

The Benthic Ecology Meeting Society (BEMS) was founded to create a meeting where we can share the latest and greatest advances in marine science in a welcoming, supporting, and engaging environment that is free from all forms of discrimination. Science is strongest when people from all backgrounds and all levels of experience come together to pursue the creation and sharing of knowledge. The BEMS has embraced efforts to ensure our meeting is accessible and inclusive with the goals of making everyone feel welcome and to promote the free exchange of ideas. We formed an advisory committee to assist with these goals, reaffirmed our commitment to our code of conduct, and found ways to keep the meeting affordable so that cost is less of a barrier to participation, and we remain committed to these efforts. The Benthic Ecology Meeting is geared towards students to provide them with an important networking and professional development opportunity. BEMS recognizes the direct harm diminishing investment in research has on our members and ultimately on our society, and we want to offer our support to colleagues that have been affected by layoffs and funding changes/uncertainty, particularly those at federal agencies that guide and support much of what we do. This year, we will waive late registration fees for anyone affected by the uncertainty many of our colleagues are facing. We must however have all abstracts submitted and registrations paid by presenters by March 1 to formalize the program. We encourage participants who can provide job opportunities to BEMS members to send those to our board for sharing in the society at no cost (bem2025@disl.edu). We will create an affinity group for those affected to create community and provide support. As a stark reminder, BEMS affirms everyone and rejects all forms of discrimination, harassment, and bigotry by anyone in our community on the basis of race, color, appearance, genetic information, disability status, sex, age, gender identity, national origin, veteran status, religion, citizenship, socioeconomic status, or any other demographic category. Our goal is to ensure everyone has an enjoyable meeting in an atmosphere of mutual respect, cooperation, and professionalism. We look forward to seeing everyone in Alabama at our next meeting.