

EDUCATION EVENT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
National Council for Geographic Education
1999 Annual Conference – November 1999
Boston, Massachusetts
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Background:

After decades of the "doldrums," the field of geographic education has been experiencing a tremendous renaissance since 1985. It began with extensive media coverage of the lack of geographic knowledge by not only K-12 and college students in American schools, but by the American public. The most recent events in this renaissance include the creation of National Geography Standards, published in a document entitled *Geography for Life*. It has continued with the inclusion of geography as one of the five core subjects in the President's "Goals 2000: National Education Act." Fueling this resurgence is the reality of actually bringing GIS technology and data into the classroom, due to lower prices and easier-to-use packages.

The NCGE has been promoting and improving the effectiveness of education in geography since 1915. The Council currently has over 5000 members, including K-12 teachers, university faculty, students, government employees, representatives from private companies, and others interested in geographic education. The NCGE publishes the monthly *Journal of Geography*, and a newsletter entitled *Perspective*. Their WWW site is www.ncge.org and their headquarters are at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania in the western side of the state.

Reasons for attending:

- 1) As the nation's largest scientific organization, the USGS can and has provided great input to publications, data sets, software, and other items related to geographic education. This is particularly true in the area of bringing GIS to the classroom: the USGS could be a leader in generating data sets that teachers can easily use at all grade levels. In so doing, the publicity generated from teachers and students across the country for the USGS could be enormous, particularly with the amount of media on the need for geographic knowledge.
- 2) The value-added in our involvement with the lifelong learning focus area of educational outreach is that we work with educators to demonstrate *how* our products can be used in conjunction with national science and geography standards. It is not enough to tell which products are available. Teachers already know how to find resources and they have a great deal of material. When we get involved with teachers--getting their input and working with them--we can understand how to best meet their needs.
- 3) The USGS outreach program suffers from a chronic lack of funds and partnerships to assist us in our efforts. I believe the NCGE holds tremendous untapped potential for partnership opportunities with the USGS. The NCGE has worked closely with the Association of American Geographers (AAG), the American Geographical Society, and the National Geographic Society. The USGS should not miss the opportunity to be another link in the cooperative efforts that have already been successful.
- 4) I wrote an article in *Focus* magazine from the American Geographical Society (Fall 1999, forthcoming) on using USGS resources to teach about glaciers. This article was promoted at the

conference in one of my workshops and it provided an excellent opportunity to work with the AGS.

5) The President of the NCGE invited me to a reception, during which I asked her if NCGE would be interested in being a partner with us and other organizations to reprint the teachers packets. Negotiations will be continuing as she is interested in this project. This indicates how well our organization is respected and viewed by professional societies. Our relationship with the President stems from our materials support of her college courses in California, illustrating that our outreach activities have far-reaching effects.



1999 NCGE President Gail Hobbs.

My Activities at the Conference:

1) I conducted 2 workshops and 1 paper presentation:

(1) 74,902 Ready-To-Go Lesson Plans: Teaching Cultural and Physical Geography with USGS Topographic and Thematic Maps. In this workshop, I illustrated how USGS maps can be used to teach cultural and physical geography, aligned with the national geography standards, by using a series of “map mysteries” built on topographic and thematic maps. Over 60 attendees were present, filling the room and spilling into the hallway.

(2) The Implementation of GIS in the Curriculum. I presented several examples of the USGS work with schools in the area of educational technology and GIS, illustrated lesson modules I have developed with teachers, described USGS digital data useful for education, and discussed issues involved with implementing GIS in the classroom.

(3) Teaching About Glaciation with USGS Resources. In this workshop, which I conducted with the American Geographical Society, I illustrated how USGS resources could be used to teach about glaciation, using circulars, bulletins, www sites, photographs, maps, and professional papers.

2) I assisted in the set up and operation of the USGS booth in the vendor exhibit area, which was staffed in an excellent manner Stephen LePage and during one day by one member of the MA state ESIC office. Our exhibit featured NAPP photography, a NAPP photo quiz, teachers packets, fact sheets, map projector poster, and a variety of new circulars and professional papers on display, including the open skies Hurricane Mitch circular and CD. We also featured map products, DDS CDs, and GIS in education demos on our computer and monitor, as well as an Earthlink Internet connection which worked excellently.



Stephen LePage at the USGS exhibit.

Our exhibit was technically at the back of the exhibit hall, but because of an open door to the hallway, we actually were the first stop for the attendees, very near the registration booth. Approximately 750 people attended the conference.



Joseph Kerski at the USGS exhibit.

3) I met with NCGE president Gail Hobbs (information above).

4) I attended the opening session by Harm DeBlij, author of over 100 articles and books on geography. His speech at the MA state capitol highlighted the difference that geography educators can make on public policy.

Recommendations:

1) These are exciting times for geographic education, with the resurgence of public interest in the subject, and the new national K-12 standards in geography. I believe that the USGS could play a role in this expansion of geographic education, by producing a modular CD-ROM that includes base and thematic spatial data sets, with one module for each of the national geography standards, and

for different grade levels (primary, middle, and high school). Teachers lack the time to find sites for spatial data, and reformat that data to use in a GIS. They need easy-to-use data that can be imported into a GIS such as Idrisi or ArcView.

2) I recommend we pursue finding partners for reprinting the teachers packets discussed above.

3) I recommend we remain involved with the NCGE. This is an organization who is coming to us for guidance, telling us how appreciated we are, and wanting to increase its involvement with us. In 1998 they initiated an educational project with NASA which is bringing publicity to both organizations. I believe the USGS is equally suited for such collaboration. **Note that the next conference of NCGE is THIS FISCAL YEAR – FY 2000 – in August, in Chicago.**

Acknowledgements:

I appreciate the USGS' support of my attendance at this event. I consider NCGE to be the most important event to my outreach duties of any conference during the year. Stephen LePage was once again a true pleasure to work with, and I commend him for his professionalism and knowledge about our organization, its goals, and our materials. Dave Szarzi in Denver provided excellent materials handling and recommendations.



Boston from the State House, where opening session was held.

****end of report****