

DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY & EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY

Dr. Mike Blum – Tulane University

“The socioecology of rodent-borne disease risk in post-Katrina New Orleans”

Catastrophic disasters can have enduring consequences on environments and societies. Remarkably little is known, however, about the long-term outcomes of disaster response, including whether efforts intended to reduce public health threats instead defer or inflate risks by influencing socioecological reassembly. In this seminar, I will discuss how work on rodent-borne infectious disease in New Orleans is advancing understanding of post-disaster health disparities. I will first present how Hurricane Katrina-related flooding has reshaped the sociocultural and landscape diversity of the city. I will then describe how public policies intended to spur return and rebuilding have instead reinforced legacy asymmetries in the distribution and composition of vegetation across the city. I will also illustrate how the prevalence and management of abandoned property align with legacy asymmetries, and how ‘greening’ following abandonment favors commensal rodents and increases rodent-borne pathogen exposure risk. Finally, I will discuss how understanding of socioecological relationships is helping decision-makers develop plans for environmental restoration that better ensure the well-being of vulnerable populations in New Orleans.



RESEARCH TALK

Tuesday January 17; Room 27, Alumni Memorial Bldg; 3:30- 4:30 PM