

Collective Expertise and Energy



Martha Narvaez,
President, AWRA
president@awra.org

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IN MY INTRODUCTORY column, I mentioned my intent to bring greater recognition to, and form a stronger connection between, AWRA and the organization's 23 state and local sections. My interest in highlighting this topic comes from my experiences with AWRA and the Delaware State Section of AWRA (DEAWRA). As a student and new professional, I was an active member in national AWRA, enjoyed attending the conferences and learned so much from the colleagues I met. One thing that was missing, though, was a local connection to water resource professionals outside of my daily project work.

After meeting members from other AWRA state sections, it became clear that Delaware would benefit from a state section. In 2004, with the support of my director and several colleagues, we founded the DEAWRA. For those of us involved, this was an avenue to meet water resource professionals in Delaware and the tristate region, many of whom we would not otherwise have come into contact.

In 2007, three years after establishment, DEAWRA worked with AWRA's New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Philadelphia sections to host the American Water Resources Mid-Atlantic Conference (MAC). This conference was one of the first in the region to focus on the connection between water resources and economics and, under the AWRA umbrella, convened a robust group of experts to discuss the topic. In partnership with New Jersey, DEAWRA has since coordinated MAC 2013 and MAC 2016 is scheduled for this fall.

Following the success of the MAC in 2007, Delaware and New Jersey teamed up to plan the 2010 AWRA Annual Conference in Philadelphia, PA. As the conference, one of AWRA's largest, commenced with the Philadelphia Mummers (costumed entertainers who traditionally welcome the New Year with a parade) jubilantly marching through the opening session, the local planning committee and national leaders agreed that the energy, expertise and connections brought to the conference would not have been possible without the national organization and state sections working together.

Based on my experience at the national and local levels of AWRA, and conversations with state section leaders across the country, I have made it my goal to strengthen the relationship between the national organization and the local sections. AWRA has 23 state/regional sections composed of the best and brightest local water resource experts working on critical issues across the nation. Although these groups are often considered separate organizations, it is critical

that they are viewed as entities that promote and cultivate one another and serve a mutually supportive relationship.

It is important to note that this effort is not only important to me, the AWRA staff and the Board of Directors, but also to our current and former members. In a recent AWRA marketing analysis conducted by Marketing General, Inc., it was found that “current and former members indicate that the value of the AWRA membership would increase with the development of a partnership with local, regional, or state sections of AWRA.” So, what is national AWRA doing to facilitate this?

In January 2015, the AWRA Board of Directors restated the value and benefit of local sections and committed to strengthening those relationships. A national-level committee was established, which then hosted two listening sessions for state section leaders to gather ideas on how to strengthen the relationship and add value to both national and state/regional sections. In response to that feedback, AWRA has moved forward on several recommendations, including:

- Host quarterly state section leader webinars.
- Continue the state section leader lunch at the annual conference.
- Dedicate space for state section updates and content in *Water Resources IMPACT* magazine.
- Create a state section online communication tool.
- Provide expertise, as feasible, in areas such as membership management, finance and water resources content.
- Consider a membership fee structure that will account for state section membership at the national membership level.
- Establish liaisons between the AWRA Board of Directors and the state sections.

In closing, I would like to thank those involved at the local level for all the work you and your section have done to improve water resources locally, as well as your efforts to extend the AWRA name. To those working on the national level, please consider reaching out and joining your local section and sharing all the great things that national has to offer.

There is so much to gain from the collective water resources expertise and energy of our members, both nationally and locally. I believe that working together as much as possible will make state sections and national AWRA the strongest multi-disciplinary water resources organizations out there.

Please contact me if you have feedback, questions or comments. I look forward to working together on this topic in the coming year. ■