

The Steamboat Pilot

Talking about weather not dull for this group

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration program meets in Steamboat

By: Matt Stensland, Friday, July 14, 2006

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — Some of the nation's top climate scientists -- and a few just beginning their careers -- have spent the week in Steamboat Springs networking and sharing expertise. Physicists, oceanographers and atmospheric scientists were among those attending the Seventh Summer Institute as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate and Global Change Postdoctoral Fellowship Program.

The seminar, which was held at the Sheraton Steamboat Resort, was part of the NOAA's ongoing mentoring program that allows NOAA fellows who recently completed their doctoral studies to network with and learn from senior scientists. The seminar is held every other year.

"Because these young scientists are so good, they are the future leaders," said Richard Somerville, a distinguished professor at Scripps Institution of Oceanography and a NOAA climate scientist. Each year, about 100 of the "best and brightest new scientists" apply for the fellowship program. Only 10 are accepted, said John Kermond, a NOAA spokesman. "The post-doctoral program adds to their academic career," he said.

During each day of the seminar, senior scientists spent 30 minutes talking about their work in the interdisciplinary field of climatology. This year, topics included hurricanes and their effect on climate change and global warming.

Retired NOAA Office of Global Programs director Michael Hall also gave his advice on working within a large bureaucracy such as NOAA and securing billions of dollars in funding for research. "Don't be afraid of big numbers," Hall told the young scientists. "Don't be afraid of big ideas. Our vision of making this a better world costs money." He said NOAA's post-doctoral program, which pays the salary for the fellows in addition to providing some research money, has been successful. "The post-doctoral program is the best investment, dollar for dollar, that NOAA made," Hall said.



Post-doctoral fellow Lorraine Lisiecki is in her first year of the two-year program. Her research focuses on studying what the ocean is sensitive to by looking at its history. She analyzes sediment core samples from the ocean floor to study ocean circulation changes. "It's really great to have an opportunity to do something that you think is making a difference," she said. The Summer Institute not only provided her an opportunity to network with other fellows in the program, but it was a good opportunity to learn from senior scientists with varying backgrounds and specialties, Lisiecki said. "Especially with climate work, there is a lot of interaction with different parts of the climate," Lisiecki said.