

Stoss on the Environment

Frederick W. Stoss

SUNY Buffalo

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National Library for the Environment

TFOE has a Newsletter! GreeNotes

Science and the Environment : Back to Basics ... Again -- A Behind the Scenes Look in Producing a New Education and Information Tool

The National Library for the Environment

Abstract:

Fred Stoss is one of the original co-chairs of the CNIE Steering Committee for the National Library for the Environment. He assisted in writing the proposal to create the NLE and initiated efforts to secure the endorsement of the NLE and the NIE by the Special Libraries Association, which was submitted to SLA's Division Cabinet and Board of Directors in 1992 by then ERMD Chair Patty Owen and approved by the SLA Board of Directors and endorsed by SLA in January 1993. Stoss has previously written about the NLE and NIE in the Electronic Green Journal </egj03/stoss02.html> and elsewhere. This article has been compiled from a variety of NIE sources, including its Web Pages, Newsletter, and personal communications with various staff, including CNIE Senior Scientist David Blockstein.

A National Library for the Environment has been proposed as a single point of access to the wealth of environmental information produced around the world. This library would provide information through an electronic infrastructure with links to major collections of data and centers of environmental expertise in both scientific and policy settings. An earlier article in the Electronic Green Journal </egj03/stoss02.html> provided the readers of this journal with an introduction to this initiative. This article serves as an update to that initial EGJ article.

The NLE Proposal

Committee for the National Institute for the Environment (CNIE) <<http://www.cnie.org/>> is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the scientific basis for making decisions on environmental issues through the creation of a nonregulatory federal science agency known as the National Institute for the Environment (NIE).

A key component of the proposed NIE will be an electronic, on-line National Library for the Environment (NLE), <<http://www.cnie.org/nle/>>. This library will address the need for objective, scientifically sound information on environmental, ecological, geochemical, and geophysical issues. The scope and mission of the NLE was formulated in May 1992 at a gathering of NIE supporters. The core group assembled at that meeting formed the Steering Committee for the NLE. The broad outline of the NLE continues to evolve, and input from the library community is always welcomed.

The CNIE has proposed initial NLE initiatives and plans to eventually include three on-line components (with other components to be added to the NLE concept in the future):

Congressional Research Service Reports;
An Encyclopedia of the Environment; and
In-Depth Issues in the Environment.

Congressional Research Service Environmental Reports from the NLE
The Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports <http://www.cnie.org/nle/crs_main.html> are presented as a service of the Committee for the National Institute for the Environment (CNIE). CNIE has put over 100 CRS documents related to the environment, agriculture, and natural resources on-line. This is a start up project for what will become the National Library for the Environment, a component system of the proposed National Institute for the Environment.

CRS, part of the Library of Congress, prepares its reports for the U.S. Congress. CRS products undergo careful review for accuracy, thoroughness, and objectivity. They contain nontechnical information that can be very useful to people interested in environmental policy. Despite their potential value, CRS does not distribute documents to the general public.

Although CRS documents are prepared specifically for Congress and not

widely distributed, their distribution is not protected by law or copyright. CNIE is obtaining text copies of the CRS reports, scanning them, and placing them online. As new CRS reports related to environmental or resource issues become available, CNIE will add them to this collection.

Encyclopedia of the Environment

The proposed encyclopedia is intended to provide a starting point for the person new to a topic, providing both a quick introduction to science and policy issues and efficient access to detailed information when that is needed. The encyclopedia will include:

A glossary of terms, abbreviations, and acronyms.

Review articles summarizing the state of the science and the policy history on a large number of environmental topics.

A "who's who" of individuals and activities in different fields, with descriptions of on-going research projects, government programs, and efforts by non-profit and business groups, with suggested contacts and biographies of researchers.

Links to other sources of information such as: academic journals; databases; legislation; news and events; discussion groups; scientific, business, environmental, state, local, and national government organizations; and topical virtual bookstores.

The encyclopedia will also act as a directory to other sources of information, with suggested readings and links to related on-line resources.

