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SWSPCP SPRING NEWSLETTER

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY ROB MCINNES,
PROFESSIONAL WETLAND
SCIENTIST

Here in the northern hemisphere, the winter months are fading behind us and the first flowers of spring are resolutely trying to break out. The marsh marigolds are emerging in my garden pond and snowdrops, crocuses and other bulbs are pushing through the lawn. The birds are busying in the hedgerows and trees and, whilst I await the Spring migrants, it won't be long before the clear blue skies are punctuated by skeins of geese. As the late, great American comedian Robin Williams remarked, 'Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party!'".




For many Professional Wetland Scientists, Spring is a time to start to really enjoy rather than endure field work and site visits. When certain aspects of our work become a little easier freed from the numbing chill of winter. Buds breaking through on woody vegetation and the first new green shoots of plants act as indicators that the growing season has begun and much of our professional work needs to start in earnest. But please share a thought for our PWS colleagues in the southern hemisphere as their nights draw in and they shuffle towards autumn. Being part of a global community of wetland professionals means we all face different challenges at different times.

Global conventions and Professional Wetland Scientists

As we moved into 2023 and onwards into Spring, I have been reflecting back on 2022. The Professional Certification Program has continued to endeavour to increase its global reach and relevance and truly embrace diversity, equity and inclusion. However, I have also had a chance to reflect on the relevance of the Program as a global initiative.

The end of 2022 saw three significant meetings that demonstrated to me the importance of professional wetland scientist at a global level. In November, the Convention on Wetlands (the Ramsar Convention) held its 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP14) jointly in Wuhan, China, and Geneva, Switzerland. A few days later in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held COP27. This meeting was rapidly followed by COP15 of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), held in Montreal, Canada. These three meetings painted a worrying picture of our collective global environment.

The Ramsar Convention started by presciently acknowledging that, globally, wetlands have declined by 35% since 1970 and that the trend of decline has not been effectively halted; and that this trend will affect the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), mitigation and adaptation to climate change under the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC and the future of global biodiversity. However, the COP also affirmed the value of protecting, conserving and restoring wetlands to achieve multiple benefits, including for climate change, biodiversity and human wellbeing.




In its periodic review of the long-term global goal under UNFCCC, and of overall progress towards achieving it, the climate change COP expressed alarm and utmost concern that human activities have caused a global average temperature increase of around 1.1 °C above pre-industrial levels to date. The impacts of this are already being felt in every region of the world and will escalate with every increment of global warming. UNFCCC note that countries have different responsibilities, national circumstances and capabilities to contribute to achieving the long-term global climate change goals. The COP made it clear that the impacts and risks associated with warming are unevenly distributed, and in this regard, the need for enhanced efforts towards achieving the long-term global goal needs to take into account ambition, equity, just transition and the best available science.

Further depressing news came out of the CBD COP. It was noted with deep concern that, while there has been progress towards achievement of the global Aichi Biodiversity Targets (set by CBD in 2011 to be delivered by 2020), national targets set by individual countries through their national biodiversity strategies and action plans were collectively not commensurate with the level of ambition required and implementation had failed to deliver on the targets, particularly in developing country Parties, thus highlighting the need for enhanced international cooperation. The COP further reported that an average of approximately 25 per cent of species in assessed animal and plant groups are threatened, suggesting that around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss. Without such action, there will be a further acceleration in the global rate of species extinction, which is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it has averaged over the past 10 million years.

The biosphere, upon which humanity as a whole depends, is being altered to an unparalleled degree across all spatial scales as biodiversity declines faster than at any time in human history.

In response to the failure to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, and being alarmed by the magnitude of continued loss of biodiversity and the threat that this poses to nature and human well-being, the CBD COP adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework as a basis for goals and targets to be achieved by 2030. One of the targets of relevance to wetland scientists is to ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.



