GREETINGS FROM THE EDUCATION SECTION!

Recently, a student asked me why he should join the Education Section of AFS. A fair question—and one that likely comes to mind for students when they first join AFS and are not familiar with Society-level activities. So I talked about student opportunities in AFS and the vital roles that students provide to the Section and to the American Fisheries Society.

And I finished, of course, by saying, “Student membership is free and its fun!”

The Education Section is one of the largest and longest-standing Sections of the American Fisheries Society. Formally, our mission is to (1) improve the quality of education for fisheries students and scientists, (2) promote exchange of information, techniques, and materials among educators and educational institutions, and (3) foster improved communication and information exchange among fishery educators, employers, fisheries specialists, students, and the public. Pragmatically, the Education Section represents a “melting pot” of educators, professionals, and students interested in promoting fisheries science and education. If your job involves educating others about fish and fisheries, either in the classroom or through public outreach, you can benefit from Education Section membership. Our commitment to fisheries education spans a broad spectrum—from fostering professional development for students to recognizing excellence in fisheries education by student mentors.

The Section works closely with the Student Subsection to provide and enhance student opportunities at all levels of AFS. The energy and expertise of our student members is a major component of important Section functions. Our newsletter editors (Joe Gerken and Jesse Fisher) provide a critical service by producing informative, biannual newsletters for our membership. Similarly, student members serve as our webmasters (Mike Meuwig and Steve Ranney) designing and maintaining our webpage. Our new, attractive logo was created by a student (Jesse Fischer) and was selected from a variety of outstanding artwork produced by student members. Students also serve as chairs of our membership committee (Kristal Schneider, Mark Fincel) and as members of numerous standing committees (Skinner Award and Excellence in Fisheries Education committees).

Last year, the Section provided financial support for two regional, student colloquia—one held at Colorado State University and the other at Kansas State University. Over 30 students (undergraduates and graduates) from the Western or North Central Divisions attended each colloquium, where they presented research findings, networked with students from other universities, and built lasting professional relationships. Given the success of these events, the Section looks forward to supporting future student colloquia in all regions. The Section recognizes student achievement and leadership in AFS by supporting travel awards to the Annual Meeting and organizing the Best Student Paper and Poster awards. For 2010, the Section and Student Subsection are discussing ways to promote and enhance student presentations. Ideas include posting award-winning presentations and posters on the Section web page, sponsoring student colloquia, and developing web-based presentations on effective presentation styles and formats. Students will be able to use these resources to help develop and enhance their scientific presentations.

Promoting academic excellence is a primary mission of the Education Section. The Excellence in Fisheries Education Award is a Society-level award administered annually by the Section and recognizes excellence in organized teaching and advising in fisheries education. Michael Hansen (University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point) received the award in 2009. Information about Education Section awards and how to nominate colleagues and mentors can be found on our web page at www.fisheries.org/units/education/index.htm. The Section also administers the John E. Skinner Memorial Travel Award—one of the most prestigious student awards offered by the Society. To augment the John E. Skinner Memorial Endowment, the Section contributed $35,000 and initiated a cost-challenge match to other AFS Units (Divisions and Sections) dubbed “The Incredible Skinner Challenge.” As of February 2010, we received matching contributions from other AFS Units and individuals totaling $13,570. The Education Section matched these funds, resulting in a total contribution of $52,140 to the Skinner Fund. We thank all of the Units and individuals who contributed to this important effort. We continue to pursue our goal of adding $75,000 to the Skinner Fund that would enable us to grant up to five additional Skinner Travel Awards each year. The Section also

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works closely with the Equal Opportunities Section to increase student diversity and provide financial support for students attending the Annual Meeting. In 2009, the Section contributed funding to the newly formed Hutton Junior Fisheries Biology Program Endowment to increase opportunities for high school students interested in careers in fisheries science.

At the 2009 Annual Meeting in Nashville, the Section sponsored a day-long symposium entitled “Fisheries Education in the 21st Century: Accommodating Change.” The focus of the symposium was to highlight educational techniques and approaches that facilitate learning in today’s academic environments. The symposium featured 16 presentations and a panel discussion composed of university, state, and federal scientists. As a follow-up to the symposium, short articles from symposium participants will be featured in a special column in Fisheries over the next year. Presentations from the symposium are also available on the Section web page.

Recently, the Section took a lead role in development and passage of the “Resolution of the American Fisheries Society Concerning the Teaching of Alternatives to Evolution.” The resolution and background statement were published in the March 2008 issue of Fisheries (33[3]:134-139). The resolution has since been referenced and featured by the National Center for Science Education on their web site, with links to the adopted resolution and a background document explaining the rationale for the resolution.

The Education Section has a long tradition of supporting AFS book projects and educational outreach. Recent and upcoming book projects supported by the Section include: Analysis and Interpretation of Freshwater Fisheries Data (C. Guy and M. Brown, eds.), Standard Methods for Sampling North American Freshwater Fishes (S. Bonar, W. Hubert, and D. Willis, eds.), Fisheries Techniques 3rd edition (A. Zale, D. Parrish, T. Sutton, eds.), Inland Fisheries Management in North America (3rd edition; W. Hubert, M. Quist, eds.), and a new book on Writing for Natural Resources (C. Jennings, B. Vondracek, and T. Lauer, eds.).

Thanks to the talents and dedication of our members, the Education Section plays a vital role in the American Fisheries Society. We all have a stake in the future of our profession and in training and mentoring the next generation of fisheries scientists—and nowhere is this sentiment more “alive” than in the Education Section. Join us, and discover how you can contribute to AFS. For more information about the Education Section, please visit our web page, or if you have an idea to share, drop me note at Steven.Chipps@sdstate.edu.