Original articles and other materials produced by and for the CNIE by experts will be subjected to peer review. Non-NLE sources of information which may not have undergone the same peer-review process will be so indicated.

In-Depth Information on the Environment

Users of environmental information can be divided into two major categories. Sophisticated users are typically professionals who have the technical capability to access and synthesize data and information and have (or have at their immediate disposal) analytical skills to fully interpret and evaluate that information in the contexts of specific issues or disciplines.

On the other hand, peripheral users represent those organizations, institutions, and individuals who lack either the general or specific skills to acquire or analyze technical data and information in a specific context.

This group of users is typically not concerned with primary data or information, but is more reliant on resources and documents that have synthesized or evaluated such primary resources.

An in-depth information component of the NLE will assist both communities of users by providing a single point-of-contact resource (the NLE) for identifying, accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and sharing data and information resources.

The project will eventually provide access to in-depth information on one or more specific issues to illustrate what can be accomplished by a full-scale electronic environmental library. The module will begin with the brief and simple information contained in the glossary and encyclopedia. This information will be linked to policy-relevant, nontechnical material in on-line reports; additional links will be provided to lengthier reports and more technical information, such as published scientific papers and databases.

The specific topics for the demonstration project will be selected by an advisory group of NLE users. All information will be reviewed by technical experts and identified according to source and degree of scientific review. While much of the information contained in the module may be already available from existing, dispersed sources, the selected topic will be one for which there is no other current effort to organize the information. Again, input from the environmental library community will be critical for carrying out this proposed aspect of the NLE.

Recent CNIE Initiatives

Legislation to establish the NIE, H.R. 2827 (a.k.a. "the Sound Science for the Environment Act"), was again introduced in Congress by Rep. Jim Saxton (R-NJ), Chair of the House Committee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans. H.R. 2827 was cosponsored by 21 members of the House, including Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), who has been called the "Teddy Roosevelt Republican." By February 1996, more than 270 universities, scientific, business, government, environmental, and community organizations had endorsed the NIE, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Last summer, the CNIE issued a major report, Federal Funding for Environmental Research and Development: Fiscal Year 1994 <http://www.cnie.org/r&d/exe_sum.html>. This report quantified the level of federal funding for environmental research and development (R&D) and described the programs that carry out those activities. This

report updated an earlier report covering fiscal year 1992, also produced by the CNIE.

CNIE supported the March 7, 1996 report of the President's Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). "The success of PCSD lies in its ability to bring together leaders from business, labor, citizens' groups and government to agree upon national goals for sustainable development and practical measures for implementation," said CNIE's Senior Scientist David E. Blockstein, a PCSD task force participant. The NIE (and NLE) will serve as a forum where such initiatives can be discussed and developed.

The Committee's proposal for an NIE brings leaders together from across society to set priorities for environmental research. According to Blockstein, "the NIE would be governed by the diverse types of people who make up the PCSD. This is a fundamental distinction between NIE and existing environmental research agencies."

The PCSD report states that "steady advances in science and technology are essential to help improve economic efficiency, protect and restore natural systems, and modify consumption patterns," and that "a knowledgeable public, the free flow of information are critically important to open, equitable, and effective decision making."

According to CNIE Chair Stephen P. Hubbell of Princeton University, "PCSD's policy recommendation to 'strengthen the base of scientific knowledge and increase its use by decision makers and the general public' can best be accomplished through the NIE whose mission is to improve the scientific basis of environmental decision making." PCSD calls for government and others to support "long-term, independent scientific research to help decision makers understand sustainability issues." Dr. Hubbell pointed out that, "unfortunately, under the present fragmented nature of mission agencies that conduct or support research, no agency has either the mission or the ability to support the type of research necessary to achieve sustainability." The NIE would support long-term independent research on environmental resources, systems and sustainability.

