



RAPID RESPONSE TEAM UPDATE

Serving Society through Ecological Expertise

Fall 2010

INFORMING POLICY AND THE PUBLIC WITH SCIENCE

➤ **LISA GRAUMLICH**, Director of the School of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of Arizona (now at the University of Washington), was among five witnesses to testify before the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming during a May 6, 2010 hearing to discuss the scientific evidence of climate change. In her prepared remarks, Graumlich stated that various sources of scientific evidence have demonstrated that “average Northern Hemisphere temperatures during the second half of the 20th Century are likely warmer than any other 50 year period in the past 1000 years.”

Graumlich also discussed her role in exonerating the Climatic Research Unit of any scientific malpractice in its climate research efforts. She was a member of the International Panel set up by the University of East Anglia to examine the work of the Climatic Research Unit known as “the Oxburgh Inquiry.”



Lisa Graumlich – Credit: House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming

➤ **ALLISON SNOW** (Ohio State University) testified July 8, 2010 before the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues. In her testimony, Snow noted the risks associated with releasing any genetically engineered organism into the environment, even one that might initially seem harmless.

“Once these organisms are released, they cannot be taken back. So this is a really big difference between a chemical spill or pollution where it might be able to be cleaned up or degraded. It’s just an obvious fact that organisms that reproduce have the potential to be out in the environment forever...very rarely in the whole history of trying to get rid of an invasive species — have we been successful. So, the dispersal of some GEOs [Genetically Engineered Organisms] could be rapid and widespread.”

Snow was the lead author of a 2005 position paper of the Ecological Society of America (ESA) evaluating the effects of GEOs released into ecosystems. Her expertise was also called upon during ESA's meeting in Pittsburgh when the media was covering new research on transgenic canola and a *Nature News* article offered Snow's perspective on the issue.

She and fellow RRT member **DIANNA PADILLA** (Stony Brook University) were also recommended in August 2010 to a staff member from the House Energy and Commerce Committee conducting research into the risks surrounding potential release of genetically modified algae into the environment.

RICHARD MACK (Washington State University), testified before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands during an April 10, 2010 hearing entitled "Losing Ground: The War on Buffelgrass in the Sonoran Desert." Mack's remarks focused on the invasive plant species buffelgrass (*Pennisetum ciliare*) and its detrimental impacts on ecosystems in the western United States.

IN THE MEDIA

➤ **STANLEY TEMPLE** (University of Wisconsin-Madison) participated in the BBC's 9/24 airing of the "Ask Rhod Gilbert" show to discuss his research on housecat predation and its substantial impacts on wild bird species. Temple conducted a mail survey of one percent of the rural residences in Wisconsin, asking questions about the cats that might be on their property and coupled this information with independent censuses. He also live-trapped free-ranging cats and analyzed what they were eating. "Our study suggests that there were at least 1.4 million free-ranging cats associated with the rural residences in Wisconsin...the typical free-ranging cat killed at least 5.6 birds per year," totaling at least 7.8 million birds per year killed by cats in Wisconsin alone. While Temple did not specifically suggest a method for how to deal with the cats, his research sparked multiple letters, including death threats by cat advocates labeling him a "cat-hater."

➤ The *LA Times*, *Greenwire* and several online news sources carried a story featuring **MONICA TURNER** (University of Wisconsin-Madison) and coauthors' research on bark beetles, which demonstrated that beetle attacks on trees actually reduce the risk of wildfires, contrary to previous thought. The study found that beetle-damaged pines drop their needles, and in doing so, lose the fuel to attract fast-moving fires between tree crowns. The study was published in ESA's *Ecological Monographs*.



Monica Turner
ESA File Photo

➤ **ROBERT TWILLEY** (Louisiana State University) proved to be a frequent source for news outlets this summer seeking local scientific perspective on the long and short-term impacts on the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon Gulf of Mexico Oil spill. Twilley was quoted in a range of print and online media not limited to *Energy and Environment Daily*, *Science Daily*, *Science* and *msnbc.com*.

➤ **JOSHUA SCHIMEL** (University of California-Santa Barbara) was interviewed for a July 2010 *Bloomberg Businessweek* story on the BP oil spill. Schimel noted that the BP spill likely “won’t create the same societal shifts that occurred after the Santa Barbara oil spill in 1969,” citing that oil played a considerably less prominent role in the Santa Barbara than the Gulf region, where local officials assert that oil is a vital part of their economy.

➤ **FELICIA COLEMAN** (Florida State University) was also among field specialists sought during the BP spill, primarily for her expertise on marine animals. Commentary from Coleman on the lasting consequences on a variety of marine life from oysters to dolphins and whales appeared in such prominent newspapers as the *Miami Herald*, the *Seattle Times* and *USA Today*. Separately, Coleman also received major coverage for her research into the behavior of marine fish. Her studies on how the holes dug by red groupers benefit marine life were featured in the *Washington Post* and *The Scientist*.

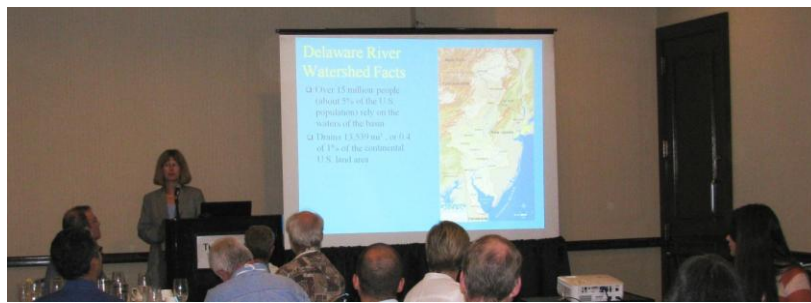
At the Annual Meeting

➤ During the RRT luncheon, held during the 2010 ESA Annual Meeting in Pittsburg, RRT members heard from **OLGA KUCHINSKAYA** of the University of Pennsylvania and **CAROL COLLIER**, Executive Director of the Delaware River Basin Commission.



Kuchinskaya at the RRT lunch
ESA File Photo

Olga’s presentation emphasized how control over the flow of information on a serious environmental disaster, such as the Chernobyl nuclear accident, can influence public perception. Collier discussed the collaborative efforts of local leaders to maintain the Delaware River Basin Commission and elaborated on its current role in watershed management efforts.



Collier talks to RRTers
ESA File Photo

ESA’s Public Affairs Office would like to hear from you! If you’ve been “in the news” or had an opportunity to inform decision-making, please let us know. We also encourage RRT members to come to us with new issues and areas where you would like to see action. Just drop an email to Terence Houston (Terence@esa.org) or Nadine Lynn (Nadine@esa.org).