

## **Heather L. Hettinger**

It is a tremendous honor to be nominated as the First Vice President of the North Central Division of the American Fisheries Society. My memberships in AFS, NCD, and MIAFS have opened the doors for so many opportunities and relationships that have undoubtedly shaped me into the biologist that I am today. I am thankful for the chance to give back to the Society that has given me so much during my nearly 13 years of membership!

### **Professional Background**

I completed my Bachelor's at Lake Superior State University under John Roes and Alexandre Litvinov, and my Master's at the University of Nebraska at Kearney under Casey Schoenebeck (former Joan Duffy Award winner and Nebraska Chapter member). Currently, I am a Fisheries Management Biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, in the Central Lake Michigan Management Unit. In this position I am charged with managing the State's aquatic resources in parts of nine different counties. This area encompasses six major river systems and approximately 1,900 lakes that range in size from 1 to 18,770 acres, and includes the second and fourth largest (by surface area) lakes in the state, in addition to East Grand Traverse Bay, West Grand Traverse Bay, Little Traverse Bay, and the Beaver Island Archipelago region in Lake Michigan. I joined the MDNR in 2005 as a Fisheries Assistant, with the ambition of becoming a Fisheries Biologist. I turned to many of my new colleagues for guidance, most notably AFS/NCD/MIAFS members Mark Tonello and Jessica Mistak. Both Mark and Jessica stressed to me the importance of being an active participant of the society at all levels. Since being promoted to Fisheries Management Biologist in 2009, I have made it a goal to continue to move that message forward to students and new colleagues that I have the opportunity to collaborate with.

### **AFS Involvement**

My involvement with the American Fisheries Society began with my participation in the Lake Superior State University Fisheries & Wildlife Club (Student Subunit) from 2001 to 2004. Since that time I've remained active at the student, State Chapter, North Central Division, and Parent Society levels. I have served as the Communications Committee Chair for the Michigan Chapter of AFS since 2012. During my tenure in this position we were awarded the NCD Best Communications Award for 2014. In this capacity I also serve as the coordinator and editor for the Michigan Chapter's annual newsletter, and oversee the Facebook page for the Michigan Chapter. In 2015-2016, I served on the Networking and Socials Planning Subcommittee for the 2016 Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference in Grand Rapids. During this conference I was responsible for planning the Student/Professional Mixer, an event that attended by nearly 700 students and fisheries & wildlife professionals. I am currently working on becoming an AFS Certified Fisheries Professional.

## Professional Activities

In addition to my involvement in AFS, I am also active on various committees both within the MDNR and our partner organizations. I am a member of the MDNR Esocid Committee, Betsie River Natural River Zoning Board, Jordan River Natural River Zoning Board, Lake Michigan Basin Team, Lake Trout Regulations Committee, and I edit and produce the annual Central Lake Michigan Management Unit newsletter.

## AFS Vision

Being a part of the communications strategies for the Society at not only the State level, but during a large event such as the Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference, has given me a look at how hugely beneficial well planned and executed communications can be, as well as where some of the disconnects are when it comes to fully executing the communications and network strategies that we have worked so hard to develop. Helping to distribute communications and meeting participation has been incredibly beneficial to me in identifying the three major goals that I will work toward if elected to the position:

- *Goal 1: Increase the understanding of how the NCD and Parent Society can benefit members.*

Increasingly I hear student subunit or state chapter members talk about how they do not understand how membership in the NCD or the Parent Society benefits them. In fact, we are increasingly seeing up-and-coming fisheries professionals choose to be members at the state level, but not participating at the NCD or Parent Society levels. I myself was guilty of this mindset in the past...until I was part of the process for planning a larger meeting and fully understanding the hierarchy of our Society. Given the NCD's position in this hierarchy, one of the best ways that the Division can serve its members is by being the communications hub from the Parent Society to the chapters and subunits under the NCD's charge. More communications that specifically talk about what the greater benefits are and what each level provides the membership need to be out there, rather than just meeting announcements and calls for participation.

- *Goal 2: Encourage recognition.*

It sounds simple; we offer awards to member's at all three levels of the society, so people nominate worthy colleagues and we reward their hard work. Except, how many times do we put out the call for nominations, and hear nothing from our members? Just glance at the NCD awards page and it's easy to see that in some years, there are awards where no person or chapter is nominated. This is absurd; the North Central Division is full of fisheries professionals and chapters who are making improvements in fisheries management every single day and deserve to be recognized. Rather than simply putting out calls for nominations and going through

the motions as we do annually, we should be stressing to members the importance of supporting and honoring our deserving members throughout the entire year.

- *Goal 3: Increase financial support for professionals to be more active within the North Central Division.*

As university, government, and non-governmental organizations budgets become tighter, more and more professionals within the North Central Division need the financial assistance to attend meetings, especially the Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference and the AFS Annual Meeting. State Chapters and the NCD do a great job of competitively funding students to attend these functions, but sometimes individuals who are established in their careers could use the help as well. The initiation of the Young Professional Travel Award is a great step toward assisting members as they begin their careers, but there is still a gap when it comes to members with a few more years of service under their belts. A similarly formatted award geared at professionals with more than five years of service would go a long way to keeping people connected to the NCD and Parent Society.

In addition to these goals, I will work with the NCD Executive Committee and NCD membership to continue to implement the 2015-2019 strategic plan, as well as begin to identify concerns that need to be addressed in the upcoming 2020-2024 strategic plan. I look forward to the opportunity to serve the NCD as First Vice President Elect, and to continue to serve the American Fisheries Society in a meaningful way!