across Indonesia while expanding opportunities for young women in marine conservation.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Scientific Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF Member Caron Shake**



### Anastasia Goelitz

Groningen, Netherlands

Anastasia is a marine biology Master's student at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. She graduated with her BSc (Hons) in marine biology from the University of Aberdeen in 2025 and is now following a research-focused degree to build a career in marine animal cognition. She started diving at the age of 14, reaching the level of CMAS* instructor at 19, and now plans to use this grant to fulfill her lifelong dream of training as European Scientific Diver with the Alfred-Wegener-Institute in Germany. While her current research focuses on social networks and personality in red knots, her deepest passion is the study of intelligence in wild cephalopods and she is thrilled to gain the scientific skills to conduct research in their natural habitat.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Scientific Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Anouk Janess

**Washington, U.S.**

Anouk is an undergraduate student at the University of Washington completing two degrees in Marine Biology and American Indian Studies. She grew up on Lekwungen lands and waters, known today as southern Vancouver Island. Her professional goals, to enhance coastal community resilience, are informed by her training in Western and Indigenous science and Indigenous epistemologies that define "place" as networks of relations and responsibilities. To honor her responsibility to place, her work weaves marine conservation with environmental storytelling to research and communicate the impacts of climate change and colonialism on aquatic organisms, ecosystems, and communities.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Scientific Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Natalie Horn

**Florida, U.S.**

Natalie is a research technician at the Florida State University's Coastal and Marine Laboratory. She currently focuses on community ecology and habitat restoration of oyster reefs in Apalachicola Bay, Florida. She is a part of the Apalachicola Bay System Initiative which aims to better understand the decline of the bay's ecosystem and deterioration of oyster reefs. Obtaining her AAUS certification with the support of WDHOF allows Natalie to expand her diving and field skills all while trying to better understand the ecosystem that she one day hopes to see recover.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Scientific Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Paulina Filz

**Baja California, Mexico**

Paulina is a Ph.D. candidate in Coastal Oceanography at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, focusing on kelp-forest ecosystems and their resilience to climate change, marine heatwaves, and fishing pressure. Her research combines scientific diving with long-term ecological monitoring and community-based marine management along the Baja California coast. Through her WDHOF Advanced Dive Training Grant, Paulina will advance her scientific diving qualifications to enhance cross-border field research and to better understand the contributions of kelp forests and their fish communities to Nature, People, and Culture. She aims to foster collaboration between scientists, divers, and coastal communities in support of ocean stewardship.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Scientific Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Samantha Hickson

**California, U.S.**

Sam is a second-year undergraduate student at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo studying Marine Science. She's involved in monitoring the Elephant Seal rookery in San Simeon and studying big-picture changes in the Pacific coast intertidal. In her career she aspires to research how ocean ecosystems respond to acidification and MCDR (Marine Carbon Dioxide Removal) techniques. The WDHOF grant will allow her to participate in Cal Poly subtidal research, including the recovery of sunflower sea stars. Sam loves to get outdoors to tidepool and look at cool birds, or stay indoors for hot chocolate and a board game.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Technical Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by TDI/WDHOF Member Stephanie Miele**



### Samantha Johnson

**Florida, U.S.**

Inspired by Florida's springs, chemist-turned-conservationist Sam returned to the University of Florida to pursue a second degree in Natural Resource Conservation. Based in Gainesville, she has been caving with the Florida Speleological Society since 2020 and now serves as a board member. Mentored by both cavers and cave divers, she also volunteers with Karst Underwater Research and serves as an officer for the Florida Cave Survey, supporting the preservation of Florida's karst environments. One of the youngest female cave divers in the state, Sam is currently progressing toward Full Cave certification. When she's not underground, she works at Cave Country Dive Shop, filling tanks and sharing her love for Florida's springs.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Technical Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Emily Corrigan

