

The Balance Wheel

Newsletter of the Association of Conservation Information

Fall, 2004

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Contributors to this issue: Dave Chanda, Chuck Schlueter, Gabrielle Morey, Nels Rodefeld, Jenny Thom, Kay Morton Ellerhoff, Michelle A. Griffin

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Dave Chanda, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Congratulations Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries! You did a great job in hosting the 2004 ACI Conference! Each year the host state continues to raise the bar and put together a fantastic conference, and this year was no exception. The working sessions were excellent. I now know exactly what is going on when someone shakes my hand as a result of the "Body Language in the Workplace" session. I especially enjoyed the keynote address by Keni Thomas, and the alligator trek, haunted tour, and field trips.

I want to thank Marianne Burke (Conference Coordinator) of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries for all of her efforts in pulling together the 2004 ACI Conference. She can now breath a sigh of relief, relax, sit back and enjoy some well-deserved kudos! It is difficult to coordinate a conference of this magnitude and obviously requires a tremendous amount of time and energy from a dedicated support staff. They, too, deserve a tremendous amount of credit. Without the contributions of individuals such as Thomas Gresham, Joel Courtney, Jeff Degraff, Linda Allen, Janice Collins, Selena Gardner, and Jill Wilson, there is no way the conference could have been so successful. So a big thank-you for your time and hospitality. You should be proud of your work.

I would also like to congratulate all of the states that won awards for excellence in the annual ACI awards competition. To be recognized on this national level of competition is indeed an achievement. This year's awards program was very competitive, with 300 entries from 30 states and federal conservation agencies and organizations.

For those of you who couldn't attend, you were missed. This issue of *The Balance Wheel* presents the highlights of the conference and gives you the opportunity to view the conference through the eyes of a first-time attendee (see article by Jenny Thom). If you couldn't attend because of budgetary constraints, take heart, as there is a good chance we can help you next year. Thanks to the generous contributions of DJ Case Associates and the Outdoor Channel, ACI has established a fund to help cover the cost of attending the conference for those members who cannot get travel approved. I plan to establish a new committee to develop criteria and the particulars of how this assistance will be distributed (any volunteers??). Look to future issues of *The Balance Wheel* for information on this new ACI program.

The ACI yearly conference continuously sends me home rejuvenated and excited about the work we accomplish. I must say I am humbled by the opportunity to serve as President of such a truly great organization and can only hope that I do as good a job as our previous presidents. To that end, I'd like to congratulate Joan Guilfoyle for the great job she has done for ACI during her two years as president. Joan's level of enthusiasm was infectious, and we were able to accomplish a tremendous amount of work during her tenure. She instituted quarterly conference calls with the ACI Board of Directors to ensure that projects/programs moved forward and didn't languish, helped guide the transfer of *The Balance Wheel* to an electronic media, and was able to successfully implement many needed improvements to the ACI by-laws and policies and procedures. Joan has also earned the right to take a deep breath, relax, and kick back a little—although only a little because I still need her help.

I think ACI is in excellent hands with the current executive staff and board of directors. During my tenure, I'd like us to stay the course, but also look to work on fine-tuning the budget and perhaps elevating our working relationship with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. One area I would like to improve is in the documentation of workshops/presentations from our annual conferences. We've seen some great programs in the past few years that certainly enabled me to be more effective in my state work. I often wondered how we could keep those members who couldn't attend the conferences informed about the latest innovations. I think the time has come to produce proceedings or transactions of the annual conference that can be used by members who were unable to attend. These transactions might even serve as a tool to assist ACI members with gaining travel approval, as they could be used to show directors and supervisors the kind of hands-on sessions, lectures, and interactive workshops that are conducted at an ACI conference. If you have any thoughts concerning the value of publishing conference transactions, I'd love to hear from you.

ACI can count on me to give the best I have for this organization. But I'd like to challenge you to do the same. You can get involved in many ways besides just attending the conference. ACI always needs help on committee work, soliciting new members, and reaching out to other conservation communication organizations. Check out the ACI directory. If a neighboring state is not a member, perhaps you can make a call and discuss the benefits of joining ACI. If you're not sure how you can help, please feel free to contact me, or any of the other board members or executive committee. All of the contact information can be found on our Web site.

Finally, I'd like to extend a personal invitation for each of you to join me at our ACI Conference in Ogden, Utah, from July 11-15, 2005. Judging by the preliminary schedule of events, they are well on their way to hosting a successful conference.

