

# #Welcome: Introducing the AFS Science Communication Section

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Do you remember how you first became interested in fisheries science? Was it a field trip to a local pond or stream, or maybe a parent who took you fishing? While we all have different stories of how we arrived at careers in fisheries science, chances are someone (e.g., parent, educator, TV program) communicated science to us at some point and a spark was ignited that led to studying life underwater. These early moments of inspiration offer insights on how we can connect with others about fisheries science as well as those who dedicate their lives to fisheries conservation and management. While the topic of science communication has previously been addressed by various Chapters and Sections of the American Fisheries Society (AFS), there has not been a centralized, systematic way to engage membership. The newly formed Science Communication (SciComm) Section fills that void and will bring together the vast resources and experiences found within AFS to help members develop and enhance effective science communication skills.

The evolving discipline of science communication has focused on effectively communicating to diverse audiences what we do as scientists, how we do it, and why it is important. Science communication has previously been defined in many different ways (e.g., Burns et al. 2003) and is generally accepted as the exchange of scientific news and research between scientists and nonscientific audiences as well as among researchers. As such, “science communication” is a multi-faceted term for talking about science, including writing, photography, filmmaking, public speaking, and social media.

All members in AFS communicate science in some capacity, from presenting research at scientific conferences to creating outreach programs at governmental agencies. Furthermore, there are members who want to gain experience and sharpen their communication skills but may not know how to get started. The Science Communication Section aims to be the home for all AFS members in any of these categories. By connecting members with experience in communicating science with those seeking advice or training, we can better share the knowledge of fisheries beyond the boundaries of paywalled journals or management offices.

Several existing AFS Sections and Chapters have hosted workshops and organized symposia at regional and national meetings that have addressed topics in the communication arena (e.g., #SocialFish at the 2016 Kansas City Annual Meeting, #FishSciPolicy at the 2017 Tampa Annual Meeting). The enthusiasm and attendance at these events indicates that many AFS members are either interested or directly involved with some aspect of science communication. It is our hope that the SciComm Section will offer a centralized hub for AFS members

to network, create, and share ideas. Given recent efforts to discount scientific evidence, scientists are galvanizing into action in order to grow and strengthen an informed public. By pooling the existing talents from all units within AFS and providing information and training to those that are interested, AFS can directly tackle issues of misinformation and “fake news” pertaining to the aquatic sciences and ensure that AFS is a leader in fisheries science communication.

With the formation of the SciComm Section, AFS joins the ranks of other scientific professional societies that have addressed the need to increase science communication within their disciplines. For example, the Ecological Society of America also has a Science Communication Section, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science has the Center for Public Engagement with Science and Technology that is heavily engaged in communicating science activities.

What specifically is the purpose of the AFS SciComm Section? As fisheries scientists, working with stakeholders is imperative for developing science-based policy decisions. The stakeholders with whom we interact are often incredibly varied. In a world of limited resources and competing perspectives, we need to be strategic in our approach to communicating fisheries science and recognize how to be most effective. To do so, the SciComm Section will highlight the communication successes and challenges AFS members face in talking about science as well as hold symposia, workshops, and webinars to learn from members’ accomplishments. Providing hands-on training will be invaluable to those that are seeking to improve their communication skills, as will the opportunity to practice new skills and receive feedback. The section will also promote the skills of members and disseminate information on fisheries science communication jobs and opportunities.

AFS has had a long interest in communicating fisheries science, as evidenced by past *Fisheries* publications. Whether defining social media and how to start getting involved (Osborne-Gowey 2014), describing the benefits AFS members can receive from growing their communication portfolio (Midway and Cooney 2013), quantifying use of social media within AFS membership (Claussen et al. 2013), analyzing both the positives and the challenges social media can bring to science communication (Wilson 2016), or exploring our creative side to promote fish science (Sopinka 2016), the discussion has been underway and evolving for years.

This special section of *Fisheries* focuses on social media as a science communication (#scicomm) tool for the education and promotion of fisheries science (#fishsci). As evidenced throughout this issue, AFS and its members are using Facebook and Twitter to connect with diverse audiences. It

is important to remember, however, that social media is not the only way to communicate science; in some cases, other techniques and tools may be more effective at conveying your message (e.g., face-to-face stakeholder engagement, public seminars). With this in mind, the SciComm Section will provide resources for AFS members interested in developing a variety of skills necessary to address their audiences and grow as fisheries professionals. Whether that is helping researchers get started in social media, offering classes in popular science writing, or promoting opportunities for outreach, the Section will have something to offer members in all stages of their careers. We invite you to join and collaborate with us towards enhancing the communication of fisheries science!

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The inaugural team of SciComm Section officers looks forward to making fisheries science communication more accessible to the AFS membership, as well as developing new skills together.

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Secretary: Ed Henry  
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