

## **Tribute to Susan Snow-Cotter, Strong Advocate for the Gulf of Maine**

Susan Snow-Cotter, a steering committee member of the Gulf of Maine Mapping Initiative, and Director of the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), passed away in December 2006 approximately 3 months after being diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer. The shock of her death is immense for her colleagues and friends who regarded her as larger than life. The long procession of Susan's friends, family and colleagues that spoke at her funeral all had one unifying theme; Susan could organize, take charge and make things happen in any situation even when the participants were reluctant or the goal seemed unattainable. She was a leader with a capital "L", and the most admirable aspect of her leadership was that she respected all and belittled none when she took charge of a situation. Her style was direct, inclusive, inspirational and, as her longtime friend and colleague said, "without guile". She was a model environmental advocate; she possessed both extraordinary vision and an ability to grease the wheels of bureaucracy enough to make the vision reality.



Susan spent the majority of her professional career at Massachusetts CZM in Boston. She started in 1994, three weeks after giving birth to her second child and moving from Saipan in the Northern Mariana Islands in the western Pacific back to her home state of Massachusetts. She soon advanced to become the agency's Assistant Director and then Director.

Susan organized the milestone habitat characterization and mapping workshop in Sebasco, Maine in 2001. It was here that the Gulf of Maine Mapping Initiative was conceived, and GOMMI's mission to promote ocean mapping in the Gulf of Maine began. The vast majority of GOMMI's major products and activities to date, including a strategic plan, fact sheets and a website, a user needs assessment and workshop, hiring of a coordinator, and a planning workshop have been accomplished through Susan's direction and strong facilitation. She arranged to have mitigation funds from the construction of an underwater pipeline in Massachusetts Bay be used to obtain high resolution mapping throughout the Commonwealth's coastal zone. Massachusetts is the only state in the northeastern US with a dedicated seafloor mapping program. Susan's vision and leadership were instrumental in pushing seafloor mapping within the Gulf of Maine from a nice idea to a reality, especially on the poorly characterized US side of the border.

Aside from seafloor mapping, Susan was interested in marine habitat protection and ocean resources management. She spearheaded the Massachusetts Ocean Management Initiative, an extremely ambitious legislative effort that seeks to develop a comprehensive ocean management plan for the Commonwealth. If the bill passes, it will be one of the first of its kind in the US, a fitting tribute to its progenitor and champion.

In addition to her extensive professional accomplishments, Susan was a caring and friendly person. She kept a candy dish and several toys in her office for visitors and staff to enjoy and use to burn off stress. She would often stop by the cubicles of her subordinates to say

hello and help them troubleshoot almost any issue. Her laugh could be heard from across the office and she created a relaxed but purposeful professional environment for her colleagues. GOMMI's Megan Tyrrell, who worked with Susan at CZM, recalls that, "Many people, myself included, regarded her as the ideal boss. She was comfortable with letting each individual nurture their natural talents and skills, while still providing enough direction to keep them progressing toward the well-defined and mutually agreeable goal."

Susan's passing leaves an enormous professional gap in Massachusetts CZM, GOMMI, the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment, the Massachusetts Ocean Management Initiative and innumerable other state, regional and federal organizations. One colleague characterized her death as "a huge loss for the Gulf of Maine". Many people traveled hundreds of miles to attend her funeral and to celebrate her life. She leaves a grieving husband and two teenage children.

We all learned a great deal from Susan's example of a life lived to its fullest. Those who knew her personally and were inspired by her strength and compassion should strive to emulate her authenticity and leadership. Those who knew her professionally should strive to complete her vision of progressive protection and management of the marine environment. The Gulf of Maine prematurely lost a champion, but eventually the gaps created by Susan's untimely death will be filled. It will surely take several of us to carry on her work, but she mentored many, and her inimitable spirit will persist.