

7-12-2005

Making a Difference in an Age of Political Cynicism

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Abstracts of presentations given on Tuesday, 12 July 2005, in session 1 of the UCOWR conference.

Recommended Citation

Bright, Shippen, "Making a Difference in an Age of Political Cynicism" (2005). 2005. Paper 33.
http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ucowrconfs_2005/33

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Making a Difference in an Age of Political Cynicism

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In 2000, four citizens in the State of Maine got together to formulate an anti-invasive aquatic plant piece of legislation that galvanized grass roots support, became a top media story and in 2001 came into law by one vote. Subsequently the legislation has been held up as national model and as a result of a presentation made to the North American Lake Management Society's annual conference regarding the legislation Ship Bright was appointed to the Federal Invasive Species Advisory Committee by the Bush Administration.

In a hard fought battle the Maine legislature passed the nation's most comprehensive anti-invasive aquatic plant prevention legislation in April of 2001. Passing preventative legislation on any issue is difficult despite the wisdom that a "stitch in time saves nine". By one vote "An Act to Prevent The Infestation of Invasive Aquatic Plants and Other Species" was passed and signed into law despite an initially indifferent Executive branch and hostile political interests over its dedicated funding mechanism.

The final bill which passed was constructed around a bill that Save Maine's Lakes [a Maine Political Action Committee] researched and introduced in the Maine Legislature. We'll talk about the challenges and the opportunities of raising awareness at the political and decision-making levels. This is a story of grassroots activism that fought against indifference, ridicule and hostility to the measure. It shows that with credible data, the ability to craft a message designed for "the people", and perseverance in a system that is purposely designed to make the passage of new laws difficult one can prevail.

We will also talk about current issues regarding federal efforts and a look behind the scenes at the politics around invasives---if that sounds boring how do you feel about the statement "invasive species: The newest threat to property rights"...

This presentation is about empowerment of the individual to make a difference on a large scale for the common good. While good science is necessary for good public policy it is most often not sufficient.