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Contest Advisory Committee
Annual Report

For the American Radio Relay League
Board of Directors Meeting

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Submitted by
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1. Executive Summary

- On January 25, 2011, the CAC received a tasking from the PSC to study the ARRL DX contest and recommend suggestions for improvement, if any.

- The CAC has not yet completed the tasking, which is quite broad in scope. However, we have made substantial progress over the past several months, including extended discussion and study of major issues related to scoring and operating hours. We expect to complete the tasking well ahead of the January ARRL Board Meeting.

- Participation by CAC representatives in the ARRL DX tasking has been better than in other recent taskings, but still leaves much to be desired.

- On or about June 10, 2011, a member of the CAC leaked emails from the CAC reflector to one or more persons outside the CAC. This resulted in articles appearing in the contesting press, as well as vigorous public debate on the CQ-contest reflector and various contest club reflectors. CAC reflector emails continue to be leaked.

- **Due to the aforementioned leaks, CAC activities have been temporarily suspended.**

2. ARRL DX Tasking

The tasking to study the ARRL DX contest is attached as an addendum to this report. The intent of the tasking is to determine if there are ways to make the contest more enjoyable and increase participation of both W/VE and DX stations.

In the first phase of the project, CAC members were asked to summarize their general thoughts on the ARRL DX contest. Based on that feedback and specific areas suggested by the tasking, a master list of discussion topics was created.

Thus far, the CAC has discussed five issues:

A. DX-to-DX contacts
B. Distance-based scoring
C. Limit on operating hours for single-op stations
D. 24-hour category for single-op stations
E. Low-band / High-band categories

2A. DX-to-DX contacts

The CAC has received reports that operating the contest from a DX country may not be enjoyable due to limited band openings to W/VE. A proposal was made to allow limited DX-to-DX contacts on different continents only and at a low point value relative to W/VE QSOs. In a preliminary poll, most CAC representatives indicated that they do not support this proposal.

2B. Distance-based scoring

A proposal was made to change scoring for the contest to be based on the distance between stations. This intent is to somewhat moderate the substantial advantage enjoyed by stations located in the Northeastern US and Caribbean.

Preliminary polling indicated overwhelming support among CAC members for distance-based scoring.

So that the CAC can evaluate the actual impact of such a change, the Chair arranged with the ARRL DX log checker, Ken Wolfe K1EA, to modify his log checking program to re-score ARRL DX logs using a simple distance-based algorithm. The CAC supplied a list of geographic coordinates for the approximate centers of all US States and Canadian provinces to be used for the location of W/VE stations. The current CTY file already contains coordinates for DX stations by prefix. For each contact, the distance in kilometer between the stations was computed and added to a running total. The total was divided by 2,000 to produce total QSO points, and that figure was multiplied by the number of multipliers to produce the final score.

Unfortunately, only the 2010 and 2011 logs could be rescored. Earlier logs would require extensive reformatting and much work on the logging program. This will limit the CAC's ability to assess the impact of distance-based scoring across an entire sunspot cycle. Scores tend to be closer during peak solar years, so distance-based scoring could have more impact.

The scoring comparisons for 2010 and 2011 have not been released to the CAC. There are two reasons. First, 2011 results for the ARRL DX contest have not been published, and the Chair feels that they should not be disclosed, even to the CAC, without permission from the PSC. Second, the aforementioned leak of emails from the CAC reflector makes disclosure and discussion of any re-scoring results problematic. This will be discussed further below.

2C. Limit on Operating Hours for Single-Op Stations

When the CAC began to discuss adding a new 24-hour category for single-op stations, a proposal was made to instead put a limit on operating hours for those stations, similar to the limits in the ARRL November Sweepstakes and CQ WPX contests. Limits of 36, 38, 40, and 44 hours were discussed.

Some CAC representatives feel that a lower limit on operating hours would stimulate more competition and would make the contest a more enjoyable and healthy experience.

Although there has been much discussion on the issue, only about 1/3 of CAC representatives support such a change, about 1/3 do not support the change, and about 1/3 have not weighed in yet. The Chair has taken the position that aspects of the contest enjoyed by some of the participants, such as those capable of putting in an "ironman" effort, should not be taken away, and that the CAC instead consider adding a separate 24-hour category.

2D. 24-hour Category for Single-op Stations

Prior to suspending activities on the tasking, the CAC was discussing various formats for a 24-hour category, including "Any 24", "Day 1 or Day 2", and "24 Hours after the first QSO." There are advantages and disadvantages to each alternative.

2E. Low-Band / High-Band Categories

A number of contesters have suggested bringing back the Low-Band and High-Band categories, which were removed when Single-Band categories were added. The categories could potentially increase participation, especially on the low bands. CAC has conducted only limited discussion of this proposal as of yet.

