

2008 NOAA Fisheries Employee of the Year Nomination Narrative

Nominee's Name: Last, First, Middle:

Nomination Category:

Ralston, Casey

Administrative/Support Employees GS 11-15

Justification:

Casey Ralston's contributions to NOAA and NOAA Fisheries programs resulted in:

- - Enhanced public appreciation for the mission of the agency;
- - Enhanced stewardship of NOAA Fisheries protected/managed species/associated habitats;
- Strengthened ties to other NOAA elements or NOAA Fisheries constituents; and/or
- Brought unusual credit to NOAA Fisheries or members of its workforce.

Casey Ralston is nominated for the 2008 Employee of the Year because of her outstanding leadership and coordination of several NMFS-wide educational events on behalf the NOAA West Regional Collaboration Team. Her groundbreaking "NOAA West Day" at the Aquarium of the Pacific (CA) helped launch spinoff events on the West Coast, including the "NOAA and Your Planet" event at Oregon Coast Aquarium (OR) and Family Science Weekend at the Seattle Aquarium (WA), all of which helped greatly increased public awareness of NOAA's mission and improved partnerships both within and outside the agency. Her leadership and advisory roles in these events earned her national attention; helped support NOAA's cross-cutting goal of improving environmental literacy; strengthened ties among 13 different NOAA programs on the West Coast; advanced partnerships with some of the largest aquaria on the West Coast; and served as a successful model for other regional collaborative outreach/educational efforts.

In response to a request by the NOAA Office of Education and NOAA West Regional Collaboration Team in late August 2007, Casey was selected by the NWFSC to spearhead the coordination of a "one-NOAA" educational event that demonstrated the diversity and collaborative nature of NOAA's programs, products, and services in the western states. Together with the Aquarium of the Pacific and NOAA staff, Casey effectively used her skills as an educator to help coordinate NOAA-themed, interactive activities for the public and provide resources for educators interested in bringing NOAA science into their classrooms. Casey met this challenging task over the course of a just a few months and while working a part-time schedule, relying solely on email and phone communications to enlist NOAA participants across two states.

Her leadership efforts resulted in the first "NOAA West Day" at the Aquarium of the Pacific in November 2007. Over 4,000 attendees (including 50 teachers) participated in this day-long event, which included four main elements: a NOAA lecture series on various science and educational topics; a family-friendly Science Zone of hands-on activities; a NOAA film festival; and interpretive talks about marine protected areas and ocean stewardship delivered by NOAA divers swimming in a dive tank.

"NOAA West Day" also helped shed light on how to best showcase the diversity, as well as the interconnections, within the agency itself in a way that is meaningful to the public. Through her exceptional organizational skills and attention to detail, Casey engaged and managed the participation of 53 NOAA staff from 13 different NOAA offices in 2 states, including NWS, NOS National Marine Sanctuaries, NMFS Office of Law Enforcement, NMFS Southwest Region, NMFS Northwest and Southwest Fisheries Science Centers, NOAA West Coast Center for Oceans and Human Health, NOAA Coastal Storms, NOAA Teacher at Sea, and California Sea Grant. While impressive in size and scope, Casey also recognized that such a variety and abundance of information about NOAA could also be overwhelming or appear disjointed to the general public. In anticipation of this challenge, she actively worked with a graphic designer and the NOAA West team to ensure that NOAA's cross-cutting themes of high public interest (weather, water, climate and ecosystems) were prominent in visual displays, exhibits, educational activities, and other aspects of the event.

Surveys forms indicated that "NOAA West Day" was not only a success, but the degree to which attendees increased their environmental literacy and would continue to use NOAA's science in their daily lives or school programs. Examples of positive feedback included: "I can't wait to share this information with my kids at home and on vacation." and "I will use these materials as I construct lesson plans in marine science and use

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Narrative (continued)

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Casey's successful efforts with this first "NOAA West Day" helped strengthen ties with valuable educational partners along the West Coast and earned her compliments from within and outside the agency. In 2008, Casey's template for a NOAA West-sponsored, collaborative education event showcasing NOAA science was applied again with much success at the Oregon Coast Aquarium on August 22, 2008. Over 2,500 attendees attended the event to learn more about the collaborative research activities in Oregon and the greater Pacific Northwest. "NOAA and Your Planet" Day also brought together 40 NOAA staff across line offices and partners including Oregon State University and Oregon Sea Grant. A few months later on November 15-16, 2008, Casey coordinated another event at the Seattle Aquarium's Family Science Weekend. Here, she and several NMFS staff in the Pacific Northwest helped inform over 5,000 attendees of the value of NOAA's work through hands-on activities involving fur seals, salmon, killer whales, and marine birds.

In addition to kudos from the NOAA Office of Education and NOAA West Team for the aforementioned efforts, Casey received accolades from the Aquarium of the Pacific CEO and President, who launched another "NOAA and Your Planet" day at the Aquarium in November 2008 based on the model Casey developed in 2007, with a commitment to making it an ongoing annual event.

Thus, Casey's role in coordinating the original "NOAA West Day" continues to serve as an effective outreach and educational tool that better informs the public of NOAA's products and services, and also serves as a benchmark for strengthening partnerships with aquaria and educational institutions along the West Coast. Casey's strong leadership, coordination, and advisory skills in creating dynamic, relevant, and transferable education activities are a credit to the Center, the agency and the public. For these reasons, I am extremely pleased to submit her nomination for 2008 NOAA Employee of the Year.