



Stephanie Clement

Bar Harbor, Maine

- Middle East Conservation Exchange Program, 1998
- Middle East Alumni Regional Meeting, Cyprus, 2001
- Middle East Alumni Regional Meeting, Turkey, 2002
- QLF Alumni Congress, Hungary, 2006
- Middle East Alumni Regional Meeting, Turkey, 2008
- Middle East Conservation Exchange Program, 2009-2010
- Middle East Alumni Regional Meeting, Oman, 2012
- QLF Alumni Congress, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, 2016

For Stephanie Clement, Friends of Acadia (FOA) are more of a family than they are friends. Nearly two decades ago, Stephanie began working at FOA as the Conservation Director. This was Stephanie's first job after completing her masters in Natural Resources and Planning from the University of Vermont (UVM). Prior to her masters, she attended Colby college as a Biology major with a focus in Environmental Studies and a minor in Japanese. Stephanie spent her college summers on outdoor internships ranging across the country, from Maine to Colorado.



Stephanie Clement, in Oman during the Middle East Alumni Regional Meeting in 2012. QLF ARCHIVES

"I'm lucky, so lucky," Stephanie says as she reflects upon her career trajectory. During her studies at UVM, she worked with the Lake Champlain Basin program, helping to prepare a comprehensive plan to preserve lake water quality, fight invasive species, protect the basin's cultural resources, and promote outdoor recreation. In addition, she served as a teaching assistant for Bob Manning, a leading professor in the department. One of Stephanie's friends, who had worked for Bob on visitor use studies in relation to Acadia's carriage roads, referred Stephanie to a job opening at Friends of Acadia the year that she was graduating.



2016 Alumni Congress, Barcelona, Catalonia. PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREIG CRANNA

Stephanie started her work at FOA in 1997, where one of her first projects was partnering with other organizations throughout Downeast Maine to create a sustainable tourism plan for the region. Stephanie describes sustainable tourism as that which improves the environment, economy, and social fabric so that current and future generations are able to meet their needs.

In a perfect coincidence, Stephanie was invited by John Hull, a QLF Ecotourism expert, to participate in the QLF's Middle East Conservation Exchange Program in 1998. This particular program selects "study sites," otherwise known as case studies, prepared by "folks who are the best and brightest in their field in other countries" Stephanie says.

She highly credits QLF for gathering these unique people who came from New England, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, and Jordan.

The exchange does exactly as it sounds: it exchanges people from North America and the Middle East. Not only did Middle Eastern conservationists visit Acadia and learn from Stephanie's sustainable tourism work there, but in 1998, the opposite took place. Stephanie had the opportunity to see active conservation in a place where they "have to work across political jurisdictions." Stephanie was impressed by "how they make conservation work in the Middle East."

The Middle Eastern participants Stephanie met were equally as memorable in their conservation efforts as they were in their compassion. In October of 2001, a QLF Middle East exchange program reunion was scheduled in Cyprus. Of course, in the ripples of the 9/11 attacks, the planes were barren the day of the trip. Stephanie remembers that when meeting the Israelis and Palestinians upon arrival, they said to her and the other Americans "I'm so sorry for what happened to your country." A moment that Stephanie still cries about, she remembers that she was "floored" at the comment when in the reverse situation "millions of Americans don't even think about the various threats that happen day-to-day [in the Middle East]." For Stephanie, "it was an amazing QLF moment," which revealed to Stephanie the family aspect of QLF, a feeling of belonging and of being cared for.

Empathy for others and for the environment is something that Stephanie carries into her work at FOA. Stephanie coordinates the logistics and paperwork for many of projects that are vital to preserving the 47,000 acres that Acadia spans. These projects are diverse in aim, and she enjoys the day-to-day variety in her work.

Currently, Stephanie is managing two focus initiatives for Friends of Acadia. The first, called "The Acadia Experience," is an effort to mitigate congestion and traffic within the park to improve the overall quality of the visitor experience. "We want to be sure that visitors have the opportunity to enjoy a full range of experiences, from quiet solitude to enjoying Acadia's most popular sites with family and friends," Stephanie explains. The National Park Service is currently working on a transportation plan for Acadia, and FOA helps fund public transportation in the park, summit stewards to encourage visitors to enjoy the park in a resource-sensitive manner, and completes research projects to help the park test how new management ideas will affect crowding.

The second initiative Stephanie works on is called "Wild Acadia," which is a series of programs designed to help restore ecological integrity at the park and give the park's natural resources "the best shot at survival" in the face of climate change. FOA is helping to mitigate the effects of climate change by funding projects to remove invasive plant species, monitor quality and trends within the park's streams and wetlands, and restore fish passage.

For Stephanie, the directorship work at Acadia is the perfect balance of coordination and field work. She never feels removed from the park, and often finds herself among the visitors. While riding on the Island Explorer Bus on a cloudy day, Stephanie remembers "as we drove up the first hill where you get the first view out over Frenchman Bay, I just remember hearing the collective 'WOAH' - it was really awesome. I was like, 'yeah, that's right, this is why we do this work, because it has such an impact on people.'" The work that Stephanie and FOA do is tangible.

This perceptibility on the progress that is made in the park, Stephanie believes, is why Acadia is a family – a community of people who "share a love of conservation and this national park." A second family for Stephanie is QLF, of which she remains an active member. Stephanie is part of the QLF Regional Council and has attended both of the Alumni Congresses. She's a self-proclaimed, "[person] who cries at every reunion," always brought to tears because of QLF's dedication to connecting and reconnecting people who share a passion.

Again, today Stephanie feels lucky. Lucky to be a member, a leader, and an inspiration in these two families.



Wahiba Sands, Oman, site of the 2012 Middle East Regional Meeting.