

AREA Conference - 2002  
Chico Hot Springs, Montana  
Conference Program Evaluation

Enclosed is a summary of the evaluation forms received through December 1, 2002. A survey for was posted in the list-serve and/or e-mailed directly to attendees. Thirty eight (38) surveys were received.

Th survey contained two sections. The first section required a rating scale of 1 – 5 (5 being excellent and 1 being poor). The second section's rating scale was from 1 – 4 (4 = Strongly Agree and 1 = Strongly Disagree). Approval rate (86%) is the cumulative average of the ratings given divided by the maximum score expressed as a percentage.

Enclosed is an unedited list of the comments that came with the surveys and the survey form.

Program	4.4
General Session Speakers	4.4
Meeting Facilities	4.6
Accomodations at Chico Hot Springs	4.4
Meals Provided as part of conference package	4.8
Field Study I: Upper Yellowstone River	4.5
Federation of Fly Fishers Center Reception	3.7
Fly Casting Instruction	4.6
Shakespeare Exhibit	3.9
Silent Auction	3.7
Fly Rod Raffle	4.3
Evening Banquet	4.1
Field Study II: Yellowstone National Park	4.5
Outdoor recreation opportunities	4.6
Networking opportunities	4.4
Average First Section	4.3
The conference met or exceeded my expectations	3.4
The program was diverse	3.4
The atmosphere was casual yet professional	3.5
The conference setting was conducive to business	3.3
Field activities complimented the formal sessions	3.5
Our association is moving in the right direction	3.2
Overall, I am satisfied with the conference	3.5
I actively participated in the conference	3.7
Average Second Section	3.4

Approval Rate

86%

Comments:

Chico was an excellent atmosphere! I really loved the surroundings. But, more should have been communicated beforehand about the accommodations, like shared bathrooms, no phones or TV, etc. The meeting facilities worked out very well for the sessions and the food was excellent (especially the cookies!). The program was very well organized and diverse, and the presenters were well prepared. Much more time needs to be spent on association business. If AREA meets only once every two years, one scheduled hour is not enough time for the business meeting. Also, please schedule it after the sessions have been completed, in case it runs over. The cowboy entertainer was a nice thought, but I would recommend that future organizers not have entertainment on the last night, unless it's a band or something that people can listen to, dance to, etc. as they continue to talk with each other. It's really difficult to listen to ballads on the last night of the conference.

I enjoyed the more informal atmosphere of the Chico conference site than when we use a metropolitan area.

OF THE AREA CONFERENCES I HAVE ATTENDED (ALL SINCE 1991) THIS ONE RATES AT THE TOP (MAYBE TIED WITH PORT ANGELES). WE'LL WORK HARD IN SOUTHEAST TO PROVIDE EQUAL OR BETTER 1N 2004!

hospitality room should have been open, staffed, and the use of the room encouraged by host - the hospitality rooms at Corpus and Hartford were models for increased networking opportunities.

During the conference, a number of individuals - primarily those who are either new to the association, or first-time conference attendees - voiced comments they felt "left out", "not part of the group", and even "unwelcome." In the future, I believe we need to make an extra effort to make these folks feel welcome and included. Looking back to my first conference in Corpus, I recall a much greater level of comraderie and brotherhood.

This may be more directed at the Association than the specifically at the conference, but I am getting the sense that there is a subtle movement to either remove the "R" from AREA, or to change it from "Resources" to "Recreation". An example is the RBFF Education Summit synopsis distributed at the conference....not once did the phrase "Aquatic Resources Education" or the acronym "ARE" appear. Instead, reference was made to Aquatic Education and AE. States that focus strongly on Aquatic Resources/Environmental Education components in their program raised concern that there is a strong push - primarily from industry, to push ARE programs to a fishing recruitment/retention exclusive effort. I have to agree that the report of the RBFF Ed Summit provides support for their concern.

Thanks again Hector for an outstanding job with the programming of this conference!