Thanks and I hope to see you soon.



NATIONAL NEWS

This is part two of a two-part series on the effects of the ESA (Endangered Species Act). This article highlights endangered species success stories from our own ACI member states. Part one appearing in our Summer '04 issue, focused on new species that are being recommended for listing under the ESA.

ACI Member States Exemplify Endangered Species Act Success

By: Michelle A. Griffin, The Balance Wheel Editor & ACI Member contributions

Part one of this series reported how scientists have joined environmental groups in petitioning the government to add 225 plants and animals to the U.S. endangered species list. Clearly such action comes in response to further decline of species in our fragile environment. In this article we will explore the brighter side of the Endangered Species Act including species which have recovered, are well on their way to recovery, or avoided listing all together due to the enforcement of the ESA.

WHAT CAUSED THE PROBLEM TO BEGIN WITH?

Habitat loss and uncontrolled use of pesticides are the recurring and most prevalent causes of species being threatened. Restrictions on pesticide use have thankfully been imposed and enforced for the most part. However, habitat loss continues to be a far-reaching problem that most would agree does not appear to have an end, or even to be slowing to a controlled pace. Of course, habitat loss is not limited to displacement of species due to commercial and residential development. In fact, more and more habitat loss is attributable to contaminated water and land. Following are examples of species detrimentally affected by habitat loss and pesticide use but with the help of multiple agencies and both private and non-profit entities are on the road to recovery.

HABITAT LOSS

Trumpeter swan – A most beautiful bird to those who have had the fortune to see this creature in the wild, they reside in parts of Texas and many other states. Being hunted for meat, skins and feathers combined with habitat loss as settlers moved across North America caused the trumpeter to disappear from Minnesota in the 1880's and led to only 69 swans in the lower 48 states by the 1930's.

Northern Flying Squirrel – Inhabiting boreal forests made of mixture of red spruce and northern hardwoods in states such as West Virginia, the northern flying squirrel lives in a habitat reduced to one tenth the historical acreage due to timbering and subsequent fires. Funding of research alone found a larger population than originally expected, but still isolated in suitable forests. Recovery efforts for the squirrel include multiple state and federal agencies and private landowners developing Habitat Conservation Plans. Results include a better understanding of the species, and protection of its habitat. Research is also underway to enhance marginal habitat for species. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife is presently reviewing the status of the squirrel to see if downlisting is warranted.

Big-eared and Indiana Bats – Also found in West Virginia, disturbance of this bat species in cave roosts was a major factor in the decline of the species. Multiple state and federal agencies, along with private cave owners worked together to close caves to spelunking during the roosting seasons. Results include significantly increased numbers of bats in protected cave areas, but the species is still declining across much of its range.

OTHER CAUSES OF SPECIES DECLINE

Peregrine Falcons – This majestic bird struggled in New Jersey, among other places, against the use of the pesticide DDT which lead to weak egg shells and tremendous loss of population over a 10-15 year period of time. By the 1970's, peregrines were almost extirpated. A large collaborative effort led to increased populations and included such large private companies as Verizon and AT&T as well as state, federal and educational institutions. This unlikely group of entities came together to protect and rebuild the peregrine population.

Osprey – Also a native to New Jersey, the osprey suffered from the ravages of DDT as well as habitat loss. In the 1880's nearly 100 nests were found in the New Jersey area; by the 1890's the number had dropped to 25 pairs. Osprey is one of first species included on the New Jersey endangered species list when the act passed in 1974. Since then, ospreys have enjoyed recovery periods and as recent as 1997 and 1998 once again experienced declines, possibly due to lack of prey. The effort continues, but success is certainly in the history of recovering this species.

Black Footed Ferret – This native to South Dakota is the poster species for the most successful re-introduction site in North America. Recovery included a collaborative effort between multiple state and federal agencies as well as local veterinarians and volunteers. The establishment of a self-sustaining population has ferrets well on their way to eventual removal from the federal endangered species list.

LANDOWNER INCENTIVE PROGRAM BIG HIT

We have given numerous success stories and most are attributable to cooperative efforts between agencies, private and non-profit entities. One such collaborative effort in Texas led to a very successful ongoing program that is now being emulated at the federal level.

