

Education Event Report

Name: Colorado State Fair

Participant: Joseph Kerski, Geographer, USGS, Denver

Other USGS Participants:

Steve Vandas (WRD), Pete Modreski (GD), and many others.

Dates: 19 August - 4 September 2000

Location: Pueblo, Colorado

Background:

Imagine constructing an entire museum and then staffing and operating an exhibit in that museum for 17 days with many other federal, state, and local agencies. That's exactly what the USGS did for our educational outreach effort at the 2000 Colorado State Fair.



The Colorado State Fair is an event lasting 17 days each August through Labor Day in Pueblo, in southern Colorado. Our building was near this gate.

The USGS was a participant, along with some 12 other Federal, State, and municipal agencies, in an "Explore Colorado" exhibit at the Colorado State Fair, which ran for 17 days in Pueblo, Colorado. The fair attract between 500,000 and 1 million visitors annually. This is the third time (1995, 1999, and 2000) that we

have had an exhibit at the fair, and the second year we have participated in a cooperative exhibit with these other agencies. We worked in a common area with these other agencies for a seamless approach. Only one other government agency, NOAA, was in a booth in another building. In addition, the Colorado Department of Transportation hosted an enormous aerial photo exhibit of the Interstate 25 corridor in Pueblo that must have been at least 35 feet long. The agencies in our building included USFS, the Bureau of Reclamation, NRCS, the Colorado State Forest Service, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, NPS, FWS, BLM, Pueblo Water District, and others, and it has been extremely popular with Fair visitors.



The USGS and the other agencies exhibited at a common area in the center of the Natural Resources Building. The “cave” is to the right of the exhibit.



Joseph Kerski (NMD) and Peter Modreski (GD Central Region Outreach Coordinator) work the exhibit on Saturday, 2 September 2000.



Inside the natural resources building with the cave on the left and the information exhibit on the right. This photo and the one above it represents the amount of booth traffic on a weekend.



Our exhibit is in this building.

The outside of the Natural Resources permanent building at the Colorado State Fair, just inside the "Governor's Gate." The USGS and the other agencies occupied the entire building.

Not only did we operate this joint exhibit space, but the inside of the entire building, the Natural Resources Pavilion, was constructed as a museum of Colorado resources. I was incredibly impressed by the construction done in the building. The construction team included our own USGS Central Region outreach team, particularly Steve Vandas and Pete Modreski. It is even better than last year's exhibit, which was quite impressive and, it seemed, difficult to improve upon.

The entire Natural and Cultural Resources Building was filled with murals, dioramas, scientific instruments (such as a "snow pillow" device to measure snow depth by weight) and hands-on activities depicting the various physical/ecological regions of Colorado--Mountains, Canyonlands, Plains, and Wetlands. "Water" is the theme of this year's exhibit. The exhibit includes ponds and a flowing stream, stuffed animals and birds, native and agricultural plants, rocks, a cave (with bats), and videos about Colorado. Activities include a computer terminal with water quizzes, "snow pillow" (snow measuring device) you can stand on, a table on which kids can sort gravel pebbles to match different rock types, a "scavenger hunt" for kids to find information and animals around the building, and assorted other demonstrations or activities each day. These activities included, while I was working there, presentations by the Pueblo Historical Museum and the Colorado (Bird) Raptors Association.



Demonstrations such as this one from the Pueblo Historical Museum and the Colorado Raptor (bird) Association occurred throughout the open hours of the Natural Resources pavilion.



"Colorado Mountains" region of the Natural Resources building.



Portion of "Colorado Plains" region of the Natural Resources pavilion.

Publicity

The Pueblo Chieftain newspaper on 20 August described the exhibit, "This year, the entire Natural Resources Building is devoted to water--where it comes from and where it flows to, the plants and animals and people and industry it nurtures along the way, water's history and its importance to Colorado's way of life, and some of the issues surrounding Colorado water." Steve Vandas, Central Region WRD outreach coordinator, was quoted in this article. This exhibit represents a truly unique opportunity for people to learn about their state, but also about science, and about what government agencies do that help citizens each day. It is hoped that our presence will result in a better informed public and support for our organization.