Rooms and service were great; but scarcity of phones and data ports was really problematic

Accommodations at Chico Hot Springs Resort (Had to share a bathroom--some crowding issues)

Meals provided as part of conference package (Outstanding!)

The conference setting was conducive to business (Agree, except for phones and data ports)

Provide more background for the first year attendees. Saying, "Now you all know Sharon ..." is unfair to those in the room who have not a clue as to who Sharon is and what she has done. There were a number of statements made in joint session which assumed prior knowledge, fine for us old timers, but confusing to the new kids. And to beat back the Big Grippers, those who say we have too tight a click, that the RBF is taking badly needed dollars from the states, that Region Five is running the whole nation, that the Board is running roughshod over the masses, to beat back these few but loud voices, we should do an atmosphere audit, find out what the members really think, not just what the Gripping Loud Mouths are saying. Thanks again Hector, for all your help and all your work. Ti

- program offered a wealth of info., but too much at same times (concurrent sessions)
- leave more free time
- need better public speakers
- would've appreciated a notification of no TV's & phones in Chico rooms beforehand
- meals were EXCELLENT

As a first time attendee at this national conference, but having attended many other national meetings of this type I have the following suggestions:

#### AREA in General

Overall I was impressed with the enthusiasm and professionalism of those in attendance at the meeting. I share the concern of other conference attendees/AREA meetings that for whatever reason, the organizations appears to be dominated by eastern people. This can probably be traced back to the small size of the group (typically only a small % of any group are truly active) and can be corrected by increasing the membership in AREA. As I indicated at the meeting I was unaware of AREA for a number of years and I am sure that many other Fisheries folk such as myself are in the same boat. I would suggest

that one way to encourage additional members is to advertise the organization and future meeting through the American Fisheries Society List Serve. I will be happy to assist, if you desire.

The "strong" opinions of some attendees concerning a dominance in the group of an eastern "clique" was probably not enhanced by this groups lack of attendance at the raft trip, Yellowstone trip, etc. Promising to readress business meeting issues at the banquet (bad idea in the first place) and then not doing it, also did not help in resolving this issue. Although I know that attempts have been made, AREA needs to become more inclusive if it desires to establish itself as a professional organization. This needs to be done quickly as I know of many that were turned off by what they perceived as an eastern clique that dominates the organization. Cindy's suggestion/proposal was a good one and should be pursued.

#### Conference

Overall the facilities were excellent (even without the bathrooms in all rooms), and the food was truly memorable. I would suggest, however, that consideration be given to shortening the minimum length of the presentations to the standard 20 minutes (15 for presentation and 5 for questions) and adding a poster session. I was interested in doing a presentation, but would have had difficulty filling up an entire hour slot. The 20 minute paper length does not prevent others from going longer (length can be extended another 20 minutes to accomodate and still remain in synch with the other sessions), but will probably encourage many more presentations and force others to get to the point a bit quicker. The poster session would be designed for more "technical" type info (ie. the design of a new kids casting contest) that really doesn't fit well as an oral presentation.

Anyway, my plans are to stick with AREA for the long run and even though I'm another easterner, I will be happy to assist in any way I can to help the group.

This was my first conference and it was above and beyond my expectations.

Would have liked some dancing music instead of the singing cowboy.  
A more serious award ceremony with real awards from AREA.  
Sonny Medeiros as a guest speaker.

The Federation of Flyfishers Education Center was facinating.  
Unfortunately, the shuttle service from Chico was delayed which truncated my

time spent there. That said, I wholeheartedly support shuttles for group activities, particularly when alcohol is likely to be consumed. We have at least three issues here. 1) curbing our dependence on oil, 2) reducing the global effects of the production, acquisition and use of oil, and 3) driving while under the influence.

This will be a tough act to follow.

Thanks to AREA for welcoming my family into the AREA family.

I thought the conference was well organized and the location/facilities were excellent. I enjoyed the speakers and I felt there was better diversity of programming than past conferences. I still feel there could be more diversity.

I am very interested in seeing a formal awards portion to our conference where AREA uses professional criteria and categories to recognize excellence in Aquatic Resource Education programs and products. I think ACI has an excellent awards program from which we could borrow many things without having to re-invent the wheel.