In 1997, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department started the first government program in the nation that provided grants to private landowners to improve or protect habitat for threatened or endangered species. The idea was to encourage landowners to do the right thing voluntarily through incentives instead of coercive regulations. In Texas, state LIP dollars have already restored dwindling native short-grass prairie in the Panhandle, protected rare plants in a "hanging" bog, restored longleaf pine forests in East Texas, enhanced spring flows and improved nesting habitat for rare songbirds near Uvalde, and restored hardwood bottomlands along the Trinity River.

The focus is on habitat that supports many species. This means an LIP grant that restores Panhandle prairie will help not only the rare lesser prairie chicken and swift fox, but could also improve pheasant or quail hunting. Since its inception in 1997, the Texas program has grown its funding significantly. Indeed, there is now a federal program which emulates this same program and provides monies to other states.

PREVENTION IS PREFERRED

Although these restoration efforts are impressive, the preferred method is to keep species from ever being listed. One of the most inspiring stories originates in Idaho and focuses on the protection of slickspot peppergrass found in the Snake River Plain of Southwest Idaho. The plant had been proposed for listing as endangered under the ESA. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service postponed making a decision to list the plant based on a request by the state of Idaho to develop a conservation plan for the plant. A steering committee was formed and the Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) was developed in about 4 months. The CCA was submitted to the USFWS for review and consideration. They decided to not list the plant based on the conservation agreement.

The development of the agreement was a collaborative effort between multiple government and private parties. It has led to better working relationships between the ranchers/landowners and the agencies. It has also improved the relationships between the state and federal agencies. Idaho plans to build on this success by developing conservation agreements for other species in the future.

COOPERATION IS KEY

A recurring theme in all of these stories is the absolute necessity of interagency as well as interdisciplinary teamwork. We have cooperative efforts that include multiple state and federal agencies, private landowners, nonprofit organizations and interested private citizens who want to make a difference. I hope this brief article highlighting some of the incredible work being done nationwide will inspire other states to create and foster these partnerships leading to a decline in the number of species in peril.



STRATEGIC PLANNING

TEAMING WITH WILDLIFE INITIATIVE

By: Chuck Schlueter, South Dakota of Game Fish & Parks

A nationwide effort is underway to provide long-term support and funding for wildlife conservation and diversity, and as usual ACI members are working on the frontlines.

The work is aimed at solidifying the State Wildlife Grants program, begun in 2001 to provide funding for wildlife diversity. An ACI Task Force has been formed to work with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to create a strategic plan and messages to support the communications effort for this work.

The original Teaming With Wildlife Initiative assembled a coalition of 3,000 groups around the country. The ACI Task force and IAWFA are working to build on this coalition to re-energize the Teaming with Wildlife Initiative. The communication objectives are to:

- Inform, inspire and motivate the public to support stable public funding for state wildlife conservation programs.
- Build the public awareness and support needed to reenergize, strengthen and expand state and national Teaming With Wildlife coalitions.
- Solidify the link among education, recreation and wildlife conservation.

Members of the ACI Task force are being asked to identify effective messages, provide input for the development of a strategic communications plan, and initiate key media contacts to cultivate strong media relationships for the Initiative.

The ACI Task Force is looking for the following information:

- Research that will draw on a national poll on attitudes toward conservation which was sponsored by The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land in April 2004, but will also look at polling conducted by other state public opinion research pertaining to wildlife conservation. This process will identify gaps in information and parameters for possible future polling.
- Case studies on planning processes where a link between strong plans and conservation funding was made.
- Ideas for a strategic plan to boost a public education effort. This strategic plan will ultimately be headed by consultants, a core group of public affairs directors and conservation partners.

The initial work of the ACI Task Force must be completed by November 2004. Work will then begin on the strategic plan. This plan will be tested in the spring of 2005. A "Train the Messengers" workshop is being planned for the 2005 ACI Conference in Utah.

The initial work will result in a customized strategic plan that will be functional, effective and serve as a blueprint for future efforts. The efforts will result in the creation of universal messages to support the Initiative, as well as tools and materials necessary to launch successful public education programs in each state.

Whether or not you are a member of the ACI Task Force, your input and ideas for this process are welcome. Please contact Chuck Schlueter with information you would like to share. E-mail chuck.schlueter@state.sd.us or call (605/773-3904).



SKILL BUILDING

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE AN ACI AWARDS WINNER?

