

## Green at the lab

# Search for climate solutions brings Colombian to Hobcaw

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COASTAL OBSERVER

Liane Gamboa is just days into her first visit to the United States, but she has a lot more than sight-seeing and sampling the local cuisine on her mind.

By the end of her five-week stay, Gamboa, 29, a geologist visiting from South America, hopes to have picked up some information that will help address climate change issues that threaten her home on San Andres Island in Colombia.

Gamboa arrived in the Pawleys Island area on Sunday and will work through April at Clemson University's Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science at Hobcaw Barony as part of Climate Change Fellows, an exchange program through Partners of the Americas. The group is dedicated to connecting volunteers, institutions and communities to improve lives.

During her stay, Gamboa will work with the institute's faculty, learning about projects it has under way that deal with the response of coastal systems to climate and land-use changes, said her host, William Connor, an assistant director and professor of forestry at the institute.

San Andres, located in the Caribbean Sea, is one of the regions in Colombia most affected by climate change.

"We have problems with the increase of sea level, erosion and salinization," Gamboa said. "Year after year, the climate is changing, and

last year, for example, we had the highest rain in all time. All of Colombia has this situation, but San Andres has more problems because it's surrounded by ocean."

San Andres is about 10 square miles and erosion is one of the most serious threats to the island.

"I don't know the numbers, but you can see year after year there are lost terrains and vegetations. In maybe 50 years we could lose 20 percent of the area," Gamboa said.

Because its economy is based mainly on tourism, the island is threatened by climate change on multiple levels.

Gamboa said she wants to learn about methods being used at the institute that can be applied to systems already in place in San Andres to help improve the situation. She is particularly interested in vegetations that can be used to help control erosion in coastal areas. She also wants to cultivate contacts she can call on for help as her work on the island progresses.

Connor will help Gamboa explore projects all over Hobcaw, a 17,500-acre wildlife refuge and research reserve, and on the area's waterways. She's also signed up for a naturalist program the institute has at Huntington Beach State Park in conjunction with the University of South Carolina, which also has a lab at Hobcaw.

Asked how she was selected for the fellowship, Gamboa had to consult a Spanish to English dictionary she keeps at hand.



Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

## Liane Gamboa is studying climate issues at Hobcaw Barony in hopes of helping her home, San Andres Island in Colombia.

"I have my dictionary with me all the time," she said. Her English is very good, but she occasionally needs a little help finding the right word. The fact that English isn't her first language was a disadvantage for her in the application process for the fellowship, she said.

Gamboa is one of 10 Fellows chosen for the program to work at labs in various locations.

The application process was highly competitive and Gamboa was chosen on the basis of her work with The Corporation for the Sustainable Development of the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina. She works on an integrated water management project, with a special focus on coastal geomorphology.

While saving the island she loves is the main focus of Gamboa's stay,

the faculty at the institute will make sure she also carves out some time to have fun and get a feel for the culture of the Lowcountry.

Gamboa is looking forward to it, she said, but she's hoping for better weather for the rest of her stay.

"I was thinking it would be more warm," she said.

Temperatures in the 50s earlier this week had her shivering and wrapped up in a heavy winter coat.

The itinerary for Gamboa's stay also includes a conference in Charleston next month. The trip ends with a stop in Washington, D.C., in early May.

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To complete the exchange program, faculty from Clemson will visit Colombia this summer.

Connor is encouraging those at the institute to apply.