

Marsh Musings

by Dr. Lenore Tedesco

Greetings, friends and supporters of the Wetlands Institute.

I am happy to report that we closed out 2011 in wonderful fashion thanks to the incredible generosity of our members, supporters and donors. Our annual year-end fund appeal was a great success. We raised more than \$38,000 to help support research, education and conservation of our coastal and wetland ecosystems. Our supporters really stepped up to help make a difference, and we thank all of you. A listing of our fund appeal donors appears later in the newsletter.

Life at the Wetlands Institute continues at a pretty frantic pace as we settle into a phase of analysis, assessment, and planning for the growth and development of the Institute. I continue to learn new things every day about our programs and discover opportunities for new collaborations, partnerships and projects. It's a very exciting time here, if a bit unsettled. We have started to make some changes and I will share them with you.

There are several areas of program development that we'll be implementing. The first is that the Wetlands Institute will be diversifying its research portfolio. New projects are being developed through collaborations with visiting scientists from West Chester University, the University of Florida, and Indiana University. Dr. Patrick Baker has joined the Wetlands Institute as a research scientist to diversify the terrapin research program as Dr. Wood transitions into retirement. Wetlands mapping, water quality, and ornithology research programs are in the planning stages.

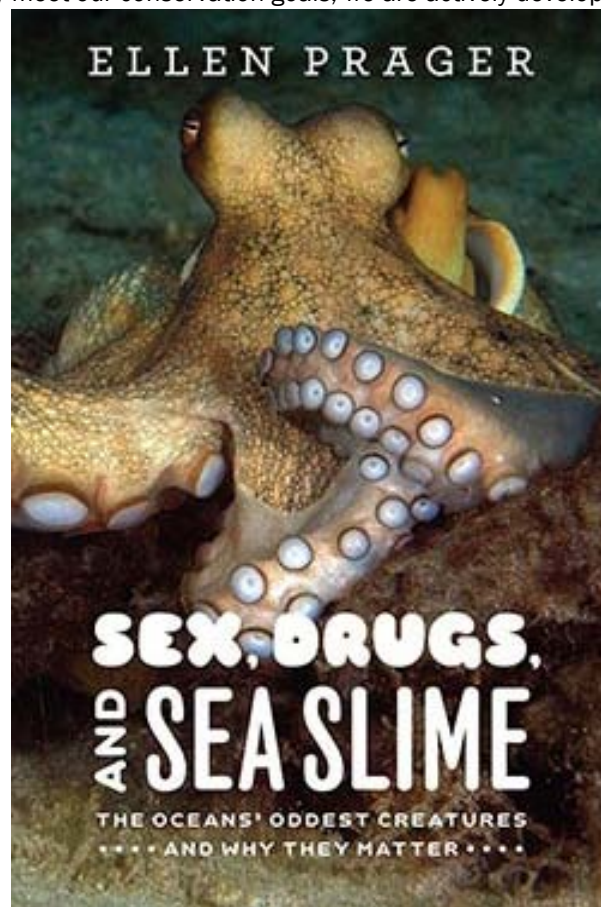
As we focus on growth at the Wetlands Institute, we will be adjusting our funding formulas to include a more diverse array of funding sources. We have already increased the proportion of funding coming from research contracts and grants, as well as philanthropic giving from foundations. I am developing a corporate sponsorship portfolio that recognizes the interests and needs of our corporate partners and seeks to provide visibility, exposure and volunteer engagements in our programs.

I am a strong believer in the power and importance of community engagement in the promotion of stewardship of natural resources and in making science accessible to the public. To this end, the Wetlands Institute is developing a series of conservation programs that will be designed to work with corporate and community volunteers for implementation. Our work with area schools will increase. We are expanding terrapin barrier fence installation programs, preparing a volunteer program to rescue terrapins from stormdrains, working to launch a program to distribute terrapin excluders for crab pots — all in an effort to prevent terrapin losses — while maintaining our work at rescuing and hatching orphaned terrapins and eggs. We are also continuing our work on the horseshoe crab census and adding programs to monitor beach-nesting birds.

In an effort to expand our educational offerings and more aggressively meet our conservation goals, we are actively developing a series of "roll-up-your-sleeves and get involved" opportunities for the community. Examples include hosting a Marine Mammal Stranding volunteer training program, and setting up a SEANET (Shorebird Ecological Assessment Network) program in Cape May and providing the necessary training. Volunteers and staff will monitor local beaches for signs of shorebird mortality. The data collected throughout the network (New England to Florida) can be used to assess the impact(s) of oil spills, harmful algal blooms, and diseases on our shorebirds. Check out all the upcoming program announcements in this newsletter.

To continue to build on our Sustainability Initiatives, the Wetlands Institute will be adding an additional solar array to the roof. The new installation will include an additional 49 solar panels and is projected to generate almost 12 kilowatts of power. This installation, combined with our first solar array, is projected to supply almost 15% of the electricity that the Institute uses. The project is in memory of Sam Roberts and is generously funded by his family and supporters of the Sam Roberts Memorial Fund at the Wetlands Institute. We will be adding renewable energy educational programs and an interactive solar energy display at the Institute. Construction is slated to be completed in late spring!

Plans are in the works to expand our lecture series and bring world-class speakers to the Institute for popular evening programs. This summer's first George Clark Lecture Series speaker will be Dr. Ellen Prager on July 18. Dr. Prager is an expert on marine creatures, a nationally known author and has appeared on several national news and TV programs. A big shout out to the Hamiltons for underwriting this event. Keep your eye on website's *Latest News and Developments* page for more opportunities to hear from engaging speakers on topics of interest to the coastal and wetland community.



The Wetlands Institute will also be a voice for research and conservation on matters of regional, and where appropriate, national importance. The Wetlands Institute will participate in the public discourse related to science and policy of coastal and marine resources. We will do so under certain circumstances and using several important guidelines. These are: 1) we will provide comment and opinions on subjects for which we have scientific expertise; 2) we will comment utilizing the scientific basis for taking a stand, and not engage in political discussions; and 3) we will present the scientific justification for the stand, and explain how we evaluated the science to make the conclusions that we did. We will present our findings in non-confrontational ways and through unbiased outlets. It will be a priority of the Wetlands Institute to translate our comments and opinions to the general public so that they can become better informed about issues of importance to coastal and wetland ecosystems and by extension, our community. Our goal is science-based environmental stewardship and common-sense conservation.

We have begun implementing this approach by submitting a comment to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission related to an addendum to the horseshoe crab fishery management plan (see the Institute's website under Latest News and Developments, for the full text of the comment). As an update, the addendum was approved, which is the position we took. We are currently working on some sustainable fisheries issues and a position to help guide the Wetlands Institute in our programming and special events.

There are a number of new programs being developed, some new renovations and updates to the facilities, and some new exhibits being set up. If you haven't stopped by in a while, there's lots to see and do.

Stay tuned, send your ideas and comments, stop by for a visit, renew and expand your engagement, and be part of the new excitement, growth and development of the Wetlands Institute. We need your help and support to achieve the greatness I envision. Make no small plans for the Wetlands Institute — *be a part of it.*