**Ontario, Canada**

Emily is a marine biologist originally from Ontario, Canada, now based at the University of the Azores, where she researches cold-water corals in the Northeast Atlantic. Her academic path includes coral restoration work in The Bahamas and a Master's degree from the National Taiwan Ocean University, where she studied coral reproductive plasticity at shallow-water hydrothermal vents. She is preparing to begin a Ph.D. focused on developing a diagnostic toolkit for early detection of stress in vulnerable deep-sea coral gardens. This award will support her technical diving training, enabling research in underexplored cold-water coral habitats and advancing conservation and restoration efforts.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Technical Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Natalie Turner-Blackman

Surrey, United Kingdom

Natalie is an underwater cinematographer based in the UK but working globally across series for BBC, National Geographic Disney+ and alike. Natalie utilises rEvo rebreather diving regularly in her work so that she can spend extended times observing and filming behaviour without causing disruption to wildlife. Natalie plans to use the technical grant to level up her rebreather diving by completing her MOD 1 with decompression training, which will allow her to go deeper and extend her bottom time whilst diving safely and gaining knowledge on decompression diving.

## Advanced Dive Training Grant - Technical Diving

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Malica Schmidt

Québec, Canada

Malica is a postdoctoral fellow in environmental physiology, dedicated to advancing human health and safety in extreme environments on Earth and beyond. Her research focuses on developing closed-circuit oxygen systems inspired by rebreather diving to enhance emergency response, underwater operations, and future space exploration. As a trained technical and scientific diver, she brings hands-on field experience into her research to better understand oxygen management under pressure. Beyond her work, Malica advocates for greater representation of women in diving and exploration, and she is an analog astronaut, mountaineer, skydiver, and glider pilot.

## Amelia Behrens-Furniss Hardhat or Commercial Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by Noel Furniss**



### Hailey Springer

California, U.S.

Hailey recently graduated from UC Santa Barbara with a B.S. in Aquatic Biology, where she worked as a scientific diver, divemaster, and within dive safety. She is now enrolled in the Marine Diving Technology Program at Santa Barbara City College, where she is training to be a commercial diver. Her interest in commercial diving was sparked during her internship with Boston Sea Rovers in 2022. As a recipient of a WDHOF grant, Hailey will have the funds to complete her training this spring, and hopes to become an asset on interdisciplinary teams that need both scientific and commercial expertise.

## Amelia Behrens-Furniss Hardhat or Commercial Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Brooklyn Johnson

Pennsylvania, U.S.

Brooklyn is graduating from the welding program at Lenape Technical School north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Brooklyn has her Advanced Open Water and Rescue Diver certification. She is going to use these skills to get her commercial divers certification at South Louisiana Community College. Brooklyn wants to do this so she can become an underwater welder. She dreams of doing this because, growing up, she was always in or on the water. At Lenape, she is part of SkillsU.S. Brooklyn also plays hockey and lacrosse. She is active and always on the move, finding new things to accomplish every year.

## Amelia Behrens-Furniss Hardhat or Commercial Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### McKaila Smith-Poirier

Nova Scotia, Canada

McKaila grew up alongside the Atlantic Ocean and the Bay of Fundy, (home to the highest tides in the world) which sparked her lifelong connection to the sea. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Community Development from Acadia University. Her father, a scuba diver, inspired her to earn her scuba certification at age 16. Over time, McKaila advanced to Divemaster and realized she wanted a permanent career in the water, ultimately pursuing a path in commercial diving. This grant will support her training as an unrestricted surface-supply diver and help her work toward a career in scientific diving, with a focus on marine growth projects. Her long-term goal is to contribute to improved safety legislation and stronger workers' rights within the diving industry across Canada. As the only woman in her current commercial diving course, McKaila is motivated to actively support and encourage the growth of women in the field.

## Jennifer King Memorial Dive Training Grant for ROTC or Military Academy Students

**$1,500, sponsored by Joe Stich**



### Audrey Norton

Florida, U.S.

