

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE OCEANOGRAPHY SOCIETY

Oceanography

CITATION

Kappel, E.S. 2018. A really tough problem for scientists to solve. *Oceanography* 31(2):5, <https://doi.org/10.5670/oceanog.2018.222>.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.5670/oceanog.2018.222>

PERMISSIONS

Oceanography (ISSN 1042-8275) is published by The Oceanography Society, 1 Research Court, Suite 450, Rockville, MD 20850 USA. ©2018 The Oceanography Society, Inc. Permission is granted for individuals to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, and link to the full texts of *Oceanography* articles. Figures, tables, and short quotes from the magazine may be republished in scientific books and journals, on websites, and in PhD dissertations at no charge, but the materials must be cited appropriately (e.g., authors, *Oceanography*, volume number, issue number, page number[s], figure number[s], and DOI for the article).

Republication, systemic reproduction, or collective redistribution of any material in *Oceanography* is permitted only with the approval of The Oceanography Society. Please contact Jennifer Ramarui at info@tos.org.

Permission is granted to authors to post their final pdfs, provided by *Oceanography*, on their personal or institutional websites, to deposit those files in their institutional archives, and to share the pdfs on open-access research sharing sites such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu.

UPCOMING
Oceanography
SPECIAL ISSUES

September 2018
Mathematical Aspects of Physical Oceanography

December 2018
Gulf of San Jorge, Patagonia, Argentina

March 2019
Scientific Ocean Drilling: Looking to the Future

June 2019
Salinity Processes in the Upper ocean Regional Study (SPURS) – 2

September 2019
Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO)

December 2019
Flow Encountering Abrupt Topography (FLEAT)

<https://tos.org/oceanography>

A Really Tough Problem for Scientists to Solve

Good scientists have many positive attributes that should be attractive to scientists and non-scientists alike—curiosity, patience, long-term views, and optimism about solving problems. From our perspective, it seems perplexing that we sometimes have difficulty connecting with the public. But today, perhaps the scientist's personality type is precisely what leaves us disconnected from people who simply do not share our worldview or who listen to leaders who find it expedient to ignore what science can contribute to our society. How do we connect with a population that simply lacks curiosity about the natural world or the role humans have played in modifying it? How do we articulate that working backward from conclusions to facts doesn't solve problems? How do we frame a response if they want answers now, or next week, not in two or even ten years when we scientists may determine that we have enough data to address a question satisfactorily (and will know, even then, that with more data, the answer may change)? What do we tell this segment of the public who doesn't perceive there is even a problem to solve? What if they can agree that there is a problem but figure it is too big to solve or simply think it is impossible to solve, certainly not in their lifetimes, so why bother doing anything?

Our community needs to be clear-eyed about the fact that while our public outreach programs have some impact in educating the public, we are most likely only reaching the self-selected population who want to participate in such events and are already at least somewhat excited by science. And we need to do more than hope, pray, protest, and/or vote to be governed by executive branch officials and legislators who respect scientists and scientific findings and whose words and actions demonstrate that attitude. In short, we need to take matters into our own hands and craft compelling words and images to connect with people who currently don't see science as an instrument that can measurably improve their lives and help solve some seemingly intractable global problems.

Fortunately, we're scientists. We're patient and optimistic. If we can solve difficult scientific and technical challenges, we can solve this communications problem, too. But we need smart, creative ideas from all corners of our community. Please send them to me at ekappel@geo-prose.com.

Ellen S. Kappel
Ellen S. Kappel, Editor

CALL FOR IDEAS!

Do you have an idea for a special issue of *Oceanography*? Please send your suggestions to Editor Ellen Kappel at ekappel@geo-prose.com.