

DRAFT - ERF Strategic Planning - Overview – Policy

Vision

A major goal of the Estuarine Research Federation is to advance understanding and wise stewardship of estuarine and coastal ecosystems worldwide. In meeting this goal, ERF strives to facilitate communication amongst scientists, decision-makers and the public and to provide the best science for coastal and estuarine managers and policy-makers.

Motivation

One of the guiding principles identified by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy is the use of the best available science and information for ocean policy decisions (U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, 2004). The report points out the need that managers and decision makers have for “timely access to reliable data and solid scientific information that have been translated into useful results and products” and articulates the reasoning behind the guiding principle as follows:

“Ocean policy decisions should be based on the best available understanding of the natural, social, and economic processes that affect ocean and coastal environments. Decision makers should be able to obtain and understand quality science and information in a way that facilitates successful management of ocean and coastal resources.” (USCOP Executive Summary, p 6)

Other reports in recent years also cite the need for better communication between coastal scientists and policy-makers. A report by the National Research Council states: “Policy decisions concerning... interactions of the ocean with everyday life rest upon a sound scientific understanding of the ocean... Both the government and the scientific community as a whole must ensure that what is known about the ocean is made available to policy makers, that what is not known is clearly stated, and that progress in furthering our basic understanding continues.” (National Research Council, 1992).

The Estuarine Research Federation is the recognized leader in coastal and estuarine science, with an established history of providing access to the best science for coastal and estuarine managers and policy-makers. As a relatively small scientific society, we achieve this through the actions of individual members as well as through the activities of the affiliates and Federation. The importance of these efforts in promoting the effective management of coastal and estuarine regions will likely grow in importance as these areas face the increasing pressures associated with burgeoning populations along shorelines.

Objectives and Strategies

During our strategic planning activities, we identified two major objectives:

- enhance the exchange of technical information between scientists involved in research and those involved in management and policy

- provide objective guidance (using the best available science) on coastal issues to non-scientists, particularly those involved in setting policy

I. Enhance technical exchange among scientists. This goal builds on ERF's established strengths. ERF is unique as a scientific society in terms of the complete integration of scientists involved in management with those involved in research. A sizeable percentage of our members (19%) are scientists who work in the federal government and another 9% work at the regional or local level. The interest in management issues is apparent at the biennial conference where numerous sessions focus on policy and management issues. Policy-relevant articles can be found in *Estuaries* and we have recently launched CESN to highlight these connections.

Specific ways to enhance the exchange of technical information were identified during strategic planning sessions over the last year and are outlined below:

A. Coastal and Estuarine Science News (CESN)

CESN was launched in July 2003. This is an electronic newsletter designed to reach out to the coastal management community, who may not be regular readers of *Estuaries* but have a need and interest in knowing about recent scientific results. Each issue of CESN serves as a companion to an issue of *Estuaries* and features 4-5 articles chosen specifically for their strong implication for management of coastal areas. CESN is posted at www.erf.org and is also distributed via coastal manager newsletters and the CESN listserv (which has more than 500 recipients as of September 2005).

Specific strategies proposed for CESN are:

- CESN is currently funded through the US EPA Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds Coastal Management Branch (special thanks to Darrell Brown and Barry Burgan). We continue to seek stable support so that CESN can make the transition from a pilot project to a program area.
- Increase international distribution. (work to translate CESN to French and Spanish)
- Consider making articles featured in CESN publicly available so that readers can access them directly from the CESN page.

In order to assess the success of CESN, we conducted a survey of CESN readers after one year (October 2004). Out of 83 respondents:

- We are reaching a wide variety of readers: the respondents' primary duties are divided between resource management (36%), mainly research (31%), and environmental policy (27%).
- We are reaching an audience outside of ERF, as intended: 64% of the respondents are not members of ERF or the affiliates.
- Respondents think the information provided is useful (74%), or at least interesting (an additional 26%).

- The format and content appears to be appropriate: 80% believed that CESN is about the right length and content, and 66% believe that the articles are useful for coastal management.
- More than half of the respondents (53%) use CESN to keep up with management-related research findings; the second most-cited use was for reports for government or elected officials. Teaching was also mentioned by several respondents.
- CESN may be enhancing the use of *Estuaries*: 50% of the respondents said that they had accessed articles that they would not have otherwise, and an additional 42% said that they had not yet, but may.

In addition, we routinely get unsolicited comments such as “have been meaning to say that I love getting this, have found more story ideas from it over the months than I can count...really helpful, and a great ERF product!”

