

EDITORIAL

An Enduring Theme: Standards of Practice for Environmental Professionals

John H. Perkins

About 9½ years ago, I wrote the first editorial for Volume 1, Number 1 of *Environmental Practice* (March 1999). I reread that editorial in preparation for writing this, my last editorial, for Volume 10, Number 2 (June 2008).

That editorial I wrote nearly a decade ago focused on the characteristics that distinguish “professional” work from other skilled work and the conditions—in a democracy—necessary for public acceptance of “professional authority.” As in 1999, the ability of a profession to gain authority remains based on two foundations.

First, the group has to have standards for competency and ethical behavior that are established by and enforced by the profession itself, not employers or legislators. Second, the operation of the professional association has to have sufficient transparency and visibility so that members of the public will trust the association to do an honest job in upholding the technical and ethical standards for work.

The National Association of Environmental Professional’s efforts to serve as a strong professional association contain numerous elements essential to meet these two criteria. Local chapters provide an important venue for working professionals to know one another in a local area. The annual meeting of the NAEP gathers a national group that affords its members opportunities to increasingly become acquainted

with each other’s work. The Academy of Board Certified Environmental Professionals (ABCEP) provides a formal mechanism for peer review of individuals and their qualifications, followed by certification (the CEP). The NAEP’s Code of Ethics is absolutely essential for articulating the ethical standards that apply. And finally, this journal, *Environmental Practice*, is a way to promote peer-reviewed practices that set the standards for members of our profession.

Yet one other element remains essential, one that I was not as conscious of in 1999 as I am now. It is an elusive sixth activity: the ability to think about new situations coming down the road. A strong profession seeks to predict new situations and not simply rely on others to say, “Hey, are you folks considering XYZ and how it affects your work?” In other words, a strong profession offers the leadership ability to say what’s needed before those outside the profession know enough to make the call.

Consider a prominent factor that now increasingly drives professional environmental work: climate change. I was delighted to see many strong presentations surrounding climate change at the recent joint annual meeting of the NAEP and California AEP in San Diego. A great deal of this strength lies with the leadership role played by members of California AEP, many of whom are responding to legislative changes in California.

Strong as the presence of sessions on climate change was, I would offer the following questions to test the adequacy of the NAEP’s leadership on this critical issue at the national level (and this list is by no means exhaustive):

- Do NAEP practitioners know how NEPA analysis must adjust to recognize climate change?

- How about the interactions between climate change and issues of solid and hazardous waste management?
- What impacts will climate change have on those who work with wetlands and the mitigation of impacts on wetlands?
- How will work on endangered species alter under climate change?
- How will public lands managers accommodate climate change on military bases, national forests, national parks, and other sites?
- How will those involved in land use planning and public participation incorporate the implications of climate change into their work?
- For companies, agencies, and governments that want to reduce their carbon emissions, how can professionals best help assess current emissions and recommend the easiest, fastest, and cheapest ways to reduce?
- Have academics developed the curricula and degree programs to educate today’s students in these new areas?

Each of these questions could help organize a session at the next NAEP annual conference. In addition, each cries out for multiple peer-reviewed manuscripts in *Environmental Practice*. Maybe new criteria or categories for the CEP are needed. In short, the NAEP’s work to deal with climate change is far from over. Indeed, it has barely begun.

Two factors provide a bright side of these challenges. First—somewhat tongue in cheek—the problems pose enough work to guarantee employment for environmental professionals from now to the end of time. Second, and more seriously, exhibiting leadership in helping individuals and governments cope with these issues will

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propel the NAEP to a stronger professional position, provided we create credibility through transparency.

I'm led, therefore, to reaffirm what I believed when I started as Editor-in-Chief of *Environmental Practice*. The NAEP has the structure and people to lead in these

arenas. Members of the Association have many opportunities to be strong professionals by hard and careful work.

The new co-Editors-in-Chief, Dr. Kelly Tzoumis and Dr. Jim Montgomery of DePaul University, thus enter their work on July 1, 2008, at a very exciting time. I wish

them well as they bring their talents and perspectives to the work of the NAEP.

Address correspondence to John H. Perkins, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA 98505; (fax) 360-867-5430; (e-mail) perkinsj@evergreen.edu.