

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Reading *Coastal Services* helps you find out about successful coastal resource management programs and projects. Attending Coastal GeoTools 2009 will help you find out about technology and how it is being successfully used for coastal management.

The theme for Coastal GeoTools 2009, being held March 2 to 5 in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, is "Building the Digital Coast," a new initiative that provides easy access to organized and relevant data, tools, and technical training.

Many partners have joined with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Services Center to develop the Digital Coast. Phase one is currently available by pointing your browser to www.csc.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/.

Phase two, which will be released in early 2009, will include more partner data and information. Current Digital Coast partners include the Association of State Floodplain Managers, the Coastal States Organization, the National Association of Counties, the National States Geographic Information Council, and The Nature Conservancy.

The GeoTools registration deadline is January 31, 2009.

To get your technology fix before the conference, *Coastal Services* features an article on an experimental forecast system that has the potential to aid emergency managers during hazardous weather events, enable coastal planners to make better-informed decisions about locating infrastructure, and even eventually provide resource managers with the capability to monitor water quality.

The Coastal and Inland Flooding Observation and Warning project, or CI-FLOW, uses the latest in radar technology to detect how much rain is falling, incorporates the latest in two-dimensional river modeling to predict how water will flow through the hydrologic system, and uses the latest in storm surge models to get accurate predictions of water levels in the vulnerable flat coastal regions.

The North Carolina and South Carolina Sea Grant programs, several NOAA agencies, and other partners are working together on the CI-FLOW project. This is a good example of "One NOAA," where regional collaborations cut across NOAA line offices to better serve our customers. ❖



Margaret A. Davidson

The mission of the NOAA Coastal Services Center is to support the environmental, social, and economic well being of the coast by linking people, information, and technology.



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NEWS AND NOTES

Achieving Higher Degrees of Stakeholder Participation

Understanding the natural science is not enough. For coastal management initiatives to be effective, understanding the people side of the equation is equally important.

Top-down, agency-driven decision-making models are quietly becoming a thing of the past. Stakeholder participation is now seen as a fundamental operational component—a way to improve public support, reduce conflict, increase compliance, and help organizations make better policies and decisions.

The Nuts and Bolts of It

Engaging the public in coastal management has its costs. The process can be time-consuming, labor-intensive, confrontational, and expensive. If improperly managed, the process can create new conflicts or escalate existing challenges. Organizations need to do their homework, and do it well, to fully realize the benefits and side-step potential negatives.

Following some general rules can help organizations increase their chances of success.

The first rule is to determine when stakeholder participation is needed. Minor decisions and emergency situations are generally not appropriate. Complex situations with far-reaching impacts, on the other hand, usually warrant stakeholder involvement.

Next, some thought needs to go into defining who the stakeholders are. It is tempting to include "anyone who visits the beach" in a list, or some other equally broad statement. But a more methodical analysis can help an organization not only define the appropriate stakeholders, but also help answer some of the finer questions surrounding the participatory process, including the best meeting method, the optimal time and day for the meeting, and possible conflicts among stakeholders.

Many processes can be used to get people involved:

- Advisory group or task force
- Public meeting or town meeting
- Open house
- Workshop
- Charrette
- Field trip
- Retreat
- Focus group
- Poll or survey

The issue at hand, the stakeholders, schedules and time frames, level of input desired, and

agency capabilities are some of the factors that determine whether, how, and when stakeholder participation should be solicited.

Getting Help from the NOAA Coastal Services Center

The NOAA Coastal Services Center's Human Dimensions program provides technical assistance to coastal management professionals addressing complex, human-based problems. The Center's free publication, "Introduction to Stakeholder Participation," is a good starting point for information. Then, the Center can help organizations define their goals and challenges, design and evaluate an appropriate public participation process, and in some cases move the process along by providing a trained facilitator. ❖

To access these and other social science services, visit the Center's website at www.csc.noaa.gov and look under "Technical Assistance," or contact the Human Dimensions program manager, Tricia Ryan, at Tricia.Ryan@noaa.gov.



Introduction to Stakeholder Participation
Order this publication from Zac.Hart@noaa.gov.