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Presidential Plenary to Explore Future of Water in American West

Water may well turn out to be the oil of the 21st century. Like oil, water is crucial to the world economy. Unlike oil, water is also absolutely vital to life itself. Like oil, its supply is coming under

enormous strain. Unlike oil, that strain results not only from economic growth but also from pollution, shoddy infrastructure, and, imminently, redistribution as a result of global warming.

The 2009 Presidential Plenary at the AAG Annual Meeting in Las Vegas will explore the



MacDonald



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future of water in the western part of the United States, specifically in the region spanning southern Nevada, southern California, and northern Arizona.

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Las Vegas, Water, and the West

Anyone with an interest in water resource issues in the American West has to make a point of visiting Las Vegas. One of the "must see" attractions in Las Vegas is the musical fountains at the Bellagio casino and hotel. Set on the Strip in front of the resort is an eight-acre lake and fountain complex with over 1,000 high-tech water spouts. Throughout the afternoon and evening the Fountains of Bellagio provide astounding water displays choreographed

to various musical selections. This water attraction was designed by Wet Designs of Sun Valley, California and completed in 1998. In the ten years of their existence the lake and fountains at Bellagio have become an icon of both the Las Vegas Strip and the issues of water scarcity that confront the city. As with most things in Las Vegas, when it comes to water issues there is both more and less than meets the eye.

Across the street from the Fountains of Bellagio sits the Venetian hotel and casino, which was opened in 1999 and also boasts its own extravagant water feature in the form of a navigable canal

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CREDIT: GLEN MACDONALD

The lake and fountains at the Bellagio have become icons since their completion in 1998. See article at right. Las Vegas is the site of the 2009 AAG Annual Meeting. www.aag.org/annualmeetings.

Deadline for Annual Meeting Abstracts: October 16.
Submit yours today at www.aag.org/annualmeeting

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“Sustainable Greening” of the AAG

I am reluctant to place the now ubiquitous marketing terms, greening and sustainable, in the title of this column. With everyone from oil companies to political candidates and timber companies to Wal-Mart exhorting us all to become greener and more sustainable by buying their product, these terms are perhaps in need of what used to be known as “operational definition.”

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that most other organizations including Exxon Mobil are by now well ahead of the AAG in systematically trumpeting their green image and the need for the rest of us to become more green like them. I hope you will forgive me for not having kept apace of Shell Oil and the others in boasting about our greening activities at the AAG, and also for not seizing the opportunity of this column to develop here a “green marketing strategy” for the AAG “brand” and to urge others to follow the example of our rhetoric.

As with most things, however, it is easier to talk about greening than to do something about it. So, instead of a new vision, I hope this mere description of some of the things we are actually doing will suffice to address this issue, and inform our members of the many common sense ways we try to be a good organizational citizen at the AAG with regard to the environment. During the last several years, without a lot of fanfare or chest-thumping, the AAG has been steadily attempting, in plain terms, to reduce waste, save on supplies, recycle materials, and in the process also save energy (both human and fossil) and to become more efficient (thus also saving money, which we regularly recycle for projects on behalf of geography).

While many of the long-standing “greening” activities (e.g. recycling paper, etc.) by the AAG have taken place as a con-

sidered effort to “do the right thing” (which I think we all want to do), some of the most significant greening results we have seen have been driven also by our efforts to achieve greater efficiency in our operations (e.g., see Richardson, “Building a Foundation for the AAG’s Future,” *AAG Newsletter*, January 2007).

One example is the comprehensive replacement at the AAG of paper-based and US Mail document transport systems with digital and online transaction systems that have resulted in massive reduction of paper used and energy consumed for transportation associated with mailing and shipping of formerly hard copy materials. In nearly



Richardson

every area of its operations the AAG now conducts its business online. For example, in Membership Management, one of our largest operations areas, instead of paper membership forms and records, AAG members may now join the AAG, renew their membership, update their address changes and submit payments for membership fees all online, with almost no use of printed paper forms, envelopes, paper checks, or energy intensive shipping of all these items back and forth by mail trucks.

