PLENARY SPEAKERS:

Dr. Andreas Fath has been Professor of Physical Chemistry and Analytics at Furtwangen University since 2011. Before that, he worked in the industrial sector for eleven years, dealing with chemical developments and applied surface technologies. His main research interests are in the areas of water / wastewater and plastics. In 2010 he was awarded the Fraunhofer Society's UMSICHT Science Prize for the invention of a process to reduce perfluorinated surfactants (PFT) in wastewater. Andreas Fath caused a national stir in 2014 with his project “Rheines Wasser” when he swam across the Rhine from the source to the estuary and at the same time scientifically examined the Rhine water. Furthermore, Andreas Fath is the author of the textbook "Microplastics", which was published in 2019 by publishing company Springer Spektrum

Dr. Rae McNeish is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biology at California State University, Bakersfield. She earned a B.S. degree in Biology at Millersville University of Pennsylvania, an M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in Biology at the University of Dayton, and was a Post-doctoral Scholar at Loyola University Chicago. Her research focuses on terrestrial-aquatic connections that impact freshwater systems. Previous works focused on understanding how the management of terrestrial invasive plants influenced headwater streams and land-use connections to microplastic abundance in major rivers of the Lake Michigan watershed. Current research is centered on 1) identifying terrestrial-aquatic connections that influence the abundance, fate, and transport of anthropogenic litter in the environment and 2) developing lab and field-based methods to monitor anthropogenic litter in terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Ongoing projects include measuring microplastic abundance in wet and dry deposition, seasonal variability of anthropogenic litter in freshwater systems, and understanding how animal species traits are connected to the microplastic presence in aquatic food webs. Dr. McNeish is also working with a diverse group of scientists and consultants that aim to standardize microplastic lab-based methods. Along with Dr. McNeish’s passion for research, she believes that student engagement and outreach are pivotal to promoting science communication with public audiences and communities. Dr. McNeish spends much of her free time with her fur-babies while enjoying her eco-printing, cooking, and hiking hobbies.

PLENARY SPEAKERS:

Dr. Jeremy Conkle is an Associate Professor (starting Fall 2020) in the Department of Physical & Environmental Sciences at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. He earned dual bachelor's degrees in Biology and Chemistry at Longwood University, an M.S. in Environmental Studies from the College of Charleston, a Ph.D. in Oceanography & Coastal Sciences from Louisiana State University and was a Post-doctoral Scholar at the University of California Riverside. His research focuses on contaminant presence, fate and impacts in aquatic systems. Previous works examined contaminants like pharmaceuticals and personal care products in wastewater treatment wetlands and their uptake in crops irrigated with treated wastewater. One current project is quantifying treated wastewater in rivers and streams and how its contaminants may influence aquaculture. However, much of and Dr. Conkle's current research relates to plastic debris in rivers and coastal settings. This includes work quantifying microplastics in the Mississippi River and their discharge to the Gulf of Mexico, microplastics in Texas' rivers and bays and microplastic consumption by blue crabs. Additionally, over the last 2 years, Dr. Conkle was an expert witness for the Wilson vs Formosa Plastics Corporation trial. Formosa was found guilty, but before the award of damages, they agreed to the largest settlement ever for a Clean Water Act case brought by a private entity. They also agreed to zero future pellet discharge. More importantly, Dr. Conkle is a proud husband and father.