USGS Materials

Our displayed publications included ground water and watersheds posters in English and Spanish, GeoMac flyer about our involvement in the summer 2000 western wildfires, flyers on Earth Science Week, How to obtain information from the USGS, rocks and minerals, web page fact sheet, GIPs on USGS maps, Ground Water, Earthquakes, Volcanoes, Denver's Geologic Setting, sample maps, a Denver Landsat scene, Colorado map indexes, Earthshots satellite imagery cards, ASK USGS cards and bookmarks, and water resources bookmarks.

Staffing, Hours, Traffic

I worked four days at the fair. USGS staffers included those of us from the Central Region Outreach Team, but also we had excellent participation from the Pueblo WRD subdistrict office, and other USGS folks from the Central Region.

I and others conducted a number of counts of the number of people in the building at any one time, and how many were entering the front door. My count of people entering the front door was typically in the 400-900 range per hour during weekends and 100-300 range per hour during the weekdays. I counted over 200 people inside the building at any one time at several moments during the weekends.



Coloring Wildlife and water-related pictures in the Natural Resources Pavilion.

The building was open between noon and 10pm on weekdays, and between 10am and 10pm on weekends. That amounts to 100 weekday hours and 84 weekend hours, for a total of 184 hours. The USGS spent approximately \$5000 on the state fair exhibit and building, plus travel costs. We kept many staff days to single days, driving down from Denver. This made for some 18-hour days, but kept the travel costs as low as possible.

Benefits, Recommendations, and Acknowledgements

The benefits included:

(1) The opportunity to talk with the general public about our work. The “general public” at state fairs includes teachers, students, senior citizens, and working professionals representing hundreds of occupations. More often than not, these are people who do not attend GIS or educational conferences, or other events that the USGS participates in. For example, ranchers found our groundwater studies something they could use and follow up on if they were concerned about a certain water well on their land.

(2) Working with the staffers from the other agencies allowed us to get an inside view of what they do and why they do it, including their outreach-related and scientific publications. These are often the same the agencies we work with in data production agreements, research projects, and so on. I recommend that the USGS expand its outreach and publicity efforts if we participate in the state fair in the future for even more exposure. I also recommend that some of the executive staff visit outreach events; it would be valuable to get their input on what we’re doing and how we can improve it.

The outreach teams at the USGS will examine educational outreach this fall as a group organized by Director Groat.. We should continually examine the benefit we receive from exhibits versus publications versus web page development versus conducting workshop versus forming partnerships versus writing curriculum versus any other endeavor. Each one of them is worthy in itself, but each one could occupy 100% of our time. Given limited staffing and budgets, we need to be careful about which we spend time on.

I believe the greatest challenge about operating an event of this magnitude is to coordinate smooth transitions between days and staffpersons. Each agency was to have at least one staffperson there at all times. The Colorado Division of Wildlife, relying chiefly on volunteers rather than paid staffers, dominated the staffing numbers. This was quite impressive; one of my dreams at the USGS is to increase our volunteer program so that we can be more effective in a wide variety of our programs, including outreach and communication.

There was very little confusion on parking, what to do, where to report, what and where the materials were, and so on. Each day I worked, by following the clearly-written start-up and shut down procedures, I knew how to turn on the “natural resources sounds” CD, the videotapes, access the computer water quiz, stock materials not only for the USGS but for the other agencies, water the plants, and so on. I commend all those involved with this effort for a job very well done.

At an event such as this, when we needed materials for the next day, it was impossible to give the Information Services staff in Denver any forewarning. I thank the IS staff for responding to my visits to the product sales desk in building 810 in Denver and supplying me with fact sheets and GIPs. I also thank the Central Region WRD and Steve Vandas in particular for travel funds.



State Fairs represent a “deep fried” slice of Americana and a unique venue for the USGS!

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