Opportunities for Library Collaboration and Help

CNIE is looking for assistance in making the NLE a reality. You can help make this project a success by providing feedback to the CNIE on the National Library for the Environment project. Let the CNIE and the NLE

Steering Committee know:

What you think about NLE so far, what's good, what's bad, what can be improved.

Where existing sources of objective, scientifically sound information on environmental issues for users at all technical levels can be found (previously peer-reviewed information is preferred).

How can the project be modified or expanded to meet your needs.
Funding sources for the project.

The development of an NLE is a feasible endeavor, but input from librarians and information specialists working in settings where environmental quality, ecology, natural resources, and wildlife management and conservation are part of everyday functions is needed to help direct this effort. If you would like to be part of this initiative and help launch a National Library for the Environment, please contact the CNIE and make your concerns and ideas known.

NLE Advisory Council Named

The CNIE appointed members to a NLE Advisory Council in September of this year (1996). The NLE Advisory Council will assist the CNIE in formulating future activities, including services, information products (such as enhanced NLE Web pages), and publications produced by the NLE. The Advisory Council will also play an instrumental role in future expansion of the NLE prototype structure and organization.

Members of the NLE Advisory Council (9-96) and the organizations they represent:

Jim Beverly - independent consultant -- no email

David Blockstein, CNIE -- David@cnie.org

Mike Bowes, former Office of Technology Assessment --
mbowes@crosslink.net

Randy Brinkhuis - EPA, Special Libraries Association --
brinkhuis.randall@epamail.epa.gov

Lloyd Ethredge - Director, Yale University International Science Information Project -- letedge@yalevm.ycc.yale.edu

Juge Gregg, CNIE -- Juge@Cnie.org

Jerry Kay, Scientific Interchange, Inc. -- earth@microweb.com

Jim Morris, New Jersey Ecocomplex -- jmorris@aesop.rutgers.edu

Don Rea, formerly MITRE Corp. -- 70571.272@CompuServe.COM

Peter Saundry, CNIE -- Peter@CNIE.org

Phil Shabecoff, Greenwire -- phil@apn.com

Fred Stoss, SUNY- Buffalo/ American Libraries Association, Task Force on the Environment -- fstoss@ACSU.Buffalo.EDU

Alan Thornhill, Rice University -- at@10mb.com

Michael Totten, Center for Renewable Energy and Sustainable Technology (CREST) -- mpt@crest.org
Lois Widmer, North Carolina State University, Special Libraries Association-- no email

TFOE has a Newsletter! GreeNotes

The ALA Task Force on the Environment found its way to the Big Apple for the ALA Annual Meeting, which was held over the Fourth of July weekend. Despite a smaller than hoped for overall attendance and an exhibitors boycott of the meeting (in protest of the extremely high labor and overhead costs), TFOE had a remarkable series of activities. The task force was hampered slightly with a number of discrepancies in the posting of its meetings - items on the Web page were not consistent with those listed in the final program bulletin. Convenient signage and updates in the conference issues of "Cognotes," helped to avoid any major problems.

The Task Force on the Environment had a very successful slate of activities in New York. First and foremost was a well-attended program, "Environmentally and Socially Responsible Business." Terry Link (Michigan State University <link@pilot.msu.edu> assembled an impressive cadre of speakers from the investment community to describe involvement by the business and investment communities in monitoring environmental and social track records of corporations. Speakers included Albert Wilson (Vice President for TIAA/CREF), Alice Tepper Marlin (President for the Council on Economic Priorities), Peter Kinder (Partner with Kinder, Lydenberg, and Domini), and Dr. Richard Lowry (President of Peter Lowry and Vice President of Good Money, Inc.). This program was co-sponsored the ALA's Reference and Adult Services Division (BRASS).