The following article continues our series on "What does it take to be an ACI awards winner?" This issue's award focus is "Education" and highlights two of our recent winners in this category, Utah and

UTAH'S WONDERFUL WETLANDS: CREATING THE GUIDE

By: Gabrielle Morey, Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

What does it take to create a successful educational guide? The methods are as varied as the reasons for creating the guide in the first place. In this instance, the reason for the creation of the guide was a change in the Utah science core curriculum. In 2002 the Utah State Office of Education changed part of the 4th grade science core curriculum to include wetlands. Specifically, the new standard states, "Students will understand the physical characteristics of Utah's wetlands, forests and deserts and identify common organisms for each environment." The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) believed that although the inclusion of wetlands in the core curriculum was a good change, 4th grade teachers in Utah were essentially unprepared for it.

As a result of this, the Project WILD Coordinator for Utah applied for an EPA Wetlands grant, and received it, allowing the UDWR to hire for a new position: Wetlands Education Program Coordinator. As written in the grant, the main duty of the Wetlands Education Program Coordinator was to create and disseminate a wetlands education activity guide for 4th grade teachers and students in Utah.

The initial steps in creating this guide included finding out what guides were already created and being used. There are numerous environmental education guides out there, and many of them have activities that are related to wetlands, or could be related to wetlands in some way. The Wetlands Education Program Coordinator went through as many of these environmental education guides as she could find. While doing this, she took notes on various aspects of the guides, from specific activities, to how the guides were arranged, to interesting parts of the guides that could be included in the UDWR guide. Some parts of guides that were thought to be important and hence were incorporated in the UDWR guide included:

Background information. Teachers need this knowledge before they are going to be able to use it and/or teach it to their students. This section included information on learning styles, environmental education and why it is important to use, as well as wetlands information.

Sequential arrangement of the activities. Activities were placed into 3 different categories: pre-field trip, field trip, and post-field trip. By arranging the curriculum in this manner wetlands are integrated into the students' curriculum, rather than simply being a one-shot field trip.

Diversity of activities. In order to address all learning styles of students, it is necessary to have various types of activities. Some included in this guide are sitting and reading activities, some are moving around activities, others are role-playing activities. This diversity also helps ensure that teachers will find some activities that interest themselves as well as their students.

Direct links to the core. Especially in today's classrooms, teachers need to know that what they are doing is going to meet their core curriculum needs. Each activity included in the guide showed its link to the 4th grade core curriculum, from language arts, to social studies, to science.

All activities outlined in the same way. Sections of each activity were: summary, objectives, materials, background, time involved, Utah core connections, preparation, literature connections, activity, extensions, assessment, and helpful websites.

Helpful appendices. These included all the Utah 4th grade correlations in one spreadsheet format, a glossary, references, and animal and plant cards for copying that each had a picture and description of a plant or animal.

The activities in this guide mainly focused around the Utah 4th grade science core curriculum standards, although there were also some activities containing information that the UDWR felt was essential for students to learn about, but were not necessarily direct links to the science core. These activities did address standards in other subject areas, however. Some examples are activities on the functions and importance of wetlands, activities to help students discover their own views on wetlands, and activities helping them determine what they could do to help wetlands if they chose to. Many of the activities in the guide were borrowed from other sources, after receiving permission, and others were newly created. When possible, activities were adjusted to be Utah-specific, which was one of the most important aspects to teachers, and one of the main reasons for creating the guide in the first place.

Another consideration when putting this guide, and especially the activities, together were the 5 main objectives of environmental education according to the Tbilisi Declaration of 1978 (*for more info on the Tbilisi Declaration, refer to this Web site: <http://www.uwsp.edu/natres/nres310510/thetbilisideclaration.htm>*): awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills, and participation. Although many of the activities in the guide easily meet the knowledge objective, a concerted attempt was made to also meet the other objectives of the Declaration. Activities like "The Choice is Yours" and the "Davis Lake Dilemma" help students determine what their own perceptions about wetlands and wetland issues are. "What do you know about Wetlands", an activity where students survey people about their wetland knowledge, then decide what to do about the answers they receive, helps students gain skills and participate in a process of educating people about the environment themselves. Part of the Tbilisi Declaration is also included in the background information of the guide, both to share this information with teachers, and to show them that the guide was created with these objectives in mind.

