

The Balance Wheel

Newsletter of the Association of Conservation Information

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Dave Chanda

In this issue of TBW I will discuss two very important conservation initiatives. The first occurred last December when the IAFWA hosted the "Summit on Conservation Education." The second will occur this July at the annual ACI conference in Ogden, Utah.

On December 7, 2004 more than 200 conservation education professionals from throughout the country met at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia to develop a national agenda for wildlife conservation education. I am very pleased that ACI was well represented at this meeting and played a key role in developing this national education strategy. The communications experts at this summit developed a set of guidelines for effective conservation education programs and identified short-term actions necessary for state fish and wildlife agencies to be successful in this endeavor.

On December 9, 2004 the Executive Committee of the IAFWA signed a resolution of support for conservation education. In this resolution of support, the Executive Committee directed that the agenda developed at the Conservation Education Summit be immediately distributed to the Directors of the 50 state fish and wildlife agencies,

the Governors of each state, and the state agency Information and Education chiefs with the request that each should review and comment on the proposed strategies. The Executive Committee also instructed the Chair of the Education, Outreach and Diversity Committee to discuss and develop this national conservation education strategy at the upcoming North American Wildlife and Natural Resource Conference. I hope that some of you will have the opportunity to attend this conference and participate in this important venture.

The 2005 ACI Conference will be held July 10 - 15 in Ogden, Utah. The theme of this year's conference is "The Changing Landscape of Conservation Communication." Robin Thomas, conference coordinator for Utah, has done a terrific job pulling the program together. You can find a copy of the agenda at ACI2005.org. I encourage you to make every effort to join us at the conference. It promises to be an interesting and exciting time for all. I would also recommend arriving by Sunday afternoon, especially if you are interested in the "Conservation Education Strategy" I discussed earlier. Utah has arranged for Tom Bennett, Commissioner of Kentucky Fish and Game and IAFWA Executive Committee Member to give a National Conservation Education Strategy Update from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Sunday, July 10.

As you may know, every state will complete and release their state wildlife conservation strategies this October. ACI has committed to working with IAFWA to help undertake a national public education effort timed to dovetail with the completion and release of these conservation strategies. As a result, this year at the conference we will spend an entire day conducting a "Teaming with Wildlife/Train the Trainers Workshop."

Some specifics for this workshop will include: an overview of the full "campaign," review of existing poll data, new poll data, focus groups results, communications strategy, key messages, development of a communications tool kit. The IAFWA would also like to do some role-playing, brainstorming and smaller group work. They are very interested in **your** ideas of how to make this outreach/education effort a success. I am sure that this workshop will draw many new participants to the ACI conference. I understand the US Fish and Wildlife Service is already geared up to send their regional communications people to participate.

As you can see, much is happening. Hopefully I will see you in Utah and together we can work on these extremely important conservation communications initiatives. Mark your calendars for July 10 – 15.



NATIONAL NEWS

Updating the Wildlife Comprehensive Planning Initiative

By: Chuck Schleuter, South Dakota and Rachel Brittin, IAFWA

The International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies has now hired a national polling firm to assist with the State Wildlife Strategy process.

The Democratic firm of Fairbank Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) in conjunction with a Republican firm, Public Opinion Strategies (POS), were selected from the 12 companies that applied for the contract with IAFWA.

Both firms have conducted research for a wide variety of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and environmental groups seeking to understand public attitudes towards the protection of land, water and wildlife. The firms' clients range from The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, League of Conservation Voters, Conservation Fund, Trust for Public Land, and many more. These firms are experts in designing research that will be effective in documenting public support for conservation to legislators and other policy makers.

In the past, these firms have successfully conducted a statewide voter survey in Minnesota and Indiana in support of specific conservation policy proposals in each state. In Minnesota, FMM&A and POS presented survey results to a series of leading Republican and Democratic legislators in order to build support for the proposal. In Indiana, they presented survey results to a coalition of conservation groups and public agencies concerned with the conservation of natural resources.

The objectives of this poll will be to help identify messages that will help develop and promote the State Wildlife Strategies. The poll will also help identify people, groups and organizations that want to be part of this process. This will help shape messages to bring favorable grassroots action.

There are six major issues being addressed by the poll:

1. Concern about wildlife relative to other issues: finding out where wildlife ranks among other important topics such as health care, the economy, education, etc.
2. Support for policy initiatives: finding which wildlife actions described in the strategies are people most willing to support.
3. Terms to avoid and use: identifying which words will be used to describe wildlife and plans to protect it, including language that provokes the greatest concern and support from voters.
4. Reactions to facts documenting problems facing wildlife: identifying specific, vivid facts that document current threats facing wildlife populations that might surprise and concern voters into action (the focus of outreach efforts).
5. Reactions to arguments in favor of protecting wildlife: identifying the messages that will resonate with the public.
6. Credibility of potential messengers: identifying the best key spokespeople for the public outreach effort. Who do people trust?