I love the casual (dress) atmosphere of the conference and hope we can keep it that way.

About the facilities - Organizers should have given more "warning" about the relative lack of telecommunications infrastructure at the hotel. Calling home/the office and receiving messages was difficult. Getting online was impossible. This presented a real problem for those of us who have come to expect a phone and internet connection in our rooms!

When a space is designated as a "Hospitality Suite" it should be hospitable to all, at all times. Private conversations should take place in private spaces. Those in charge should make welcoming their first priority. Conference organizers should have maintained control of the space.

Otherwise, I thank the organizers again for making this a great overall experience.

About the conference/program - Most of the sessions were very informative and interesting. While it was helpful to hear about RBFF programs and efforts, I sometimes felt that the Foundation overwhelmed all else at the conference.

About AREA business - I am deeply concerned with the lack of accountability of the Executive Board to the membership, and with the appearance of conflicts of interest and clique/elite/in-group domination of the organization. Clearly a change in by-laws is in order. For a

group the size of ours, there is no excuse for the lack of inclusion and transparency in decision making. I will formally propose by-laws changes as soon as possible.

The Executive Board and our appointed representatives would be well advised that, while the current by-laws do not require consultation of the whole membership in decision making, they do not prohibit it either. If the membership continues to feel unrepresented and excluded from decision making, the powers that be may well find themselves without a constituency. The abrupt adjournment of the business meeting and postponement of discussion, followed by the chaotic reconvening and closing of the meeting only served to foster resentment and cynicism. And the fact that this evaluation was forgotten is indicative of the problems we face.

The health of our community and the existence of our organization is at stake. The "leaders" of an organization such as ours do not direct the membership, they serve it. The challenge for the Executive Board is clear.

About the evening banquet - It is unfortunate that two thirds of the ceremonial time at the banquet was taken up with an inside joke shared by only a few. While catching up with old friends at a conference and enjoying humor is generally a good thing, in this case it exacerbated the problems we already have. AREA is not an appendage of the Sonny Medeiros Foundation. Give him a rest.

Imagine how different the conference might have been had we taken some time, either at the start of the conference, or at the banquet, or both, to welcome, introduce, and acknowledge new members.

Knowing that there are concerns about the formation of cliques it is a tendency to try to "joke" it off, but in retrospect I wish the business meeting had been longer and would have allowed for the discussion to be more open. We go to these meetings and are anxious to catch up with the friends we have made and this should never be discouraged, we are human and we make friends. However, while the topic was a sensitive issue, I feel that open discussion by all is always the best way to go, and to have anyone feel like they were not heard would not be okay. I feel it would be remiss of us as a group to schedule such a short meeting in the future in light of the discussion that was had. We cannot go back and change the way it went this time, but let's learn from this one and try to do it better. We obviously have to think about the construction of the board and it's leaders so that all regions are represented, but that does not have to mean that those who have lead us in the past are not appreciated or that this is a reflection on them in any way, we have come along way and are where we are. I believe that it is thanks to those who have

brought us this far. Bruce said it very well, "this is exciting discussion to be having" and it is up to us now as a group to let it help us grow. I for one am willing to help that process along in any way I can. To everyone, don't give up, help this be a learning stage instead of a stumbling block.

Seems there were too many options for things to do after scheduled activities. This made it hard to get together and network with people during non-meeting times. Different individuals or small groups seemed to go their own way during and after meeting times. I don't think I ever saw the hospitality room used and it should have been the center for professional networking.

I think the general meeting should have been longer. It should really be the focus of the conference. The sessions are professional growth opportunities but what gets discussed in the meeting is the heart and soul of this organization. And all those people that have issues with the way things are run don't have time to express their opinions. And those of us who disagree don't have time to say anything, in other words, there needs to be more time set aside for discussion of these issues that affect this organization. Since some of the bylaws dictate that nothing can be done until we meet again, shouldn't more time be given to those decisions? It just makes more sense to me.