This program drew a good and enthusiastic audience of more than 80 individuals. This program was developed by Terry Link in response to his reflections on a number of environmental incidents. "Environmental concerns with corporate performance took center stage after the Exxon Valdez incident," Terry stated in his proposal for this program. "This incident, followed shortly thereafter by the Union Carbide Bhopal accident, helped to create the 'Valdez Principles' -- a set of principles meant to guide corporations in acting responsible toward the environment," Terry stated in his introduction of the program. The Valdez principles were expanded and renamed the CERES Principles

<<http://www.pader.gov/dep/deputate/pollprev/ceres/PRINCIPL.htm>>.
The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) is a coalition of investors, public pension trustees, foundations, labor unions, and environmental, religious and public interest groups, believes that globally sustainable economic activity must be environmentally responsible. An excellent overview of these principles is provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection at
<<http://www.pader.gov/dep/deputate/pollprev/ceres/ceres.htm>>.

The speakers answered a series of questions that Terry used in prompting this forum:

- What determines if a company operates in an environmentally friendly or socially responsible manner?
- How do research organizations track corporate performance in these areas?
- How do libraries and their users obtain this information.

The answers to these questions were provided by some very frank discussions that examined business and consumer roles in seeking to understand responsibilities in light of complicated issues that motivate or drive us to purchase good and obtain services. These responsibilities were examined as a series of often competing values involving the issues of not only the environment, but other social issues such as nonviolence, community economics and well-being, personal and global responsibilities.

Peter Kinder provided program attendees with a very useful handout, a reprint of a fact sheet entitled, "Some Resource Materials on socially Responsible Investing and Fiduciary Duties," which is available from his office at Kinder, Lydenberg, and Domini, and co., Inc., 129 Mt. Auburn Street, Cambridge, MA 0138; 617/547-7479.

Terry Link also provide a rather comprehensive and extremely useful guide to relevant literature and Web sites at URL
<http://www.lib.msu.edu/publ_ser/tpl/tests/ala.htm>. This site provides access to book an a wide variety of extremely useful Websites in the areas of Business and the Environment, Socially Responsible Business, and other Investment and Financial sites.

Later in the week TFOE's program included a tour of an U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Regional Library. This was the first opportunity for TFOE to work with the EPA and the task force was glad to engage EPA and contractor staff in putting on this special introductory or

inaugural program.

This library open house was held in the Region 2 Office of the EPA at their new facilities on the 16th Floor of the Federal Building at 290 Broadway, near City Hall in lower Manhattan.

The afternoon's events included tours of the year-old library, kibitzing with colleagues, and a staff-demonstration of Internet-accessible environmental resources. More than 40 persons took time away from the Javits Conference Center and Midtown hotels where many of the ALA meetings and programs were held to establish contacts and increase networking and outreach activities with the EPA Library Network.

The library tour and refreshments were sponsored by Garcia Consulting, Inc., who holds a major contract for the outsourcing of nearly all EPA library services and operations. Most attending the open house took full advantage of a trip up to the 30th floor of the one-year-old building to enjoy a breathtaking wrap-around view of New York.

For those TFOE, SRRT, or ALA members not able to take advantage of this TFOE-sponsored tour, the EPA Region 2 Library is within easy walking distance of many New York sights and scenes, including the world Trade Center, City Hall, Chinatown, Soho, Battery Park, and Little Italy. 290 Broadway is just two blocks from City Hall, so in addition to seeing our Library you will see a vibrant part of everyday New York. You can call the EPA Library in advance to make an appointment to visit this environmental treasure.

The afternoon's speakers included Jonda Byrd, Manager of the EPA Library Network; Karen G. Schneider, Director, Region 2 Library; and Vivian Milczarski, Senior Reference Librarian. In conversations with Jonda Byrd and Karen Schneider after this event, it was hoped that a dialogue between the EPA Library Network and TFOE will remain and grow in time. Readers are encouraged to take a look at the new and improved EPA Home Page <<http://www.epa.gov>> and to look at the pages devoted to the EPA Libraries.

TFOE Business Meeting

An annual TFOE Budget of \$3000 was submitted to SRRT and approved.

The TFOE Resolution for the Use of Non-Chlorine Bleached Paper was brought to the floor for discussion for final presentation to SRRT at the 1997 Midwinter meeting in Washington, D.C. Terry Link volunteered to

usher this resolution through its last phases of development.

