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Delta Independent Science Board

November 20, 2014

To: Organizers of the Bay-Delta Science Conference of 2014
From: Delta Independent Science Board
Subject: Accolades, Suggestions, and Further Comments on the 2014 Conference

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We congratulate the organizers of the 2014 Bay-Delta Science Conference for orchestrating an outstanding conference. The plenaries, presentations, and posters did much to advance science in the Bay-Delta region and its growing relevance to issues of statewide and regional importance. After expanding on our praise for the conference, we offer some suggestions for the next iteration of this important event.

Most Board members were on hand for at least one of the three days and several were there throughout. We attended many sessions, as well as the Delta Stewardship Council meeting, conveniently co-located on Thursday. We discussed the conference during our 31 October public meeting.

We continue to believe that this conference is a very high priority for regional scientists and policymakers working on the Delta. Agencies should view participation in this conference as an essential part of employee development and agency engagement; necessary for the scientific effectiveness and credibility of all involved in Delta issues.

This regional conference is at least as informative as major national and international gatherings, while being also more relevant, and less expensive, for most attendees. We liked its size and duration, its topical areas, and its opportunities for scientific communication and collaboration. Artistic involvement enriched the program. Those who had attended previous Bay-Delta conferences noted improvements in the level of analysis and more examples of scientific synthesis.

Our suggestions for future conferences are summarized below.

Raising the prominence of posters. Council Chair Fiorini said that the posters tended to be more efficient for communicating with policymakers than most talks – policymakers can get the main policy message more quickly from a poster than a talk, and can get into details as well if desired. Several ideas for raising the prestige and effectiveness of posters included:

- Have the Delta Stewardship Council recirculate 4-8 of the most relevant posters from the conference at DSC public meetings as a way of making science more prominent at DSC meetings, communicating more scientific information to DSC participants and members, and increasing the policy value and utility and prestige of scientific posters.

- Allow 1-2 minute pop-up talks (1 slide each) for posters at a plenary or regular conference session. This would help direct attendees to view posters and interact with their authors.
- Encourage top regional scientists to prepare posters.
- Move some, or all posters some of the time, to the upstairs coffee area, or otherwise organize the layout so attendees do not have to go downstairs to see the posters. Consider using the patio for posters if weather permits (perhaps too dark for evening activities).
- Strongly encourage, or even require, that author(s) of the posters be available to discuss the contents, as at AGU. Author presence seemed to lag during the two reception nights – perhaps this was a Giants/World Series problem this year.

Number of concurrent sessions. Five concurrent sessions were held this year. Some thought 3-4 concurrent sessions would be better. Others felt comfortable with up to 10 concurrent sessions, making each talk shorter (e.g., 12 minutes with 3 minutes for questions has worked well at past Salish Sea Ecosystem Conferences). Overall though, the number of concurrent sessions should be up to the conference organizers, but we are encouraging some experimentation.

Encourage synthesis talks and sessions. Three ideas in this area include:

- Consider a synthetic speaker for sessions built from a compilation of independently submitted abstracts on a similar topic.
- Include more panels and opportunities for interactions in the format of CABA seminars, but probably across broader themes.
- Consider more “thoughtful” talks and posters that include synthesis, policy implications, visioning, etc. rather than just data and method presentations.

Diversify and integrate science topics. The biology and ecology coverage is superb, and hydrodynamics and water quality are quite good. However, there is relatively little scientific coverage of the other “coequal” goals of water supply reliability and “Delta as place”. Although there is less scientific work done in these areas, some more coverage of these areas would be desirable, especially if integrated into the current strengths of the conference and the policy interests related to science in the Delta.

Stress policy and management implications. Continue to encourage that the policy implications of the work, included in the abstracts, be carried through to the oral and poster presentations.

Get smart? Develop/use smartphone app to download abstracts and help plan session attendance at the conference. This is increasingly common at conferences.

These are just suggestions. We have great faith in the conference committee to judge how or if, to implement these ideas, so as to continue to provide the excellent conference experience in 2016 for the benefit of science, policymakers, and public interests in the Bay-Delta.