

Education and Outreach Working Group

Sept 2002: Report of 2002 Activities for the October USCRTF Meeting

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The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force is charged with addressing issues related to protecting coral reefs in US waters. In addition to the many and far reaching scientific and monitoring activities of the task force, education and outreach activities have been identified as tools to address many of the challenges faced by coral reefs. Human practices are a primary agent for degradation of corals, and education and outreach are the mechanisms for improving awareness, changing behavior and practices, and developing policy and laws that lead to improved conditions for coral reef survival. The Outreach & Education Working Group (O&E WG) of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force has addressed coral reef outreach and education in the following ways during FY 2002.

Regular Teleconferences

Starting in March 2002, the O&E WG established a regular teleconference schedule to keep the group on task, provide regular contact between members, and to foster strong working relationships between Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) participants and government entities. Twelve to twenty two individuals participated in teleconferences on March 12, June 25, July 16, August 20, and Sept 19. In addition, the co-chairs held a pre-meeting teleconference before each O&E WG teleconference to plan the agenda and discuss issues.

Administrative Support

Also starting in March 2002, the O&E WG is receiving administrative support from NOAA. A portion of one NOAA Coral Reef Program staff member's time is dedicated to supporting the administrative needs of the O&E WG, and as a result:

- A draft contact list was produced for and distributed to participants, with an updated contact list expected by mid-November.
- A summary is produced for each teleconference and distributed to all individuals on the contact list.
- Relevant notices and information are distributed via e-mail to group participants. This ensures that interested parties that might not otherwise be informed of events are aware of upcoming events.

Recognition of the Role of NGOs

NGO participation is an important part of the O&E WG working group, and critical to the success of its mission. These organizations conduct a large portion of the coral reef education and outreach efforts within the waters of the USCRTF members. NGO participation in the O&E WG fosters good working relationships between members of the USCRTF and NGOs, which helps to support coral reef outreach and education efforts. To highlight the importance of NGO coral reef education and outreach efforts:

- The O&E WG has compiled a report titled “NGO Contributions to Conserve Coral Reefs” to be distributed at the USCRTF October meeting.
- The USCRTF 2001 Accomplishments Report also notes the importance of the NGOs in coral reef education and outreach.

Increased Local Outreach and Education during Fall USCRTF Meetings

Participants in the O&E WG recognized that the fall USCRTF meetings provide an ideal opportunity to offer coral reef education and outreach to the constituents at the host location. In order to encourage a stronger focus on public outreach and education during fall USCRTF meetings, the O&E WG participants submitted a list of suggestions to the Steering Committee for discussion at the July planning meeting. Some of these ideas will be incorporated into the October 2002 meeting, and with more lead time, more are anticipated for future meetings.

An example of a new public outreach and education effort for the fall 2002 USCRTF meeting is the revolving coral reef slide show produced by the O&E WG participants. The slide show (a power point presentation) contains images of and facts about coral reefs, with a focus on reefs in the waters of USCRTF members. This presentation will play in the ten to fifteen minute periods before sessions start when people are entering the meeting rooms and will provide information to attendees, as well as provide visual reminders of the issues facing coral reefs. In addition, the O&E WG plans to have the slide show available for educational purposes.