

## **Caitlin Keating-Bitonti**

Analyst in Natural Resource Policy at the Congressional Research Service



### **What is your current occupation?**

I am an Analyst in Natural Resource Policy at the Congressional Research Service (CRS), a service unit of the Library of Congress in the Legislative Branch. As an integral part of the legislative process, CRS staff conduct research for the staff of members of Congress and committees (all political parties of the House and Senate). This includes analyzing proposed policies and identifying and assessing policy options by providing consultation, memoranda, reports, and briefing materials—giving staff and members of Congress all the information they need to make informed decisions. The work done by CRS analysts is objective, non-partisan, authoritative, and confidential.

I work in the Natural Resource and Earth Science Section of the Research, Science and Industry Division at CRS. My portfolio includes ocean science and resource issues. My academic research focused on understanding interactions between the ocean and climate system and how changes in the ocean environment influenced the evolution of fossil marine species. In my research, I often studied the modern ocean as an analog. Thus, I found my expertise and academic training in these areas to be a good fit for this Analyst in Natural Resource Policy position at CRS.

### **What is your educational background?**

I have a B.S. in Geology from Syracuse University, an M.S. in Geoscience from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a Ph.D. in Geological and Environmental Sciences from Stanford University, and I completed a postdoctoral fellowship in the Paleobiology Department at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. As mentioned above in #1, I studied marine

sediments and fossils to reconstruct various aspects of past ocean and climate conditions at each of these academic institutions.

**A key message for students is that the geoscience workforce is dynamic, and boundaries between sectors and occupations are fluid. How has this been true in your career?**

On paper, I am trained for a career in research and academia. I have no formal training in science policy, government affairs, international studies, etc. However, part way through my PhD program, I was introduced to academic scientists that used their voice to advocate for science-based policies at both the local and national level, sparking my interest in learning more about science policy. My postdoctoral fellowship was based in Washington, DC, and I figured that if I had any interested in getting involved in science policy now would be the time to try it out.

There are many internship and fellowship opportunities in DC for scientists interested in transitioning into policy and government work. I applied to several of these opportunities. In 2018, I was accepted as the Geological Society of America Congressional Science Fellow and spent a year on Capitol Hill working in the personal office of a U.S. Senator where I learned first-hand about the legislative process. In 2019, I was accepted as a AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow at the U.S. Department of State where I participated in climate change science diplomacy. Policy internships and fellowships give entry into the DC policy space while also providing a supportive environment to a community of scientists looking to make the transition to policy work. With the experiences I gained from these two policy fellowships, I was able to be a competitive and successful candidate for federal jobs on the USAJobs website. I highly encourage scientists looking to transition to policy work to consider researching and applying for these types of opportunities.

**Where do you see your sector moving in future years? How would you advise students to prepare to be competitive job applicants and successful employees?**

CRS works for Congress so our work ebbs and flows with the interests of Congress. I am drawn to the work of CRS because I enjoy continuing to learn about new issues and to think about issues I'm familiar with from different perspectives. Consultation and analysis requests from Congress often challenge me to learn something new or think about an issue in a new light. I also enjoy writing reports, which is an important component of CRS' work (see [crsreports.congress.gov](https://crsreports.congress.gov) for examples of CRS reports). Thus, it is important to know what type of day-to-day work you enjoy (e.g., writing, consulting, analysis) and the skills you have to contribute to being successful in the work expected of you when considering the wide variety of government jobs out there.

In order to be a successful candidate you need to know how to prepare your resume and application materials. Each sector has a specific resume outline. If venturing into a new sector, I recommend researching the style of resume expected from applicants. You don't want to be discounted from a job you are both eager to be considered for and qualified for because the reviewing HR office can't evaluate your resume because it doesn't follow suit. For example,

federal jobs require federal-style resumes to be submitted with your application via [USAJobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov). Both the federal resume and USAJobs can be difficult to navigate without familiarization so do your research and don't wait until the last minute to apply for a job.

**What is the role of networking in your sector? Do you have advice for a student who is just beginning to build their network? What is the best way for students to get their foot in the door?**

Networking is very important for most jobs in DC, especially in the policy and government space. Many of the scientists working in policy and/or government in DC took advantage of networking to break into the DC scene, so reaching out to someone with a job you are interested in or to someone with a similar academic background now working in policy is common practice. Often many people see responding to these types of inquiries as “paying it forward” as someone likely provided them with advice to get them to where they are now. As I said in #4, navigating USAJobs can be tricky so having someone provide you with advice or give you heads up when relevant jobs might be posted would greatly benefit you. In short, don't be hesitant to network and reach out to people you don't know.

Internships and fellowships are great ways to get your foot in the door in DC. These positions can often lead to full time job positions. Refer to my response to #3.

**What does a “typical” day of work look like for you?**

A typical day as an Analyst at CRS involves providing a timely response to requests from staff of members of Congress or committees. These requests might entail writing memos or briefs on a specific subject, researching all aspects of topic, or reviewing and analyzing legislation and policy options. When I'm not responding to requests, I am researching ocean topics that might be of interest to Congress while writing reports on issues that will inform and benefit them. In order to stay informed on current and relevant issues, I attend webinars, seminars, or hearings on topics relevant to my ocean science and resource portfolio.

**What is the best part of your job?**

The best part of my job is getting to discuss ocean issues on a daily basis while continuing to read and analyze ocean issues without having to do primary research. My favorite part of academia was conducting literature reviews and writing. My job at CRS entails both of these things so in my opinion this is the best job out there for me.

**Do you have any other comments or advice for students looking to enter your sector of the geoscience workforce?**

Networking and reaching out to strangers can be intimidating, but if you're looking to transition from research to policy it's good to seek advice from those who have made the transition. (Just know most scientists working in policy were likely in your same shoes at one point.) Applying

for science policy internships and fellowships sometimes requires insider knowledge so do your homework and connect with people who have participated in the programs you are considering.

The policy and government sectors want smart, critical thinkers and creative problem-solvers working for them. You don't need to have the educational background/training to work in these sectors; instead you just need to showcase how the skill sets you have acquired as a scientist/researcher can uniquely serve and benefit this line of work.

**Connect:**

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