

COASTAL CONNECTIONS



VOLUME 4, ISSUE 6

A BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOCUSED ON TOOLS FOR COASTAL RESOURCE MANAGERS

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Barbara Fegan

Founder, in 1980, of the nationwide coastal volunteer celebration known as Coastweeks

Current hometown: Orleans, Massachusetts

Hometown when Coastweeks began: Wellfleet, Massachusetts

Family: Sons James and Paul Fegan, daughter-in-law Gerri, and three grandchildren

Inspiration for starting Coastweeks:

At the time, I was the environmental chair on the board of the Massachusetts League of Women Voters, and a friend of mine had a similar position in the local Sierra Club chapter. We decided to hold a celebration of the coast on a national holiday—Columbus Day, because we figured he had a lot to do with water!

Most fulfilling aspect of Coastweeks:

Discovering how genuinely people responded. All they needed was an idea, something to motivate them to take care of the coast. It's a lot harder

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FOCUS

MANAGING CONFLICT OVER PUBLIC ISSUES

Coastal management professionals benefit by learning how to handle controversial issues.

Today, more than half of all Americans live within 50 miles of the coast, and population density continues to increase in these ecologically fragile corridors, according to the recently released "U.S. National Report on Population and the Environment," published by the nonprofit Center for Environment and Population.

As the stakes get higher for responsible coastal planning, community stakeholders grow more varied—and more vocal.

"Nationally, we're at a point where most natural resource planning doesn't just happen with laws handed down from above but with the active participation of different members of the community," says Kristy Ellenberg, president of Ellenberg Associates, Inc., of Columbia, South Carolina. Ellenberg Associates is an environmental consulting group that teaches natural resource professionals how to handle conflict as it intersects with people, policies, and science.

Early Outreach Is Critical

Coastal management professionals can lessen or prevent clashes with stakeholders by stepping outside their own worldview to consider other perspectives. How do different stakeholders see the world? What sorts of concerns will they raise? What do they know about the issue?

"It's also really important to start building bridges to different members of the community," says Ellenberg. "We do this by reaching out, not only to those with the same academic background or career interests, but also by contacting people in other areas of life—for instance, people we say 'hello' to at the grocery store or see at the college football game," she adds.

Institutions with good intentions can get into trouble when they fail to reach out to stakeholders. Ellenberg cites the recent case of a large public agency that was selling property in order to reinvest money in the community.

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now—the world and its problems are more complex.

Most challenging aspect of Coastweeks: A few self-centered organizations and people who regarded Coastweeks as a way to advance themselves.

One aspect of Coastweeks that makes you proud: Coastweeks excited people who didn't think of themselves as dynamic or self-starters. Years before, people might have said, "When we have time, we'll have to do something about that creek out there." With Coastweeks, they had a name for it, and a structure.

Another accomplishment that makes you proud: I spent two years after World War II as an army nurse in Japan, running a 50-person ward.

Things you do in your spare time: I'm delighted to finally have all the time I never had before. But I am restricted by my health. I look 85 and act it! So, I do an awful lot of reading.

"When we started in 1980, the shores and big bodies of water, that entire part of the environment, was being overlooked," says Barbara Fegan, founder of Coastweeks.

"When I started Coastweek (which later became Coastweeks), so many things I did were not strictly by the book. But I was so sure of myself, so sure it was going to work. There were no lectures, no meetings, no telephone calls. But, every year, it just grew and grew. This was the secret of our organization—people could do something for the coast that they chose to do, and feel good about it," she says.

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"There was a lot of internal dialogue at the agency about this plan to sell, but very little thought had gone into how they were going to communicate these changes to the public or handle complications that might crop up," says Ellenberg. Before long, rumors disparaging the agency's intentions began circulating, and the institution took a damaging public-relations hit.

A far more desirable scenario unfolded when a California organization seeking to create a marine protected area invited a diverse and opinionated group of stakeholders to the negotiating table.

"During the dialogue process, they had some trials and tribulations with the stakeholders, and they didn't get every single thing they wanted," says Ellenberg. "But the final regulations for that marine protected area were more enforceable. When a variety of participants are invited to

take part in coastal management decisions, everyone is much more motivated to uphold the final agreement," she notes.

Managing the Meetings

You can frequently ease friction among stakeholders and move the agenda forward by upholding important meeting guidelines.

- **Frame the problem.** Write out a clear statement of the situation that can unite group members in a common purpose. A simplistic yes/no statement, such as "Do we need to build a new highway?" will invite disharmony. An inclusive statement that encourages specific suggestions is better, such as, "How can we best meet our city's transportation needs while preserving quality of life?"
- **Identify and include the most important participants.** Whether you're planning an individual meeting or a long-term initiative,

Upcoming conferences you won't want to miss:

COASTAL GEOTOOLS 2007

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina • March 5–8, 2007

Learn about state-of-the-art geospatial data and tools for coastal planning and management.

www.csc.noaa.gov/geotools/

COASTAL ZONE 2007

Portland, Oregon • July 22–26, 2007

Network at the world's largest international gathering of professionals in ocean and coastal management.

www.csc.noaa.gov/cz/

For more information on these conferences, e-mail Lynn.Sellers@noaa.gov or call (843) 740-1284.

your ideal participants might include experts, those with authority or responsibility to act, those with a stake in the outcome, and individuals needing training or more education on the issue.

