



Ecological Society of America **Rapid Response Team Update**

Serving Society through Ecological Expertise

Spring 2008

Informing Congress...

- In August, RRT member Alan Townsend met with several representatives from the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming to discuss climate change legislation and also to introduce resources available through ESA, such as the Rapid Response Teams.

- In February, RRT members David Lodge and Richard Mack traveled to Washington, DC to attend events of the National Invasive Weed Awareness Week conference.



Dick Mack, left, and David Lodge at the National Invasive Weed Awareness Week conference.

They met with staff from eight key congressional offices and committees and with representatives from the Department of Agriculture, Department of Transportation, and the Fish and Wildlife Service to promote awareness of invasive species issues and ESA's position paper "*Biological Invasions: Recommendations for U.S. Policy and Management.*" As a result of these meetings, the House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans requested advice from Lodge and Mack on a draft bill to create a screening process for invasive species.

- In April, ESA's Public Affairs Committee met with staff from the office of Rep. Gerald McNerny (D-CA), who serves on two key House Science and Technology Subcommittees. McNerny's staff requested further information on cellulosic biofuels, and RRT member Phil Robertson provided timely information to the office.

Supporting Funding for Science...

- In April, RRT members responded to an ESA Action Alert to ask Congress to include additional funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the fiscal year 2008 emergency supplemental appropriations bill.
- ESA Graduate Student Policy Award winners Matthew Trager (Univ. of Florida) and Becky Chaplin-Kramer (Univ. of California-Berkeley) participated in this year's Spring Congressional Visits Day event sponsored by the Biological Ecological Sciences Coalition and the Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions. The group of 35 scientists, broken into small teams, met with nearly 70 Congressional offices with the goal of increasing federal funding for agricultural and biological research and education at the National Science Foundation and through the Department of Agriculture's National Research Initiative.



(L-R): ESA graduate student members Matthew Trager and Becky Chaplin-Kramer with ESA Science Policy Analyst Colleen Fahey and Public Affairs Director Nadine Lymn on Capitol Hill.

Reaching Out...

- ESA has recently launched several exciting podcast programs, one of which features interviews with scientists involved in ecological policy issues. The first episode of *"The Ecologist Goes to Washington"* features RRT member and ESA President Norm Christensen. Christensen recounts how he first became involved in policy and offers his personal perspectives on how ESA can best navigate policy issues while remaining true to science. He outlines the major ecological issues that the Society will likely tackle in the future and offers words of wisdom for scientists interested in applying their research in the policy arena. Listen to this and other podcasts on the ESA website <http://www.esa.org/podcast/>.
- RRT member and Vice President for Public Affairs Rich Pouyat was invited to speak to the Ecological Economics Student Group at the University of Maryland in March. Pouyat spoke to the graduate student-run group about the policy implications of scientific and economic research surrounding ESA's recent policy statement on biofuel sustainability.



Norm Christensen

- In April, RRT members Alan Covich and Norm Christensen gave presentations as part of a symposium about ESA's Southeast Regional Knowledge Partnership (SEKP) at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Southeastern Biologists. SEKP seeks to bring scientists, policy makers, and business and community leaders together to address the particular environmental issues confronting southeastern states. The purpose of this symposium was to generate dialogue among interested attendees and to explore the goal of creating regional level Rapid Response teams to complement the work of the national RRTs, but with particular focus on regional issues such as drought in the Southeast.



The Buzz about Biofuels...

- In January, ESA released a policy statement on biofuel sustainability that offers the ecological principles necessary for biofuels to help decrease dependence on fossil fuels and reduce carbon dioxide emissions that contribute to global climate change. RRT members Bob Howarth, Phil Robertson, and Laurie Drinkwater worked with ESA staff, the Public Affairs Committee and the Governing Board to produce the statement. The statement garnered widespread media and internet blog coverage, as well as a speaking invitation at the Annual Meeting of the National Oilseed Processors Association.
- On March 10, ESA hosted a conference entitled "The Ecological Dimensions of Biofuels" for 350 attendees to hear invited presentations by leading scientists from academia and industry. A two-day intensive workshop followed the conference, where 40 invited participants worked on developing a report summarizing opportunities for additional research and strategies for how key stakeholders could respond to those needs. Workshop participants included RRT members Phil Robertson, Laurie Drinkwater, Virginia Dale, Rich Pouyat, and John Wiens.
- Resulting products from the biofuels conference and workshop include a congressional briefing on cellulosic biofuel sustainability scheduled for June 11 on Capitol Hill, publications in ESA's journals and *Issues in Ecology*, submission of an article for *Science's* Policy Forum, and ESA factsheets and other educational materials.

