

CFES Report

Chris Burn

The Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences (CFES) held its annual meeting at the University of Ottawa on April 21-22. CFES has 13 member societies, representing 15,000 earth scientists in Canada. CFES is gradually re-establishing itself and fulfilling its mandate, which is to advocate on behalf of the earth sciences in Canada. It almost ceased to function a few years ago, but under the guidance of Scott Swinden and Sandra Barr it has become a functioning and coordinating entity. The web site is: www.cfes-fcst.ca

Chris Burn attended the meeting as an alternate representative on behalf of the CAG and in his capacity as the CFES representative to the Royal Society's Partnership Group for Science and Engineering (PAGSE). He was unable to attend the first part of the meeting, 6 pm – 9 pm on April 21. He attended on April 22.

CFES does not have a budget problem, but works within its financial structure. There are two principal initiatives that require on-going financial support: maintenance of the web site and production of a booklet on the value of geoscience for society (G4S). This latter project follows similar products made in the UK and US. Content has been developed for this, but not layout. Once a draft is ready, it will be circulated to CFES member societies.

The most successful contributions to the web site are the blog posts. These are followed from announcements on FB and Twitter. It would be helpful for CAG to identify some recently retired members who could contribute blogs with an informed perspective on current events and developments in the earth sciences (one or two posts per society per year). The CAG may send newsletters to CFES, where they will be extracted and posted on the CFES web site or linked or repromoted on social media. The CFES has a good web staff, who are keen and active. Most of the webpage has been translated into French, a big job this year. Blog posts in French would be especially welcome. It would be helpful to have a link to the CFES web site on the CAG web site.

Professional Geoscientists Canada is a member of CFES. This is the national organization for the provincial agencies registering professional geoscientists. There is a major effort to coordinate registration requirements across the country and there are conversations about coordinating registration internationally. Strangely, there is considerable difficulty in coordinating international ethical responsibilities for professional geoscientists.

CFES is promoting a mega IUGS conference to be held in Vancouver in 2018 called RFG2018 Resources for Future Generations. Rfg2018.org is the web site. The web site advertises social science content will be part of the conference. CAG should decide how much it wishes to promote this conference. It would be silly to be completely absent, no matter how un-critical the conference appears to be. The conference stems from the crash of the resource industry and the failure to recover to the levels people were accustomed.

PAGSE's Chair, Maria de Rosa of Carleton's Chemistry Department, came to discuss PAGSE and how CFES can help achieve some objectives through PAGSE. Chris Burn's field program means that he cannot be physically present at meetings in the summer, when the Finance Committee of the House of Commons requests input for its budget deliberations. So far, I have been able to contribute by email. PAGSE has changed hands to some extent, with people who have been associated for some time with these deliberations moving on. PAGSE advocates, so rarely comments on direct initiatives, but commonly argues that postgraduate sponsorship is a valuable investment, and has been a steadfast supporter of MITACS and of broadening the MITACS vision into sectors other than conventional industry. It would be helpful for the CAG to send in ideas during the prebudget consultations. These should concern areas of science and engineering where the CAG considers that investment would benefit Canada. The ideas should be advocacy, not lobbying. PAGSE also oversees the Bacon and Eggheads breakfasts for parliamentarians (<http://pagse.org/en/breakfasts.htm>). Suggestions for speakers are always welcomed by the committee.

The highlight of the meeting was a talk and discussion with Jim Handman of the Science Media Centre (<http://sciencemediacentre.ca/site/?lang=en>). This was the most informative talk I have ever heard about journalism today (*churnalism*) and the role that science plays in national conversations. It would be highly worthwhile to invite Jim to a CAG meeting to run a workshop, for although he is a science journalist – he produced *Quirks and Quarks* for 20 years – he understands academic work and the media.

One of CFES's former presidents is concerned that statements appear in the media suggesting that large numbers of geoscientists are climate change skeptics. He wants to find out if this is true. Iain Samson, the current President of CFES, believes it is important to follow this up. It is certainly the case that there are prominent climate change skeptics in the Ottawa geological community, for example Ian Clarke of uOttawa and Tim Patterson of Carleton. These people advance the view that the Earth has seen it all before and nothing anthropogenic is happening at present. The CAG is in a key position to participate in this initiative because we may be the only member of CFES that has atmospheric scientists among its members. The issue is that some of these skeptics think it is wrong that climate science is being used to inform public policy. I cannot figure out if they think the science is wrong or that science should not inform policy. I suspect the former. For many of us this is a tiresome discussion, but it is a reality, and the media are always on the look out for a local skeptic to quote.

Finally, CFES is going to appoint a nominations committee in order to identify future officers in a more transparent manner than recent practice, which has been out of necessity. The proposal is to appoint 2 members of the board and 2 from member organizations to the nominating committee. The committee is to propose a slate. To begin with, at least, it is unlikely the slate will be opposed. The CAG is to provide a member this year because we are alphabetically one of the two highest ranking societies on the roster. The position would be held for one year only.

The next AGM will be in spring 2018.

Respectfully submitted.