In order to receive this wetlands education guide teachers must attend a nine-hour workshop. At the workshop, teachers learn about wetlands and participate in many of the activities from the guide. Additionally, to help teachers with implementing the activities in their classrooms, 2 of the UDWR Regional Offices as well as the Salt Lake Office each have one wetlands trunk available for checkout. More trunks are currently being developed for the other 3 UDWR regions. The teachers who have been trained in this guide have received it with much enthusiasm. Many of them have very little, if any, knowledge of wetlands prior to attending a "Utah's Wonderful Wetlands" workshop. Even those who have prior wetland knowledge come away from the workshop with new information and activities to help disseminate this knowledge to their students. The UDWR is looking forward to many more teacher workshops taking place throughout the state to "get the word out" about the importance of Utah's wetlands.

IDAHO WINS WITH EDUCATORS EXPRESS

Wildlife Express is an upper elementary publication produced by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Each month, September through May, a four-color, four-page tabloid is produced which highlights specific wildlife species in Idaho. Besides a feature story about the species of the month, corresponding articles are all related to the species and cover such topics as food chains, habitat/niche, carrying capacity and more.

The Educator's Express, which was the second place recipient of the ACI Award in education, was a brand new addition to the magazine this past year.

"We wanted to help educators use the **Wildlife Express** as more than just a science or reading tool," said Kevin Frailey, Idaho Fish and Game's Conservation Education Supervisor. "The Educators Express contains activities which the teachers can use to expand the lesson," he adds.

The Educator's Express is a binder full of activities, student worksheets, and materials that makes it easy for educators to use math, language arts, and social studies in addition to science. The binder is divided by tabs, which indicate the species highlighted that month. Last year's September issue focused on the cougar and the Educator's Express had six activities which educators could pull out and use to supplement the reading of the magazine.

"We believe that educators are being pulled in so many directions, they need materials that not only met their science objectives and standards, but were easy and fun to use. We also put together a binder that was user friendly and not overwhelming," said Frailey.



UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

2005 ACI CONFERENCE IT'S NOT TOO EARLY TO PLAN NOW FOR NEXT YEAR'S BIG EVENT

Many of the preliminary plans have been made for July 2005. Below is a draft agenda. The hotel is the Hampton, which is located next to and shares a hallway with the Ogden Eccles Convention Center. The meetings will be in the Eccles Convention Center.

The Hampton is a 100-plus-year-old mansion that was converted into a hotel and then completely renovated prior to the 2002 Winter Olympics in Utah. It was purchased by the Hampton chain last summer. Needless to say, the unique marble floors and lobby make the hotel an enjoyable atmosphere to stay in.

We negotiated a special room rate of \$63/night. (Room tax is an additional 9.5 percent). The room includes a continental breakfast that is pretty good. (From Atkins friendly fare to low fat to whatever!)

The hotel is within 2 to 3 blocks of excellent restaurants and night life. It looks like there will be a Professional Bull Riders rodeo event going on about 7 miles from the hotel at the Golden Spike Coliseum. Of course, that date may change, but so far it is tentatively planned for the same week.

We provided 2-hour lunch and half-hour breaks to facilitate more time for networking.

See below for the draft agenda and make your plans now to attend!!

2005 Association for Conservation Information Conference DRAFT Agenda

Saturday, July 9, 2005

Arrival – Shuttle transportation will be available from the Salt Lake International airport to the conference location.

Sunday, July 10, 2005

Arrival – Shuttle transportation will be available from the Salt Lake International airport to the conference location.

10:00 am – 12:00 pm	ACI Board Meeting
12:00 pm – 4:30 pm	Registration
12:00 pm – 1:30 pm	Lunch on your own

1:30 pm – 4:30 pm ACI Board Meeting Cont.
3:00 pm – 4:30 pm Committee Meetings

6:30 pm – 9:00 pm ACI Opening Social

Monday, July 11, 2005

8:00 am – 4:00 pm Registration
9:00 am – 11:30 am General Session

- Welcome & Housekeeping
- Remarks
- Keynote Address

11:30 am – 1:30 pm Lunch on your own

1:30 pm - 3:00 pm Habitat Partnership Plan

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm BREAK

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm The Great Salt Lake: A Jewel in the Desert

6:00 pm – 12:00 am Hospitality Room

Dinner on your own

Tuesday, July 12, 2005

6:00 am – 7:00 am Yoga
8:00 am – 4:00 pm Registration
8:00 am – 9:30 am AM Session A.1 - RBFF
AM Session A.2 – Team Building/Personality Testing

9:30 am – 10:00 am BREAK

10:00 am – 11:30 am AM Session B.1 - RBFF
AM Session B.2 – Using Animals as Props