Audrey is a nuclear engineering student at the University of Florida (UF) and a Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) Midshipman. She is aiming to graduate and commission into the U.S. Navy as a submarine officer. She grew up in a military family and spent several years living overseas getting to explore different countries and their cultures. She really loves hiking, rock climbing, sailing, pretty much any outdoor adventure. Audrey aims to qualify for the U.S. Navy Scuba Training so she can be a dive-qualified officer on a fast attack submarine, and in her free time, she eventually wants to dive to 200ft since that is the same depth her mother has dove to in her diving career. Audrey has done several small dives and plans to get her open water certification alongside some other basic courses to help prepare her for her goals.

## Ella Jean Morgan Memorial Dive Training Grant for Young Women

$1,000, sponsored by **Frank Boulanger**



### Maggie Dalby

Missouri, U.S.

Maggie is a second-year undergraduate student at Florida Atlantic University who is studying to receive her Bachelor of Science in Biology. She is planning on going to school for her Master's degree as well as a Ph.D. She hopes to work in marine research or conservation specifically with sea turtles or apex predators after graduate school. Maggie currently works as an undergraduate research student in two different labs on campus. She works with research on octopus as well as sea turtles, and loves anything marine life. With the Basic Dive Training Grant, she will be able to become certified and will be able to get her scientific diving certification in the future to help even more with the research work.

## Zale & Saxon Memorial Basic Dive Training Grant

$1,000, sponsored by friends of **Evelyn & Suzie Dudas**



### Corinne Morgan

California, U.S.

Corinne is a Dean's List student studying zoology and sustainability graduating in 2026 from San Diego State University. Growing up along the California coast inspired her commitment to marine conservation and showed her the direct impact that marine protected areas can have on ocean ecosystems. Corinne will be pursuing a Master's of Marine Conservation in July 2026, where immersive fieldwork will be central to her studies. She is grateful for the opportunity to earn her scuba certification through this grant and believes that experiencing the ecosystems she aims to protect firsthand will strengthen her ability to contribute meaningfully to marine research and conservation efforts.

## Zale & Saxon Memorial Basic Dive Training Grant

$1,000, sponsored by friends of **Evelyn & Suzie Dudas**



### Saee Patil

Maharastra, India

Saee is a Master's student in Environmental Sciences driven by a deep curiosity for the ocean and its hidden worlds. Passionate about marine ecology and conservation, she is currently working on sea turtle conservation and ghost crab ecology, exploring the delicate balance of coastal ecosystems. This grant will allow Saee to dive beneath the surface, both literally and academically, gaining firsthand access to marine ecosystems in their natural habitats. By combining scientific training with immersive field experience, she aims to transform her passion into impactful conservation action and a lifelong commitment to protecting marine life.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

$1,000, sponsored by **Ocean Wishes**/WDHOF Member **Margo Peyton** and **WDHOF**



### Isabella Pellegrino

Florida, U.S.

Growing up in Miami, Isabella's curiosity about the ocean evolved into a career focused on protecting coastal ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. She now works in fisheries monitoring and sea turtle conservation, contributing to field research, biological sampling, data analysis, and community outreach across South Florida. Isabella's goal is to strengthen ecological datasets and support science-based resource management that will help sustain these environments for years to come. To her, diving is more than just a professional skill; it represents a meaningful connection to the marine environments and species she is committed to protecting. Outside of work, she enjoys hiking, cooking, skateboarding, and film photography, all of which deepen her appreciation for the outdoors. As a WDHOF grant recipient, she is grateful to apply her new dive training to expand her impact beneath the surface and inspire the next generation of ocean stewards.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

$1,000, sponsored by **Ocean Wishes**/WDHOF Member **Margo Peyton** and **WDHOF**



### Julia Wambui Kariuki

Kwale County, Kenya

As a Kenyan woman in Marine Science, Wambui is committed to inspiring the next generation of marine stewards to take the plunge into conservation. She has three years of experience in marine research, sea turtle protection, and community outreach. Collaborating with Local Ocean Conservation (LOC) and the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), Wambui focuses on turtle rehabilitation and ocean literacy. She will use her WDHOF grant for Open Water dive certification and gear, transitioning from surface observations to underwater surveys of the health of coral reefs and seagrass beds, as well as the ecology of the sea turtles she has spent years protecting on land. For Wambui, the ocean is not just a laboratory, but a shared heritage that requires both science and community stewardship to thrive.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

