



## Q&A with Nikki Spiller, Director of Harbor Watch

Nikki's passion for the ocean began at a young age:

1. What did you study? Did you always know you'd be interested in marine/water science?  
It was no surprise to my family when I decided to major in Environmental Science at Marist College. You could always find me exploring tide pools at the beach in the summer when I was a kid, so it was a natural fit. I have always been drawn to the water, whether to explore the animals living below the surface, just listening to a flowing river, hiking to a waterfall, or boating and kayaking.
2. How did you become an intern at Harbor Watch, what date was it and how old were you?  
I stumbled upon my internship with Harbor Watch. I saw a tiny sign for Earthplace as I was driving through Westport and thought "they may have an internship in the environmental field!". When I stopped in, I was directed to the Harbor Watch department, spoke with Dick Harris about the program, and after an interview and some reference checking, I was offered the job. I worked as an intern in the summer of 2009 before my senior year of college. After I graduated, I had a couple of short-term positions, and then came back to Harbor Watch in October 2010 to work full time and have worked here ever since!
3. Where did you grow up?  
I was born in Stamford and spent many days during the summer at the beaches in town. Just before middle school I moved to Trumbull. I have a strong affinity to Fairfield County and being near Long Island Sound.
4. What's the best part of your job?  
The variability! We have so many great projects we work on, so each day is a little different. In any given week during our monitoring season you can find me driving a boat, taking water samples from manholes, in the laboratory, exploring a salt marsh, or at my computer analyzing data or writing a grant.
5. Why is the work of Harbor Watch so important?  
The work we do is so important because it is actionable. We work hard to provide valuable data to resource managers and the public in order to make meaningful improvements to water quality. We are thankful to our partners who we have built great relationships with who work with us to quickly solve pollution issues. We are also proud to incorporate students into our projects to give them hands-on skills working in the science field, allow them to think critically to solve real-world problems, and cultivate the next generation of environmental stewards.
6. Why does Harbor Watch need a new boat?  
Harbor Watch started by conducting monitoring in Norwalk Harbor. It is in our name to be out there on the water! We have been fortunate to have used the same boat for 30 years, really stretching every last bit of life out of her, but she now requires more structural repairs (the stern started falling off!) than she is worth. A new boat will allow us to maintain our long-term data sets, be a watchdog in the harbor for pollution issues, provide students with a unique and valuable experience in science research, and give us the possibility of traveling to other harbors to expand our work.
7. How has Harbor Watch expanded their work/reach since you started?  
When I started, Harbor Watch was focused primarily in the Norwalk River, Saugatuck River, and Sasco Brook watersheds conducting bacteria monitoring, dissolved oxygen profiles, and a fish study. Since then, we have expanded our bacteria monitoring throughout Fairfield County, increased our pollution track-down stormwater monitoring, formalized education programs for high school and college students, became a partner in the Unified Water Study, conduct salt marsh research along the coast of Connecticut, and partner with municipal, state, and academic institutions on nutrient and sediment data collection.

*Interview conducted by Sophie Pollmann, Director of Development & Marketing*