11:30 am – 1:30 pm Lunch on own your

1:30 pm – 3:00 pm PM Session A.1 – Editing and Grammar
PM Session A.2 – Volunteer Programs

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm BREAK

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm PM Session B.1 – Wildlife Photography
PM Session B.2 – Internet

Dinner on your own

5:00 pm – 12:00 am Hospitality Room

Wednesday, July 13, 2005

6:00 am – 7:00 am Yoga
8:00 am – 4:00 pm Registration
7:00 am – 4:00 pm **Field Trips**

- Great Salt Lake & Farmington Bay Airboat Tour
- Fishing on the Provo River (flies, lures and bait allowed)
- Fishing on the Weber River (flies, lures and bait allowed)
- High Mountain Wildflower/Wildlife Walk (Albion Basin...Cecret Lake)
- Downtown Salt Lake City Shopping & Temple Square Tour
- Antelope Island Tour

5:00 pm – 6:30 pm Hospitality Room

6:30 pm – 9:00 pm ACI Auction & Banquet
Sponsored by the Outdoor Channel

9:00 pm – 12:00 am Hospitality Room

Thursday, July 14, 2005

6:00 am – 7:00 am Yoga

8:00 am – 4:00 pm Registration

8:00 am – 9:30 am ACI Business Meeting

9:30 am – 10:00 am BREAK

10:00 am – 11:30 am AM Session B.1 – Marketing Magazine Advertising

AM Session B.2 – Biosocial Issues in Natural Resource Management: A Closer Look at Wolves

11:30 am – 1:30 pm Lunch on your own

1:30 pm – 3:00 pm PM Session A.1 – Video Production on a Budget

PM Session A.2 – Natural Resources Using Outreach to Facilitate the Public Process

3:00 pm – 3:30 pm BREAK

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm Keynote Concluding Speaker

5:00 pm – 6:30 pm Hospitality Room

6:30 pm – 9:00 pm ACI Awards Banquet
Sponsored by Liberty Press

9:00 pm – 12:00 am Hospitality Room

Friday, July 15, 2005

Departure – Shuttle transportation will be available from the conference location to the Salt Lake International Airport.



MEMBER NEWS

SPIRIT OF ACI AWARD WINNER THANKS FELLOW MEMBERS

By: Nels Rodefeld, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Fellow ACI family members,

The highest compliment someone can receive is one that comes from his or her peers. I was truly surprised and very humbled to receive the "Spirit of ACI" Award at this year's conference.

My fondest childhood memories are of the outdoors. I remember chasing salamanders, catching six-inch chubs in the creek behind my house and netting butterflies in the field down the road. I knew the outdoors would always be an important part of my life.

High school brought clarity to my choice of professions. Communicating – writing to be specific – came naturally. My dad always told me if I was going to dream, I should dream big. So, I spent many math classes dreaming about how I would write about my hunting adventures in the pages of an outdoor magazine.

My journey brought me to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and for the last 10 years, reality has surpassed even my wildest dreams. I've written news releases on state's most important, and sensitive, outdoor topics. I've filmed TV shows and served as editor of "Outdoor Oklahoma."

I can honestly say I've never been prouder of what we all do as conservation communicators and educators. ACI plays an important role in helping all of us improve our skills, and possibly more importantly, share our common trials and tribulations.

It has been my pleasure to serve with you, and for you, and I just wanted each of you to know that for me, there is no higher distinction than to have been honored with the "Spirit of ACI" Award.

ACI NEWBIE LOOKING FORWARD TO VETERAN STATUS

By: Jenny Thom, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Two ACI veterans and one newbie (that would be me) departed Oklahoma at 6 a.m. to travel to the 2004 ACI Conference in New Orleans. I knew I was going to meet people from across the nation involved in the same type of work as me. From reviewing the conference agenda, I also knew the upcoming week was specifically tailored toward a communication perspective, which meant there would be no sifting through biology-based seminars. Beyond those two facts, I knew very little. And so began my journey to see a new place, meet new people, learn from their experiences and find truths to bring back with me.

My expedition into an unknown experience began as most – optimistic trepidation bundled with excitement. I felt solace and strength in my two guides, Micah Holmes and Nels Rodefeld, respected co-workers and two individuals who had already discovered the world of ACI.