$1,000, sponsored by **Ocean Wishes**/WDHOF Member **Margo Peyton** and **WDHOF**



### Caroline Njeri Wanjiku

Mombasa, Kenya

Njeri is a marine researcher at CORDIO East Africa working under the community-based conservation program and is a Master's student in Environmental Studies (Community Development) at Pwani University. She focuses on translating research into practical conservation actions and empowering coastal communities to sustainably manage marine resources. Completing a diving course will enable her to support participatory coral reef monitoring and ecological assessments, strengthen community engagement, and encourage more women to pursue diving. The training will enhance both her professional capacity as a marine researcher and her effectiveness in coastal conservation work.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by Ocean Wishes/WDHOF Member Margo Peyton and WDHOF**



### Smrutirekha Acharya
Odisha, India

Smrutirekha is a lifelong learner with a deep passion for marine living organisms and their hidden diversity. She has completed her Ph.D. in Marine Sciences and has been recognized for her work on the systematics and ecology of marine and estuarine fishes. Her integrative research, combining classical taxonomy with DNA barcoding has resolved cryptic species complexes. Her research contributed nine new marine fish species to science, along with multiple regional records from Indian waters. Her research contributed over 200 species DNA barcodes to GenBank. Through this grant, she wishes to extend her research beneath the surface linking underwater observation with rigorous biodiversity science and conservation action.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by Ocean Wishes/WDHOF Member Margo Peyton and WDHOF**



### Chamodya Weerakoon
Western Province, Sri Lanka

Chamodya is a marine biodiversity researcher, sustainability professional in the tourism sector and a biotechnology graduate passionate in protecting ocean ecosystems. Her research on coral reef ecosystems across Sri Lanka's southern and eastern coasts strengthened her commitment to science-based conservation. Also, she volunteered to work to connect people with the ocean through awareness programs and citizen-science initiatives that promote protection of coastal and marine biodiversity. Through the Basic Dive Training Grant, she seeks to develop diving as a scientific tool to support underwater monitoring, reef restoration, and public awareness. Chamodya aims to inspire communities and future ocean stewards by connecting people with the sea and promoting responsible interaction with marine life.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by Richard Laurence Parish Foundation/ WDHOF Member Robin Parish**



### Liyu Mekonnen
California, U.S.

Liyu is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Davis, who explores the carbon storage potential of vegetated coastal ecosystems as a nature-based climate solution. Her doctoral research investigates how seagrass meadows, a vegetated coastal ecosystem found along nearly every continent's coastlines, can naturally mitigate carbon emissions and ocean acidification. Becoming dive-certified will allow her to follow scientific inquiry into the depths, as recent research suggests that subtidal vegetated coastal ecosystems may bolster carbon storage even more than intertidal systems. Liyu's focus throughout and far beyond her tenure as a graduate student lies in assessing coastal carbon storage and contributing to the development of efficient and equitable nature-based marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) strategies. Scuba diving will expand the scope of her research to further contribute to shifting carbon assessment and mCDR research towards community-based approaches.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by SDI/WDHOF Member Stephanie Miele**



### Lelanie Cotto-Cay
Puerto Rico, U.S.

Lelanie is a Puerto Rican undergraduate student in the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus. She is completing her environmental science degree and currently working with marine biologists on the island to accomplish her undergraduate dissertation in sargassum and how it affects the intertidal zone biodiversity as well as the different ways that sargassum can be used for the conservation of seagrass. Lelanie aims to be a well-versed marine biologist, and the Basic Training Grant will help deepen her knowledge of Puerto Rican marine life, to support her studies, future investigations, and conservation efforts.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Aditi Ramesh Yadav
Gujarat, India