Otherwise, this conference is by far my favorite one to attend. I always come back with a ton of ideas and I always have a great time. It serves my job more than any other conference out there. And this year was definitely no exception.

- I wish the program descriptions could have been available sooner; I would have made a different choice of the first initial sessions. I was hoping the the Best Practices session would give research-backed guidelines for quality aquatic education; instead it turned out to be a session describing what is going to be done and asking for help. O'Malley did give me a copy of the current best practices document and was very helpful.
- The setting was beautiful and appropriate for meeting others.

I thought that the conference hosts did a great job. The only improvement as far as hosting of the conference went that I can offer is I would have appreciated a list of conference attendees names, addresses and e-mail addresses. I particularly appreciated the advanced notices about what to expect with the weather and recreational opportunities. Vince was fantastic. Concurrent sessions offer a good variety of subjects, but also conflicts in choosing which one to attend. Sessions starting at 8:00 a.m. were at a disadvantage.

I was pleased to see that there is wide-spread interest in the members in the business of the association. Unfortunately, many felt disenfranchised for a number of reasons; the most significant was the lack of a substantive business meeting with a conclusion. It is important that the incoming board identify what is causing this disenfranchisement and take advantage of the energy that has now been identified. I see this as a great opportunity for substantial growth. I feel that the formation of task forces on key issues is a great step.

- Needed a session or 2 on Federal Aid
- Banquet entertainment weak
- Overall Great Confernce

While the site was peaceful, I go to conferences to work and I didn't have the technology (phones!) to do work. I agree that the "Sonny Medeiros" Foundation should be retired. I, as well as a few others at our banquet table, did not understand the inside "joke" or "honor". We (I) were (was) not sure what it was all about.

Where was (is) the evaluation of the "hospitality room"? Who was supposed to keep it open? The food was incredible! The caterer was one of the best I've seen.

Corporate sponsored hospitality suite  
Mentor program for new aq ed coords attending conf  
More effort on everyone's behalf to speak as one voice and all regions evenly represented  
More professional AREA stances on aq ed topics pertinent to aq ed and the organization

I was really pleased with the conference and congratulate you on a job well done.

I would have liked to have all of the new people introduced, it would have been easier to put names with faces that way and find out who was in the same boat.

Also, the leadership seemed a little cliquish, I felt they should have mingled a bit more and made themselves more available to the newcomers. It seemed they all ate at the same table every time and didn't make much of an effort to introduce themselves to the new people or to separate and mingle. I did try several times to introduce myself, but they were always in a group talking and didn't seem to take much notice of someone standing on the sidelines, trying to break in.

The only thing I didn't like about the facilities is the telephone situation. I had no cell phone service and a regular phone in the room would have been nice.

I just wanted to give some input into the hospitality room and what was said about needing to supply alcohol there. I personally do not drink and don't want to

be around those who decide to do it in excess. If that is taking place in the hospitality area, then I and others will not be around to give input into discussions that take place there. It should be hospitable to all not just some.

In my opinion alcohol doesn't have its place at these meetings. Some people will disagree, but to me if you have to have alcohol to make a decision, your in trouble. I saw a lot of drunk attendees in the evenings who were hung over the next day at meeting. I wonder what some of the parents of the kids we have programs for would think if they saw how we act when away from work.

I did not socialize much in the evenings with very many people. I did not want to be in the smoke-filled bar and have to deal with the drunks(either within or outside of our conference attendees) Once it got dark at Chico, you either went drinking or back to your room. Nothing and nowhere else to go. It would have been nice to actually have had a social hour with planned social activities. If you leave everyone to their own time, most will return to their rooms with their group of friends.

The board is doing a good job with their duties, but they have done nothing to try to unite the states and their representatives. I know it is frustrating that no one is coming forward to take over some of those duties, but I and many others never even knew the new board was being elected. I did not receive an e-mail or a letter asking for volunteers or nominees. If you are going to complain about no one stepping forward until after the fact it will never work. The reason the board is mainly consisting of the upper states is that those people on the board didn't know anyone outside their area very well. I have met all the board, but not one of them know me. It is very difficult to make a suggestion for a new board member when you don't know that many other folks out there from other states. Names are one thing to know, but what about the person and their program.

