

OUTREACH EVENT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Attendees Name and Report Writer:

**Joseph Kerski, Geographer:
Education/GIS, USGS, Denver, Colorado.**

Event:

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

Dates: 24-27 July 2002

Location: Colorado Convention Center, Denver, Colorado

Background

NCSL is an organization comprised of state legislators—those who serve in state houses and senates. It is more than an annual conference, but a professional organization that is concerned about issues such as budgets, natural resources, economics, health, justice, and education. It provides a forum for advancing ideas in each state, across states, and on Capitol Hill; for promoting information-sharing, one-on-one and collectively; and for providing state legislators with the knowledge and resources needed for them to get their jobs done most effectively.

The NCSL seeks to serve legislators in advancing their ideas. They do this by improving the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures, fostering interstate communication and cooperation, and helping ensure that legislatures have a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

The USGS exhibited last year at the NCSL conference in San Antonio, Texas. During

our May 2002 annual exhibits meeting, this conference was placed on the FY 03 list of events in which to host an exhibit. The next conference is in July 2003 in San Francisco.

The USGS communications program has long focused on six audiences—educators, general public, government, non-government, news media, and legislators. Clearly, the NCSL's main focus is legislators, and this conference represents the primary event of the year when we reach state legislators.

USGS Exhibit

This year, our exhibit was at the left side of the exhibit hall in a 20-foot exhibit space. We used two backdrops with large photographs depicting USGS science. We arranged materials on two tables in front of the exhibit but left space for attendees to enter the exhibit. The exhibit was located in the same aisle as a popular location where the NCSL was giving away free items to all attendees. The convention center is very large, with high ceilings, and therefore, I was thankful that we brought lights for the exhibit.



Joseph Kerski, Pat Schassburger, Steve Vandas, and Carolyn Bell were some of the USGS staff at the exhibit at the NCSL conference.



Carolyn Bell displays aerial photograph of Denver that we were giving away at the conference.



Items on left side table of the USGS exhibit included pamphlets, flyers, and pencils.



Left panel of USGS exhibit at the conference.



Right panel of USGS exhibit at conference.

We focused on the following theme for the USGS exhibit: Why science matters. Materials included flyers on The National Map, circulars on geologic mapping and water quality, fact sheets on the USGS, water resources, biology, geology, and geography, Earthquake information, our Internet resources, and pamphlets on GeoMac and USGS maps. The exhibit featured a flat panel monitor, laptop, and Internet connection. The high speed Internet connection was extremely valuable to look up and display USGS Internet resources for the attendees. For example, we quickly looked up two reports on water quality in Kansas lakes for a senator from that state, which he found quite useful.

The NCSL attendees are very selective about what they pick up. They at times asked, "What are the one or two most appropriate items for me to share with my district about science and the USGS?" Therefore, we were rightly selective on what we exhibited at the conference, and it seemed to me that what we brought was perfectly appropriate in variety and quantity.



Right side table with USGS materials at the NCSL conference.

Observations

State legislators are an incredibly diverse group. They have almost every conceivable professional background imaginable, including law, health, construction, education, and occasionally, science. It is a fascinating challenge to find something about the USGS that can interest some of them. In other cases, they are already interested particularly in environmental issues. Surprisingly (to me), only a few legislators who stopped at the exhibit were interested in finding out something specific from the USGS that would help them in the current or future legislative session.

Together with other USGS staff, I attended a dialogue on rebuilding confidence in democracy, engaging citizens, and bolstering state budgets. The dialogue was moderated by NPR National Political Correspondent Mara Liasson, and featured about a dozen state legislators. I found this quite interesting.

The exhibit hall featured an incredibly diverse array of organizations and companies that wanted the legislators to understand their mission and activities. These included organizations representing

the health profession, natural resources, and justice issues. Other federal agencies included the US Department of Energy and the US Census Bureau. Also of interest to the USGS were the following exhibitors: Yucca Mountain Project, ESRI, and the Association of State Geologists. I thought that the Wyeth exhibit (below) was the most interesting, offering a complete recording studio on site.



Wyeth exhibit that featured a soundproof recording studio where legislators could tape a 30-second public service announcement for their districts.

I found it quite fascinating to observe how different companies such as Phillip Morris and Mobil Exxon presented themselves. Distribution items from these organizations were incredibly varied—from trinkets and useful items of all shapes and sizes.



I was pleased to see many students at the conference. This photograph shows a student exhibit from Project Citizen, a project that teaches young people how to identify and deal with public policy problems in their community.

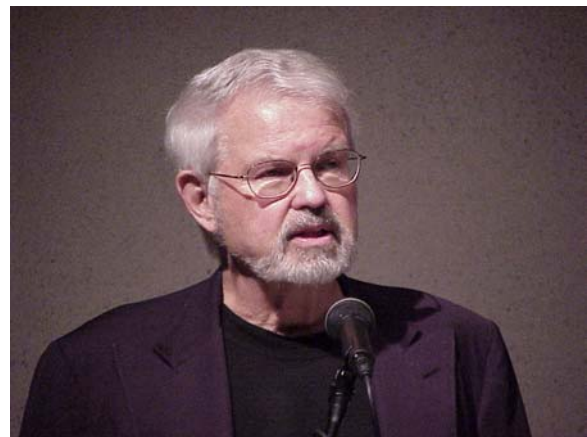
Recommendations

I found the NCSL conference quite interesting and worthwhile. I definitely believe we should participate in this conference each year. This was a conference for representatives in state government. I am sure we are looking into exhibiting at conferences for the national legislature as well or other venues to reach the US Congress.

I wonder how much interest we would have if we offered tours of the USGS for an hour after the conference ended during one of the conference days. We could have had tours of the Earthquake Center or the Rocky Mountain Mapping Center or the National Water Quality Lab this year as the conference was not far away. Perhaps this idea has already been pursued. Next year, we could offer tours of our western region office in Menlo Park, since the conference is in San Francisco.

Governor Lamm Speech

I attended a presentation by former Colorado Governor Richard D. Lamm. His speech focused on the political history of Colorado. The presentation also included a discussion of water availability, open space, and population growth. It was a great privilege to meet Governor Lamm; I gave him my card and invited him for a tour of the USGS. I teach at the University of Denver occasionally, which is where he teaches as well, and intend to follow up with him on this.



Richard D. Lamm, Governor of Colorado from 1975 to 1987.

Acknowledgements

I appreciated the USGS' support of the time for my attendance at this event. I thank the Central Region Office of Communications and others for their excellence in staffing the exhibit.

****end of report****