

## **USGS at the NSTA National Conference in Boston, Massachusetts**

USGS science plays an integral role in earth science instruction across the country, according to many participants at the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) annual conference in Boston, March 27-29, 2008. A large number of teachers, when approaching our exhibit, were heard to say, “Oh, USGS, my favorite organization!” or, “I use your materials all the time!.” Animated stories of USGS science used in many educational settings were ubiquitous.

The NSTA, founded in 1944, is the largest organization in the world committed to promoting excellence and innovation in science teaching and learning for all. The organization boasts a membership of 55,000 science teachers and administrators, scientists, and business and industry representatives. The NSTA publishes several professional journals and books for science educators and offers additional support through innovative education initiatives and science advocacy. This year, the national conference attracted 15,000 attendees, with approximately 1,500 sessions and 400 exhibits.

The USGS began attending NSTA again in 2005 after an absence of several years. Since then, USGS has reestablished a significant presence at the conference, manning a 30’ booth with the considerable talents of USGS colleagues from across the regions. Staffing the booth were Paul Barlow, WRD in Northboro, MA; Morgan Bearden, GIO in Rolla, MO; Liz Colvard, SIEO in Menlo Park, CA; Cher Cunningham, SIEO in Reston, VA; Gillian Fairchild, WRD in Northboro, MA; Ben Gutierrez, GD in Woods Hole, MA; Denis LeBlanc, WRD in Northboro, MA; Ellyn Montgomery, GD in Woods Hole, MA; Cheryl O’Brien, GIO/SILS in Reston, VA; Chris Polloni, GD in Woods Hole, MA; Bob Ridky, SIEO in Reston, VA; Nancy Soderberg, GD in Woods Hole, MA; Kama Thieler, GD in Woods Hole, MA; Janet Tilley, Geography in Reston, VA; Chris Waldron, WRD in Northboro, MA; Bill Winters, GD in Woods Hole, MA; and Pam Van Zee, EROS in Sioux Falls, SD. The Associate Directors responded generously to our request to support representatives from the disciplines.

The backdrop centerpiece, a collage titled, “USGS: Opening Windows to the Earth,” was complemented by

an array of products that are popular with teachers and available to order. Thousands of copies of more than 70 USGS products and publications were given away, including numerous fact sheets, circulars, public information sheets, bookmarks, maps, and posters. A limited number of This Dynamic Planet and Tapestry of Time and Terrain maps were made available each day and drew scores of Earth Science teachers to the booth. Teachers also found the USGS Education Resources for Teachers brochure and Facts on Disc, a searchable CD of USGS fact sheets, particularly useful. The exhibit contained one live port used to explore USGS science and answer questions and a flat-screen television that featured USGS films.

A beautiful image of Boston provided by EROS and the host of other USGS products and resources attracted many attendees and resulted in a number of conversations about the usefulness of USGS science not only in earth and environmental science classrooms, but also in biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics classes. Many conference participants left the exhibit with ideas for using USGS science in new and imaginative ways and were impressed with the range and accessibility of USGS resources.

The NSTA conference provided a unique opportunity for the USGS to meet and connect with the Nation’s important advance guard for developing the national literacy necessary to use and contribute to our areas of science. We successfully displayed the scope, depth, and significance of USGS science, with USGS representatives being energized to consider new strategies for effectively integrating research and education for mutual benefit. The conference confirmed that USGS science can truly “open windows to the Earth” for students and teachers alike and kindle a relationship with the natural world that will last a lifetime.

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