How Does One Connect With The Ocean?

Introduction:
As a certified diver for over 50 years I have had wonderful experiences in the world’s oceans and have always felt that the ocean was just part of my home. I am so comfortable in the water……a water baby. I am not sure where or even how the connection with the ocean began for me, but certainly not in the hot dry semi-arid lands of West Texas, where I was born and raised (1948). This is almost as far from the ocean as anyone can get. Usually people develop the predisposition and mental connection with large bodies of water without being living near it. This connection is defined in the book, “[*Blue Mind*”](https://www.amazon.com/Blue-Mind-Surprising-Healthier-Connected/dp/0316252115) by marine biologist Dr. Wallace J. Nichols. He focuses on the remarkable effects of water in all of its shapes and forms on our health and well-being.

Growing up in a farm and in a ranching community in the 50’s did not provide much of an opportunity for me to connect with our water world. However, the TV show “Sea Hunt” with Lloyd Bridges is what sucked me in. From the first episode I knew that I wanted to be in the water and that was my calling.

My diving career began in Lubbock, Texas in 1966; nowhere near the ocean. My checkout dive was in a mud lake with absolutely zero visibility. My first 100 down hours were actually mud lakes in which I truly could not see anything. However, my first dive in the ocean was an amazing, breathtaking experience. I could not believe everything that I was seeing. This was my hook for conservation! I did not understand how anyone could want to harm this astounding water world. I wanted to protect what I was seeing.

As a teenager listening to the world news, I kept hearing reports about the ocean being used as a dumping ground for everything from raw sewage to highly toxic weapons of mass destruction. Countries around the world including the US, were using the ocean for decades to dump live ordnance in. At one particular location near the mouth of the Mississippi, was a site that contained a canister of 200 tons of mustard gas that was dumped into the ocean by our Department of Interior/Navy because it was leaking. My goal became to stop these things from happening.

I have always been an Earth scientist, I just did not realize it. In my youth I was intrigued by our oceans and questioned the logic behind our use of the ocean as a dumping ground. I thought that someday we might not be able to clean up our mess if we continued in that path. It was always a mystery to me how they would think that this would not have a long term consequence. I think that day is in sight and that we need to reverse our thinking to become the solution rather than the problem.

For decades we disposed of radioactive, chemical, and biological agents as well as other unknown compounds in our oceans. We seemed to think the oceans of the world were a never ending, bottomless dumping ground that could take anything we dumped in them. So, now we are having to rethink that decision.

These are the issues that have focused my attention in giving back and doing what I can as to save the water world. In my 50 years of diving I have seen the coral die and the ocean change due to the human misconduct. The results of these thoughts are the creation of The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation (WFCRC) an international 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation that is fully engaged in coral reef and coastal conservation programs and *holistic* approaches to coastal change management and inclusion in underserved and developing nations around the world as well as in Florida, our new worldwide headquarters.

*As a believer in evidence based science,* I also believe that long-term conservation efforts and collaboration over a very broad scale is essential to the survivability of our marine treasures; however, if we do not address the current and present manmade threats NOW, we will not have anything to pass on to future generations.

I have been ask: “Have I switched camps… from a geologists to a conservationist” For me as an earth scientist, it was just a logical progression to be concerned about the health of the Earth. I believe that they go hand in hand.

All my life my careers have led me to see how Earth is changing and the effects that we humans have on it. While at Braniff International Airlines in Dallas, a US flag carrier, I gathered and prepared approach maps, procedures and flight patterns for every major and alternate airport in the Latin America Operation. Obstruction and communications information was gathered while in every country in South America and I published it in the “Notice to All Airmen” (NOTAM) a daily publication for pilots.

In Bangladesh and Thailand I worked on a marine project gathering data for over six years. We were on tiny islands with the minimal comforts which were the water well we drilled and the generator we brought in. I was the observer and freight forwarding agent for customs issues and ~~the~~ shipment of instruments, supplies, and personnel to remote sites in the jungle and coastal regions. All operations were helicopter and boat supported. The entire camp was just tents and tarp covered areas all at sea level. Therefore monsoons would just blow everything in the camp back into the jungle. we would find ~~your~~ our cots and belongings wrapped around trees in the jungle after the monsoons. However we did have good water.

As a geologist, and database administrator/explorationist for Chevron USA in Houston, I had the opportunity to develop and populate large databases for an earth science user group. I gained digital expertise in GIS ARCMap, drone/satellite imagery that created my *“50,000’ view of events*”. I provided logistics for field trips to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska that was fixed wing, helicopter and truck supported. I produced all of the video for both land and air operations in addition to being one of 12 people that Chevron gave gun training to for security (bears only) while on the field trips.