- **Design a strategy and structure.** At the very beginning, set ground rules for group etiquette. “Start and end the meeting on time,” “no interrupting,” and “no personal attacks” are fair and neutral guidelines that help members refocus when tempers flare or discussions wander off course.
- **Assess the need for an outside facilitator.** In some situations, the issues are so contentious that groups hire outside experts skilled in mediation or group facilitation to help participants work through tensions and obstacles.

Dealing with the Media

Controversial coastal-management decisions can be won or lost in the court of public opinion. A well-planned public information campaign that includes media outreach can bolster your case.

- **Execute a timely, targeted media strategy.** An excellent press release does no good if it reaches the wrong reporter or is sent too late in the publication cycle. Is your desired media outlet published daily, weekly, biweekly? How much advance notice do reporters and editors need before a story is considered for publication? Who is the publication’s designated reporter on environmental or urban-planning issues? You can find answers to these and other questions by checking the publication’s Web site or calling the editorial department.

- **Increase odds of coverage with supplementary materials and photos.** Succinct fact sheets and press releases are a plus for reporters and editors, TV news directors, and radio talk-show hosts. If you have impressive, high-quality photos that can accompany written materials, obtain permission from your photographer and offer to share these photos with publications.
- **Manage interviews.** Stay focused on the most important points, be truthful, don’t ramble, and adjust the complexity of information to the reporter’s understanding of the topic. If you are being interviewed for radio or TV, speak slowly and clearly in complete sentences. Avoid talking “off the record.” If an issue is too controversial, or you do not know enough about a topic, just say so.
- **Crisis communications: take a deep breath.** If a reporter calls and wants your opinion on a late-breaking development, don’t chatter aimlessly. Say, “I need to collect my thoughts. May I call you back in a few moments?” Consult with your supervisor or communications staff, contacting the reporter as soon as you have crafted an appropriate, measured response.

When working through community conflicts over coastal planning, you will probably experience moments when progress stalls and tensions mount. “At times like these, ask yourself, ‘How can we make this process go forward, while also protecting natural resources?’” says Ellenberg. “If your organization is proactive in negotiating solutions, rather than simply emphasizing problems, you can sometimes break a stalemate.”

NEED TRAINING IN NEGOTIATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Services Center offers two courses that help natural resource managers increase their negotiation and conflict-management skills.

“Public Issues and Conflict Management” is a two-and-a-half-day workshop that helps participants refine their collaborative-process skills, manage meetings more productively, and learn how to deal effectively with the media. Each course will be tailored to the needs and skill levels of participants.

“Negotiating for Coastal Resources” is a one-and-a-half-day course that provides coastal managers, nongovernmental organization representatives, and government staff members with an interactive curriculum covering all facets of negotiation. Participants assess their personal negotiation styles, overcome negotiation barriers, and learn how to strengthen interagency cooperation by forging strategic relationships.

For more information or to request training, contact the Center’s Coastal Learning Services program at nos.csc.CLS_trainers@noaa.gov.

NEWS AND NOTES

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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Fragile Coral Gardens in Alaska Receive Protective Status

The Aleutian Islands Habitat Conservation Area in Alaska, recently established by the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, protects 279,114 square nautical miles containing deepwater corals and other sensitive ecosystem features. NOAA worked closely with environmental groups, the commercial fishing industry, the fishery management council, and other partners to protect this vast area. For more information, visit www.fakr.noaa.gov.

Grand Bay Reserve Launches Web Site

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resource's Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve has created a new Web site. The site describes Mississippi's estuaries and coastal habitats, current weather and water quality, and activities at the reserve. The Web address is www.grandbaynerr.org.

Aquaculture Conference to be Held in Connecticut

The Northeast Aquaculture Conference and Exposition will be held December 6-8, 2006, at the Mystic Marriott Hotel and Spa in Groton, Connecticut. Participants include aquatic health specialists, researchers, environmental organizations, commercial farmers, and local, state, and federal organizations. For more information, visit the conference Web site at www.northeastaquaculture.org.

Accolades

Andrea Cooper, coastal smart growth coordinator for the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, received a performance recognition award from the state's Executive Office of Environmental Affairs in honor of her efforts.

Transitions

Penelope D. Dalton has become the director of Washington Sea Grant, replacing Louie Echols, who has retired... **Tim Eder**, former director of water resources for the National Wildlife Federation, has been hired by the Great Lakes Commission as its new executive director... **Kerry Kehoe**, formerly the Maryland coastal program manager and counsel for the Coastal States Organization, has been hired by the NOAA Coastal Programs Division as a federal consistency specialist... **Brendan Annett**, previously the acting manager of the Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, has now officially been named manager of the reserve... University of Georgia professors **Tim Hollibaugh** and **Ervan Garrison** are serving as interim codirectors of the Georgia Sea Grant College Program.

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