

RYBA: The Newsletter of the Minnesota Chapter of the American Fisheries Society

**A Cast from the President
Brian Nerbonne**

Science, Policy, and the Public

First, a few statistics:

- 50% of newly elected Republican congressional representatives deny that humans have anything to do with climate change. A 2009 Gallup poll found that 39% of Americans believe in Darwinian evolution.
- 30% of University of Texas students agree with the statement, "Humans and dinosaurs lived at the same time." Another 30% said they "don't know" whether the statement is true or false.
- Four unvaccinated Minneapolis children were recently diagnosed with measles after their parents believed a clearly discredited theory that vaccination causes autism.

More examples abound. A recent review by an independent panel found that in recent both Democratic and Republican administrations, the Environmental Protection Agency misused science in setting policy. Staff who were interviewed stated that science was only used if it agreed with a preferred policy, otherwise it was ignored, buried, or distorted. Recent polls of the public have shown a drop in the public's trust of scientists as a source of unbiased information.

How did we get to this point? There is probably plenty of blame to go around. A favorite target is the media, who have often been guilty of writing "balanced" journalism that tries to provide equal time to both sides of an issue, even if one side has little basis in science. Pundits are even worse, basing their arguments on a biased view of science at best, or a deliberately misleading series of falsehoods at worst. Politicians are easy to blame, as many seem to spin the facts to fit their ideology. But what about the scientists themselves? Should we shoulder some of the blame as well?

A large contributor to the problem is that some "scientists" are actually not practicing science at all. The tobacco industry for decades employed an army of doctors and scientists who did "research" that showed no harmful effects from smoking. The petroleum industry employs a handful of researchers who keep just enough of a shred of

doubt in people's minds that they don't believe in climate change. I bet most of us working in natural resources have read reports from consulting firms that cherry pick the science to give the answer that their client is looking for. Is it any wonder the public has lost some faith in our profession? None of us like to think that we would ever be so unethical, but now and then I've felt my own values creeping a little too far into my work and had to take a step back.

In addition, scientists have not done a great job in translating our work into something the general public can understand. We speak in acronyms, use jargon, and don't go out of our way to communicate to the popular press. Quite the opposite, actually; we grumble when a reporter calls or make fun of a coworker who appears in the media. I've many times observed natural resource professionals taking a very gruff attitude toward members of the public when approached during field work. The interruption was treated as such, rather than a chance to communicate our message to the public, or at the very least make a decent impression of people doing the work.

I challenge our membership to make an extra effort to communicate the message of our fisheries work to the general public. Don't just publish your work in a report or journal. Go out and share the information with a lake association, a journalist, or some other means of communicating with the public. Have you learned about an issue and want to get the word out to decision makers? The MN AFS chapter is one potential conduit. Numerous issues are popping up all the in the legislature, in congress, or with the private sector (e.g. invasive species control, aquatic habitat protection, efforts to cut funding for vital programs). If you feel strongly about an issue, bring it to the chapter Excom and we'll work together to craft a comment letter, position paper, or resolution that can convey our understanding as scientists. Or at the very least, treat that guy coming up to you at the boat ramp as an opportunity to enlighten a future supporter of our work! We'll never escape the spin of politicians and the media, but we can help to counter their effects by getting our message out there.

Awards Update Mike Habrat

The following awards were presented during the 2011 American Fisheries Society Minnesota Chapter annual meeting in Sandstone:

Best Paper went to David Staples for "*Evaluation of protected slot limits for walleye on two large lakes in Minnesota.*"

Best Student Paper went to Marcus Beck for "*Image analysis techniques to evaluate effects of nearshore lake development on aquatic macrophytes.*"

Best Student Paper Runner Up went to Jonathan Lore for "*Identifying stressors causing fish community impairments in the High Island Creek watershed.*"

Best Poster award went to Nick Schlessor for "*Dispersal of a post-spawn walleye run: Initial results of a walleye tagging project on Rat Root River (Rainy Lake).*"

Retiring President Kristin Blann was recognized for her services as president of the Minnesota Chapter of AFS.

Special recognition was given to Fundraising Committee Chairmen Brian Borkholder and Tom Burri in recognition of their dedication and efforts toward raising funds to support chapter activities and overall outstanding contribution to the Minnesota Chapter of AFS.



And the winner is....Andy Carlson! Andy took home this year's grand prize, a framed underwater photograph of a walleye taken by Eric Engbretson. Matching the winning tickets and awarding the prize was President Brian Nerbonne. To see more of Eric Engbretson's work, visit www.underwaterfishphotos.com

2011 MN AFS Scholarship Winners Bruce Vondracek

2011 MN AFS Scholarship winners were announced during the awards banquet at the annual meeting in Sandstone. This year, three students were recognized for their achievements.

Darcy Mundahl is a junior majoring in Ecology with a emphasis in Fisheries and Aquatic Ecology at Winona State University. Darcy completed an internship with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in Baudette and was a Research Assistant at Michigan Tech. Darcy plans to attend graduate school with the goal of becoming a fisheries specialist in the Midwest. Darcy was also an assistant coach for Nordic skiing at middle and high schools in Winona.

Andrew Carlson is a junior majoring in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology with a fisheries specialization at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Andrew worked for two summer for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as a watercraft inspector. Andrew also volunteered with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency during spring and summer on the Citizen Lake Water Monitoring Program for three years. Andrew plans to attend graduate school and study fisheries science with the goal of becoming a fisheries professional.



