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### AVEO gets a new staffer

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After a funding shortfall led Ashuelot Valley Environmental Observatory (AVEO) to lose its science director, the Keene nonprofit organization recently received a staffing boost.

Through the AmeriCorps program, AVEO was able to hire a new program director, Kate Yard.

The AmeriCorps program will supply the bulk of Yard's compensation, according to Moon, though AVEO is contributing a portion.

Executive Director David M. Moon said Yard began working on July 20 and is expected to stay for a year.

Yard has been the nonprofit organization's first hire — other than intern Elise White — since former science director Brett Amy Thelen's position was eliminated earlier this year for lack of funding.

Thelen was of AVEO's two staff members and served as the organization's science director through a pair of grants that ended in January. She continued working with AVEO, on a volunteer basis, before becoming a research associate in the environmental studies department at Keene State College.

"The science director position was actually created as a project," Moon said, to establish principles for the operation of AVEO's citizen science work.

"Citizen science" refers to the linking of volunteers with researchers to help study and monitor everything from salamanders to common nighthawks.

Yard's position will rely on similar skills to Thelen's but will be "much more programmatically-focused," Moon said. In addition, Yard will help with a new campaign to visit local conservation commissions to help them understand the value of citizen science.

Yard's hire comes about two months after Craig Stockwell — president of the organization's board of directors — summed up AVEO's funding challenges as follows:

"We can honestly say we're fighting for survival right now," he said.

And now?

"It's still tough, and I'm still kind of struggling strategically," Moon said, "but we know we've got Kate for another year, and that ensures that AVEO is going to be around for at least another year."

And, he added, "I think that we'll pull out of it if we can strengthen our relationships with some of our partners."

According to a biography on AVEO's Web site, Yard is working on her master of science degree in conservation biology at Antioch University New England.

She earned her bachelor of science in wildlife biology from the University of Montana in Missoula.

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