

Axing Truth

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In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.
- George Orwell

My dear, descended from the apes! Let us hope it is not true, but if it is, let us pray it will not become generally known.
- wife of the bishop of Worcester
on hearing Darwin's theory of evolution

Introduction

Prefaces to collections of papers are not a literary genre of high repute or one that normally stimulates much effort on the part of preface authors. Prefaces are necessary for establishing the origin and theme of a collection and offering acknowledgments but otherwise are often bland and uninformative.

This an account of an attempt to depart from that tradition and offer a more useful preface, one that provided commentary on the symposium that generated the papers, a big picture framework for the subject matter of the papers, and blunt facts and opinions challenging to the establishment. It is a sad tale of censorship and political correctness gone amok.

The preface at issue, in the final form approved by myself and the LRM editor Dr. James LaBounty, is the preceding document in this Supplement. It was intended for the collection of scientific papers that has been published as a special issue of the journal *Lake and Reservoir Management* (LRM) under the collection title, *Salton Sea Centennial Symposium, Part 1*. That journal is published by the North American Lake Management Society (NALMS). The preface is titled *A Lake and a Symposium in Multiple Contexts: A Prefatory Essay on Salton Sea Science and Politics*.

Synopsis of preface

The preface consists of brief descriptions of the following: the Salton Sea itself and symposium planning; recent history of scientific work at the Sea; four talks by keynote speakers and a panel discussion; current restoration plans; the threat of high, immigration-driven population growth rates to the Sea's water supply and other environmental values; attempts to raise the population issue at this and other Salton Sea symposia; passage of a bill by the U.S. Senate that would have doubled the rate of U.S. population growth; votes of particular senators on that bill; parallels with a major environmental and political issue in the Pacific

Northwest, the impact of population growth on the already badly damaged salmon stocks of the region.

Censorship by NALMS Directorate

The chronology of events was roughly as follows, but I was not privy to timing of events and discussions going on within the NALMS directorate (Executive Director and Executive Committee).

Editor LaBounty found the preface strongly worded but saw nothing inaccurate in it. He persuaded me to tone it down in a few places and add a disclaimer. Those done and after seeing a number of laudatory reviews of the preface, he was preparing to send it off for production of galleys. He indicated his belief that I was operating within my prerogatives as guest editor of the volume and entitled to express my opinions, even pungently.

The NALMS Directorate then grabbed control of the process, disrespecting the work and judgment of Editor LaBounty. It *demand*ed excision of one-third of the text from the last two sections of the Preface. The NALMS Executive Director, speaking for the entire Executive Committee, called the facts and opinions presented there "unprofessional" and "inflammatory." It was made clear that this was not a matter of style or language. It was primarily the facts and opinions themselves that had to be censored.

The shotgun charges of "unprofessional" and "inflammatory" were the weak and sole justification for all the excisions demanded. Those are unusual criteria for defining the 'acceptable' in science or even literature, many might say. The Directorate could not identify a single line of the preface as inaccurate, illogical, unclear, irrelevant, libelous or unfair.

Here are the some of the prohibitions reflected in the Directorate's demands:

- You may not say that doubling the U.S. population growth rate would lead to environmental devastation.
- You may not mention the names of any U.S. presidential candidates who voted to double the U.S. population growth rate.
- You may not reference specific instances at Salton Sea symposia where charges of "racism"

were publicly leveled against persons who raised issues of population growth.

- You may not imply the existence of race-card players, venal cornucopians and sanctimonious utopians, let alone that they are powerful forces inhibiting slowing of population growth and of environmental degradation.

- You may not refer to “ideological or governmental censorship.”

- You may not quote from a poster presented at this symposium that asked, “Who will speak truth to power? ... Scientists and engineers comfortably funded for their studies of environmental degradation and ways to achieve short-term fixes?”

- You may not mention that most U.S. Senators in the Pacific Northwest have also voted to double the U.S. population growth rate, which would have severe negative impacts on the salmon populations and rivers there.

Opinions of external reviewers

After it became apparent that the Directorate was probably going to claim a right to impose extreme censorship and overrule Editor LaBounty, I asked many respected senior scientists and environmentalists from the U.S. and Canada to give me their frank opinion on the preface. I did not indicate that it was under attack, but I asked each one to take an especially close look at the last two sections of the preface and tell me whether they saw anything that was “inaccurate or inappropriate” in them.