I have spoken to our rep. for our region. That person knew nothing to help and I feel some of the blame for this miscommunication lies on their shoulders. I did not hear from our rep even once in the last two years. I didn't even know who it was until the old board announced the new board. I totally agree with Cindy that there needs to be diversity on the board, but I didn't see what could have been done at that time. The elections were done and the board was announced. I think it is something we need to look at for future boards.

Dave H. should be commended. He and his crew did an awesome job with the conference. I especially enjoyed the last speaker Vince. He was great and a wealth of information.

I really enjoyed the conference. The scenery and food were fabulous and the weather great. I don't want you to think I just hated being there. We just have a lot of work to do. I just had a few things to get off my chest. I will get involved where I can. I offered to be a Regional Rep, but haven't heard back from our existing reps yet.

Since this is supposed to be anonymous, I would like my identity to stay with you alone. I don't think it matters where the concerns or suggestions come from. I will trust you to be professional about this as well

It was great conference!

I think we really needed to schedule official times to meet as a whole group. I also guess from what I saw that the regions need to meet so that each person knows who their representative is. Apparently, the western folks don't know their reps. Even though I would rather have fished than meet, it was good that we at least met with our regions briefly. A longer board meeting is apparently needed, though. I had a BLAST!!!!!!

Hats off to Dave, Jake, and Chad! They did a great job! Hector - thanks for taking the lead on the program, it was a lot of work.

On the other hand.....

Behavior by some of the board members was deplorable. New people are asked to step up to the plate with the mixed message that they are not one of the "in" crowd. Some of the board members intimidate or disgust new folks into not stepping up to the plate, mentoring new people is not a strategy that is used by this board. The make up of the current executive board is not ethical. Decisions are being made by the executive board that should not be made. The comment from Carl Richardson to skip the rest of the business meeting (at the banquet) and just move on to the fun was totally unprofessional and unreasonable considering that the membership was told that the business meeting was going to continue after dinner and folks were expecting some of the issues to be resolved.

I work for my director. Which is why we affiliated with the International. Not RBFF. RBFF's presence at this meeting was way too intense. And RBFF's influence on Carl Richardson and the board is very obvious.

I have stepped up to the plate over and over. And I have been around a long time.

I heard a lot of folks talking about not being interested in renewing their AREA membership. Who can blame them? Has anyone ever questioned why the membership has dropped by half of what it was a few years ago?

We need a much longer business meeting at the next conference.

Should recognize new members, or even go as far as to introduce all attendees- we are a small group and can get away with doing something like that.

I heard multiple comments about people not feeling like they were a part of the "group" in the off schedule times. Not sure how to fix that, or if it's really anyone's job to deal with that. Most of these comments came as the meeting was wrapping up, so it's difficult to do anything about it at that time anyway.

Chico Hot Springs is a wonderful place for our organization to meet.

More sessions (days) and only two concurrently. (Too many sessions I wanted to attend and too few I could!)



## Survey Form

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Program
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. General Session speakers
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Meeting Facilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Accommodations at Chico Hot Springs Resort
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Meals provided as part of conference package
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Field Study I: Upper Yellowstone River
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Federation of Fly Fishers Center Reception
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Fly Casting Instruction
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Shakespeare Exhibit
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Silent Auction
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Fly Rod Raffle
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Evening Banquet
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Field Study II: Yellowstone National Park
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Outdoor recreation opportunities
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Networking opportunities

Please score the following statements using a 1 – 4 scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree).

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The conference met or exceeded my expectations
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The program was diverse
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The atmosphere was casual yet professional
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The conference setting was conducive to business
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Field activities complimented the formal sessions
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Our associations is moving in the right direction

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. Overall, I am satisfied with the conference

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. I actively participated in the conference

Additional Comments, Critique, and Suggestions: