

National Science Foundation EPSCoR Social-Ecological Systems Workshop



LIVING ON EARTH

May 10-13, 2009
Anchorage, Alaska



What are Social-Ecological Systems?

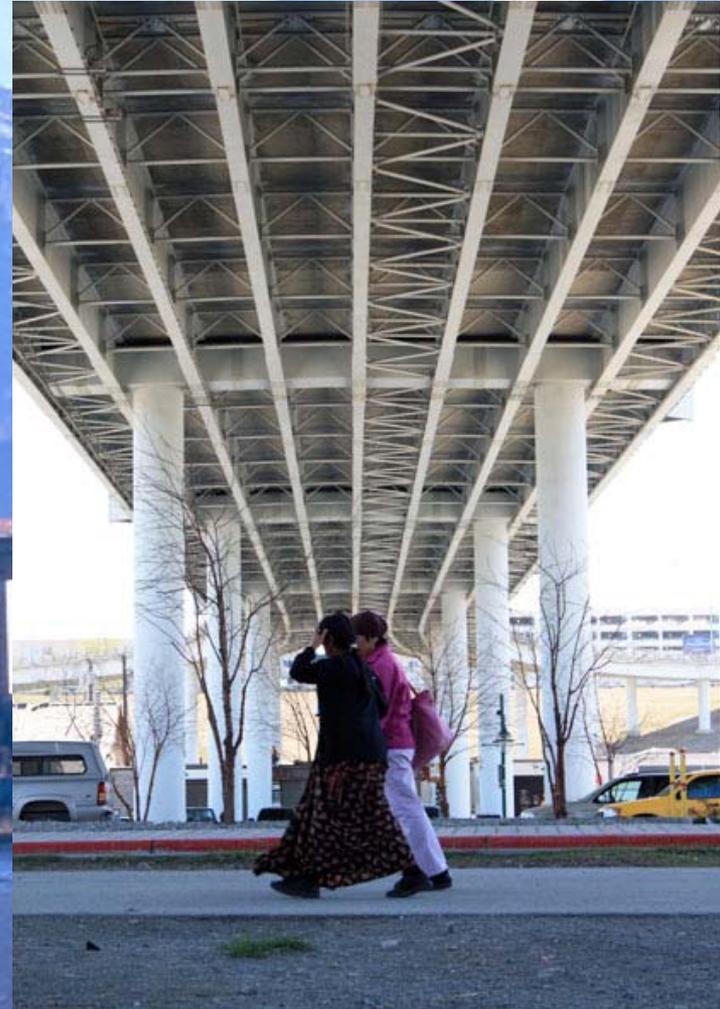
- The notion of social-ecological systems (SES) is based on the recognition that landscapes with humans are driven by ecological and social processes;
- We all live in social-ecological systems;
- SES studies usually include a special emphasis on human interactions with the non-human environment.

Why Alaska?

- Alaska is a “natural laboratory” – fragile ecosystems and diverse cultural systems;
- Small and dispersed human population often dependent on local resources;
- Climate change and its effects more pronounced than elsewhere;
- Emerging excellence of SES research.

Anchorage

- Alaska's largest city, situated on the edge of vast stretches of wilderness
- Abundant in urban/wilderness transition zones, which were highlighted during "Immersion Activities"



Immersion activity participants walk under downtown overpass near Ship Creek

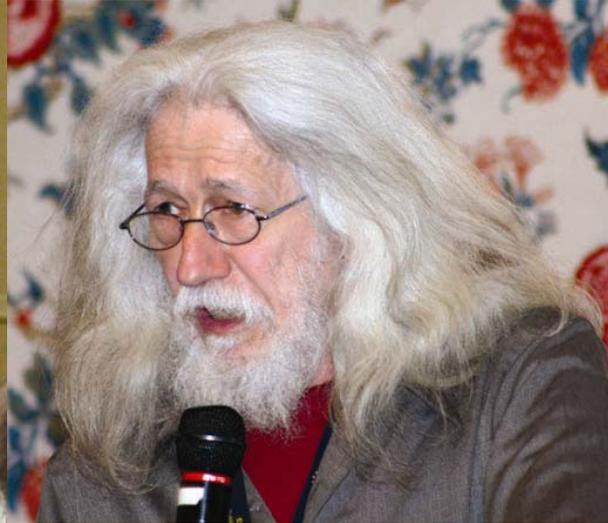
Conference Highlights

- Keynote speakers
- SES tools and strategies sessions
- SES research presentations and poster session
- Information exchange presentations by EPSCoR jurisdictions
- Session on SES outreach
- Immersion activities



Alaska EPSCoR co-PI Lil Alessa at SES tools/strategies session

Keynote Speakers



- Frances Westley, U. of Waterloo
- Steve Heimel, Alaska Public Radio Network
- Maurie Cohen, NJ Institute of Technology