A knowledgeable guide is invaluable for any journey, and I had two. En route, they answered a few of my questions and soothed illogical apprehensions. To begin with, and I was slightly embarrassed to have to ask, they told me the acronym ACI stood for Association for Conservation Information. Nels advised that I should prepare to meet a dynamic group of individuals with a passion for their art – conveying conservation messages – that was as strong as their vivacity for fun. In Nels' words, "ACI members work as hard as they play." A conference in the city of New Orleans would prove to be a great venue in which to grasp the full meaning of his statement.

The passage of nine hours, side bruised from the seatbelt digging into it (a result of cat-napping in the back seat) and changing scenery, signaled we were getting closer to New Orleans. I marveled as we drove over a Louisiana bridge at least 18 miles long. The view from any window of the vehicle revealed lush swampland. The abundance of water and billowing trees was an exciting contrast to my central Oklahoma-landscape-accustomed eyes.

After negotiating our way through the network of highways overlapping downtown New Orleans and settling into our hotel rooms, Micah and I set out to explore the culture and debauchery to be found in the streets of New Orleans. We wandered around, choosing that first night to be observers rather than participants, and found our way back to the hotel where we spotted Nels and Jen Levin engrossed in a discussion relating to the next morning's board meeting. After spending the remaining hours of the evening discussing general attitudes of the American public towards hunting and fishing, new life additions (i.e. - infants) and general association issues, I decided to sit in on a portion of Sunday's board meeting.

Much of the meeting was beyond my scope of knowledge, but it introduced me to a group of people who were shaping the organization. I immediately recognized their fervor towards the association, belief in its purpose, and genuine warmth and respect towards one another. A pleasant byproduct of attending the meeting was that it helped me feel more comfortable at that evening's opening session on the steamboat, because there were a few more familiar faces than simply those of my Oklahoma colleagues.

Had I attended the board meeting or not, I still would have been comfortable. I quickly discovered ACI members are more than a group of professionals with a common interest; they are a fruit basket full of long-lasting friendships and genuine people. No one seemed to be a stranger for long. Meeting one member opened the door to knowing others, as everyone readily introduced one another and quickly became acquainted with new people. I found it easy and enjoyable to spend lunch and dinner breaks with different groups.

Part of these easy first-meetings had to do with the fact there were so many right-brained individuals in such close proximity. I can only chuckle as I remember one evening where a group of us stopped at a bar/restaurant to grab dinner. The waiter put all of our orders together on one ticket. You would have thought he was asking us to diagram the musculature structure of the human body to have observed us trying to figure out each person's portion of the bill!

The professional development aspect of the conference was quite stimulating. Because I am in my first post-college job, I sometimes feel but a novice in my position at the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. I am often asked to wear several different hats. I recognize myself in some, but others are new. The conference sessions provided insight into those new areas as well as other viewpoints for already familiar ones. I often felt as the apprentice must feel learning from masters.

One session on color management conducted by Ann McMahon, the owner of Professional Publications, was particularly insightful. McMahon's company was one of the first desktop publishing bureaus in the U.S. and is currently on the forefront of working with digital imagery in the printing process. Their goal is to develop digital outputs

equivalent to those produced by film. The workshop increased my understanding of what happens to the color of an image as it changes mediums and provided much needed comprehension into monitor calibration.

A particularly amusing speaker was Yvonne Day, a scholar, lecturer and consultant on the topic of nonverbal communication. I learned that it is unnatural for humans to lie and we give away physical cues when doing so. Day taught us different ways that men and women unwittingly disclose when they are lying, which I have since used in my personal life, if not yet professional.

She also exposed what different body movements indicate to others during communication exchanges. Since Day's workshop, I have found myself consciously uncrossing my arms when they naturally would like to and refraining from use of "the stick" (finger pointing) during verbal exchanges. I also now try to present the "good" side of my face to the camera when in front of one. Before that workshop, I had no idea there was a physiological explanation of a person's "good" and "not-as-good" side.

I have integrated other things I learned at the conference into my professional life, as well. However, the most unexpected and rewarding result of attending came out of the new relationships I made. We seemed to spend an equal amount of time learning together as we did socializing together. The hospitality suite was conducive to this as well as the atmosphere found on Bourbon Street and the French Quarter of New Orleans.

I learned just as much interacting with members as I did attending the conference sessions. Free-time and social events were a pleasant mix of fun and stimulating conversations related to our profession. It was fascinating to learn about projects and the ways people in other states are accomplishing things. I now have this incredible network of people I can call upon for professional advice.

