

## **DRAFT - ERF Strategic Planning - Overview – Education**

### *Vision*

Part of the Estuarine Research Federation's mission is to support education of scientists, decision-makers and the public and facilitate communication among these groups. As the only professional organization in the U.S. focused specifically on coastal and estuarine science and management, we should play an important role in enhancing the understanding and wise stewardship of estuarine and coastal ecosystems worldwide.

### *Motivation*

Historically, ERF—through its publications and meetings—has provided a good forum for the exchange of scientific information. Every ERF member cannot know it all, but in the crowded arena where the science, policy, and management of coastal and estuarine environments often clash, we think that ERF can serve an important role in educating our membership and other interest groups. Keeping up to date with the knowledge from different research and action areas will make for better communication among ERF membership and the general public.

In the 1998 and 2000 member surveys, less than 20 % of the survey respondents gave us a score of 9 or 10 (with 10 being the best) on questions relating to our outreach programs to schools and colleges and career services for members. These were among the lowest scoring question areas.

ERF's Education Committee became very active around the same time. Activities since then include the creation of the E-ReFs site, enhanced student activities at ERF, participation in the DIACES program for recent Ph.D.s, development of an award recognizing excellence in education and ....

### *Objectives and Strategies*

Broadly, the participants in the Education workshop group perceived the need and desire to enhance ERF activities related to the continuing education of ERF members and other interest groups. Three primary objectives were identified:

- identify new opportunities to promote learning among different interest groups (e.g. students, professionals, managers, general public)
- make the ERF education Web Page a functioning, educational resource
- enhance student participation and education at conferences

Provide new opportunities for learning. ERF can sponsor various workshops and/or field trips at the biennial conferences or at Affiliate meetings. Planning for workshops at ERF biennial conferences is still in the very early stages, but it envisioned that some workshops will be held at the conference in Providence, RI in 2007. The workshops at Affiliate meetings are organized and developed by affiliates in coordination with ERF Headquarters, and a budget must be improved in advance by the ERF President and Executive Director. These workshops and field trips provide opportunities for learning a new analytical technique, discussing controversial

topics in the science, policy, and/or management of estuarine and coastal environments, or observing something novel in the field. Many ERF scientists feel completely out-of-touch with policy and management issues, and likewise many ERF policy and management personnel need primers on the latest in estuarine science. ERF students in particular may have special interests that cannot be addressed effectively through their studies but could be addressed via workshops. As affiliate societies identify workshop topics and potential presenters, these events are announced on the ERF and affiliate societies websites. Ultimately, these events are expected to enhance affiliate society meetings and promote learning among different interest groups within ERF.

Make the ERF education web page a better-functioning educational resource. The objective is to provide a supplement that supports learning. Currently, the education web site includes some really important information like E-ReFs, but overall page content is variable and unfocused. Last year an Education sub-committee reviewed the web page and made specific recommendations to enhance its structure and function. The Education Committee is working with the ERF webmaster to update the Education web page in a number of ways.

First, the sub-committee recommended that K-12 education be left to the professional K-12 estuarine educators. The ERF web page can function to direct interested parties to existing estuarine education resources focused on K-12 education, but should not be in the business of K-12 education per se.

ERF historically has focused on the education of its students at the collegiate level—graduates and undergraduates—and we should continue that focus with web-based resources. E-ReFs is an excellent example of estuarine research resources developed by the ERF membership, and the Education committee hopes to identify other “collective” resources that can play to the strengths of a diverse ERF membership. We are considering active pages such as “estuary of the month” or other visual features (photos, graphics, etc) that will make the Education pages more attractive and accessible. Because additional, different end-users will be drawn to the Education page (professionals and the general public), we plan to have a front page that will function to direct users to pages specific to their interests (versus the clustered mélange of information on the current Education page).

Enhance student participation and education at conferences. Our conferences provide a fertile training ground for our student. The Federation is supporting student travel to conferences, and expanding efforts to provide career counseling and mentoring opportunities. The ERF Education Committee Chair recently obtained support from the NSF to bring undergraduates to our biennial conferences. Conference attendees help judge the student presentations during the conferences and Affiliate Society meetings. Activities at the conferences help students to network with senior members of the community.

#### *Timelines for action*

The new website should be up and running by ERF 2005 in Norfolk.

#### *Resources needed*

Funding to upgrade the Education website has been provided (\$4K) by the ERF Governing Board.

*Measures of success*

Performance measures for the website will include the use of page hit counters to determine use by users from edu, org, and gov domains, for example. In the coming year, a survey of users will be completed to gauge the usefulness of the Education content.