Similarly, for our large Annual Meetings almost all attendee registrations, field trips, workshops, and related event payments now also occur mainly through paperless, online systems. An enormous reduction in paper usage also occurs through the custom abstract submission software we designed and had developed exclusively for AAG. In addition to automating the abstract submission and session organization process, the AAG now also publishes its Annual Meeting Abstracts book on CD, with only a few copies printed in paper book form for those who request these in advance. In most

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Our Own House and the World

Voltaire famously admonished his readers that it is difficult to know the world without leaving your own house. Of course, to travel does not mean the same thing as to know anything about where you go. In the era of low-cost airline travel many people travel all over without necessarily learning much of anything about where they go. Voltaire was exceptional. At one time, the teaching of geography in schools and universities was designed to compensate to a degree for the fact that most people must stay at home for economic reasons and because travel in itself wasn't the solution to learning about the world. In many places over the past year a number of commentators of various sorts have drawn attention to the need to reinvigorate the teaching of geography for a changing world and to clearly state its relevance for any adequate understanding of that world. Travel is undoubtedly a good thing but it is never enough in itself to understand what it is that you are experiencing when you go somewhere.

In Britain, a country we often look to as a paragon in the teaching of geography, the national "schools watchdog" or regulatory agency (Ofsted, www.ofsted.gov.uk) issued a report in January 2008 on "Geography in the Schools" which shows that much teaching of the subject is "mediocre" and the actual provision of teaching geography is declining at all levels. Some of the problem, the report says, lies in curricula which fail to engage students with current "geographical issues such as floods, rising sea levels, conflict resolution, famines and trade disputes." The decline of fieldwork because of health and safety concerns and a "little England" mentality among many students further compound the problem. In 2006, the British government did begin a new program to improve geography teaching in the schools. The plan's initiatives include a website where teachers can go to find fresh ideas for lessons that cover many of the issues mentioned in the report (www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk).

But the problem is bigger than the questions of appealing curricula or the quality of teaching in any one country. In Italy, for example, similar concerns have recently surfaced. The President of the Italian Association of Geography Teachers, Gino De Vecchis, responded to a reporter from the national daily newspaper *La Repubblica* who had encountered the Ofsted report in terms remarkably close to those in that document. The article (January 18, 2008) had the evocative title: "And for our students Pistoia is in Nebraska." The issue, as De Vecchis made clear and we all know only too well, isn't about knowing place names, having a sense of direction, or being able to read a map. These are all undoubtedly good things. It is also not only about the value of knowing that Iran is next door to Iraq, and that Georgia is adjacent to Russia, before pursuing policies that seem ignorant of these facts. This is also a good thing. It is much more about knowing how to frame the world in terms of its major socio-geographical divisions and inequalities, about knowing something of global military power and the hierarchy of states, about understanding how human economic activity is producing changes in the world's climates, and understanding how the world's physical geography works in terms of biophysical processes and the impacts they have on human settlement and development.

An Italian sociologist and journalist, Ilvo Diamanti, explains the current lack of attention to thinking geographically and teaching it well in terms of a number of recent global trends. As he says, we must fight back. The future depends on it. One trend is the ending of the geopolitical equilibrium of the Cold War which gave the world a settled form and regional divisions and fixed borders that provided a ready template for teaching. Now you need to know more geographical details

and keep up to date. What is happening in Moscow no longer helps as much in understanding what is going on in Prague. Another trend is time-space compression which according to some means the "death of distance" as everywhere becomes alike. This too doesn't bear much examination if you think in terms of how much more important local differences have become in determining access to jobs, schools, and public facilities, etc. Finally, people's rapport with their surroundings has also changed because of the increased elasticity of connections with others at a distance. The Internet and the Worldwide Web are exhibit A. Yet, research shows how much people still depend on local social interactions and in fact define themselves increasingly in localized terms. For all these

reasons the teaching of geography needs to change but, as Diamanti suggests, it is precisely because of them that people think they don't now need to know any.