In the Media...

- As a result of ESA's policy statement on biofuel sustainability, RRT members responded to several media requests. Norm Christensen responded to questions about U.S. biofuel policies and how they relate to those in the U.K. RRT member Phil Robertson recorded a radio interview for BBC Radio regarding the findings and conclusions of the policy statement.
- In March, an ESA press release highlighted the work of new RRT member David Inouye on global climate change's effects on wildflower phenology. His article in *Ecology's* Special Feature on Phenology attracted the attention of KVMR-FM Radio, *Nature* Reports: Climate Change, Miller-McCune.com, and *ScienceDaily*, among others.



Phil Robertson

Welcome, New RRT Members!

Sharon Collinge

Associate Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies
University of Colorado, Boulder, CO



Dr. Collinge's scholarship and teaching emphasize understanding the ecological consequences of human-induced changes to natural systems. Her research centers on the impacts of habitat loss, fragmentation, and restoration on the persistence of native species. Her current projects focus specifically on the impacts of landscape alteration on disease dynamics in prairie dogs and the use of ecological theory to guide efforts to restore vernal pool ecosystems. She is particularly interested in the interface between environmental science and policy regarding endangered species and habitat protection.

David Inouye

Professor of Ecology and Conservation Biology
University of Maryland, College Park, MD



Dr. Inouye has worked with bumblebees, euglossine bees, pollinating flies, tephritid flies, hummingbirds, and wildflowers, on topics including pollination biology, flowering phenology, plant demography, and plant-animal interactions such as ant-plant mutualisms, nectar robbing, and seed predation. His long-term studies of flowering phenology and plant demography are being

used now to provide insights into the effects of climate change at high altitudes. He directs the graduate program in Sustainable Development and Conservation Biology. He serves as Secretary for the ESA Governing Board and is also the founder and moderator for the ESA's ECOLOG-L listserv.

Steve Polasky

Professor of Ecological and Environmental Economics
University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN



Dr. Polasky's research interests include biodiversity conservation, endangered species policy, integrating ecological and economic analysis, valuing ecosystem services, environmental regulation, game theory, common property resources, and renewable and nonrenewable resources. He was the senior staff economist for environment and resources for the President's Council of Economic Advisers from 1998 to 1999 and also served as co-editor for the *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*. Dr. Polasky is currently serving on the Science Advisory Board for EPA.



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*** Informing Congress...**

- In January, Jason Neff and Alan Townsend, members of the biogeochemistry RRT, responded to a request from Senator Dianne Feinstein's (D-CA) office to evaluate ideas regarding climate change legislation.
- Also in January, climate and biogeochemistry team members Lisa Graumlich, Alan Townsend, Jason Neff, and Lou Pitelka, assisted the Congressional Research Service—a congressional support agency—in reporting on climate change effects on ecosystems, biodiversity, and wildlife.
- In May, RRT member Bill Schlesinger provided testimony at a Joint Subcommittee Oversight Hearing: “The Future of Fossil Fuels: Geological and Terrestrial Sequestration of Carbon Dioxide.” The hearing involved the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, and the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources.
- Also in May, invasive species RRT member Richard Mack met with congressional offices, personnel from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, U.S. Forest Service officials, and the Congressional Research Service to promote ESA's position paper “*Biological Invasions: Recommendations for U.S. Policy and Management.*”



Dick Mack meets with Legislative Assistant Chrissy Poe in the Office of Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) about invasive species issues.

- In early June, RRT member Gary Lovett, along with Charley Driscoll from Syracuse University, met with five congressional offices to highlight concerns about proposed budget cuts for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) surface water monitoring programs.



Gary Lovett speaks with his Congresswoman, Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), about restoring funding for EPA surface water monitoring programs.

* *Supporting Funding for Science...*

- RRT members responded to an ESA Action Alert to ask Congress to exempt the National Science Foundation (NSF) from the Continuing Resolution freeze and to fund NSF at the fiscal year 2007 levels passed by the Appropriations Committees. Congress did provide NSF's Research and Related Activities with a 7.7 percent increase.
- Science Education RRT members Alan Berkowitz and Carol Brewer participated in this year's Spring 2007 Congressional Visits Day event sponsored by the Biological Ecological Sciences Coalition (BESC) and the Coalition on Funding Agricultural Research Missions (CoFARM). The group of 40 scientists, broken into small teams, met with over 70 Congressional offices to bolster support for agricultural and biological research and education at NSF and through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Research Initiative.



On Capitol Hill: ESA Director of Education Jason Taylor with Science Education RRT members Carol Brewer and Alan Berkowitz

* *In the Media...*

Greenhouse Gas Emissions...