While there are certain basic questions about wildlife that should be asked of respondents across the country, IAFWA envisions the survey to include a significant "zone polling" component, in which the content of questions varies slightly depending on the region in which each respondent lives.

Results of the survey will be presented both in-person and in writing. The written report will also present key data in tabular and graphic form. After a draft report has been reviewed and commented upon by TNC and IAFWA staff, the firms will make a detailed PowerPoint presentation of the survey results. **Of special interest, the ACI Annual Conference in Utah will feature a one-day session on various aspects of the Plan, including a session on "Training the Messengers." IAFWA hopes to incorporate a PowerPoint presentation by the firm, showing the poll results.**

Initially the poll was meant to be a three-year process. However, to maximize available resources the focus will be put into this initial polling. Besides a national poll, this study will include four focus groups.

There are a couple of important meetings coming in the next few months that ACI members can be a part of to further their involvement and knowledge in the Comprehensive Wildlife Planning process. **The Legislative Fly-In Day to Washington, D.C. will be held March 1-2. The North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference will be held March 16-20 in Virginia and will feature sessions on the Plan. The theme of the IAWFA Annual Conference in September will feature the State Strategies.**



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Employee Magazine Subscriptions: Free or Not?

By Scott Ball, Florida

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has been dealing with the mixed blessing of re-establishing its magazine, Florida Wildlife. The good news is that we're getting our magazine back. The down side has been the logistical and administrative burden of starting it back up from scratch after a year on ice.

Among the issues we've been dealing with is setting a policy for employee subscriptions. In the old days, employees, retirees and volunteer Hunter Education instructors received complimentary subscriptions. Now, more than ever, we'll be under the gun to make the magazine pay for itself, and it's not likely we can afford staff freebies right away. Still, we wondered: What do other states do? To find out, we went to a valuable resource: the ACI e-mail listserv.

After asking the question, we heard back from 12 states. That may not qualify as a scientifically valid sample, but we thought we'd share the responses nonetheless.

Ten out of 11 states give their staffs complimentary subscriptions as a benefit of employment. To varying degrees, these states give comps to others as well (volunteers, school libraries, constituent groups, etc.) South Dakota reports that about 25 percent of its subscribers receive their magazines gratis. Minnesota gives free subscriptions to its residents, and Ohio gives them to anyone who asks. Of those 11, only West Virginia does not give out complimentary subscriptions.

The twelfth responding state is considering discontinuing its magazine and redirecting those resources in a manner that more efficiently reaches a larger audience.

As much as we'd like to, Florida can't afford to give away 2,000-2,500 free subscriptions right now. Hopefully, the day will come when we can do that, but in the meantime we plan to offer a discount rate to employees, retirees and volunteers.



SKILL BUILDING

In Minnesota, You Can Fight Back

By: Scott Pengelly, Minnesota

It is the ultimate frustration for a government media relations officer.

A local TV reporter sweeps in (during sweeps month) with a preconceived notion of what your agency is doing wrong. Searching for sound bites and evidence to provide skeletal support for the premise, the reporter is not deterred by your evidence to the contrary. The story airs, angry citizens call, legislators express dismay, and you get razzed by your friends after church.

Worst of all, you have few options to set the record straight.

Not so in Minnesota. We have the Minnesota News Council, a one-of-a-kind option for those who believe they have been wronged by the media. Story victims in Minnesota can fight back.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources did just that when a reporter misrepresented so many details that his story was a fairytale and the outcome a nightmare. More about that in a few paragraphs. First, you need to know more about the News Council.

The Minnesota News Council is designed to promote news media fairness by giving citizens who feel damaged by a news story an opportunity to hold the news organization responsible. The News Council, now in its 34th year and unique for its endurance, is believed to be the only statewide organization of its kind currently operating.

For those who believe they have been wronged, the key is the complaint process – an opportunity to be heard by neutral parties after being brushed off by the media. That opportunity is particularly valuable when dealing with broadcast media outlets that rarely offer opportunities to respond unedited, unlike newspapers and magazines that publish letters to the editor.

When the Minnesota DNR faced just such a situation, the News Council became our public forum and provided an opportunity to repair damage to our reputation among our citizens and legislators. Without the News Council process, that would not have happened.

The Minnesota DNR held a critical meeting designed to break down divisional barriers and move the agency toward ecosystem-based management. The meeting, attended by 10 percent of DNR employees from all levels of the organization, was carefully structured to ensure employees were determining the new direction of resource management in Minnesota. Panelists for some sessions included state legislators, university professors, and opinion leaders from outdoors organizations.

