

# COASTAL CONNECTIONS



VOLUME 2/ISSUE 1

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2004

## COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROFILE



### Betsy Blair

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**Hometown:** Schenectady, New York

**Education:** Bachelor of science in biology, *cum laude*, Tufts University; master of forest science, Yale University

**Most fulfilling aspect of your job:** Working with talented and dedicated people.

**Most challenging aspect of your job:** Resolving trade-offs between resource values.

**One work-related accomplishment you're proud of:** Making major headway in mapping the 160-mile Hudson River Estuary.

**One personal accomplishment you're proud of:** Raising two happy, healthy kids who care about the world.

**Things you do in your spare time:** Spend time with my family hiking, kayaking, exploring wild places, and consuming ice cream on a

*Continued on Page 2*

## THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS

### COMMUNICATING VIA THE MEDIA

"If you want your research to be known, and be out there, you need some press," says *Boston Globe* reporter Mac Daniel. "It's good for the program." While many would agree with Daniel, the thought of writing press releases, interviewing with the media, and what seems like "dumbing down" the subject matter often isn't exactly motivating.

However, getting your message out via the media, outreach projects, or other means doesn't have to be a painful process. Identifying what your message is, why it's important to people, and who can help you communicate it are some of the steps you can take to make sure your communications efforts are effective. The following tips can help you get your community interested in the work your program does to protect its valuable coastal resources.

**Talk to the media.** "The first thing you need to do is develop a relationship with your local environmental reporter," says Daniel. Even if you don't have a story to pitch, call these reporters to tell them about your agency. Once you've worked on several stories together, they may even call you for stories rather than the other way around. Chris Chung, program manager of the Hawaii Coastal Zone Management (CZM) Program, says that after working with the *Honolulu Advertiser* on several stories, "they call us to ask if we're interested in other stories and events. We nurture that kind of relationship."

**Make sure it's newsworthy.** The fact that your program is hosting a nonpoint pollution workshop probably won't interest the general public. But if this workshop will explore the pollution effects of developing a proposed shopping plaza, reporters—and their readers or viewers—may want to know more. When you have an idea for a news story, ask yourself, "Why should the general public care?" Also, be sure it's timely. Reporters don't want to know what you did last week. They want to know what you're doing today and what's coming tomorrow.

**Speak like your audience.** While you don't need to use overly simple language, avoid using jargon and very technical terminology. An easy way to remember to do this is to employ the "mom test." In effect, explain the issue as if you were describing it to your mother. Unless your mom is also a coastal resource manager, this test should help keep your language at a level everyone will understand.

**Relate to your audience.** Your story "has to be related to people's daily lives," notes Daniel. In addition, incorporating stories and references to community pride or tradition will inspire people and make them take note, adds Chris Chung. When you tell stories, says Chung, "it really gets people

*Continued on Page 2*

Profile continued from Page 1

regular basis. I also enjoy working with textiles.

**Family:** Husband, Michael Chrobot; two children, Ben (10) and Maya (5).

**Favorite movie:** A toss-up between *Shrek*, *A Fish Called Wanda*, and a documentary about Maya Lin.

**In your CD player right now:** *Just the Motion*, by Betty and the Baby Boomers,

four Hudson River Valley environmental educators, including the reserve's own Jean Valla McAvoy.

Betsy Blair loves what she does. When describing projects at the reserve, she often exclaims, "oh, very exciting," and "yes, really important." One of the projects she is most excited about right now is the recent bottom mapping of the Hudson River Estuary. "It's changed the way I see the river," notes Betsy. "Now we can really see what's going on at the bottom." The project also has allowed Betsy to do what she does best—"have one foot in science and one foot in policy." The mapping has not only helped her program better understand the river's habitat, but also has let her wear the hats of researcher, historian, conservationist, and educator.

And another hat Betsy wears proudly is that of a mom. Betsy and her family love to explore the outdoors and frequently visit the coast of Nova Scotia. "I just love the wild coast up there," she explains. When she's inside, Betsy focuses on fabrics—quilting, rug hooking, and even making costumes for her kids. Betsy and her husband Michael, a woodworker who builds boats and furniture, live in Kingston, New York, with their children, Ben and Maya.

Communicating via the Media continued from Page 1

to look at resources and the work you do in a different light." Chung and his staff regularly use stories in their public relations efforts to describe what they're doing in a way that will get people most interested.

**Use your partners.** If you work with other agencies or organizations, tap into their media resources. Not only will you get their help in communicating your message, but you'll add to your own media contact list. According to Jim Langdon, director of the Bureau of Intergovernmental Relations for the Wisconsin Department of Administration, the state governor's office often issues press releases on behalf of the coastal program. Langdon says the coastal program then just "follows up with local press to make sure they're getting our points."

**Explore other avenues.** While the media can be an immediate and wide-reaching means for spreading your message, plenty of other outreach options exist. Hawaii CZM, for example, placed a 16-page insert in the local paper to raise its profile and promote an upcoming conference. The insert described CZM activities and included activities for children and teachers.

Wisconsin's Coastal Management Program has produced several coastal episodes for a regional television series that showcases recreational sites in and around the Great Lakes. According to Langdon, the series reaches an audience of over 700,000 in Wisconsin and extended areas. The goal of the coastal episodes, says Langdon, is to make people aware that everything they seek about the ocean's coasts—lighthouses, sailing, deep-sea fishing—is on Wisconsin's coasts too. "Those coastal episodes are the most popular," notes Langdon.

While many coastal programs recognize that reaching out to the media and the public is important, it often gets knocked to the bottom of the to-do list. But, says Langdon, coastal managers "need to value communication as a core component of the program." Once you've built a firm relationship with local media and have begun to establish communications goals for each project, the pain that was once public relations will become a pleasure.