In November, 2006, members of the climate RRT helped ESA prepare a statement on climate change that was released when the Supreme Court began hearing oral arguments in the case of *Massachusetts et. al. vs. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)*. In a 5-4 ruling on the case, the Supreme Court determined that the EPA has the authority to regulate carbon dioxide emissions from new motor vehicles. ESA's statement is available at:

<http://www.esa.org/pao/newsroom/pressReleases2006/11292006.php>

Climate Change...

In February, National Public Radio's Earth & Sky program asked scientists "What would you like to tell the American public, right now, about global climate change?" Two of the 26 featured quotes were from RRT members Alan Townsend and Lisa Graumlich:

Alan R. Townsend ... "no longer on the distant horizon"

"Global climate change is no longer just a threat on the distant horizon. It is with us today, and it is already affecting the lives of people around the world. We can do something about it, but now is the time for nations everywhere to begin those efforts in earnest. The more we delay, the more we increase the probability of abrupt and truly significant changes in climate that would have enormous social and economic consequences."



Lisa Graumlich ... "national parks"

"For the past 25 years, I have been doing field work at high elevations in the mountains of the western US. I have worked in the premier national parks, including Glacier, Yellowstone, Mt. Rainier, Yosemite, and Sequoia. In all of these parks, we are seeing the fingerprint of global climate change. Glaciers are disappearing and plants, animals and insect pests are moving upslope at unprecedented rates. Our national parks can no longer be protected from human influence by building a fence or hiring park rangers. Recall that national parks are an American invention. In fact, the writer Wallace Stegner often remarked that the idea of national parks was the best idea that we ever had. It's my fervent hope that we find the will to address global climate change in order to ensure that the parks and wild places of the West continue to delight and inspire future generations."



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Autumn 2006

** At ESA's Annual Meeting in Memphis, TN ...*

Media Activities... ESA's Public Affairs Committee and RRT members led a well-attended and productive workshop on communicating ecology with metaphors, anecdotes, and analogies. RRT members also were interviewed by attending media about invasive species in grasslands, and the effects of changing nitrogen cycles on human health.

Congressional Staff... ESA often hosts one or two congressional staff members at the Annual Meeting, enhancing the communication of science and establishing personal networks between scientists and policy-makers. The congressional staff member hosted in Memphis met with Agroecology RRT members as well as RRT member and Vice-President for Public Affairs Rich Pouyat.



ESA's bustling Annual Meeting Press Office

RRT Luncheon ... ESA's second annual luncheon for RRT members highlighted the accomplishments of the RRTs over the past two years and featured a working discussion led by outgoing ESA President Nancy Grimm on the future RRT structure and functions.

** Looking Ahead ...* ESA's Public Affairs Office is planning the next round of RRT activities, and working on enhancing and updating ESA's Experts Guide and website. Stay tuned – we will be contacting you for your feedback and updated biographical information. Please send ideas and suggestions for future RRT opportunities and activities to Laura Lipps at Laura@esa.org

** Providing Input to Congress...*

RRT Team Member Dennis Whigham co-led a group of congressional staff on a wetlands field trip, along with colleagues and ESA members Pat Megonigal and Tom Jordan. The field study formed part of an educational course for congressional staff on the fundamentals of wetland science, sponsored by the ESA, the Society of Wetland Scientists, and the American Society for Limnology and Oceanography.



Congressional staff members take measurements in a tidal wetland.

** Providing Input to the Media...*

As the 2006 hurricane season got underway, reporters called ESA's Press Office to get in touch with RRT members with expertise in hurricanes and ecosystems. If you have been in the news lately, we encourage you to submit stories to Annie@esa.org, to be posted on ESA's website.

** Supporting Science at Federal Agencies...*

Providing Comments on Rulemaking ... ESA's President, with the assistance of Aquatic Ecology RRT members, submitted comments to the Environmental Protection Agency on its proposed rule on stream mitigation. The comments are available at:

<http://www.esa.org/pao/esaPositions/Letters/letterDocket06302006.php>

Supporting Funding for Science ... RRT member Alan Townsend joined 80 other scientists to discuss science funding with Members of Congress, as an ESA representative for the Coalition for National Science Funding. ESA's Public Affairs Office brings RRT members, students, and scientists from all career stages to D.C. for science policy training and targeted meetings with Congressional offices.

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Spring 2006

Providing Informational Briefings...

*** Invasive Species...** In March, RRT members David Lodge, Dick Mack, and Susan Williams, co-authors of ESA's recent position paper on invasive species, unveiled the paper at a National Press Club briefing to an audience of approximately 75, including federal agency representatives, Congressional staff, and members of the media.

