

Outreach Trip Report

Attendee: Joseph Kerski,
Geographer/Outreach, Denver.

Sites Visited:

- (1) Children's Water Festival.
- (2) USGS BRD MidContinent Ecological Science Center.

Date: 22 May 2001

Location: Fort Collins, CO

Other USGS Attendees: Pat Schassburger, Steve Vandas, Pete Modreski.

Children's Water Festival



The Childrens Water Festival was held at the student center, adjacent buildings, and in the adjacent fields at the Colorado State University campus.

The Children's Water Festivals are a national event, with multiple events occurring during any given year in all 50 states. The festivals began in the mid-1980s in Nebraska and received support from the Groundwater Foundation. Steve Vandas, Central Region outreach coordinator for water, has recommended to our

group that we should visit one of these festivals. I must say that I was not disappointed.

Approximately 600 students from numerous school districts participated in indoor and outdoor events with education about water topics as the central theme. These topics covered both water availability and water quality, and included hazardous waste, wastewater treatment, watersheds, groundwater, animal and plant life in water, and others.



Students collecting and analyzing biological data with microscopes and other instruments in the field.



One of the displays at the Water Festival that we are planning to modify and use at the Colorado State Fair. This exhibit showed how many gallons of water were required for everyday activities, with light bulbs in the jugs to illustrate the amounts.

The purposes of attending this event were to:

(1) Observe how another outreach event is conducted, so that we can be continually improving our own events.

(2) Obtain ideas specifically for exhibits at the Colorado State Fair, where the USGS will participate with 18 other agencies in operating a natural resources pavilion. This year's theme is Water Availability, and next year's is Water Quality.



Field work and water rescue learning activities at the festival.

The children's water festival is largely held for students in Grades 4 and 5. Besides the activities, which occurred throughout a 6-hour time frame, an exhibit hall hosted interactive, educational displays and activities. Other festivals in Colorado include Grand Junction and Pueblo.

What impressed me the most about the water festival was the amount of community and corporate involvement. A board in the exhibit hall showed that at least 15 companies were involved in the

event, which supplied food, drinks, exhibits, personnel, financial, and other support to the event. In addition, an equal number of government agencies and nonprofit groups were listed as supporting the event. Our own Central Region's Steve Vandas has supported these events for years with workshops, materials, and exhibits.

The outreach staff should take a serious look at how these water festivals are organized, staffed, funded, and communicated, as it would help us in our general-public events, particularly for USGS open houses.



Water Wizards at the Festival: Teams compete in series of water-related questions in "game-show" format.



Very popular fishing exhibit at the water festival.

Tour of USGS BRD MidContinent Ecological Resources Center (MESC)

Pat Schassburger, Central Region outreach coordinator for Biology and national biology exhibits coordinator, organized a tour for us on the outreach team at the USGS Midcontinent Ecological Resources Center.

Michele Banowetz, outreach coordinator for MESC, arranged for us to meet with Doug Posson, director, and Duane Asherin, the center's Deputy Director. I was impressed that both of them met with us; it showed how much they value outreach and communication.



The USGS MESC building in Fort Collins.

MESC's staff includes 150 employees, including 40 who work for Johnson Controls as contractors. Their budget is \$15 million per year.

Activities of the MESC include research and outreach. The activities include restoring bighorn sheep in parklands, studying the black-footed ferret and other endangered animals, analyzing environmental impacts, and

examining invasive plants. Their scientists provide investigations of the social, economic, and institutional impacts of recreational land management policy.

Beginning in 2002, the MESC will be located in a new building on the campus of Colorado State University. Seven federal and state agencies will be located in new buildings in the vicinity. This facility will offer greatly expanded laboratories to further the work of the MESC. A few staffpersons from mapping, geology, and water resources will work at the center.



USGS BRD MESC outreach coordinator, Michele Banowetz.

I believe that the BRD science center model has a great deal to offer the rest of the bureau and merits serious attention. First, they are very proactive in funding nearly 40 researchers from universities.

Second, their staffing is innovative and forward-looking in regards to investigating and obtaining outside funds from grants and other sources. One-third of their budget is

reimbursable dollars, especially with agencies in this order: FWS, NPS, BOR, and BLM.

Third, MESC's partnership model is something that the coordination and requirements (liaison) staff in the mapping centers should examine. It is quite successful and impressive. The center even has a publication entitled "Developing Effective and Responsive Partnerships."

Fourth, their outreach model is a good one for the bureau. Michele told us that she will have another staffperson in outreach soon, and together, they plan to meet with scientists on a regular basis to extract more value from that science. They seek to model outreach behavior to scientists, so the scientist won't see outreach as an "extra thing to do," but is integrated with their way of doing business.

Fifth, the MESC has expertise in assessment, surveys, and perception. These areas are in need as we formulate the USGS education plan, and for such things as obtaining feedback and support for the "national map."

At the center, I visited Bob Waltermeier, GIS specialist. He was working on such things as creating sampling areas for amphibians, and working on a Landsat-related migratory waterfowl study in Argentina. I was amazed at the breadth of the GIS activities at the MESC, including 5 staffpersons. I feel the approach to staffing and funding GIS-related activities warrants investigation particularly by

the national mapping division personnel. Others of us on the field trip visited Lee Ischinger, riparian ecologist.



Part of Interdisciplinary Central Region Outreach Committee.

L-to-R: Joseph Kerski, mapping/geography, Steve Vandas, water, Pete Modreski, geology, Pat Schassburger, Biology.

I wish to acknowledge Pat Schassburger and Michele Banowetz for the excellent visit to BRD and Steve Vandas for setting up the tour of the water festival.

**** End of Report ****