

Report: USGS at the NSTA Annual Conference in St. Louis, MO

Robert W. Ridky, National Education Coordinator

USGS science plays an integral role in earth science instruction across the country, according to many participants at the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) annual conference in St. Louis, March 29 to April 1, 2007. A large number of teachers, when approaching our exhibit, were heard to say, "Oh, USGS, my favorite organization!," or, "I use your materials all the time!." Animated stories of USGS science used in many educational settings were ubiquitous.

The NSTA, founded in 1944, is the largest organization in the world committed to promoting excellence and innovation in science teaching and learning for all. The organization boasts a membership of 55,000 science teachers and administrators, scientists, and business and industry representatives. The NSTA publishes several professional journals and books for science educators and offers additional support through innovative education initiatives and science advocacy. This year, the national conference attracted 17,000 attendees, with approximately 1,500 sessions and 400 exhibits.

Until three years ago, the USGS was the only federal science agency not represented at the meeting, and several professional societies and our sister agencies had commented that our absence was widely noticed and our participation sorely missed. Since then, USGS has reestablished a significant presence at the conference. This year, our exhibit was expanded to 30 feet and manned by a dynamic group of 11 USGS colleagues representing each region and USGS discipline: Morgan Bearden, GIO in Rolla, MO; Jon Campbell, GIO in Reston, VA; Liz Colvard, GIO in Menlo Park, CA; Jody Eimers, WRD in Reston, VA; Jack Epstein, Emeritus, GD in Reston, VA; Carrie Jucht, EROS in Sioux Falls, SD; Rachel Muir, BRD in Reston, VA; Phadrea Ponds, BRD in Fort Collins, CO; Julia Towns-Campbell, BRD in Columbia, MO; and Bob Ridky and Cher Cunningham, SIEO in Reston, VA. The Associate Directors responded generously to our request to support representatives from each of the disciplines.

A new centerpiece for the display was created by graphic designer Vivian Rodriguez entitled, "USGS: Opening Windows to the Earth." The remainder of the panels featured popular USGS products for educators that are available to order. Thousands of copies of more than 70 USGS products and publications were given away, including numerous fact sheets, circulars, public information sheets, bookmarks, maps, and posters. Teachers found two items especially created for the conference (*USGS Videos and Animations* and *USGS Education Resources for Teachers*) and a searchable CD of USGS fact sheets particularly useful. The exhibit also contained two live ports used to explore USGS science and answer questions and a flat-screen television that featured USGS films.

The EROS Data Center generously provided a framed copy of the Lena Delta *Earth As Art* photograph to raffle off at the booth. This beautiful image and the host of other USGS products and resources attracted many attendees and resulted in a multitude of conversations about the usefulness of USGS science not only in earth and environmental science classrooms, but also in biology, chemistry, and physics classes. Many conference participants left the exhibit with ideas for using USGS science in new and imaginative ways and were impressed with the range and accessibility of USGS resources.

The NSTA conference provided a unique opportunity for the USGS to meet and connect with the Nation's most important and least recognized science leaders and display the scope and depth of USGS science. It energized our employees to encourage and contribute to national efforts calling for more effective integration of education and research. Finally, in Rachel Muir's words, it provided a "rare opportunity (for USGS employees) to work as a team across the disciplines – and it felt great!"

