

Chapter to Chapter

Surfing Restoration in the Central Rockies

An Interview with Central Rockies Chapter President Chris Rutledge

It takes a lot of commitment to be an active SER Chapter member. Busy professionals volunteer their precious time to organize educational opportunities, field trips and networking opportunities in their local areas. Last June, SER International convened a Chapter Summit in Denver to meet with chapter leaders and brainstorm ways to help Chapters thrive (see page 3). One theme became clear: Chapters need more and easier ways to help connect their members. Keeping members connected takes time, and volunteers who lead busy lives don't have endless time to spare. Some Chapters generate quarterly newsletters, but that takes time and can be expensive to print and mail.

People join Chapters because they are hungry for ways to stay connected to the many ideas, practices and changes in the field., and because they want to learn and grow as practitioners, professionals, teachers and enthusiasts. One of the best ways to benefit from Chapter membership is to network with other restorationists. Face-to-face conversations and excursions means that members can develop a network of colleagues who can be resources and for whom they can be resources.

Chris Rutledge, president of the Central Rockies Chapter (CeSER) in Colorado, U.S.A., is hoping that their Chapter's new and improved web site will ease the amount of time he has to spend getting the word out to his members about events, issues and updates. A restoration ecologist with Greystone Environmental Consulting, an environmental firm in Greenwood Village, Colorado, Rutledge first became involved with his local SER chapter in 1997. CeSER, which was formed in 1996, today boasts 70 members. In the last year, the Chapter has sponsored a talk on the role of restoration in conservation biology and field trips to restoration sites in South Platte Park. He offers some advice and encouragement to other Chapters who want to find an easy way to use the web to connect members to what's going on in their Chapters.

Q: How hard was it to launch a web site? How did you make it happen?

CR: We had a web site, but it was always complicated trying to update it, so it wasn't a helpful tool beyond letting people know we existed. We would have to go through over-worked web

administrators to get any new content up. But SER International's Executive Director, MK LeFevour, sent an email to SER Chapter leaders to let us know she had set up a module that basically automates the construction of web pages. She offered all the Chapters the opportunity to create our own web sites. SER International pays the hosting fees, and the great thing about the module is that it is so user-friendly. It's very easy to keep the page up-to-date. I can easily add a little content here, a little content there.

Q: Was it hard to learn how to use the module?

CR: Not at all! I'm no expert in this stuff, but MK spent about an hour with me on the phone and walked me through the basics of how to put our site together. It was enough information to make me pretty dangerous, at least! MK also gave me access to the web programmer so I could work out a few kinks that cropped up. It took me less than an hour to learn the mechanics, and then, I just started building in content. We had some content from our old, very outdated web page that served as the starting point. From our Chapter meetings, we had also come up with a lot of great ideas on things to do, and the web page ended up being a great way to share those ideas.

Q: What information do you have on your web site?

CR: We have all the general information, such our Chapter objective, officers and committees, how to join, and then

information on how to join our listserv. I also added links to web sites of interest, and a section for jobs and volunteer opportunities. I was able to put up copies of previous Chapter newsletters, and announcements for upcoming events.

I have also recently started adding "Restoration Project Profiles." These are just short articles that describe various aspects of restoration projects within the Central Rockies area. Everyone who submits a profile includes all of their contact information, and I hope that this will lead to some really great networking within the local restoration community, and we'll also be a resource for people outside the area who have questions. At the moment, we have three Restoration Project Profiles posted on the site, and I hope to add a ton more over time.

The great thing about the web is that even people who aren't members, or who don't live in our area, can access the site and learn



about restoration in the Central Rockies region. The main objective for the website is to provide a clearinghouse of information on restoration in the Central Rockies, and also to facilitate networking among those involved in restoration.

Q: Have you gotten many hits?

CR: It's only been up for a few months. MK and I are brainstorming on how to get the word out about our site, including a press release. By the way, did I mention our web address is www.ser.org/cerser?

Q: You anticipated our next question! So what is your Chapter planning for the near future?

CR: Our Chapter has spent the last year coming out of several years of dormancy. One of our short-term goals is just to let people know

we are back, we are doing things—trying to generate general interest and regain some momentum. We're planning to host a soils workshop. There seem to be a lot of people within our local restoration community who are always looking for applied information. We have also recently applied for a National Science Foundation Grant with professors from Colorado State University and Denver University. The idea behind this grant is to help build and facilitate collaboration between scientists involved in restoration in the Intermountain West. Among other things, this project would include development of a restoration specialist directory focused on scientists, hosting annual conferences over a period of 5 years, and publishing a book on restoration ecology in the Intermountain West. What I like about this proposal is that it is very consistent with our Chapter's mission statement.

GRANTS CORNER Has Moved to Your Computer!

Due to the popularity of this column, we are now sending weekly email updates on grant opportunities to subscribers to the Members-Only Grants Corner listserv. For information on how to subscribe to the listserv, email Membership Coordinator Jana Franz at jana@ser.org

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dry land, and nothing in between.”

Mitsch, winner of the 2005 John Sperry Award (see page 5), has been advising the U.S. government about restoration in the New Orleans area and other parts of Louisiana. During his talk, he confirmed that the disastrous flooding from Hurricane Katrina was not a surprise to scientists and engineers who had been lobbying to restore the Mississippi Delta. “In the last 150 years, the wetlands have been disappearing,” he pointed out. “When land settles, vegetation leaves

and when all the wetlands disappear, then New Orleans takes a direct hit in a big storm. Many of us believe we need to restore thousands of hectares of wetlands in this region before we rebuild the city. Just putting dikes back and buildings will spend a lot of resources and we will lose the opportunity to restore the marshlands as a buffer zone.”

Other highlights of the World Conference included the Earth in Transition gathering (see page 4 for more details), field trips to local restoration sites and the annual SER International Awards presentations (see page 5).

Earth In Transition *continued from page 4*

hunters can no longer use their sleds to hunt, and the meat from the hunts we used to feed the dogs. “Now the hunters just keep the dogs for sport,” she said. Hunters who can't hunt rely on government aid to survive. “At first, it was considered ‘catastrophe aid,’” said Heilmann, “but when they need it year after year, it becomes the new way of life.”

Abraham, Heilmann and others warn, “What happens to us will happen globally. We are the canary in the mine.”

“What is clear to all of us indigenous experts is that traditional ecological knowledge is an irreplaceable source of potential adaptive solutions,” says Dennis Martinez, chair of the IPRN and a member of North America's O'odham Nation.

Earth in Transition is the continuation of a long-term effort by

SER to integrate traditional ecological knowledge into the larger, Western-science-dominated field. “What Western scientists learned from listening to indigenous people describing the effects of global climate change in their local regions is that the environmental challenges we face will require intervention on every level, from the village to world governing bodies,” says Keith Bowers, chair of SER International. “Global climate change is affecting their environment, culture and physical survival, and the industrialized world is just starting to feel it. But this gathering gives me hope, because these indigenous scholars represent an on-the-ground movement of restoration that is vital to the health of our planet.”

For more information, including how to obtain copies of the Earth in Transition proceedings DVD and to hear podcast interviews of participants, visit the IPRN website: www.ser.org/iprn