The three-day meeting was held at a resort off-season during a blizzard, at a cost of approximately \$84 total per person, including lodging, food, breaks, meeting space, and even AV equipment. It was a steal. Staff literally worked day and night, leaving with a concrete plan for a new direction in natural resources management and charged up for the challenges ahead.

Reporters from major newspapers and television stations, including KSTP-TV (the Twin Cities' ABC affiliate), were formally invited to attend. None did. Months later, however, KSTP decided this would make a great sweeps month story - facts be damned.

KSTP portrayed the snowstorm meeting as a high-season summertime junket, with video showing families sunbathing, playing tennis and cavorting lakeside. The intended message was that DNR staged a family resort party on "your dime." The cost was presented as a lump sum without context or cost per attendee. Taken as presented, it would enrage any taxpayer - myself included.

The problem, of course, is the story was fiction, not news. Predictably, however, the news director and the station stood behind the story. Requests for an opportunity to set the record straight resulted in a follow-up story that further obscured the facts.

Associated Press picked up the story, which prompted newspaper coverage and editorials. The fictionalize account became radio talk show fodder. We were defending ourselves on all fronts, which didn't play well. The perception seemed to be that the DNR was making excuses for despicable waste.

How could we turn this around? Without the News Council, the best strategy might have been to circle the wagons and just wait for the attacks to end. With the News Council, we had an opportunity to have others ride to our rescue.

Make no mistake, the News Council is not anti-media. Quite to the contrary, a stated mission is to improve news reporting. Its decisions favor media as frequently as complainants. The process can work well for both sides.

That process requires that the complainant have a face-to-face meeting with the news staff in an effort to seek resolution. A formal complaint is considered a last resort, requiring a detailed written complaint and a waiver of claims that signifies the News Council hearing process is accepted as a lawsuit alternative.

Our face-to-face meeting with KSTP staff was unproductive. The producer and news director were defiant; the reporter was belligerent; a New Council hearing was the outcome.

KSTP refused to participate, but that did not deter the News Council. Both Twin Cities dailies, several TV news operations, and most outstate newspapers are "members" who accept the process. Media outlets that refuse to participate aren't rewarded by being immune to scrutiny. In our case, we hoped KSTP would stand up to defend itself. We suspect the news director knew his story was indefensible, but was unwilling to admit it.

Nonetheless, we had our "day in court." The News Council comprises 25 members: 12 journalists and 12 from the general public plus a chairperson. The composition brings diverse opinions from assorted media types and from the public they serve. News Council members who have real or perceived conflicts of interest recuse themselves.

Often, media representatives on the News Council have been the object of a hearing in the past. A celebrated case between Northwest Airlines and WCCO-TV, covered by CBS's 60 Minutes, resulted in a strong condemnation of the news story. To his credit, the WCCO news anchor, despite vehemently objecting to the News Council's decision, volunteered to become a News Council media representative shortly thereafter. Though objecting to the decision on the Northwest Airlines story, he believed adamantly in the process and in the opportunity it presents to improve news coverage and right wrongs.

We believe our complaint did just that. The News Council ruled 17-2 that the video was misleading and 19-0 that the story ignored evidence and reached unjustified conclusions. The News Council process was a significant time investment for the DNR that also came with great risk of renewed negative news coverage if our complaint wasn't upheld.

It was all worth it, however. Extensive news coverage of the News Council decision exonerated the DNR, changed public perception, and prompted several daily newspapers to retract editorials. One editor offered a public mea culpa. What's more, the decision was a morale booster for DNR employees who had been chided or berated following original broadcast of the story. That, alone, might have been the most valuable outcome. Our employees now knew their commissioner would stand up for them. Media outlets, too, now knew that the DNR would not roll over. Did that affect future coverage? Nobody knows, but we believe so.

And what about KSTP? Although the station refused to participate in the process, it covered the News Council decision during its 10 p.m. news broadcast. In that report, the news director professed to stand behind the story, but he acknowledged the value of News Council review and noted its overwhelming decision in DNR's favor.

Readers of this piece who relish this News Council opportunity likely don't have it. Apparently some similar organizations have risen and fallen, but none has sustained itself for 34 years nor exists today.

Fortunately, most reporters are responsible journalists and most media outlets are responsible operations. But the Minnesota News Council is there when the exceptions arise. And the News Council does so much more to advance journalism than hold hearings. The scope of its work is outlined on the News Council Web site at <http://www.mtn.org/~newscncl/>. Advice about starting a news council is offered at <http://www.news-council.org/about/startone.html>

A detailed summary of the Minnesota DNR's case against KSTP-TV is available at http://www.news-council.org/complaints/hearings/det_121.html. Most other News Council cases, including the Northwest Airlines vs. WCCO-TV cited in this article, can be reviewed at <http://www.news-council.org/complaints/hearings/bydate.html>



UPCOMING EVENTS & DEADLINES

ACI Auction Committee Hatches \$6,000 Plot

By: Ocean's Five (aka: ACI Auction Committee)

Hold on to your wallet, Bucky. The ACI Auction Committee is fully energized.