Of the 14 who responded: one said he was too tired to review a long document!; one waxed a bit cynical and said that I was wasting my time trying to instill courage in scientists and that I should write an op-ed for a newspaper; two were noncommittal; and 10 were highly enthusiastic. Several made useful minor editorial or technical suggestions which were incorporated into the preface. *Not one reviewer said there was anything inaccurate or inappropriate in the preface.*

All these review were forwarded to Editor LaBounty, accompanied in each case by 2-3 lines giving a capsule summary of the credentials of the individual reviewer some of whom were already known to LaBounty.

Below are summary statements by each of the 13 reviewers who replied to my request:

- "What you say is exactly what should be said and what too many people are too cowardly to say... I don't think anything is inappropriate. Everything is well said."

- "You and your colleagues have a lot of 'cojones' taking on the political-academic-environmental complex. As an 'armchair minuteman' I admire that."

- "Very well done...quite eloquent."

- "An excellent job, easy to read, informative, sufficiently blunt, but not obliquely confrontational."

- "So, are you inaccurate or off the mark in your prefatory essay? No, indeed. Scientists must be warned, to not just avoid dodging the real issue that needs to be out in the open."

- "Do not shy away from what you have written... We no longer have the luxury of narrowing our public comments. Everyone, as citizens of the world, especially including scientists and engineers, have a responsibility to raise the alarm and speak out about the ways they believe humanity is going wrong and threatening our future."

- "It's hard-hitting,... but what you've stated is certainly not inaccurate or inappropriate."

- "Your preface is excellent!"

- "It is an excellent preface, and not one that most scientists would have the guts to write."

- "I read your preface, and think it is great. ...I think too few scientists are willing to discuss the 'population growth elephant' in the room, as adroitly pointed out by Bob in Salmon 2100. "

- "You are wrestling with a challenging, perhaps impossible, set of issues."

- "I have read the preface and found it very interesting"

- " Knock it way back here, but keep the essence and write an opinion piece for the Union-Trib or LA Times (or Sac Bee), where thousands of people will read it. Few will be scientists, which is what you want, because scientists will only wring their hands and worry about offending granting agencies, as you say."

The resignations

Not willing to butcher the preface in the heavy and arbitrary manner demanded by the NALMS Directorate, I withdrew it, submitted a three-paragraph 'pablum' preface in its stead, resigned as

guest editor of the LRM Salton Sea issue and asked that my name be omitted from its title page. I continued to oversee processing of final proofs.

Editor LaBounty also submitted his resignation to the NALMS Directorate, to take effect in October.

Final vindictive acts

Once quality control for the LRM Salton Sea special issue was wrested from Editor LaBounty's and my hands by the NALMS politicians, quality of the issue went downhill fast. First inkling of vindictiveness afoot came when I was denied permission to check proofs of front materials for the issue.

Not until the issue had been printed and distributed was the full scope of the damage inflicted by the NALMS Directorate apparent.

Most mean-spirited was how the Directorate treated our dedication page. The authors of articles in the special issue had earlier decided to dedicate the issue to Jim LaBounty, whose enthusiastic interest in publishing this special issue rescued it from less reliable options. So we let Jim's wife, Carole, in on the secret and her family took a great photo for us to use for this purpose. The text was to read simply: *The authors dedicate this volume to James F. LaBounty, generous and wise editor, a brandy-bearing St. Bernard, and newest patron of Salton Sea science.* This idea was approved by the LRM publisher, Philip Forsberg.

Behind our backs, the NALMS Directorate reneged on this agreement. They plagiarized our idea and our photo, censored *our* thanks to Jim, and replaced our words with their own, arrogating dedication rights to themselves, they who had contributed nothing to the special issue.

And there were other post-publication shockers. The NALMS Directorate had also refused:

- a USGS request to insert in the Preface an acknowledgment of the Salton Sea Authority's financial assistance to the publication;
- to print the title page materials sent, which identified this issue as part 1 of the proceedings of the 2005 Salton Sea Centennial Symposium;
- to adequately oversee printing of the issue, with result that many gray scale figures and and black-and-white and color photos came out much darker than ideal and darker than they were in proofs; and
- to print the satellite image we provided for the cover of the issue at a size that would have shown the Salton Sea much better and made the cover more attractive.

Readers can come to their own conclusions about the competence, professionalism, and fair-mindedness of the NALMS Directorate. It certainly ended up shooting itself in the foot and producing a special issue that was less than it could have been. But perhaps by providing such an egregious example of censorship of information and ideas it can serve both as a warning to the scientific community and as a notice to society at large about some real weaknesses in certain segments of that community.

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