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## NOAA Coastal Services Center Training Course: PUBLIC ISSUES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Meeting management and facilitation skills not only can help you make the most of limited meeting time, but also can help as you speak to the public or reporters about sensitive issues. "Public Issues and Conflict Management," a three-day workshop sponsored by the NOAA Coastal Services Center, covers such topics as

- Designing and using collaborative processes
- Facilitating groups and working with difficult people
- Working with the media to understand public issues

The workshop includes a media session during which a panel of media experts answer participants' questions about effectively using the media to promote their programs. The Center provides the instructors and materials and works with organizations that wish to host a workshop in their region. If your organization could benefit from this public issues training, visit the Center's training Web site at [www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/cls/public\\_issues\\_conflict.html](http://www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/cls/public_issues_conflict.html).

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# PRESS RELEASES: COMMON MISTAKES

Press releases are often a useful way to generate media interest in your organization's work. But writing a good release takes some planning and careful construction. Avoiding these 10 common pitfalls can help you spread your message to the media successfully.

- 1. Not covering news.** To be "news," a story should be timely and show an impact on people, something unusual, human interest, or a relation to current events. A new partnership in and of itself probably won't count as news.

on-line permit tracking system," try "Residents hoping to construct a private dock can now track the status of their permits on-line." Follow this with the who, when, where, how, and more about the why.
- 2. Burying the story.** Reporters want to know who, what, where, when, why, and how. Begin a release with what is happening and why people will care—the what and why. For instance, rather than opening with, "The State Coastal Management Program has released an
- 3. Focusing on the organization rather than the story.** Just as you should lead with the news of your story, also be sure it's the focus throughout the release. Don't get bogged down in the details of your organization's mission and its partners. The project or event is what will interest people here.
- 4. Writing too long.** Keep releases to two pages at the most. No matter how long the release, reporters will most likely focus on the first one or two paragraphs.
- 5. Being too wordy.** Don't go overboard with descriptions and adjectives. Be concise, describing the facts as clearly as possible. Press releases don't need to tell the whole story; reporters will call you to fill in those details.
- 6. Using passive voice.** Make your releases active. Instead of "studies were conducted," use "researchers conducted studies."
- 7. Sending it too late.** For newspapers, send press releases about two weeks in advance of an event. Television news is a bit more day-to-day, so a week ahead may be OK.
- 8. Omitting contact information.** Be sure to include the name, phone number, fax number, and e-mail address of the person reporters should contact. Choose someone who will be available to speak with the media. If the manager of the project is out of town for two weeks, use someone else involved in the project as a contact.
- 9. Not calling back promptly.** If you've listed yourself as the contact on a press release, make sure that if you miss a call, you return it right away. If reporters don't get information immediately, they won't meet their deadlines, and the story won't run.
- 10. Sending it to the wrong contact.** Be sure your media contact information is up to date. Contact media outlets beforehand to find out who should receive press releases and how they like to receive them (fax, e-mail, etc.).

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## WORKING WITH THE MEDIA: DOS AND DON'TS

### DO

- Designate a public relations contact for your organization.
- Respect media deadlines.
- Explain why the public would care about your story.
- Prepare fact sheets about your organization and your project.
- Use colorful examples.
- Develop relationships with local reporters.
- Have visuals for television and newspaper photographers.
- Take the media with you when you go out in the field.
- Ask when your story will appear.

### DON'T

- Say anything "off the record."
- Say "No comment."
- Focus on your organization—rather, focus on the story.
- Lie or stretch the truth.
- Wait for the media to contact you—be proactive and persistent.
- Use jargon.
- Ramble—be concise.
- "Wing it"—prepare your thoughts and a few statements about the issue.

*Coastal Connections* is a publication of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coastal Services Center, produced for the coastal resource management community. Each issue of this free bimonthly newsletter focuses on a tool, information resource, or methodology of interest to the nation's coastal resource managers.

Please send us your questions and suggestions for future editions. To subscribe or contribute to the newsletter, contact our editors at

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# NEWS AND NOTES



## Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' Meeting

NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management will host the annual Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' Meeting from March 9 to 11, 2004, in Washington, DC. Hotel reservations at the site of the conference (Hotel Washington) must be made no later than February 6, 2004. Visit <http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/pmm/> to register.

## Sustainable Beaches Summit

From March 29 to 31, 2004, the Sustainable Beaches Summit will bring various coastal professionals to Sandestin, Florida, to discuss top concerns related to beach and natural resource management, coastal tourism and development, recreation, and conservation. To register, visit [www.cleanbeaches.org/sustainable/](http://www.cleanbeaches.org/sustainable/). Open registration ends February 14.

## Sea Grant Releases Booklet on Rebuilding Sand Dunes

Tips for rebuilding eroded dunes are featured in a new 28-page publication from the North Carolina Sea Grant. *The Dune Book* explains how erosion occurs and describes several effective dune management practices along developed shorelines. For more information, visit [www.ncseagrant.org/files/dune\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.ncseagrant.org/files/dune_booklet.pdf).

## Report Released on U.S. Coastal Economy

The National Governors Association's recent report titled, "The Changing Ocean and Coastal Economy of the United States" summarizes key findings on socioeconomic factors influencing the coastal and ocean economy and explores their implications on state and national policy in several areas, including coastal resource management. For a copy of the report, visit [www.nga.org/cda/files/102203WavesColgan.pdf](http://www.nga.org/cda/files/102203WavesColgan.pdf).

## Transitions

**Donna Moffitt**, director of the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management, has left her position to serve as director of the North Carolina Aquarium... **Mike Friis** is the new manager of the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, replacing **Dea Larsen Converse**... **David Hartman** has retired as manager of the New Hampshire Coastal Program... **Terry Thompson** is the new acting manager of Alaska's Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR).

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