



# Q & A with NWS Raleigh Hydrologist Barrett Smith



**Barrett Smith**

**Position:** Senior Service Hydrologist

**Education:** North Carolina State University

**Hometown:** Asheboro, NC

**Where did you go to school and what made you want to work at The National Weather Service?**

I attended North Carolina State University for my Bachelor's and Master's degrees. I grew up in Asheboro, NC, so I have essentially been in this area my entire life. It was the uniqueness of winter weather – the possibility of freezing rain, sleet and snow all in one event – that fascinated me. Then, while I was at NC State, I was able to intern with the NWS here in Raleigh and fell in love with the mission and service aspect of the NWS.

**What was your NWS Career Path to get to NWS Raleigh and how long have you been at WFO RAH?**

My career path has been somewhat unique in that I spent my first decade or so as the same office (NWS Raleigh), going from a volunteer student intern to an official intern-like position in the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), and then a full-time employee as Meteorologist Intern, General Forecast and finally lead forecaster. The past two years I was the Program Coordination Offer for NOAA and the NWS in Silver Spring, Maryland, where I staffed the NOAA Administrator and the Director of the NWS. I returned to Raleigh to be the Senior Service Hydrologist in June of this year [2019].

**What is your current role here at NWS Raleigh?**

As the Senior Service Hydrologist I manage our hydrology program, which includes dissemination of river forecasts and river flood warnings, as well as support of flash flood situational awareness, watches and warnings. This includes river surveys and determining flood impacts, database maintenance, and outreach with partners of the NWS. Essentially, it is my job to ensure our forecasters have all information and tools they need to accurately and efficiently issue the water related forecasts, watches and warnings to



meet our mission of saving lives and property.

**What is your favorite type of weather to forecast?**

Outside of my interests in water, I find winter weather forecasts to be the most fun and rewarding, probably because they can be so challenging. Forecasting precipitation types pulls on so much of our science and forecasting techniques.

**What is the most memorable weather event you have experienced?**

Like many in our office the April 11, 2011 tornado outbreak is etched in my mind. I can remember leaving to come to work early because the day had such an eerie feel. The long hours and teamwork with my coworkers was inspirational, and while the aftermath with damage and loss of life was sobering, the unknown number of lives saved by our outreach and warnings is something I take pride in.

**What non-weather hobbies do you enjoy?**

I love playing rugby. I picked up the sport while traveling in South America back in 2005, and ever since I've played regular with college and club teams.

**What is the most challenging part of your job?**

Flooding is inherently challenging because it is unique at each location depending on the proximity to a river or stream, the land use (think urban development vs rural farmland), and the time/intensity of rain (not to mention dam breaks, ice jams and other non-weather causes). In addition, just forecasting rainfall creates its own uncertainty.