

Presidential Address: Footprints for the Future

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Welcome to our 40th meeting! I want to especially welcome our international visitors. For many of you it is your first time at an APMS meeting. For a larger percentage of you, it is something you have done for many years. Then, there are several of us who don't want to admit how many APMS meetings we have been to. But, one thing is a fact—it's everyone's first—and last—40th APMS meeting. We have reached another milestone. We are living in an unprecedented technological time. We are either in or entering a new millennium—depending on whether the first year was 0 or 1!

I find it strange, that we are now living a computer-based existence, where the computer's operation is based on the digits 0 and 1—and we are not sure whether the first year was 0 or 1!

When I was first elected to office in the APMS, I tried to gain a better sense of the APMS. I realized that I wanted to determine what we are! We can look back and reflect on the history of the organization, and gain a sense of where we have been. But, it is not as easy to determine what we presently are today, because there are no footprints.

When we look back on our history, there are footprints left by the organization. When we look at the present, it is more difficult—because we are in the act of making the impressions that will be footprints that will be seen by those in the future. It is truly difficult to assess the resulting print, when you are creating it! It is much easier to assess our history, and the footprints we've already made.

Does it really matter where we have been? Yes, our history is very important. It was once said that: "Those who cannot remember the past—are condemned to repeat it."

Does it really matter what we are today? No—today is either the process of repeating the past, or the first prints of the future. If we determine that we want to repeat the past—then that is what we should do. We still need to reflect on our history so that we understand what we are, and can continue as we have for the past 21 years.

I think the much more important consideration is, where do we want to go and what will the footprints be that we leave in the future? We can't do anything about the past or the present, but we can do something about our future legacy.

When I became President of the APMS last year, the contribution I wanted to make, was for the future, and what we could do to become more effective and visible on a National level.

Over the past several years, I have observed changes in industry that have the potential to have a significant effect on our organization in the future. The question is, "Is the APMS properly structured and positioned to take advantage of future conditions?" It is a question that we must answer. One of

my first actions as President was to establish an Ad Hoc Committee for Strategic Planning. This committee's job is to develop a strategic plan that will map out our future direction and structure.

This strategic plan must contain direction for three areas that I believe need attention:

First we need a marketing plan that will elevate the APMS to true National visibility. Aquatic Plant Management is a relatively narrow interest area. Based on a review of our past records, our membership level has remained essentially unchanged for the last 18 years, and we experienced a 26% drop in both total and active membership last year. Is this an indicator of changes taking place? Should we expand our interests to include associate members from other aquatic related societies?

The Invasive Species Act and the Executive Order has received a lot of visibility in the past 18 months. For those in the agencies that deal with big issue interests, such as rangelands and agriculture, there is potential for significant funding and programs. Without a stronger, sustained visible presence on the National level, Aquatic Plant Management could very well "get lost in the woodwork" of Invasive Species. APMS should dictate how aquatic plants should be considered under the Invasive Species Act—It should be a focused goal of our future for this society.

A large portion of our annual support comes from industry. Industry has been and continues to change. Companies are merging and product patents are expiring. Last year we experienced a drop in our Commercial/Sustaining Memberships. Is this an indicator of changes taking place? Are there other aquatic-related industries that we should embrace?

If the changes in industry continue, and it results in a shrinking sponsor base, then we must develop an operational posture that helps our sponsors—help us!

If we do not change with the changes around us, events will overtake us, and we will be forced to change by reaction. I am not suggesting that the changes will be bad. I am simply suggesting that our members, supporters, and industry, will fare much better, if we anticipate, and are poised in a position to take advantage of and benefit from any changes.

Second, our strategic plan must contain an improved financial plan for operations. We are a \$200,000 business! Our biggest effort each year is our annual meeting. Thanks to our Finance Committee our investments are secure and much improved. This is all the more reason that we need to have a more consistent, logical plan for annual financial management.

I believe that this financial plan must be structure to achieve at least 3 things:

First, we should operate the Society each year, on the income derived from Membership Dues. We must determine if we can continue to operate the organization in a cost effective, efficient manner using volunteer positions. For most of

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the first 40 years, we have done well. However, I think we have and continue to suffer in areas such as coordination with other National societies and the general public, as a result of our volunteer-based operations. I am not against volunteers—I am one—but the reality is that most all of our officers and directors have other jobs that constitute their careers—and have larger responsibilities. These responsibilities take day-to-day priority. Under these circumstances, volunteers can only focus on APMS business once or twice a year—for a few days, at the Mid-Winter Board meeting and the Annual meeting. The exception to this may be the Secretary and Treasurer. They probably spend more time than anyone else—but also have the most critical organizational positions.

Second, we should finance the Annual Meeting on the income and support derived by each year's attendance. At the annual meeting, we receive 3 types of income: Registration, Scholarship and Annual Dues. The scope of our meeting activities should be limited to that which can be supported by the registration income, and the support and activities generously conducted by our meeting sponsors. Scholarship goes to Scholarship; Dues go to annual operations.

Third, we should develop a plan for more consistently putting our scholarship funds to work. As I have met with the various APMS Chapters this year, there are still some difficulties with the awarding of annual scholarships. Some Chapters offer as much as \$2000 each year, and still encounter problems. Two years ago the APMS, the Chapters and the AERF cooperated with the funding of a \$36,000, 2-year scholarship. This is significant! I believe that we must actively seek out other outreach efforts that we might support.

We should consider using scholarship funds for direct funding of research that will benefit the public's state of the knowledge concerning aquatic plant management. Through carefully selected efforts, we can generate both the information and the media to dispel the misinformation that exists within both the public and governments.

A second part of the information needed to develop the Strategic Plan, is to look at sources of revenue.

Over the past 21 years, we have increased our dues from \$20.00 to \$35.00 while this is an overall increase of 70%, it is an increase of only 2% per year, or slightly over \$0.71 cents per year. We must consider the possibility that it is time for a dues increase. With the exception of International meetings, our meeting registration fee has increased from \$50 in 1979 to \$85 in 1999. Overall, a 41% increase; but an increase of only \$1.75 per year. We must consider the potential to increase meeting registration.

We need to pursue closer ties with our Chapters. We should explore the possibility of cost-shared projects, such as information programs that can provide factual, science-based information to the general public and public officials responsible for state program implementation. We should consider holding this annual meeting in conjunction with the chapter's annual meetings rotating among the various chapters' regions. We, the members of APMS, must define what we want to be in the future and what changes we may want to make. The alternative could be that the changes will make us.

In your registration package, there is a questionnaire. This document was developed as one means of getting input from the membership. Please take the time to fill it out and either return it to the registration desk before you leave, or mail it back to the APMS address. This input will be part of that will be used to develop the strategic plan. More importantly, it will provide a basis for recommendations to the Board of Directors, by the Strategic Planning Committee.

Once the Strategic Planning Committee has finished, they may not recommend many changes. Regardless, I believe that their effort will prove to be beneficial. We will gain a much better understanding of where we have been—and where we want to go.

To date we have achieved success. However, success is never a given—it takes dedicated effort to repeat success—and although repeating failures is easy—failing is not fatal!

Someone once said; "The difficulty lies not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones."

One of a leader's highest callings is to spark his organization to bring about beneficial change. My personal challenge to try and spark this organization was much easier to meet than the challenge I have offered to the Strategic Planning Committee. My guidance to them is this; when considering a change, persevere to escape from the mold, especially when it can benefit our position in the future. New footprints will fit the future much better!

Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve as your President this past year. More importantly, thank you for the support of so many who have responded to my initiative. As I challenged myself at the beginning of my term as President, I now challenge the future members, officers and directors of the APMS, and it's Chapters: You will be called to lead—your turn will come. Do not be shy in responding to you calling—do not fear the effects of change—follow through—and your efforts will be successful. The Strategic Planning effort may well prove to be my APMS legacy. I confidently entrust it to the future leaders.