So, the cynic in me could conclude 'What's the point?', and that Ramsar has failed to stem the degradation and loss of wetlands; UNFCCC has failed to arrest climate change; and the CBD has failed to achieve the global biodiversity targets. But, conversely, the optimist in me recognises this as an opportunity for professional wetland scientists to stand up and be counted. Whilst the reasons for the shameful collective failure to protect our only home are many and complex, one of them relates to the skills of individuals. Never before have the wetlands of the world needed well trained, experienced, knowledgeable and dedicated wetland scientists than now. PWS are incredibly well-placed to drive forward these global agendas through their work with wetlands, whether in their own backyard or at an international scale, ensuring that their biodiversity is protected, that their values are recognised and that their unique role in global climate regulation is appreciated and communicated.

The SWS Professional Certification Program was well represented at the Ramsar COP in Geneva, participating in numerous discussions and hosting a valuable side event allowing the Program to engage with participants from around the world. It became clear that, across the globe, our skills are needed and the ability of governments and other organisations to identify genuine wetland professionals, who are qualified and ethical, is a strong reality. The messages coming through at the Ramsar COP, and the bleak collective picture arising from these three global Conventions, makes me feel more strongly than ever that our vision for SWSPCP to be the globally recognized authority on certification of wetland professionals, requiring adherence to the highest standards in education, experience, and ethics in protecting and managing wetland resources and elevating the profession of wetland science is incredibly pertinent at local and global scales. We continue to work towards this vision.

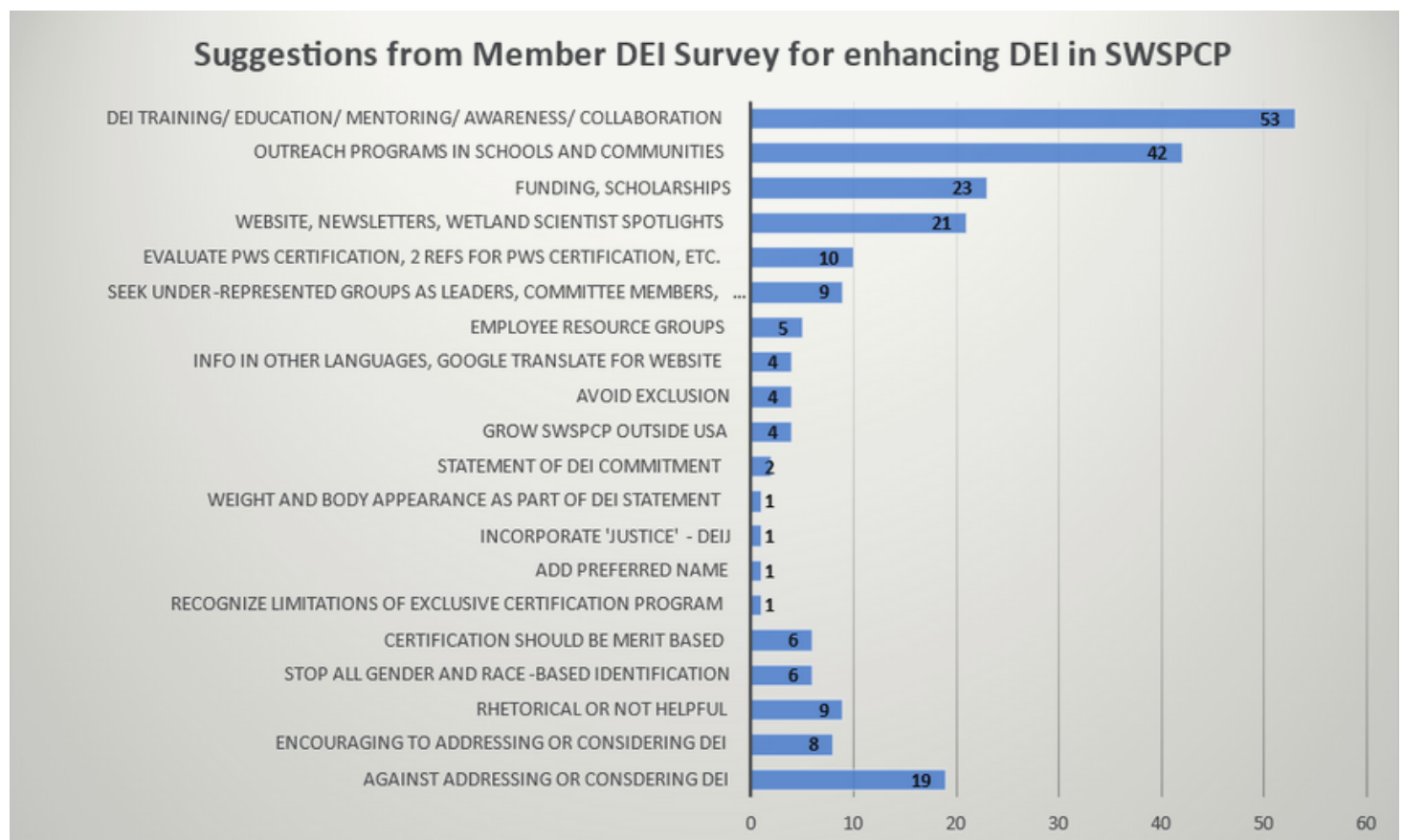
I hope that 2023 is positive for all and, that in whatever small way possible, we all contribute to the global agendas for wetlands, their biodiversity and their role in climate change, through our wetland-related work. Every wetland counts, even the smallest, and a positive change is still a step in the right direction. When confronted with global challenges, it is sometimes wise to reflect on the words of the South Africa Bishop Desmond Tutu who once remarked, 'there is only one way to eat an elephant: a bite at a time'.