Guided by a deep respect for the ocean and its living systems, Aditi is an emerging leader in marine research and conservation with a research specialization in Marine Sciences. Her work bridges science, conservation, and policy across aquaculture, marine ecology, and marine pollution, grounded in hands-on field experience at a turtle hatchery in Sri Lanka. Aditi has contributed to global ocean leadership and advocacy platforms, including UNOC3, the Citizen of the Ocean Summit, the COP30 Virtual Ocean Pavilion, and to the ROCA Report 2024–25. Through this award, she seeks to advance evidence-based conservation monitoring, strengthen policy action, and safeguard vulnerable marine species for future generations.

## Basic Dive Training Grant

**$1,000, sponsored by WDHOF**



### Sylvia Wambui Wanjiku
Mombasa, Kenya

Sylvia is a fisheries and oceanography graduate and the founder of Doorway to Acceptance (DTA), a grassroots non-governmental organization supporting women survivors of gender-based violence through socioeconomic empowerment and gender inclusion. Based in Kenya's Coast region, her work addresses how women's exclusion from ocean-based livelihoods contributes to vulnerability, inequality, and violence. Through conservation-focused engagement, she promotes women's participation in the blue economy. This basic diving scholarship enables Sylvia to gain essential underwater skills for reef monitoring and restoration while challenging male dominance in diving and expanding pathways for women's leadership in marine conservation.

## Diver Medical Education Grant

valued at $1,250, sponsored by WDHOF Member **Chantelle Newman**



### Abi Mandeville

Devon, England

Abi was a young mum and completed her BSc and MA when her son started school. She worked as a sport therapist, teacher, and support worker, and only resumed her scuba diving when her son left for university. She then found a volunteering opportunity that combined her love of diving with coral reef restoration in Mexico! She secured a job managing that project a year later, and spent two years learning and building on her skills including AGRRA monitoring, and completing her Divemaster and EFR instructors course, as well as forming lifelong relationships with other professionals in the area. This grant will give her the opportunity to create a new life, building on the qualifications and experience she gained in Mexico and expanding her medical knowledge as a sport therapist. She wants to start an organisation that can benefit the diving community through medical education, and quality training.

## Diving Emergency Medical Responder Grant

valued at $500, sponsored by WDHOF Member **Chantelle Newman**



### Taylor Bange

Florida, U.S.

After serving as a front-line travel nurse during the COVID-19 pandemic, Taylor relocated to the Florida Keys in search of a fresh start. Although she had always loved swimming, discovering diving introduced her to an entirely new world, boosted her mental health, and ignited a passion for the unknown. Seeing the need for safety at sea, she is now working to combine her love for water with her nursing career, and is using this grant as her first step. Her goal is to become a captain, run spearfishing charters with her partner, and eventually develop a water-based wellness retreat.

## Diving Emergency Medical Responder Grant

valued at $500, sponsored by WDHOF Member **Chantelle Newman**



### Rebekah Leigh

California, U.S.

Rebekah is a General Preventive Medicine resident physician at the University of California, San Diego, with a focus on occupational medicine, and plans to further specialize in diving medicine and hyperbarics. This grant will support her completion of the EFR Approved Diving Emergency Medical Responder Course. She is pursuing this training both as an avid scuba diver and to build expertise in responding to medical emergencies underwater, laying the foundation for a career in diving medicine.

If you are interested in further information about the scholarship programs or would like to make a tax-deductible donation, please visit our website at:

**www.wdhof.org**




## WOMEN DIVERS HALL OF FAME MISSION

*The Women Divers Hall of Fame's two-part mission includes:*

- *Recognizing women divers who have made outstanding contributions to the exploration, understanding, safety and enjoyment of our underwater world and*
- *Supporting the underwater world and its associated careers by promoting opportunities for women and men in diving through scholarships, internships and mentorship opportunities and a worldwide network of industry contacts.*

To learn more about the Women Divers Hall of Fame, visit **www.wdhof.org**