

Strategic Planning for SE-EPPC

by Brian Bowen, President

During late 2004 and early 2005, the SE-EPPC Board began focusing on strategic planning in an effort to create a road map to the future. The process began with a Board meeting in Nashville on October 29, and continued at the 7th Annual SE-EPPC Symposium on May 2 in Birmingham, AL. Joyce Bender, SE-EPPC vice president, presented ideas gathered from the Nashville meeting and Brian Bowen, SE-EPPC president, facilitated discussion about those ideas.

Joyce presented a brief overview of SE-EPPC, talked about our current status and the strategic planning session in Nashville. The big questions asked in Nashville were basic: what is our role, or “what can we do as a regional organization that states can not or should not have to do?” How can we better respond to and support the state councils? How do we improve/establish networks with other organizations that share similar goals?

The proposed answers to these questions were as follows:

- Continue to provide assistance to state chapters to build strong organizations.
- Encourage chapters to be engaged politically. Coordinate letter-writing campaigns on issues of regional or national importance, and at the state level in support of state legislation or policy decisions.
- Continue to provide tax exemption status for chapters.
- Make annual symposia relevant by addressing regional issues, providing training opportunities, having an open forum for members to participate in organizational affairs.
- Be a clearinghouse for information by publishing or making available proceedings and reports from research oriented meetings.
- Improve the website and use it as a clearinghouse.
- Develop communication processes to aid in early detection and rapid response.
- Promote the St. Louis Declaration and Codes of Ethics.
- Create alliances with other groups to strengthen our message.
- Provide EPPC invasive lists to Natural Resources Conservation Service and similar agencies.
- Support regional risk assessments for ornamental plant species by facilitating development of standard protocols.
- Provide guidance and financial support on research projects.
- Republish the SE-EPPC newsletter in hardcopy and/or electronically.
- Provide input to *Wildland Weeds* magazine through articles and locating sponsorship.

How do we accomplish all of this? Hire an executive director. Many of the strides made while there was a part-time coordinator position from 1999 to 2002 have been on hold and, in general, the Board and committee activities have slowed. An executive director could focus on implementing the programmatic needs and improvements the Board has identified. The position would require raising funds for salary and operations.

Randy Westbrooks presented a PowerPoint program that reiterated the discussion points, added new concepts and organized them as the *SE-EPPC Proposed 2005-2010 Platform*. The first subheading, “2005 Platform,” had three recommendations: create SE-EPPC Regional Committees, hire a full-time Executive Director, and develop a Five-Year Strategic Plan. The remaining subheadings identified committees and their tasks (see sidebar).

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SE-EPPC Proposed 2005-2010 Platform

Joyce Bender
Kristen Allen
Randy Westbrooks

2005 Platform

SE-EPPC Regional Committees
Fulltime Executive Director
Leadership, Fund Raising, Visionary
Five-Year Strategic Plan

Regional Committees

Program Development
Training and Technical Support
Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR)
Communications
Research

Program Development Committee

Annual Symposium, Proceedings
State Chapters
EPPC State Chapters
Special Task Forces
(e.g., Beach Vitex)
State Interagency Invasive
Species Councils

Training and Technical Support Committee

Annual Hands-on Training
(GPS, Equipment, etc.)
Onsite and Distant Technical
Support for Specific Problems

Early Detection and Rapid Response Committee

Regional EDRR Pilot Project with
Mid-South Invasive Species Alliance and
Federal Interagency Committee for the
Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds
(FICMNEW)
Risk Assessment Center for New
Exotics in Trade (Mississippi State
University and USGS)

Communications Committee

Outreach, Public Relations,
Speakers Bureau
Newsletter, Articles in
Wildland Weeds magazine
Website, E-mail reminders
Snail Mailings
Codes of Conduct (on Website)
Fact Sheets

Research Committee

Identify Research Needs
Support Funding for Research
Publish Research Findings

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Further discussions included possible funding mechanisms for the executive director position and reinstating the SE-EPPC newsletter. A consensus of those attending thought the newsletter was important enough for state chapters to financially support the cost of printing and mailing, as done in the past.

Some final discussion addressed the SE-EPPC webpage and some of the improvements that were expected. An idea to develop an invasive exotic plant distribution map for the Southeast was discussed. Networking opportunities were explored to determine other groups who shared the same interest (e.g., Southern Appalachian Information Node) and who had available technology to partner with us on this task. These talks will continue.

Our strategic planning process created a list of goals and action items, but much of this is presently impeded by our lack of a director. Someone working on these items full-time will definitely make much of this possible. We will continue to keep our planning open to SE-EPPC members and welcome your participation.

SE-EPPC Annual Symposium
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These sessions contained 24 presentations from an array of graduate students, scientists, and professional experts. In addition, there were six informative poster presentations displayed during the conference.

Two excellent "closing presentations" kept everyone's interest until the end. Chuck Barger, representing the UGA Bugwood Team, gave numerous insights into the powers of websites and images for invasive knowledge networks. David Borland, Alabama TNC, inspired us with the philosophical underpinning for rescuing and restoring our natural heritage. Later in the evening a gourmet banquet and dancing ensued in the SE-EPPC "Conference" tradition.

The field tours on May 5 were perhaps the highlight of the gathering. In Birmingham, Consultant Mark Thomas, Forestry/Wildlife Integrations, showed how one expert, energetic man armed with the right technology can rescue and restore a highly infested park single-handed. Following this, Marty Schulman, Ruffner Mountain Preserve, shared how to effectively involve volunteers in combating invasives in a preserve. In Huntsville, Andy Prewett, The Land Trust of Huntsville and North Alabama, and Amy Werkheiser, OMI, Inc., also shared how to involve volunteers and community groups in fighting invasive bush honeysuckles and winning.

It could not have been a better "Conference" and we look forward to next year in North Carolina.



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