Rob McInnes
SWS PCP President

THE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) COMMITTEE – A TIMELY INITIATIVE OF SWSPCP

Since the formation of the DEI Committee by the SWSPCP Board in September 2021, this committee has been actively engaging with its members. As the DEI Committee's first major undertaking, it conducted a survey to members in February 2022. As many of you might have seen, the initial summary of these results was published in the Summer 2022 newsletter of SWSPCP. While the newsletter article contained some statistics of various key aspects of DEI practices within SWSPCP, further analyses were conducted on the feedback; especially the insights into actions and activities that could help enhance DEI within SWSPCP. The graph below summarizes the categories of suggestions that were offered by the survey respondents.

DEI Suggestions



A total of 305 members responded to the survey with some offering multiple suggestions. All suggestions, even those that were apparently negative to DEI, were considered in the breakdown analyses. The most popular suggestions for enhancing DEI in the SWSPCP included DEI training, education, mentoring, awareness, collaboration, and outreach to schools and communities (top two bars on the graph). Accordingly, the DEI Committee considers these to be the top priority to address in the action plan currently being developed. Additionally, the Committee views the third-most popular suggestion (funding and scholarships) to be something of importance for the Board of Directors (BoD) to consider, especially as it pertains to involving the Globalization and Outreach Committees of SWSPCP. This could include awarding scholarships or grants for students from underprivileged backgrounds or first-generation college students; scaling certification fees to income level; reducing or eliminating fees for applicants from disadvantaged communities; offering gratis or sponsored certifications; and funding travel for SWSPCP Global Champions. The DEI Committee feels that the fourth item (website, newsletters, wetland scientist spotlights) is something that should be relatively easy to achieve as SWSPCP moves forward with a new website design.

There were several suggestions that SWSPCP has already implemented or are in the process of implementing. For example, the DEI Statement has been uploaded on the SWSPCP website. Other suggestions currently being implemented include: offering information on the website in other languages; adding a preferred name to forms; and recognizing that the certification program is merit based, etc. In the coming months, an action plan will be finalized that will detail which SWSPCP committees or other groups, both internal and external, could be involved in implementing the strategies to achieve the goal of addressing and enhancing DEI in our organization.

Sadly, Discrimination is ongoing

Although the good news is, that out of 305 respondents, 180 have never experienced discrimination; the remaining respondents have. At the time of this survey, 82 respondents had experienced discrimination in the past; 12 experienced discriminations in the past and were still experiencing it, and seven were 'currently' experiencing discrimination. The DEI Committee is extremely concerned that a full 6% of member respondents are experiencing discrimination.

