

MN Ground Water Association Foundation

2026 Gil Gabanski Student Scholarship Recipients

Vy Le

Bio:

I am a Ph.D. candidate in Geoscience at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and my interest in groundwater began long before graduate school. Witnessing firsthand the impacts of dioxin contamination from Agent Orange and arsenic contamination in water-logged rice paddies in my hometown, Vietnam, had sparked my curiosity about how water quality affects both ecosystems and human health.

That perspective led me to pursue a B.A. in Environmental Geoscience as an Environmental Fellow at DePauw University, where I studied groundwater systems through hydrogeology, chemistry, and environmental science. There, I researched suspended sediment sources using radioactive nuclide fingerprints with Dr. Frederick Soster and arsenic contamination pathways. At UW-Madison, under Dr. Christopher Zahasky’s guidance, I investigated bacterial transport using radioactive to label bacteria and positron emission tomography imaging to quantify in situ attachment during column experiments using a novel imaging approach--positron emission tomography, resulting in a first-author publication in *Environmental Science & Technology*.

My current Ph.D. research, conducted in collaboration with Dr. Erin Berns-Herrboldt’s research team at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, focuses on investigating the mechanisms that affect phosphorus mobility in the riverbank hyporheic zone. I have also enjoyed mentoring undergraduate researchers in both field and lab settings, including through the Freshwater Collaborative research program. These experiences have strengthened my skills in collaborative research, fieldwork, analytical chemistry, laboratory



experiments, reactive transport modeling, and Python-based data analysis. As I'm continually drawn to the complexity of how contaminants move and transform in water systems, I hope to pursue a career as a hydrogeologist where I can stay engaged in research and continue addressing evolving water quality challenges through interdisciplinary, multi-pronged approaches.

Ryder Roelf

Bio:

I am a senior at the University of Minnesota Duluth pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Earth and Environmental Sciences with a focus on geology and hydrology. My time at UMD has allowed me to explore a wide range of topics within the environmental sciences through hands-on fieldwork and research experiences. I have participated in stream surveys, fault mapping, and other field-based studies alongside professors and peers, and served as an officer in the Earth and Environmental Sciences Club, where I helped organize and lead events.

These experiences led me to conduct independent research through UMD's Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program under the guidance of Dr. Braunagel. My work utilizes geophysical methods, specifically Electrical Resistivity Tomography, to map subsurface hydrology in reconstructed stream and wetland systems along Mission Creek, Minnesota.

Outside of academics, I worked with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as a fluvial geomorphology intern. In this role, I supported hydrologists and ecology teams by assisting with stream barrier surveys, geomorphic assessments, field sampling, and data analysis, contributing to river restoration and aquatic habitat improvement efforts across the state.



Mikell Schoonover

Bio:

Mikell Schoonover is a junior at Bemidji State University pursuing a double major in Environmental Science (Hydrogeology) and Geography (Earth Sciences), with a minor in Geology. Through her involvement with the Center for Sustainability Studies at BSU, she has assisted graduate students studying aquifer relationships at the USGS Shingobee Headwaters Aquatic Ecosystems Project alongside Dr. Carl Isaacson and Dr. Miriam Ríos-Sánchez. Prior to attending BSU, she participated in a Keck Geology Consortium Gateway Project with Carleton College under the guidance of Dr. Chloe Fandel, where her research focused on region-wide spring-tributary relationships. This work culminated in a group poster presentation



at GSA Connects 2024. These experiences laid the foundation for her current undergraduate research, supported by the S-STEM Scholars Program at BSU. She is studying potential groundwater-surface water interactions related to bedrock fractures and esker systems in northeastern Minnesota under the guidance of Dr. Carl Isaacson. She is grateful for the mentors who have encouraged and challenged her throughout her academic journey. After completing her undergraduate degree, she plans to pursue a master's degree and continue exploring her passion for groundwater research.

Jennifer Huang

Bio:

I am a second-year PhD student in Dr. Peter Kang's research group in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Minnesota. My work combines numerical modeling with data-driven approaches to accurately predict the transport and fate of contaminants in karst aquifers. Using high-resolution field data from a karst aquifer in Southeastern Minnesota combined with innovative modeling techniques, I hope to contribute to our understanding of how nitrate and chloride impact karst groundwater systems. Our field site is uniquely instrumented to provide continuous chloride and nitrate monitoring, allowing us to glean insights into both short-term and long-term contaminant trends. My modeling work employs an ensemble of modeling frameworks to characterize the complex flow and transport regimes seen in karst aquifers. This research will help inform responsible and sustainable groundwater management, agricultural fertilizer use, and road salt policies. As I progress through my degree and career, I hope to continue this impactful work to preserve groundwater resources for our communities.



Hannah Bruskwicz

Bio:

Hannah Bruskwicz is a third-year undergraduate at St. Cloud State University, double-majoring in Hydrology and Environmental Engineering, and a member of the women's volleyball team. As a native Minnesotan, Hannah has been connected to water from a young age, exploring local lakes and rivers and experiencing the diverse landscapes that stretch from forests to prairies. These experiences helped shape her interest in the environment and inspired her pursuit of a career in water resources.

At university, Hannah's coursework has ranged from water resources engineering and hydrology to water treatment technologies. Her studies in Hydrology and Environmental Engineering have provided opportunities to work with subsurface remediation design concepts related to groundwater contamination using data from real petroleum spills in Minnesota. Beyond the classroom, Hannah has continued to expand her knowledge through local internships in government and private sectors, gaining experience with both the design and real-world application of technologies used in water resource management.

Hannah is deeply grateful to the groundwater community and the association for supporting students pursuing careers in water resources. As she continues her studies and prepares to graduate in the spring of 2027, she hopes to begin a career in water resources where she can contribute to the protection and sustainable management of groundwater systems. She looks forward to applying her academic and professional experiences to real-world challenges while continuing to learn from and serve the groundwater community.