I am now developing a *Cloud based* “GIS Coastal Network” to be viewed with Google Maps and/or ArcMap on my geo portal and [digital library](http://www.wfcrc.org/geo-portal/document-gallery/) based on location. Our [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/TheWorldFederationForCoralReefConservation) highlights some of the issues I am involved in. I have also published articles in GeoExPro, New Zealand Surfer, and AAPG Explorer.

I have worked with various government agencies and magistrates for permits and NGO Status, Environmental Impact Studies and due diligence, for projects domestically and internationally, that require negotiation and a high degree of effective communications. I have developed project location proposals in Tanzania, Kenya, St. Maarten and The Cook Islands. All these projects utilize programs I have developed, such as “The Best Practice for Oil Spill Cleanup”, “R.E.E.F.S. (Reef Enhancement Engineering for Seascapes), The Coastal Protection Master Plan (CPMP) and The Coral Reef Mapping Tool. These are all built around a GIS data base and that embeds ecosystem services into stakeholder-driven planning processes.

By following guidelines outlined by the United Nations Ocean Conference Sustainable Goal 14 and 17 we are reaching out for collaboration in an effort to change how we administer to our oceans and have created The Caribbean Ring of Hope Sites (under construction). Over the past several years I have continued to hone my skills and gathered data necessary to compile WFCRC’s business plan, web site ([www.wfcrc.org](http://www.wfcrc.org)) and mobile applications in order to share what we know about coral reefs and coastal conservation.

I have participated in diving, recovery operations and clean ups in numerous environmentally sensitive coastal regions. My open water certification was obtained in 1966 and I have many years of experience observing marine events and coral communities in many locations.

As the executive director of The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation for a decade, I now have been challenged to put my words into actions. As I work with some of the most dedicated people in so many parts of the world, I am reminded of how different we all are, and how much we are the same.

It began as an investigation for a coral conservation plan for St. Maarten in 2007 which our team developed and participated in our local town hall meetings and The St. Maarten Coral Reef Conservation Gala events. Our town hall meetings were not well attended but were well received as most people there had never participated in one.Now they had a voice in what was most important to them. The Manager of the MPA and The St. Maarten Nature Foundation, Tadzo B, was our Charge’d affare for St. Maarten and worked with us on many permits and other affairs necessary to execute our programs.

In 2017, WFCRC was invited to join a consortium in its *humanitarian* effort to bring health care, engineers, environmental science, coral reef and coastal conservation action plans, plastic removal from the ocean and fishing regulation enforcement to [The Cook Islands, South Pacific](http://wfcrc.org/docs/cod/WFCRC%20Cook%20Island%20Program-An%20Overview.pdf). Our proposal went to and was accepted by the manager of the marine protected area and the Prime Minister of New Zealand to provide this program on a yearly basis. With the notoriety already generated by this project, other countries like The Christmas Islands, Jamaica, and the Dominion Republic have expressed an interest in the program.

WFCRC’s mission in this consortium was to provide a comprehensive coral reef and coastal conservation action and monitoring plan for these seven islands, Suwarrow, Penrhyn, Rakahunga, Manihiki, Pukapuka, Nassau and Palmerston *with in the time allotted*. With the agreement we have with ESRI we will be able to provide GIS software for the mapping and monitoring of coastal marine environments and training free of charge for following up on the program we provide The Cook Islands. All aspects of the program were ready to execute when funding was lost and the team had to stand down.

We promote Stewardship not Ownership, Earth Sciences, diving worldwide, and conservation of the ocean. This is and always will be the guiding principles and core values in the development and execution of The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation.

The time frame for corals does not coincide with “business as usual.” A basic change in the way we value nature, needs to take place on an ever changing playing field. We need to read the play book.

While multiyear investigations serve their purpose, our focus is working where “the rubber meets the road” in this case the water, not in an office somewhere. We would like to make an identifiable difference in years not life times.

Marine conservation has become a difficult political and socio‐economic problem that is being sidelined in favor of more easily tackled issues such as reducing plastic pollution (Stafford & Jones, [2019](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/aqc.3182#aqc3182-bib-0106)). Or other low hanging fruit.

All of these life lessons and disciplines have created my dream job of working on conservation and sustainable marine programs

My personal take a way’s are:

* Knowledge Exchange Sharing
* Inclusion and Collaboration
* Scalable Programs
* Sense of Balance
* Sense of Apathy

Sources: <https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/archive/fknms_map/sanctuaryboundarymap.pdf>