Preparing For Our Future: 2013 AGU Science Policy Conference

Incorporating Earth and space science research into policy is integral to supporting any nation’s public safety, security, and economic growth. At the national and global level, Earth and space policies address the inter connects of science and policy fields. AGU convened its second annual Science Policy Conference as a forum to engage stakeholders. The meeting, held 24-26 June in Washington, D.C., featured contributions from government, industry, academia, media, and nonprofits.

The goal of the conference was to provide a platform for discussion on the challenges and opportunities for science and policy at the intersection of space science applications that serve local, national, and international communities.

Several events accompanied this year’s conference. We hope you can join us in 2014.

—ERIK HANKIN, Public Affairs Coordinator, AGU;
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Session on Severe Weather Highlights Collaboration Between Research and Policy

Wildfires, floods, and winds that can blow down houses are very different types of severe weather hazards. However, one solution will reduce our risk for all of them—better communication and collaboration between scientists and policy makers. Experts share their perspectives on the uniqueness of their research fields, and what steps can be taken to work together.

—ELIZABETH LANDAU, Public Affairs Manager, AGU; E-mail: elandau@agu.org

Watch Video and More Online!

View the two 2013 AGU Science Policy Conference plenary sessions on video-on-demand; review ePosters presented at the conference; read the conference blog, The Bridge: Connecting Science and Policy; see news articles about the conference; and more.

http://spc.agu.org

For information and updates about the 2014 Science Policy Conference, visit http://spc.agu.org/2013/mailing-list/ and join the conference mailing list.
The Science and Communication Needed to Help Communities Plan for Sea Level Rise

From the shores of Bangladesh to the bayous of Louisiana, sea level rise will affect communities across the globe and will likely be exacerbated by other threats such as severe weather. Local and national decision makers face a myriad of challenges as they prepare for or adapt to changing coastal conditions while trying to manage increasing population and development along the coasts. In the United States alone, approximately 30% of the population lives in a coastal county.

During the 2013 AGU Science Policy Conference, an expert panel discussed how sea level rise will affect public safety, national security, and other challenges facing the United States. During the session “Sea Level Rise: Science Needed for Local Decisions,” Rear Admiral Jonathan White, oceanographer and navigator of the U.S. Navy, informed the audience that planning needs to happen at all levels, “from the White House to the state house to the boathouse.”

“Sea level rise is like politics—it’s all local,” said Ken Miller, professor at Rutgers University. This statement accurately captures the complexities of sea level rise. Although there is a global rise in sea level, when looking at it on smaller scales the amounts of land submerged are very different and a multitude of factors need to be taken into account, such as sinking land, coastal topography and habitat, human use and infrastructure, tidal range, and sediment transport.

Detrimental effects of sea level rise can include coastal flooding, groundwater contamination and saltwater intrusion, and soil changes due to increased salt content—all of which can extend inland for many miles. For example, in Broward County, Florida, seawater is already flooding homes and streets and affecting the drinking water of local residents; more than $12 billion in infrastructure is at risk from a projected 3-foot sea level rise predicted to occur between 2075 and 2100. Jennifer Jurado, director of Broward County’s Natural Resources and Management Division, explained how southeast Florida is working to adapt to these challenges it already faces.

One important message that resonated throughout the panel was not only that scientists and decision makers need to commu- nicate the risks, future scenarios, and uncertainties of sea level rise but also that attention should be focused on larger needs of local communities. Lynne Carter, program manager of the Southern Climate Impacts Planning Program at Louisiana State University, recently conducted a survey that indicated that the planning horizon for most Gulf Coast communities extends only 1-5 years. For successful mitigation of the effects of sea level rise, communities must start looking farther into the future, Carter stressed.

When communities do not look at the long term, people and property are at risk, speakers agreed. Incorporating science into planning and decision making is essential and requires that the scientific community make a concerted effort to communicate their research.

How best to do this? Panel member Margaret Davidson, acting director of the National Ocean Service Office of Coastal Resource Management at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, provided an answer. “Communicating climate change is like golf,” she said. “You have to play it where it lies.” She suggested that if the language of science isn’t working, scientists need to use familiar phrases and ideas to speak to decision makers.

—KRISTAN UHLENBROCK

Science Policy and Education Events at 2013 Fall Meeting

Programming for the 2013 Fall Meeting is under way, and the schedule promises to be even more exciting than last year. Science policy–related events planned for the 2013 Fall Meeting include the following.

Communicating With Congress Workshop

Provides an opportunity for heads and chairs of Earth and space science departments to share ideas and tips on how to build strong departments.

Geophysical Information for Teachers (GIFT) Workshop

Includes presentations by leading research scientists coupled with take-it-to-the-classroom activities. This 2-day workshop, held in partnership with the National Earth Science Teachers Association (NESTA), is for current and preservice middle and secondary school teachers.

Congressional Science and Mass Media Fellow Luncheons

One luncheon provides attendees with information on AGU’s Congressional Science Fellowship program, which places accomplished scientists, engineers, and other professionals in the office of a member of Congress or on a congressional committee for 1 year. The other luncheon gives an overview of the Mass Media Fellowship program, which places a university student at a newspaper, magazine, broadcast or cable news department, or newsw Web site for a 10-week summer internship.

Exploration Station

A family event designed to showcase AGU science and allow children and the public to interact directly with scientists and education specialists. Exploration Station includes educational exhibits and hands-on activities. This event, open to the general public (of all ages), includes a featured speech given by an AGU scientist. This year’s speaker is Lucille Jones, of the U.S. Geological Survey. Her talk will focus on natural hazards in urban centers.

Town Hall Meetings

Provide opportunities for government agencies, academic programs, special projects, and other focused interest groups to gather input from the broader AGU community. They are open to all meeting participants.

Honors Tribute

Acknowledges the achievements of AGU medalists, awardees, the prize recipient, and Fellows.

To learn more about these events, visit the AGU Fall Meeting Web site: http://fallmeeting.agu.org/2013. To learn more about science policy–related sessions at the 2013 Fall Meeting, search for the “Public Affairs” topic in the drop-down menu of the Session Search Web page: http://fallmeeting.agu.org/2013/sciencedef-program/session-search/