Recommendations to the BoD

Because 19 of our certificants are/were experiencing discrimination, the Committee is hoping to offer relevant resources on the SWSPCP website. A few resources have been offered below and the Committee requests that the SWSPCP membership contribute more suggestions within the U.S. and other countries. This can be accomplished by emailing the DEI Committee Co-chairs, Kim Ponzio (kponzio@sjrwmd.com) and/or Swapan Paul (swapan.paul@sopa.nsw.gov.au).

Resources in the UK: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/discrimination-at-work/discrimination-at-work/taking-action/get-help-with-discrimination-at-work/>

Resources in Australia: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/talk-to-a-counsellor> and <https://www.lifeline.org.au/131114/>

Resources in US :<https://www.theeap.com/problems/resources-for-combating-hate-discrimination-and-racism-at-work>
<https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/small-business/eeoc-resources>

Upcoming Activities or Emerging Issues

The DEI Committee remains agile, active, and committed. While it has been working on developing an Action Plan, as an interim, it is suggesting webpage enhancements for DEI, including resources for those being discriminated against. The DEI Committee is also developing a 2- or 3-year strategic plan and a corresponding Action Plan to implement those strategic programs. Should any of the members have any further suggestions, they are cordially welcome to reach out to the DEI Committee.



SHARE THE NEWS

WHY THE INTEREST ?

Casey Dunn, PWS

Accreditation from the Society of Wetland Scientists - Professional Certification Program is a milestone marker in my career. As a consultant specializing in fish and mussel studies, I recognized early in my career that I also needed to expand my skills to include wetland delineation studies and Section 404 consultations to remain competitive in the private sector. These services are in high demand and marketable across all infrastructure industries. I am often surprised by unique wetland systems I discover in unexpected places and appreciate the value in protecting these fragile aquatic resources from necessary infrastructure initiatives. As one of the most recognized and respected organizations in the environmental consulting industry, the Society of Wetland Scientists certification was an excellent opportunity to receive accreditation for these specialized skill sets.



Nicole Lake, PWS

I fell in love with being outside and working in wetlands back when I was doing my internships for college. Over the years I have had the privilege to work with many Professional Wetland Scientists across the Northeast USA. Their experience of what the certification has meant to them and the understanding that the certification is well acknowledged within the environmental/ wetland community had initially set me on this trajectory to achieving my PWS that has taken me many years to achieve. I believe that it is an important distinction and the next step in furthering my education and career. I also believe that the certification program helps to ensure that the community stays current on scientific exploration and breakthroughs, and that we are constantly evolving and expanding our knowledge base. I am very proud of my certification and everything that I have done to reach this goal.

Dana Wilson, WPT

I applied for the WPIT knowing it is the first step in my career as a wetland scientist. While it is not the PWS certification, it still shows my dedication and commitment to the industry and the profession. The WPIT also allows me to have access to industry publications such as this newsletter, as well as to a network of like minded professionals that share a common interest. I look forward to seeing where my career in wetlands will take me, as well as my journey to PWS.

Welcome!

SWSPCP proudly welcomes the following people who have become members in the last 30 days.

Katrina Jackson as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Sarah Jarquin Weatherbee as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Magdalena Gierczak as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Danielle Anderson as a Wetland Professional In Training.
Olivia Barry as a Upgrade from WPIT to PWS.
Ryan Greenawalt as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Wyatt Jackson as a Wetland Professional In Training.
Curtis George as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Shane Slate as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Tyson Kurtz as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Samantha Bohn as a Upgrade from WPIT to PWS.
Catherine Cruz-Ortiz as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Matt Bricker as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Samuel Joseph as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Joshua Hoke as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Andrew McNulty as a Wetland Professional In Training.
Eesa Ali as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Erin Deck as a Wetland Professional In Training.
Ashley Chattle as a Wetland Professional In Training.
Paul Day as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Brendan Little as a Upgrade from WPIT to PWS.
Kelly Daniels as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Julia McGuire as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Hailey Preston as a Professional Wetland Scientist.
Alexander Dalager as a Professional Wetland Scientist.

