

AREA Elections – 2020
Mid-Atlantic Representative
Candidate Statement – Joelle Ernst

I have been involved with fishing education and outreach as part of the I FISH NY program at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Bureau of Fisheries for the past 17 years. In my current role as Fisheries Education and Outreach Unit Leader I oversee this program at a statewide level. This includes but isn't limited to promotion and outreach through social media, press releases, agency website, brochures, interpretive signage, and a weekly e-newsletter. Although my new role keeps me in the office, I have countless hours of experience teaching and getting New Yorkers interested in fishing through introductory fishing programs. Concepts taught included instruction on casting and safety, local fish identification, knot tying and rules/regulations. Having the opportunity to communicate with a wide variety of audiences through the years has allowed me to gain perspective on some of the barriers people face when it comes to fishing. That experience, coupled with current research conducted by AREA, Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF) and other NGO's, has given me a better understanding of what courses of action can be taken to help increase angling participation in New York State. I also administer New York's Angler Achievement Awards Program, Free Sportfishing Clinics Program and a rod loaner program at local libraries.

My passion for the outdoors led me to pursue a degree in Environmental and Forest Biology from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (with a concentration in Fisheries and Aquatic Science.) Today, whether it's hiking, fishing, or just exploring, I absolutely love sharing these hobbies with my two children. I'm also an aspiring "46'er." (Climbing all the Adirondacks 46 High Peaks.)

My priorities as AREA Mid-Atlantic representative would be to strengthen the communication network between the states that make up the region through more frequent correspondence. Also, developing ways to adapt our outreach and promotion efforts to accommodate the changes we're facing in the way of environmental education during the global pandemic. We are potentially facing a future where in-person programming may become a thing of the past. Sharing ideas and working collaboratively to come up with expected outcomes for post-pandemic programming is vital.

I had the pleasure of organizing the 2017 AREA Regional meeting where the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions met in NY to share recent projects and ideas. This gave me the opportunity to meet AREA members in the surrounding states, some of whom I have developed friendships with. I welcome the opportunity to represent the Mid-Atlantic region of AREA and contribute in any way I can to keep this great organization running as effectively as it does.