*** Disturbance...** In March, RRT members Monica Turner and Robert Twilley briefed congressional staff on ecological recovery of natural resources from fires and hurricanes.

RRT members held tailored, one-on-one meetings with congressional staff in addition to the briefings.



Dr. Susan Williams presents recommendations for federal invasive species policy at the National Press Club.



Congressional staff discuss science policy with biologists.

Supporting Funding for Science...

RRT members voiced their support for funding the ecological sciences:

* In March, members called their representatives to encourage support for the National Science Foundation.

* RRT member Jason Neff joined ESA student members to discuss science funding with their Members of Congress, as part of ESA's biannual Congressional Visits Day (CVD)

Serving the Judicial Branch...

In January, RRT scientists worked with several scientific societies, including ESA, to craft an Amicus Curiae (“Friend of the Court” brief) on wetlands for the Supreme Court. The Court heard arguments on several wetlands cases in early 2006.

In April, RRT member Ron Kneib participated in a follow-up forum on wetlands and federal law.



credit: National Park Service

The brief is available in the current ESA Bulletin at: <http://www.esapubs.org/bulletin/current/current.htm>

Serving the Media...

* ***Climate change ...*** In April, RRT climate scientists worked with ESA President Nancy Grimm to submit a letter from ESA to the editor of the Wall Street Journal regarding climate change. A copy of the letter can be found at: <http://www.esa.org/pao/esaPositions/Letters/letterWSJ04122006.php>

* ***ESA meetings ...*** In January, RRT members attending the ESA Merida meeting made themselves available for interviews, and several were interviewed by Mexican television and print media.



* ***Impacts of Ecological Research...***

RRT members provided a wealth of success stories where ecological research has directly benefited society. ESA will compile these for use as anecdotes with the media and policy makers.

Rapid Responders: ESA's Public Affairs Office wants to hear from you!

Please send ideas and suggestions for future RRT opportunities and activities to Laura@esa.org.

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Winter 2005

Serving the Legislature...

* **Endangered Species...** Several Rapid Response Team (RRT) members have been working diligently with congressional staff to ensure that ecological science informs potential revisions to the Endangered Species Act. RRT scientists briefed Hill staff in several working sessions, commented on draft legislative language, and participated in multi-society brainstorming sessions on creative solutions to impasses.

* **Hurricane Katrina...** RRT scientists briefed congressional staff on the importance of integrating ecological science into decision making for recovery of Gulf Coast ecosystems.



ESA President Nancy Grimm announces ESA RRTs to a Capitol Hill audience.

* **Education, Marine Resources, and more...** RRT members contributed their expertise to a variety of legislative issues through the year:

- ◆ Education RRT scientists reviewed and commented on draft House legislation on incentives for science education.
- ◆ Marine ecology RRT scientists provided information on federal fisheries science to congressional staff.

Rapid Responders:

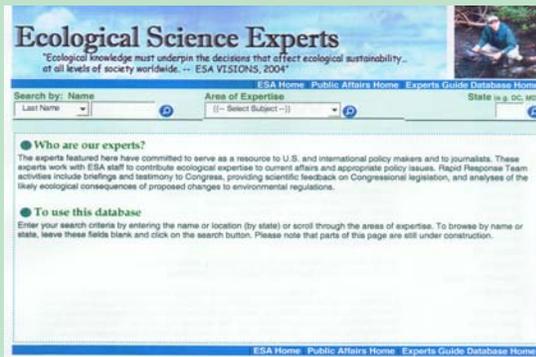
*ESA's Public Affairs Office
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*Please send ideas and suggestions
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Serving the Executive Branch...

- * **Invasive Species ...** Several RRT members submitted comments to federal agencies on invasives issues such as U.S. Department of Agriculture plant importation rules and management of invasive marine algae. RRT members reviewed and updated ESA's outreach materials on invasive species.
- * **Forest Management ...** RRT scientists worked with ESA's President to provide comments to the Forest Service on its National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule.
- * **Marine Science ...** Marine Ecology RRT members provided scientific comments to federal agencies on several issues, from National Marine Fisheries Service stock revival to invasive marine species.

Serving the Media...



- * **Web Search...** ESA launched the Experts Guide Website, aimed at policy makers and media. Visitors search by location or area of expertise for profiles of each RRT member. Search for experts at www.esa.org/experts

- * **Hard Copy...** ESA provides Experts Guides in print and Experts travel mugs at press and Hill events to increase awareness of the RRTs.

- * **Annual Meeting...** RRT members met with Canadian policy staff and science reporters to discuss the role of RRTs in science communication. See *Nature's* blog (subscription required) for details: <http://www.nature.com/news/columnsandblogs/0508.html>

