Inaugural C-ESTA event strives to build network of networks

Photo courtesy Rhode Island Sea Grant.

The first Coastal Ecosystem Stewardship in the Americas (C-ESTA) conference, held at URI's W. Alton Jones Campus in March, brought together donors, social entrepreneurs, and practitioners from North, Central, and South America to create connections, reflect on experiences, explore ideas, and strengthen collective capacity for effective stewardship of the lands, rivers, coasts, and oceans of the Americas.

The brainchild of Stephen Olsen, URI Coastal Resources Center (CRC) director; Barry Costa-Pierce, Rhode Island Sea Grant director; and Glenn Page, a principal with the EcoLogix Group in Annapolis, Md., C-ESTA gathered over 40 people from seven countries in the Americas who share similar aspirations yet continue to struggle to achieve the results that lead to better stewardship of ecosystems. In his opening remarks, Costa-Pierce said, "Practitioners are heroes—they have changed the world one community at a time. They are all about the 'do' of sustainability principles. Sustainability is not nirvana, but a way to make things incrementally better over time, plateau by plateau, and by providing examples to others along the way."

"Stewardship and governance of coastlines is the focus of C-ESTA," added Olsen. "There are stewardship principles that hold everywhere and good practices that hold anywhere, yet the places are different, and this event is a way to pull the places together to look for the commonalities and needs that exist across all such efforts to improve sustainable coastal management."

"We met in an attempt to integrate across sectors and disciplines to explore complex, systemic, and multifaceted issues that cannot be solved by any one program, institution, method, or process," said Page. "We know each location has its own unique sets of issues. We also know that there are overarching societal and ecological conditions that are shared by all coastal stewardship efforts. It is difficult to see the whole picture. Networks of donors and networks of practitioners are forming but they intersect only occasionally."

C-ESTA attendees agreed to strengthen the networks that include URI, CRC, and Sea Grant as an essential hub for all nations; to embark on realistic partnering at the local level since all coastal sustainability efforts are local; to involve Canada more explicitly in the efforts due to that nation's leadership in funding local sustainability efforts; and to hold the next C-ESTA event in 2009 in Latin America.

Presentations and a summary of the meeting can be found at: *seagrant-tadm.gso.uri.edu/cesta/*.

—Malia Schwartz

SEA TURTLE FIXED-GEAR WORKSHOP GENERATES IDEAS FOR REDUCING ENTANGLEMENTS

Fishermen, state and federal fisheries managers, gear technologists, nongovernmental organizations, sea turtle biologists, and sea turtle stranding and disentanglement network members from Virginia to Canada came together in Rhode Island in April to "share information, hear a diversity of opinions, and explore new ideas for reducing entanglements and disentangling sea turtles," said David Beutel, workshop facilitator and a Rhode Island Sea Grant fisheries extension specialist.

Sea turtles become incidentally entangled in fixed fishing gear, and if unable to get free, they can drown. NOAA Fisheries' Northeast Regional Office (NERO) has documented these interactions in their region, which extends from the Canadian border to the Mid-Atlantic. In response to fixed-gear entanglements, the agency initiated the Sea Turtle Disentanglement Network (STDN) in 2002, but realized that preventing entanglement in the first place was a more proactive step in addressing turtle-gear interactions. To that end, they enlisted Sea Grant's help in facilitating the workshop. "The charge for these two days is to better understand how and why turtles become entangled in lines, consider solutions and ideas to reduce entanglements, and improve entanglement response and reporting," said Carrie Upite, NERO biologist.

The first day of the workshop pulled together information on sea turtles in the region, their life histories and where they are found, their interactions with fishing gear, and how the STDN is responding to entanglements. The day concluded with a hands-on gear demonstration and description of various gear configurations and options currently being used by the fishing industry. The second day engaged participants in breakout group discussions around the options for reducing sea turtle entanglement in vertical lines (the up-and-down lines attached to buoys or markers where most sea turtles entangle) and options for improving disentanglement. "I feel that the workshop was a great success based on the discussions we had and your willingness to think about potential ways to reduce sea turtle entanglements," reflected Sara McNulty, NERO sea turtle stranding coordinator. "Over the next several months, NERO will be looking into research options and prioritizing the ideas that came out of the workshop."

Proceedings of the workshop, including the outcomes and ideas from the group discussions are being compiled by Rhode Island Sea Grant and should be available from NERO by the end of the summer.

"We need a stronger outreach program when it comes to sea turtles. This outreach needs to be proactive. If we can be proactive, we're not reactive, and when we're reactive, we're defensive," said Beutel. "When working together with a multitude of ideas, we will make progress. We have identified ideas for research on gear and turtle behavior. This is a good start."

—Malia Schwartz

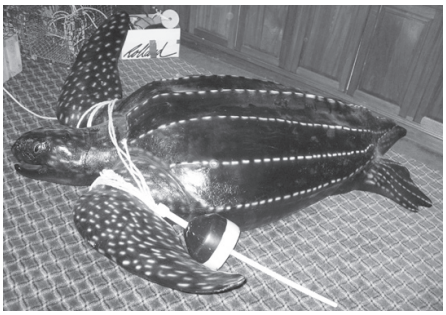

Photo by Malia Schwartz.