We know where you live and we know what you like to spend money on: trips, trips, trips.

In an effort to surpass last year's record take of \$5,771, five characters gathered in a dark corner of Café Du Monde in New Orleans last July. Shrouded in a cloud of beignet powder, the committee secretly plotted against your family budget. Nicknamed Ocean's Five, the committee has a plan to land more than \$6,000 in booty at an Ogden, Utah, gathering this July. Plot details were refined during a clandestine conference-call in February.

But the Ocean's Five clan needs your help to pull off the heist. We're looking for bait – particularly the lure of travel – to pry cash from our prey.

Want to get in on the ground floor of this operation? Start thinking about trips that will lure our victims. Ocean's Five will be in touch.

2005 ACI Conference

Winter weather making you dream of summer fun? Well, stop dreaming and start planning to attend the 2005 ACI Conference in Utah. The action heats up on July 11th and won't simmer down until the 14th. This year's conference is packed with instructional sessions that will enable you to jump higher, run faster and be more effective. The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources is also excited to show off our great state and will wow you with some outstanding field trips...oh, I mean hands on conservation outreach field work. For detailed information about all the 2005 ACI conference has to offer check us out online at www.aci2005.org

And don't miss out on the early registration discount.



MEMBER NEWS

Labarbera Named Minnesota DNR Communications Director

By: Scott Pengelly, Minnesota

Mark LaBarbera, a conservation leader with diverse public and private sector experience, has been hired as director of communications for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

LaBarbera is past president and former board chairman of the Outdoor Writers Association of America and the Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers. He has been president of the Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Alliance and the Outdoor Heritage Education Center. LaBarbera is a former senior vice president of North American Outdoor Group (NAOG), which includes the North American Hunting Club, North American Fishing Club, the National Home Gardening Club, and the group's award-winning publications and productions on ESPN. Through his work at NAOG, he has collaborated with organizations such as the International Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, American Sportfishing Association, and National Shooting Sports Foundation.

LaBarbera replaces C.B. Bylander, who is now Chief of the Minnesota DNR's Fish and Wildlife Division Outreach Section.



SPECIAL SECTION

Amendment To ACI's Articles Of Incorporation

The following amendment to ACI's Articles of Incorporation is proposed by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

In short, the change will allow the ACI board of directors to conduct business over the phone. The amendment will allow the board to vote on ACI matters via teleconference calls throughout the year if needed.

Currently, all ACI business may only be conducted at the annual summer conference. The change will allow the board to operate more efficiently and make decisions in a more timely manner. The meeting minutes will be recorded and

Reported by the ACI Secretary. The amendment will also prohibit the board from conducting business by e-mail.

Currently the bylaws read as follows:

"ARTICLE 14" BYLAWS.

The initial directors shall adopt a set of bylaws to govern the Association's procedures and practices. Following the adoption and

ratification of these articles by the membership of the Association, The power to adopt and amend the bylaws shall be vested in the Board of Directors, provided that a quorum is present. Bylaws may not be adopted or amended at meetings conducted by telephone or use of the mails.

The proposed amendments are noted in [blue](#):

"ARTICLE 14" BYLAWS.

The initial directors shall adopt a set of bylaws to govern the Association's procedures and practices. Following the adoption

andratification of these articles by the membership of the Association, the power to adopt and amend the bylaws

shall be vested in the Board of Directors, provided that a quorum is present. [Bylaws may be adopted or amended at meetings conducted by telephone conference calls. Bylaws may not be adopted or amended by the use of the mail or e-mails.](#)

The amendment will be voted on by membership agencies and the Member's Delegate at the 2005 ACI Conference in Utah. If you are unable to attend the conference you may vote via absentee ballot. Membership agency votes should come from that agency's I&E chief and the first vote received by the ACI Secretary will be counted and no future ballots by mail or votes in person will count for that particular agency. In other words, a state can't cast two votes or both a yes and a no.

Send ballots to ACI Secretary Geoffrey Schneider at geoffrey@ndow.org.

Ballots may also be mailed to Nevada Department of Wildlife, attn. Geoffrey Schneider, 4747 Vegas Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89108. All Ballots must be received by June 27, 2005.

Yes, I vote to approve the amendment.
 No, I vote to leave the current Article in place.

Name _____
Agency or Affiliation _____

-END Winter 2005 TBW ISSUE-