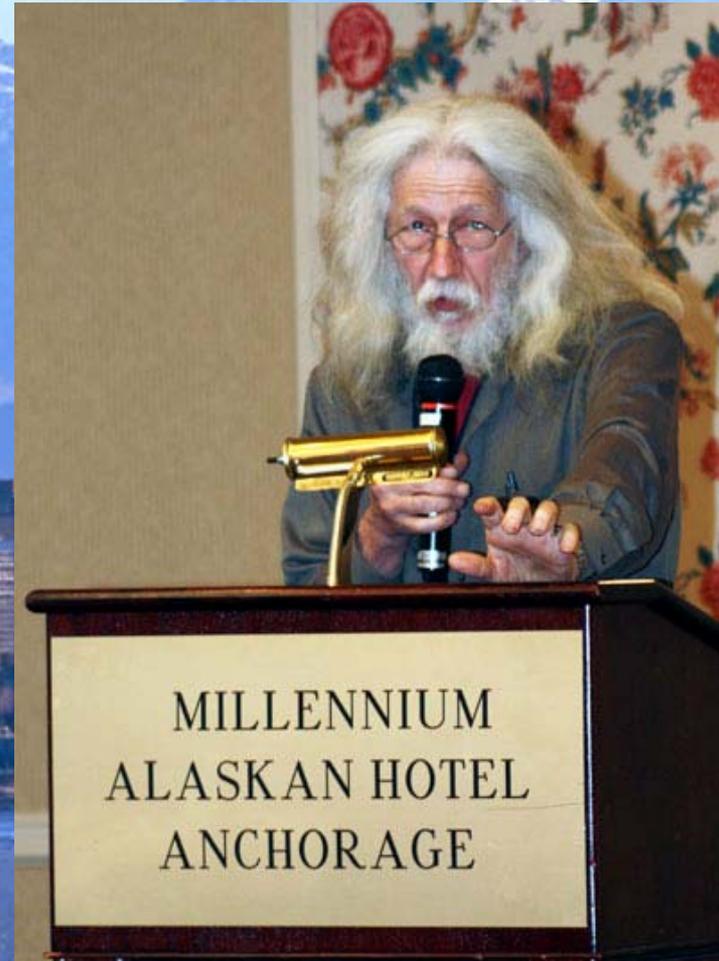
Frances Westley

- Chair of Social Innovation at U. of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada
- Renowned scholar and consultant in areas of social innovation and strategies for sustainable development



Steve Heimel

- More than four decades of radio experience, including more than two decades in Alaska
- Longtime Anchorage resident and observer
- 20-year member of AAAS



Maurie Cohen



- Assoc. Prof. of Environmental Policy and Sustainability at New Jersey Institute of Technology
- Focuses on systems innovation with respect to transportation and mobility

Presentations & Discussions



Abstract presented by Sarah Strauss, U. of Wyoming



Adam Asquith, U. of Hawaii, discusses his state's research

- Presentations of current SES research
- Outline of SES research by jurisdictions to stimulate collaboration and networking

Immersion Activities

- Visits to three Anchorage-area SES sites, assisted by docents;
- Three groups of attendees tasked with observing and recording SES characteristics of these sites.



Immersion Activity, Ship Creek

Eagle River Nature Center



- Fairly undisturbed valley on the border between city and wilderness;
- Landscapes ranging from muskeg to boreal forest to alpine tundra.

Ship Creek



EPSCoR grad student Nick Straka takes photos of high water levels on Ship Creek

- Downtown industrial watershed formerly used for power generation;
- Now home of extremely popular salmon fishery (“combat fishing”).

Westchester Lagoon/Chester Creek



Site leader Andy Kliskey runs immersion activity at Westchester lagoon

- Urban greenbelt leading to artificial lake, which empties into natural inlet;
- Waterfowl sanctuary and recreational oasis.

Immersion Activities



An immersion group prepares its presentation

- More than “field trips;”
- Groups were asked to collate and present their observations within a research context.

Outreach Session



- Federal agency representatives (USFWS, USGS, BLM) addressed participants on ways to communicate SES research to the public

Attendance

- Over 50 attendees
- 10 states represented:
Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, Vermont, Wyoming



Participants at Westchester Lagoon immersion site

Outcomes

- Successful networking opportunity;
- Individual collaboration ideas were developed;
- Increased interest in SES research within the EPSCoR world;
- Alaska EPSCoR to produce 10+ minute video on conference for internet posting and possible TV spot.



EPSCoR videographer Kaleb Yates films at Ship Creek

Written Feedback

(post-conference surveys)

- Pros: Organization of conference; immersion activities; free time to network;
- Cons: Need for narrower focus; need for more SES specifics and processing of results; exhausting schedule.

What's Next?

- Circulation of jurisdictional SES questionnaires;
- Follow-up survey in x months;
- Nurture and develop cross-jurisdictional linkages;
- Use the workshop to boost SES research in Alaska;
- Assist in developing future workshops at the intersection of ecological and social science research.