

Wetland Community Prepares for 21st Century Wetland Issues at Wisconsin Wetlands Association's 13th Annual Conference in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin

Laura England, WWA Outreach Programs Director

“Wetlands are at the center,” said Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle in his remarks on what the state needs to do to protect our region’s treasured water resources. The Governor addressed a crowded room at the conclusion of a special session on *Climate Change & Wetlands*, one of the program highlights at WWA’s 13th Annual Conference, held in Oconomowoc on January 31st and February 1st in honor of World Wetlands Day. The Governor and preceding speaker Tia Nelson also underscored a point that was emphasized by our plenary speakers and other presentations throughout the conference – the coming decades will bring many challenges for wetlands, and a sea change for wetland protection will require the commitment, leadership and collaboration of the wetland community and decision-makers of the region.

The theme of this year’s conference, *Wetlands in the 21st Century: Altered Landscapes & Changing Climates*, drew presenters from around the Midwest to present their work to an audience of nearly 300 wetland enthusiasts representing 11 states and nearly one hundred organizations. The conference began with an introduction to the theme by Glenn Guntenspergen of the U.S. Geological Survey, whose research assesses the impacts of climate change and landscape alterations on wetland habitat in the prairie pothole region.

Barbara Bedford of Cornell University completed the morning session with a keynote address on the connections between wetland science and policy based on her personal experience having served as a scientific advisor on numerous federal wetland policy issues – legislative, regulatory and judicial. While her experience exemplifies the uphill battle that wetland advocates often face, Barbara’s remarks also provided inspiration for wetland scientists to take on their critical role in the policy-making process.

Nearly fifty presenters shared their work in the concurrent sessions and poster session that followed during this two-day event. Presentations covered a diversity of wetland projects, from studies of the habitat needs of individual wetland species to the quantification of wetland services to landscape-scale monitoring efforts. The special session on *Climate Change & Wetlands* was particularly well received. The session opened with a presentation by the distinguished University of Wisconsin-Madison Professor Emeritus John Magnuson on the effects of climate change on water resources in general followed by presentations on the effects of climate change on wetland carbon storage and emissions, peatland biodiversity and amphibian species.

Amphibians were also the focus of our banquet presentation given by Kevin Zippel, Amphibian Ark Program Director. Kevin impressed upon the audience the gravity of the global amphibian conservation crisis and provided a bit of a morale boost with a discussion of what his organization and others are doing to prevent species extinctions including the *2008 Year of the Frog* global outreach campaign.

As usual, our wetland field trips concluding our conference were well attended. While temperatures hovered just below freezing, this was easily the warmest weather we have had in years for our conference field trips. Participants noted that despite the layers of snow and ice at

tour sites, they really enjoyed getting a chance to see wetland restoration projects, wetland mitigation projects, and high quality wetlands.

Wisconsin Wetlands Association thanks the many presenters, advisory panel members, field trip leaders, moderators, volunteers, exhibitors, sponsors and others who contributed to the success of this World Wetlands Day event. This conference contributed to a growing collaboration for protecting and conserving wetlands across the region. Visit

www.wisconsinwetlands.org/2008conference.htm for more photos and conference information including a PDF of the program with presentation abstracts.



Wetlands in the 21st Century:

Altered Landscapes & Changing Climates

13th Annual Conference
January 31 & February 1, 2008
Oconomowoc, Wisconsin



Opening of Wisconsin Wetlands Association's 13th Annual Conference, Jan 31 & Feb 1, 2008.



Poster session at Wisconsin Wetlands Association's 13th Annual Conference.



Wetland Field Trip at Wisconsin Wetlands Association's 13th Annual Conference.



Banquet at Wisconsin Wetlands Association's 13th Annual Conference.