Communications (and the lack thereof) was another topic of discussion. TFOE (and other task forces represented under SRRT) were in dire need of improved communication between the task forces and OLOS and ALA. The development of a Web site for TFOE was discussed as was the need for creating an online TFOE newsletter.

Patty Owen (Hudson Branch Director, Pasco County Public Library, Florida) continues to pursue the creation of a Children's Environmental book Award and will prepare a detailed proposal for submission to SRRT at the 1997 Midwinter meeting. Her outline will include criteria for the award as well as selection of judges, and a timeline for the inaugural presentation of the award.

Fred Stoss (Associate Librarian in the Science and Engineering Library at SUNY Buffalo) was asked to remain on as Chair/Coordinator of TFOE for an additional year. In continuing this challenge, he stated that improved communications between OLOS and ALA and the creation of a TFOE newsletter would be his major objectives.

Action Council Activities

TFOE is a component of the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT). The most important issue at the SRRT Action Council to impact TFOE is one of a very positive nature.

In the past TFOE has not had an opportunity for program planning at the annual Midwinter meeting. The inclusion of an All Task Force event at this year's Midwinter meeting (February 14-20, 1997 in Washington, D.C.) will provide TFOE with a unique opportunity to have a designated space and time for an activity. Fred Stoss hopes to plan a TFOE event that will serve as a means to introduce TFOE to other ALA members and others attending the Midwinter meeting.

Science and the Environment : Back To Basics... Again -- A Behind the Scenes Look in Producing a New Education and Information Tool

During the past two years there have been significant changes to our concepts and understandings related to the environment and our natural resources. Many of these changes have taken place in the policy side of

the environment. As a result of these policy shifts, a clear scientific understanding of today's environmental issues is needed now more than ever.

Teachers (K-12), college and university educators (especially those in two-year, community colleges and four-year liberal arts colleges), and librarians in public, school, and academic settings need to be provided with specific information resources to foster a greater sense of technical understanding of environmental issues. Such enabling tools are found in various in-service learning experiences, workshops, training seminars. Additional tools include the development of specialized information services and products. However, more is needed to keep our teachers, librarians, and others scientifically and technically literate with regard to our environmental interests.

Answering the Call

Last year saw the development of a new and exciting environmental education and information resource -- Science and the Environment <<http://www.voyagepub.com/publish>>. Science and the Environment is a free Web-based, electronic educational magazine that provides scientific and technical background information, news summaries, and graphics on a variety of environmental topics. The Web site has been designed as an educational tool, helping to broaden and enliven traditional science classroom study.

Science and the Environment is divided into eight separate chapters each containing ten stories. These chapters have been designed to cover the full gamut of current environmental issues: Biodiversity & Wildlife Management; Alternative Energy & Fuels; Marine Ecology; Health, Population & Agriculture; Clean Air; Climate Change & Atmospheric Studies; Clean Water; Waste Management & Recycling.

The "Clean Air" chapter covers the technologies and policies for controlling stationary (factories, power plants) and mobile (automotive) emissions. Urban smog, air quality updates, acid rain, reformulated gasoline, automobile fuel efficiency standards, air pollution trading and the effects of fossil fuel burning (coal, oil, gas) are also discussed. The Fall 1996 "Clean Air" chapter <<http://www.voyagepub.com/publish/stories/air.htm>> provided summaries of stories on acid rain, electric cars, vehicle emissions, dioxins, and smokestack pollution.

The Science and the Environment Web site is information intensive.

Ideas for teachers and educators

<<http://www.voyagepub.com/publish/choose.htm>> provide in-class innovations for stimulating and sustaining class interest in environmental discussions, including how to effectively use Science and the Environment. A select list of other Web sites

<<http://www.voyagepub.com/publish/links.htm>> related to environmental education, Web-based technologies in the classroom, general education resources, and other Internet resources is also provided.