B. ERF and Affiliate Conferences

Potential ways to enhance the participation of coastal managers at conferences are as follows:

- Encourage coastal managers to present their results at meetings organized by ERF and the Affiliate Societies, and encourage the conferences’ science committees to recognize this objective in selection of presentations.
- Incorporate coastal management presentations throughout in appropriate sessions, perhaps noted with an asterisk. Continue offering sessions focused on coastal management issues at ERF and Affiliate conferences.
- Develop a “press package” focusing on the coastal management science papers at ERF and Affiliate conferences. Distribute the package with an invitation to local and regional coastal managers and policy-makers to attend specific sessions where management issues are presented.
- Consider the merits of offering special registration fees (such as for 1-day attendance) to facilitate attendance at conferences by coastal managers.
- Survey conference attendees (and/or Society members) to get feedback on how well ERF is meeting management needs.

C. *Estuaries*

Strategies under consideration for the journal include:

- Consider developing a series of synthesis articles on important coastal problems.
- Consider whether to encourage more management-oriented papers in *Estuaries*..

D. Web site

Enhancements to the ERF web site might include:

- Developing pages on web sites of ERF & Affiliate Societies that focus on coastal management issues (much like the education page)- this could include links to relevant websites, ERefs listings specifically for coastal management, etc

- Posting priority research needs of coastal managers on ERF & Affiliate’s websites, in newsletter articles and other distributional venues.

E. New ideas

Other approaches under consideration for enhancing technical exchange:

- Is there a need for a “reverse CESN” that would synthesize coastal-zone socio-economic research and papers?
- Provide information on priority research needs to appropriate regional or national granting agencies, perhaps through a letter from the ERF Governing Board.
- Develop a series of white papers on important coastal issues.
- Other ideas?

II. Provide the best available science to non-technical decision-makers. ERF Board members participate in activities such as Congressional briefings and are often asked to comment on coastal policy issues. For example, the past President’s of ERF prepared comments on the Ocean Commission report on behalf of the organization. Individual members have also been involved in many policy-related activities (i.e. serving in advisory roles at various levels of government; participating in open house events for the public). Despite these activities, there is room for improvement. 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 advocacy role with governmental agencies and our role in building the public image of our profession. These were among the lowest scoring question areas. Survey respondents suggested numerous ways that ERF can increase its “public voice.” Some suggested a need for greater activism. In the words of one member, ERF should “engage in lobbying or alert membership about pertinent national bills so that individuals can contact their congressman.” Another suggested that ERF could “serve as a clearing house for experts for those (press, schools, etc.) who need/want information quickly.”

The communication of technical information, particularly as it relates to public policy, is area has received increased attention from the ERF Governing Board in recent years. In November 2003 the Board developed guidelines for the Federation’s involvement in public policy along with criteria for identifying opportunities and reacting to issues. ERF has also provided partial support for an AIBS Fellow in Washington, D.C. to work on coastal issues. We are now in a position to strengthen our commitment to these types of activities. As we proceed, we recognize the need to ensure that ERF’s level of involvement with advocacy meets the expectations of our members.

Timelines for Action

A. Policy Committee

The ERF Governing Board established an ad hoc committee for policy at the spring 2005 Board Meeting, with the following charge:

- produce a guidance document on ERF policy-oriented activity – consider our audience; review the spectrum of policy-related activities; define the boundaries of appropriate action for the Society (this will build on the current outreach document)
- provide a recommendation for the Board regarding the establishment of a standing policy committee (review the charge of the existing outreach committee)
- explore partnerships with kindred societies – ESA, CSO, AFS, ASLO, AIBS
- develop a list of potential policy strategies (along with budgetary requirements) Potential activities include: writing white papers; sponsoring an “ERF Day”; Capitol Hill briefings; developing a “State of the Estuaries” report;
- revisit ERFs support of a Fellow in Washington, D.C.
- develop ways to publicize what is already being done.

Timelines for Action

- CESN is being translated into both Spanish and French on a pilot basis, starting with issue 28(3).
- The Board is currently seeking continued support for CESN.
- The Board is working with the planning committee for ERF 2007 to enhance the conference experience for managers. Affiliate society Presidents are also sharing information on this topic at ERF Board meetings.
- New ideas for the journal, the ERF web site, and other strategies are all in development, so there is no firm timeline for action as of yet.
- The ad hoc Policy Committee will report to the ERF Governing Board at the Fall 2005 meeting.

