

DESTIN FORT WALTON BEACH FLORIDA

Natural Resources

Meet the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Natural Resources Team

What is the Natural Resources team?

The Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida Natural Resources team is a tourism development department dedicated to conserving Northwest Florida's natural beauty, protecting native wildlife, and developing tourism experiences that provide opportunities for families to enjoy adventures on the water.

Who makes up the Natural Resources Team?

The team is comprised of five biologists. Under the leadership of Natural Resources Chief Alex Fogg, they collectively help promote tourism by prioritizing sustainability and putting the community first. Please see more details of who makes up the team below:

Alex Fogg, Natural Resources Chief



Alex Fogg serves as the Natural Resources Chief for Destin-Fort Walton Beach tourism. In his role, he is involved in coastal and terrestrial ecotourism centered projects ranging from collaborative research programs and land management initiatives to

beach restoration, waterway safety, artificial reef creation and invasive lionfish management. He manages the most

active artificial reef program in Florida and since 2020 has deployed more than a dozen large vessels and thousands of tons of environmentally friendly reef material to create a world-class dive destination that serves as an essential habitat for species of fish that are important to the ecosystem. Alex also organizes the largest lionfish tournament in the world, the Emerald Coast Open, which since the inaugural event in 2019 has resulted in the removal of nearly 85,000 invasive lionfish. He is an avid recreational and scientific diver and lionfish hunter, with broad experience in offshore field operations and technical diving capabilities. These skills, coupled with his advanced science background and affection for the outdoors, guides ecotourism efforts not only in Destin-Fort Walton Beach but throughout the region and abroad.

Robert Fenwick, Natural Resources Manager



Robert grew up camping, fishing, and backpacking on Colorado's western slope. A fascination with the ocean led him to Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida for a Bachelor's Degree in Marine Biology and state-level contributions to gamefish

management and coastal habitat restoration with the Florida Dept of Environmental Protection and Southwest Florida Water Management District. Returning west, Rob



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helped establish the Resource Stewardship program for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, owned and operated a mixed-fruit orchard, and attained his Master's Degree in Natural Resources at Utah State University. Most recently, Rob partnered with numerous federal, state, local, and non-profit organizations to improve the condition of forests and rivers across Colorado. Now back in Florida, Rob is excited to begin work as the new Land Resources Manager for Okaloosa County. When not working, Rob enjoys mountain biking, hiking, canoeing, growing orchids, and exploring the outdoors with his wife and children.

Jessica Valek, Coastal Resources Manager



Originally from Minnesota, Jessica moved to Pensacola, FL in 2014 to pursue a career in marine biology. She studied at the University of West Florida where she received her bachelor's degree. She began her career as a Research Assistant at the

Institute for Human and Machine Cognition in Pensacola focusing on artificial reef development, and a variety of different topics that focused on combining technology with biology. She then moved on to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Lionfish Control Program where she managed many programs to spread awareness about the invasive species and encourage

involvement in removal efforts. Jessica joined the Destin-Fort Walton Beach team in March 2021, and the main focus of her work is managing the sea turtle conservation program as the marine turtle permit holder. She and her team of volunteers conduct daily morning surveys looking for sea turtle nests and monitor the beaches and nests throughout the nesting season. She conducts a large number of public education and outreach events and programs to inform locals and visitors about protecting sea turtles. Additionally, she manages marine debris removal efforts and assists the team with lionfish removal efforts, research projects, restoration projects, and education and outreach efforts.

Jacob Bolin, Land Resources Coordinator



Jacob grew up in northeastern Alabama and received his bachelor's degree in forestry from Auburn University. He has experience ranging from timber inventory cruising and wildland firefighting to imperiled species surveying and land

management planning. Jacob also has experience in managing native and non-native invasive species throughout the Southeast. He recently started with the Destin-Fort Walton Beach team in April 2024. He is responsible for managing Okaloosa County land resources



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by balancing conservation with ecotourism. Current projects include developing and mapping hiking and camping opportunities at newly acquired North Shoal River Preserve and Shoal River Ranch as well as existing underutilized recreation areas. Jacob is also exploring the expansion of river and lake opportunities such as paddle trails and boat ramps.

Danielle Lasseign, Coastal Resources Coordinator



Danielle grew up in southern California where she earned her bachelor's degree in marine biology from California State University, Long Beach. She worked as an educator for a local aquarium in San Pedro, CA, then moved to the US Virgin Islands

where she earned her master's degree in marine and environmental science and gained extensive diving experience as a scientific diver. Danielle assisted with coral health and disease monitoring and other reef ecology monitoring projects. In 2019, she moved to Florida where she started her role as a student contractor with the US EPA and assisted with various coral health studies, and spent time exploring northwest Florida environments via hiking, paddle board, diving, etc. She joined the Natural Resources team at the end of 2024 as the Coastal Resources Coordinator and plans on using her experiences

in scientific diving, resources monitoring, and outreach to assist with current and future projects that will restore and conserve the beautiful resources we all love and depend on.

Ryan Ashley, Coastal Resources Coordinator



A Destin-Fort Walton Beach local, Ryan grew up interacting and working within the area's fishing community. In this time, he developed a firsthand understanding of the region's unique marine ecosystems and their importance to the community. He

went on to receive his bachelor's degree in biology and ecology from Vanderbilt University before returning to northwest Florida. Ryan originally joined the Natural Resources team in 2024 as an intern but was later brought on as a Coastal Resources Coordinator. In this role, he is responsible for managing a collaborative fish tagging program with local charter captains, as well as maintaining research partnerships, lionfish removal efforts, and restoration projects. Additionally, Ryan is a part of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Sea Turtle Patrol, where he works to protect the area's marine turtles. He hopes to combine his local knowledge and love for the water to contribute to the community he calls home.