An active archive of the previous 1995-96 academic year's quarterly issues has been compiled on a CD-ROM. All 320 previously published articles are now available on the Science and the Environment CD-ROM. Complete with a full-text search engine. This CD-ROM is formatted for Mac/Win/DOS/Unix in Acrobat, and is an excellent reference source with hundreds of contacts and links to relevant Web sites. The cost of this CD-ROM is at an introductory, time-limited rate of \$24.95. The CD-ROM is complete with photographs, maps and graphics.

Putting It All Together

Science and the Environment's production time routinely runs the entire month before the publishing date. For example, on the Fall 1996 issue released in September, editors and production staff labored in August to gather last-minute, current sources (to add to the rest of the source materials they researched in the prior months of June and July), wrote the stories based on those sources, gathered accompanying photos, edited those stories and photo captions, and coded them into HTML. Including pre-production work and preliminary research, the production timetable for Science and the Environment is approximately two to three months for each issue.

Much of their research and information gathering is conducted at University libraries, leafing through every imaginable journal, magazine and newsletter that is in anyway connected with environmental topics. It is not uncommon for the staff of Science and the Environment to browse through 600-800 hardcopy sources to produce this electronic magazine. They also monitor the headlines of over 50 major newspapers in the US and international arena, to keep track of some of the more recent trends in environmental policy and technology.

Last, but certainly not least, Science and the Environment producers do some serious surfing on the Net to locate the harder to find subjects (such as reports from the rural outback on the feasibility of solar power

use). Their Net research also enables us to find the most exciting, educational Web sites to which they link stories for the further benefit of the reader. Their intended goal is to hyperlink each of the 80 stories in every issue to a separate Web site that will help to expand the reader's knowledge on that particular subject.

Editors will often run micro-themes within each chapter to give readers a cross-sectional overview of a particularly pertinent issue. For example, in the Fall 1996 issue, the "Biodiversity & Wildlife Conservation" chapter features a few stories on Eco-Tourism, the fastest growing segment of the travel industry. Some of the burning questions they examined are: How successful have eco-tourist outfits been in raising environmental awareness among vacationers? Are many of the outfits truly "low-impact" on the ecosystems in which they operate? Is eco-tourism a solid means for a developing nation to grow its economy while protecting its environment?

Stories represent viewpoints from across the spectrum on these selected environmental issues. The goal of Science and the Environment is to educate by encouraging people to extract the truth from a wide variety of considered opinions and ideas. This gives the readers a solid basis upon which to formulate their own environmental viewpoints.

As a comprehensive source of environmental information, Science and the Environment sees their service as an opportunity to set sail for further exploration (their maritime logo begs sea-faring metaphors). Their philosophy is to facilitate the reader in building a better compass for themselves -- i.e. to empower themselves to steer a clear course through the midst of often contradictory and inflammatory "half-truths" that are often published under the guise of fact. These "factoids" come from all sides of the political spectrum. The producers of Science and the Environment feel that a true education is one that empowers an individual to throw partisan politics aside and get down to the business of separating fact from fiction.

Editors take a multi-disciplinary track that emphasizes not only the environmental, scientific, and technological issues, but also the social/cultural, political, and philosophical undercurrents that can make these issues so volatile. Recognition of these inter-related factors is crucial to the understanding of complex environmental issues. Ultimately, wise and comprehensive solutions can arise from such discourse.

While examining Science and the Environment and talking with several

of its editors, I was thinking about my tenure at the Center for Environmental Information (CEI) in Rochester, New York. We often said that CEI's abbreviation stood equally for Communication, Education, and Information. Arranging the letters to form the acronym ICE, I envision Science and the Environment setting a true course on the voyage to Informing, Communicating, and Educating. Carefully navigating through the ICE bergs of ignorance and apathy.

Frederick W. Stoss <fstoss@acsu.buffalo.edu> is the Biological Sciences Librarian, Science and Engineering Library at SUNY Buffalo in Buffalo, New York, USA.