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Dear AERC Colleague,

As I begin my second year as president of AERC, I would like to thank you for all you do to support ecosystem research and let you know how much I appreciate your continued involvement in and support for the AERC and its mission. I look forward to the coming year with great enthusiasm both for what we can achieve together within this great organization as well as for the opportunity to learn more about our membership and the fantastic research you conduct. Over the coming months the Board and I will be exploring some new alternatives for our 2016 annual meeting and hope that you can attend.

Today, the members of the AERC Board of Directors and I would like to share with you our excitement about the success of our annual events in Washington DC that took place in early October, 2015. This year, we once again conducted an impressive and successful series of AERC events centered on our annual meeting. Building on the momentum of recent year's successful events, we focused on AERC's main mission of communicating the importance of ecosystem science to Congress and conducted three specific events: 1) An AERC-sponsored workshop for meeting participants on Communicating Science to the Media and Policy Makers, 2) An AERC-sponsored congressional briefing on Ecosystem Resilience to Extreme Events, and 3) AERC-sponsored congressional visits on Capitol Hill. This excellent program of informational and educational activities was enthusiastically received by all in attendance; many of whom were graduate students and postdocs! Here is a summary of these three activities.

AERC-Sponsored Workshop on Communicating Science to the Media and Policy Makers

AERC's annual events in Washington DC kicked off on the morning of October 21st with a very successful workshop conducted by Julie Palakovich Carr of the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) Public Policy Office, and held at AIBS' offices in Washington. Julie's presentation and hands - on exercises focused on how to communicate with the media and included mock interviews where workshop participants attempted to use the methods Julie described, together with prepared statements, to respond to questions from a reporter (Julie) about each person's own ecosystem research and what its importance was. During the second half of the morning, Julie described how to communicate face to face with a congressional staff person and what methods and techniques can be used to enhance that communication. For this section of the workshop on how to effectively communicate with decision makers, participants broke into groups and practiced giving their 2 min "pitches" to each other under the watchful eyes of a former congressional staffer, Julie, and those of AERC- member faculty representatives who have first-hand experience communicating with congressional office staff on Capitol Hill. There were 25 participants in the workshop (11 of whom were graduate students and postdocs), primarily from AERC member institutions. More than half of

those participating in the workshop applied the coaching they received during visits to their respective congressional offices the next day.

The 2015 Annual AERC Business Meeting was well attended with faculty, students and postdocs from member organizations participating. The meeting was productive, reflecting the hard work and accomplishments of the Board over the past year. Issues including retention and expansion of member organizations, increased web presence, budget, and election of new AERC Board Members were addressed. The Board once again thanked Rob Gropp and Julie Palakovich Carr of the AIBS for all of their assistance with the organization and events of the meeting – as usual they did a fantastic job. Once again, following the excellent tradition established in 2013, the graduate Student Board Member was asked to design and conduct a Web-based evaluation survey for meeting participants, which should be completed and the results posted on the AERC website (www.ecosystemresearch.org) in February, 2016.

AERC-Sponsored Congressional Briefing on Ecosystem Resilience to Extreme Events

This year's one-hour congressional briefing presentations were provided by Dr. Mandy Joye from the University of Georgia, Dr. Todd Crowl from Florida International University, and Dr. Daniel Obrist from the Desert Research Institute (pdf's of presentations can be found at the AERC website, www.ecosystemresearch.org). The briefing was a huge success and was attended by a total of 46 people from a variety of governmental, non - governmental, academic, and professional organizations. Staff members from many congressional offices participated, with additional participants from the House Science Committee, the US Forest Service, the US Geological Survey, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Consortium for Ocean Leadership, NEON, and the United Nations Department of Agriculture. Also participating were members from professional societies including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography, the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the American Meteorological Society and the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. Graduate students, postdocs, and faculty members from 9 universities and research institutes from across the U.S rounded out the briefing audience, with most of these coming from AERC member institutions. After the three briefing presentations, the speakers responded to numerous excellent questions. Many in the audience stayed after the formal Q & A to talk with these experts on ecosystem science pertaining to extreme events.

AERC-Sponsored Congressional Office Visits on Capitol Hill

After attending the morning congressional briefing on the Ecosystem Resilience to Extreme Events on October 22nd, nineteen graduate students, postdocs and faculty members from AERC member institutions visited their respective House and Senate congressional offices. There they presented their own briefing statements on the importance of their own ecosystem research in addressing policy issues and why funding for ecosystem research needs to be expanded.

I hope this letter has given you a feeling for the excitement that this year's AERC events in Washington DC generated among all who participated. In particular, I am excited about the potential for growing AERC in the coming years and for finding new ways to serve the membership as AERC works to garner support for ecosystem research, both domestically and

globally. After my first year on the AERC leadership team, I have been impressed by the array of activities available to members and I strongly encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities that the AERC annual meeting provides, not only for learning new methods of communicating science to policy makers, but also for networking with other ecosystem researchers and congressional staffers.

None of the good things that AERC does could be accomplished without your dues support and service. I want to personally thank you for your continued support for AERC and for making possible the efforts by AERC to promote increased funding for research that benefits us all.

I wish you a a good start to 2016!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Olin E. Rhodes, Jr.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Olin E. Rhodes, Jr.
AERC President