Michael Palin (of *Monty Python* and PBS travelogue fame) is quoted in the British Ofsted report on why we need to be taught geography. Most of us will never just "pick it up." He says:

You can travel the seas, poles and deserts, and see nothing. To really understand the world, you need to get under the skin of the people and places. In other words, learn about geography. I can't imagine a subject more relevant in schools. We'd all be lost without it... Geography is the subject which holds the key to our future.

Learning, like charity, begins at home... and in school. ■

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Agnew

For details on the 2009 Presidential Plenary, "The Future of Water in the American West," see page 1.

AAG Publishes New Resources for Teaching Spatial Thinking

With funding from the U.S. Department of Education's FIPSE program, the AAG has developed a "Teaching Geography" CD-ROM and website to support instruction in spatial thinking at all levels of education.

The CD is included in the second edition of *Teaching Geography* (Guilford Press) by Phil Gersmehl, yet it also acts as a completely independent, stand-alone resource. Through 80 interactive multimedia units, the CD illustrates key modes of spatial thinking and how these are used by geographers to examine environmental, political, social, and economic issues in major world regions. Concepts include pattern analysis,

hierarchies, spatial transitions, site and situation, and many others.

Each unit is supported by notes for teachers that explain each spatial concept and how it may be used to develop classroom presentations and student activities. The CD also provides examples of student activities to help teachers get started, as well as a complete set of state geography standards.

Earlier drafts of the CD materials were extensively tested by K-12 teachers, college geography faculty, and educational methods instructors. The result is a bounty of content that can help geography educators and those training teachers at all levels of education. In addition, the companion website offers

downloadable packets of workshop materials for teacher professional development in geography, math, science, and history. The workshop materials were developed in collaboration with the National Council for Geographic Education with input from science, math, and social studies educators.

Sample CD units and ordering information are available at www.aag.org/tgmg. Single copies are available for \$25.00, and a lab pack of ten copies is \$200.00. For additional information about the "Teaching Geography" CD and website, please contact Susan Gallagher (sgallagher@aag.org). ■

Members of Note

Michael Leitner, Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at Louisiana State University, has been appointed Editor of the journal *Cartography and Geographic Information Science*, a publication of the Cartography and Geographic Information Society (CaGIS). **Jeong Chang "JC" Seong**, of the Department of Geosciences at the University of West Georgia, has been appointed Associate Editor. Guidelines for

CaGIS contributors can be found at www.cartogis.org.

Working through the United Nations and the Documentation Center of Cambodia, **James Tyner**, Professor of Geography and founder of the Cambodian Justice Project at Kent State University, has arranged for the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Kent State University to translate documents

for the ongoing international trial on the Cambodian genocide.

Lieutenant Colonel **Steve Oluic** has been promoted to Associate Professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York. Currently, Oluic assists the Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement in fulfilling their border security operations. ■

AAG Disability Fund In Memory of Todd Reynolds

The AAG has established the AAG Disability Fund in memory of Todd Reynolds. The purpose of the fund is to expand support to geographers with disabilities to participate in the AAG and its Annual Meetings. Examples of the kinds of activities that the fund will support include but are not limited to: providing financial assistance with travel, accommodations, registration, or related expenses for graduate or undergraduate students with disabilities to participate in professional meetings of the AAG; covering the cost of additional special services at AAG meetings to increase accessibility for attendees with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses; conducting dissemination or other activities around AAG events and activities to expand accessibility more broadly to geographers with special needs.

Donations may be made by check. Checks should be written to the AAG with a note in the memo line designating the AAG Disability Fund/Todd Reynolds. Mailing address: AAG, 1710 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20009-3198.

For further inquiries, please contact Candida Mannozi, cmannozi@aag.org.