Congratulations to the 2011 Scholarship Winners. From Left to Right: Bruce Vondracek presenting; Darcy Mundahl, Andrew Carlson, and Justine Koch.

Justine Koch is a senior majoring in Biology and Environmental Sciences at Gustavus Adolphus College. Justine reestablished the Madison Lake Watershed and Lake Association in southern Minnesota as an assignment for a sustainability course. The association had not been active for the past decade. She is currently working on her Honor's Biology Thesis, "A comparison of survey methods to evaluate macrophyte index of biotic integrity performance in Minnesota lakes" with Marcus Beck, a Ph.D. candidate, at the University of Minnesota. She has worked for Lake Management Inc. as a commercial aquatic herbicide applicator, which provided her with

Scholarship Winners can't

the unique opportunity to serve as both friend and enemy to homeowners and natural resource managers at some point or another. She plans to attend graduate school with the goal of becoming an aquatic ecologist with a consulting firm or governmental agency.

Minnesota DNR Update Owen Baird

In MN DNR Fisheries there have been numerous staff changes due to retirements and the continuing cascading effect of staff moving into new roles.

Last year, spawning walleye tagged in the Rat Root River, a tributary to Rainy Lake were later caught in the North Arm of Rainy Lake (in Canadian waters). A long-held belief was that US and Canadian walleye stocks were distinct and have been managed as such for many years. However, this emerging information may dictate the need for a better coordinated system-wide management approach by US and Canadian fisheries managers. The study will continue in 2011.

Seven Mile Creek Watershed Riparian Protection and Enhancement - Nicollet County. Seven Mile Creek is a direct tributary of the Minnesota River in south-central Minnesota. It drains heavily tiled agricultural land in its upper watershed, while the lower watershed meanders through a wooded valley gradient that is spring-fed. The stream supports brown trout and other cool water fish species and flows through a popular Nicollet County park. Work on adjacent agricultural land to improve land use and stream conditions include conservation buffer easements, water and sediment control basins, and ravine grade stabilization structures; all practices that stabilize ravine geomorphology thus reducing sediment loading into the stream. Partners include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Nicollet County, Great River Greening, Minnesota Trout Unlimited, and private landowners.

Declines in Leech Lake percid populations and their fishery during the early 2000's prompted increased management activities. Recently, the Leech Lake Management Plan was updated for 2011-2015. A protected slot limit for walleye angling harvest will remain to maintain walleye spawning stock biomass within the objective range of 1.5-2.0 lbs per acre. Walleye fry will be stocked during 2011-2014 with either 7.5 or 22.0 million fry, varying by year. Annual reductions of the local double-crested cormorant colony to 500 nesting pairs will continue and habitat protection will remain an area of focus for future

"Man's history is woven into waterways, for not only did he live beside them, but he used them as highways for hunting, exploration, and trade. Water assured his welfare, its absence meant migration or death, its constancy nourished his spirit. A mountain, a desert, or a great forest might serve his need of strength, but water reflects his inner needs."

- Sigurd F. Olson (1899-1982), Listening Point 1970

Become Friends with Minnesota AFS on Facebook!

Network with your colleagues, keep up to date on emerging issues, post on the MNAFS wall!



Happy Trails...to newly minted Past President Kristen Blann. Here current President Brian Nerbonne recognizes Past President Blann for her year of service. Great job Kristen!

FWLA/Issues update

Loren Miller, Kristen Blann, Henry Van Offelen

A sampling of updates from FWLA and Issues....

- There are proposals in place to change sulfate standards as they apply to mining. This may become a Fisheries issue for surrounding waterbodies. Currently the controversy surrounds wild rice and its dependence upon clean waters.
- Big waves in LCCMR. The House committee chairs have told the LCCMR to strip 20-some projects after the long process of selection was completed. They are telling LCCMR to fund AIS, ash borer, mine sulfate studies, and the Coon Rapids dam. The AFS FWLA and Issues committees agree these are important issues but stand against circumventing the thorough process for proposal review.
- Bills have been introduced in the House and the Senate limiting special and experimental northern pike slot limit lakes to 60 and 90 respectively. Currently, Minnesota has 119 waters with special northern pike restriction intended to boost the size of fish. If passed, no proposal for which lakes would be repealed was laid out. Research by Minnesota AFS member Rod Pierce and others has shown the effectiveness of northern pike protective slot limits for increasing size structure
- A bill has been introduced to the Senate to put a moratorium on water quality rulemaking until 2013. The bill would block Pawlenty-administration era rulemaking processes already underway at MPCA and DNR, including shoreland rules, rules for drinking water and invasive species, and river corridor critical area rulemaking, among others.

Sign up to volunteer for the AFS 2012 Parent Society Meeting in Minneapolis

Volunteers are needed for the 2012 Parent Society Meeting in Minneapolis, August 19-23. There are duties large and small that we need Minnesota AFS members to step to the plate and help with. To see which committees need assistance and to sign up, visit <http://www.mnafs.org/>. Email to Brian Borkholder with the link provided on the chapter webpage.



Owen Baird celebrates a raffle victory with Brian Nerbonne.



2011 Northeast Regional Science Fair MN AFS awards were presented to the students pictured. Judges for the Northeast Regional Science Fair were Brian Borkholder (Fond du Lac), Jason Butcher (Forest Service), Josh Blankenheim (MNDNR), and Matt Ward (MNDNR, pictured third from left). We handed out over \$600.00 worth of donated prizes, \$60 from MNAFS, and \$540 from Duluth area businesses.