



## Why Help Coordinate Field Trips and Events?



### Coordinating Field Trips for Media and Congress

Field trips are one of the most effective ways you can show the media, your elected officials and their staff about a restoration project and what we have accomplished together on behalf of habitat restoration. Providing members of Congress and the media with an opportunity to see projects firsthand gives them a better understanding of restoration activities.

Field trips give you the opportunity to develop a real relationship with area reporters, your congressional delegation and their staff. They get to know you in a relaxed and fun setting – and you may end up with a whole day of their time (not just the 15-30 minutes you get with visits to Washington, DC.) When you call to ask for their support later they know you, and know they can call you when they need more information on habitat issues. There is no substitute for personal interaction.

Individual public officials are more likely to attend an event where they can make a news announcement and get news coverage. Reporters are likely to find an event with public officials to be more newsworthy, so when possible, try to get both members of Congress and media out at the same time.



### When Media and Congress Don't Mix

Mixing media with one or two congressional staff or members of Congress can make for a successful field trip event. However, if you plan on holding a field trip for a large number of congressional staff, any attending media may view this as a “junket” and this approach is not advised.

### Getting Started: Congressional Field Trip

Work with your NOAA contacts and your office's communications or legislative affairs staff to schedule a trip with a member of Congress. They should be able to help determine when members and staff plan on being back in the district or state. You could also consult the [House of Representatives calendar](#) and [Senate calendar](#) for a general sense of when Congress will be in recess. Ideally, a few hours or an entire day would need to be scheduled with the member of Congress. Make sure to mention that the media is also invited. You could also try calling the district or state office and getting their interest. Sometimes the local offices handle scheduling for district or state events.

Also, if a Member of Congress isn't available, it's just as important to try and get their staff out to see our collaborative efforts. Staff will likely have more time, and they are the ones you will keep working with in the future. Tell them you are interested in showing them projects in the field. They are always glad to get back in the state/district and

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many would love a chance to get out in field. If they are interested, you will need to put the scheduling request in writing. You can work with NOAA Restoration Center’s communications specialists to put together an itinerary and share it with interested staff and members. Make the itinerary interesting and informative and fun.

Consider a trip you might already take state officials/dignitaries on and build from that. Be sure to include current or potential projects, and provide them with logistical details like what to wear, etc. Consider taking them out kayaking on the water or to some important habitat or wildlife viewing opportunity that they might not be as able to do on their own. If they are interested, give them the opportunity to get involved - how many congressional staffers have ever had the opportunity to release fish into the wild, participate in marsh planting or view a million migrating salmon upstream?

Finally, **please give NOAA a chance to invite Congress first.** Allowing us a chance to send an invitation before your organization does will keep congressional staff questions to a minimum.

### Getting Started: Local Media Field Trip

**Know up front that national media will not usually attend a media tour.** Inviting a large group of media out to view a restoration site only really works well for local media in smaller towns or cities. For the national media in particular, they need one-on-one visits to a site. They want to cover stories exclusively and share only exclusive information in their stories. Also, cost is a big issue for the dwindling budgets of print media, so journalists might not be able to travel to a site on the other side of the country.

**Work with your office’s communications staff and the NOAA Restoration Center’s communications specialists to plan your local media tour. Include them from the very beginning.** Once you have the details and date set, put together an invitation/ advisory to send to state reporters in advance, inviting them to attend the event. Your office’s public affairs staff can assist you in distributing this to the environment media and writers in your state. They can also help you to put together and distribute a press release, and to get quotes and other materials cleared. NOAA will work to do the same.

**The same basic rules that apply for members of Congress and their staff, also apply for the media.** Determine “the news hook.” Why should they cover your field trip? What restoration or habitat issue can you connect to the trip? As with Congress, provide the media with a unique experience and give them the opportunity to get involved. If there’s a dam removal or groundbreaking, provide a TV crew with an opportunity to get footage.

**Provide local media with a draft agenda as soon as possible.** They will want to know the details surrounding the trip and who will be there that they can interview. Having celebrities, public figures and even different types of news outlets (TV stations, newspapers, etc.) will further encourage media attendance.

## Tips for a Successful Media and Congressional Field Trip

**Leading up to the trip, allow media attendees know who else will be on the trip.** Let them know about VIP attendance and others who may draw crowds or be newsworthy on their own. This helps media and congressional attendees justify their attendance, and sends a strong message about the importance of the project/field site.

**Make the trip as easy as possible.** On the day of the event, have everyone meet at a central, easy-to-access location. Then provide transportation to the project site in a van/truck/boat etc. As a partner, you could include lunch, water, snacks and meals as necessary. Unfortunately, NOAA can't pay for meals or drinks, so it's necessary to discuss this with us in advance.

**Have some educational materials to hand out: information on programs and projects, but also general information on the resources, such as your state/region's wildlife viewing guide.** Work with your communications staff to put together a press kit for reporters which should include the same educational materials and also a press release about the day. As a courtesy, show the press release to the congressional staff attending the trip or to the member's press secretary in advance and be sure to get any quotes by your congressman approved well ahead of time. NOAA can always provide a quote from leadership.

**At the field trip, do not bombard participants with every detail of information.** Let the tour and sites do

the talking. Give them time to have fun outdoors and to ask questions. This should be their opportunity to see what you are doing and find out what they want to know.

**When taking members of Congress, staff, or media on a field visit, assume they don't know anything about the project.** Remember that they are policy specialists and journalists who usually cover many areas of expertise that may have nothing to do with the environment. Make sure they feel comfortable asking questions and be ready to identify common species and show people how to use equipment. Do not assume they know anything about the effort, the NOAA Restoration Center, or your organization. This includes the details of programs and projects. Avoid jargon and acronyms at all

costs! Remember that the point of a field trip is to give them an overview of the resources and site details, not to discuss the finer details of policy and funding.

**After the trip, be sure to follow up with a thank you note to the Member of Congress or staff who attended.** It's always nice to thank people for spending time learning about our collaborative restoration efforts. You can send them an email with photos from the day and any media coverage of the event. Or a handwritten note is always a nice touch.

For more ideas, contact the NOAA Restoration Center's communications specialists: 301-713-0174.



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