"Sustainable Greening" of the AAG from page 2

years, field trip guides and local meeting publications are published online rather than in hard-copy. Furthermore, nearly all follow-up correspondence, confirmation, receipts, etc., for both Annual Meetings and Membership are handled online rather than through paper and energy-intensive mailing and shipping.

Our Publications Department has also seen very substantial decreases in paper resource usage and shipping energy usage through fully automating online our AAG journals' article submission, peer review and publication preparation processes. Other, smaller areas of operations have also seen similar but proportionately more modest savings of resources. For example, the AAG grants, awards, and honors programs are all now managed online, rather than through receiving, reproducing and re-shipping large packets of applications materials back and forth to selection committees around the nation.

Collectively, massive reductions in the use of paper and in energy intensive mailing and shipping have been achieved at the AAG during the past five years through automating Membership, Publications, Annual Meeting, and many other areas of operations.

In the communications area, the AAG has adopted new technologies to foster distance learning, meetings, and research project coordination, thus lessening travel. We now regularly use Skype for conferencing and working meetings involving colleagues and collaboration in Africa, Latin America, and throughout the U.S. At our Annual Meetings, we have begun to create podcasts and downloadable video recordings of selected proceedings at our annual meetings, to make these available to those who may not be able to physically attend our meetings. During our recent meeting in Boston, for example, we recorded presentations by speakers such as Jeffrey Sachs and Noam Chomsky, and made these available both online and on DVD for those

interested. Plans are in place for expanding these efforts at future annual meetings.

AAG employees are also encouraged and financially rewarded to commute to work by using public transportation, with a program in which AAG pays for employees' expenses of commuting on the Washington Metro public transportation system (all subways, commuter trains, and busses). This very substantial employee benefit, for which the AAG covers the full cost, is also considered tax-free to the employee. The program helps save gas, reduce pollution of automobile commuting, and relieve congestion in downtown Washington, DC.

Of course, the AAG also engages in a broad range of general conservation measures, such as extensive recycling of materials such as printer ink cartridges, batteries, newspapers, office paper, books, cans, bottles, file folders, etc. We now maintain twice as many trash bins devoted to recycled materials as for general trash. At AAG annual meetings, plastic name badges, tote bags, and other supplies are collected and reused or recycled. Long-standing energy conservation measures include insulating windows and doors with special shades and weather stripping, regulating temperature in the building on evenings and weekends, and installation of newer, more efficient heating and air conditioning equipment. Recently, we had the roofs of our office building coated with special reflective coating to reduce heat absorption and save on air conditioning energy usage.

New AAG Green Initiatives

In addition to the many green activities and programs already underway at the AAG, some of which are described above, with this column I am also pleased to announce two new AAG actions designed to help the environment. First, beginning this month, AAG members wishing to do so may elect

to receive their AAG journals online only rather than in both hard copy and online. AAG members may make this choice when joining the AAG or when renewing their membership, or can request this change at any time, including now, by contacting Laura Miller of the AAG staff at lmiller@aag.org, or 202-234-1450, ext. 131. AAG members who wish to access the AAG journals online may do so from any location in the world simply by logging onto the AAG website.

Second, starting with this issue, the AAG newsletter will be printed exclusively on certified recycled paper, despite its somewhat higher cost. The quality of the recycled paper of this issue is closely comparable to the new paper which was previously used for the AAG newsletter. We trust that any minor difference in the paper quality will be acceptable to AAG members, given the environmental trade-offs. We hope you will enjoy this inaugural recycled paper issue, and note that the ink colors are unchanged and unfaded: still bright green!

While I have not attempted to provide in this column the much needed operational definition of the term "greening," I hope I might at least have achieved an "operational description" of some of the many greening activities underway at the AAG. We take the goals of supporting the environment through our work at the AAG seriously, and despite substantial progress made so far there is, of course, much more that we as an organization might realistically and cost effectively do—while not losing sight of our overarching AAG mission to support geography—in the realm of "greening." I look forward to receiving your ideas and to working together with you to make continued progress in greening the AAG in future years. ■

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