One of the greatest benefits I received by attending the ACI conference was an improved national perspective, which transferred into a rejuvenated spirit for my own work. Shaping public opinion and engaging the American public can feel like a daunting task when looked at from the perspective of one individual.

I came to a tangible recognition that I was not one person working in one state. Each small task I successfully undertake carries more impact because it is a piece in the national network of individuals striving towards the same basic goal. We are all working towards a larger public consciousness about wildlife conservation and the natural world. That understanding, for me, is powerful.

After one short week, ACI members were no longer strangers in an organization of which my agency is a member. I have made connections with other members, and am proud to be a part of this organization. I now grasp the full meaning of how hard ACI members work to achieve their individual and collective goals. I gleaned the beginning of this understanding by attending the conference; the rest has been unfolding as my interactions with ACI members continue.

We played hard, we worked hard, and conservation efforts in North America are strengthened by the existence of ACI. I can't wait to see everyone again at next year's conference in Utah.

OWAA/ACI LIAISON COMMITTEE

By: Kay Morton Ellerhoff, Committee Chair

Here's a quick summary of the Outdoor Writer's Association of America's top news in the past "OWAA year"--June through June as presented at the 2004 ACI Conference in New Orleans.

- OWAA penned a resolution deploring all-rights contracts; the goal is to help facilitate amendment of U.S. copyright legislation so it's more agreeable to freelancers.
- OWAA's board of directors approved a revised strategic plan with emphasis on enhancing member services, maintaining OWAA's financial stability, and defending members' intellectual property rights. Other key points include the development of: (a) a membership recruitment plan and (b) a mentor program.
- The board increased membership dues by \$25 with little impact on membership numbers. Total membership at this writing = 2,046.
- Executive Director Bill Geer resigned in February of 2004; *Outdoors Unlimited* Editor Kevin Rhoades was hired April 1.
- OWAA eliminated several sections; media-based sections were retained, including Newspaper; Radio; TV/Video and Photography. Also, the Film Academy Committee, previously a standing committee, was eliminated after a vote by the membership.

OWAA just completed its 77th conference in Spokane, Wash., (June 19-23). Feedback from members has been largely positive because of the excellent location, great weather for outdoors events, a wide variety of workshops, newsmakers, pre- and post-conference trips, etc. Attendance was down, however, possibly because of high fuel prices and the unavailability of lodging in Spokane due to a soccer tournament that competed for every room in the city (final tally 688--243 individual members, 289 supporting members, 156 nonmembers/guests/spouses). Madison, Wis., will be the site of next year's conference, June 18-22.

Objectives:

Over the next few years Rhoades hopes to make a substantial contribution with membership recruitment. OWAA's board of directors endorsed his membership recruitment plan which focuses on recruiting new individual members in all areas of outdoor communications--writers, photographers, lecturers, outdoor television show hosts, filmmakers, illustrators, radio-show hosts, etc. Primary recruitment techniques include member referrals and soliciting members from other state/regional writers' groups.

He also believes it is imperative to pay attention to the needs of current members—from contracts issue to improving/enhancing existing member benefits. By next June, headquarters will assist the Reference Manual Committee in revising the Outdoor Style Manual. Rhoades's goal is to complete the new reference manual in time for next year's conference in Madison. Later this year members should be able to pay dues and conference registration fees online. He plans to increase the Outdoor Market (publishers' editorial needs) section of *OU* to five pages. Also, OWAA will continue to produce 12 print newsletters each year, along with a bimonthly e-mail newsletter (Tech-E-Letter).

Although total attendance at OWAA's annual conference has remained somewhat stable, participation by individual members has decreased since 1987. Primary reasons: (a) five-day conference is too long and (b) overall costs (flight, travel, lodging, etc.) are too expensive. A Conference Review Committee will create a conference survey and headquarters will facilitate the survey, compile results, and make recommendations to the board in time for the December midyear meeting.

Special note to ACI members from Executive Director Kevin Rhoades: "On behalf of Outdoor Writers of America, I'd like to extend an invitation to those of you who are not members of OWAA to join the association and/or participate in our next annual conference in Madison. If you have questions about benefits of membership or would like to attend OWAA's June 2005 conference, contact Membership Manager Lisa Draeger or me. OWAA's Web site is www.owaa.org. Phone = 800-692-2477.

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