3. Participation by CAC Members

It was noted in last year's report that morale and participation by members of the CAC had declined substantially. I'm happy to report that the group has responded well to the ARRL DX tasking, with most members excited to be working on a meaningful project. There has been somewhat less difficulty extracting opinions and votes from the members.

That said, only about 1/3 of the representatives actively participate in our discussions. By "actively", I mean making proposals and debating the merits of a given change. About 1/3 of the representatives will reply with a one- or two-line opinion or vote when asked, though sometimes it's apparent that the issue has not been considered in any depth or in light of comments made by the more active representatives. The remaining 1/3 of the representatives have to be chased down for responses and votes.

The uproar caused by the leak of CAC reflector email has revealed that at least one CAC member is not actively soliciting opinions from contesters in his Division, indicating a minimum level of effort being applied to CAC matters.

Since the ARRL DX tasking eliminates the issue of not having important work to do, I can only conclude that the problem is the structure and composition of the CAC.

Structurally, the CAC is simply too large a group to effectively study complex or controversial issues. In order to provide geographic balance, the Chair must chase down each and every member for input and votes on every issue. That's tough to do with 16 people.

In terms of composition, while it makes sense to have diverse geographic representation on the CAC, it is not always the case that Division appointees are qualified to be effective members of the CAC or will be motivated to work diligently on ARRL HF contest issues.

Finally, fully half of the CAC members have served for the maximum six years or more, and 10 members have served more than five years. Serving for that long on a committee that has no rule-making authority is bound to test one's motivation.

4. Leaks of CAC Reflector Emails

On June 10, 2011, our Hudson Division rep, George Wilner, K2ONP, and I received an email from Jeff Briggs, K1ZM, informing us that he had heard about the CAC deliberations on ARRL DX, and strongly arguing against both distance-based scoring and a reduced operating time limit for single-op stations.

It's important to note that K1ZM built, owns and operates the super station VY2ZM on Prince Edward Island. VY2ZM has won the ARRL DX Single-Op All Band High Power category *nine years in a row* on Phone and five of the last seven years on CW, a winning record unsurpassed in any contest of which I'm aware. Based on preliminary results of rescoring past logs, it is likely that distance-based scoring would sometimes allow the best Northeastern US stations to overtake VY2ZM. This likely explains K1ZM's opposition to changing ARRL DX rules.

Although I didn't think about it at the time, in retrospect the level of detail in K1ZM's email suggests that he had access to information from the CAC reflector.

I later posted K1ZM's email to the CAC reflector so all of our representatives could consider his arguments. I characterized K1ZM's arguments as "forceful and emotional", and advised the CAC to look past that to the substance of Jeff's points. Within a few hours, I received an email from K1ZM chiding me for calling his email forceful and emotional, and boasting that his "back channel happens to be pretty good." This was the first time that I became aware that CAC emails were being forwarded outside the group.

After receiving K1ZM's email, I immediately informed the CAC that someone had leaked our emails and reminded our members that ARRL rules for Advisory Committees specifically forbid disclosure of CAC internal communications:

Committee communications, whether written, electronic, or verbal, either to or from the Board, to or from Headquarters, or within the Advisory Committee, shall be considered privileged and shall not be released outside the organization.

The next day, June 11, 2011, I was contacted by Jamie Dupree, NS3T, editor of the radio-sport.net contest news website to comment on rumors that major changes to the ARRL DX contest were imminent. I politely denied the report, saying only that the CAC was studying the contest rules, as we often do for all ARRL contests, and that no changes are imminent. A couple of days later, an article appeared on radio-sport.net reporting that the CAC was considering distance-based scoring and a time limit for single-op stations. The text of one of my private emails to the CAC reflector about an upcoming vote appeared in the article. A sidebar next to the article contained an article by K1ZM opposing distance-based scoring.

I sent another email to the CAC reflector informing our members of the radio-sport.net article and disclosure of yet another email. I invited the person who leaked the emails to resign, but no one came forward.

Subsequently, I reached out to K1ZM and proposed that he join the small group of top Northeast Division contesters I regularly consult on CAC matters. This allowed us to discuss the issues in general terms without our conversations appearing in the press. So far, this dialog has been productive. K1ZM denies having forwarded CAC emails to radio-sport.net.

Meanwhile, there has been further evidence that, as recently as June 20, 2011, emails from the CAC reflector are still being leaked to persons outside of ARRL. At this point, it's fair to assume that the CAC's internal discussions are no longer private.

The leak of emails from the CAC reflector has caused the amateur radio contesting community to focus unprecedented attention on the CAC and its activities. While the intensity of this attention has been awkward in some respects, it has also revealed widespread dissatisfaction with the scoring advantage enjoyed by stations located in the Northeastern US. As a result, a number of creative ideas for improving the ARRL DX contest have been proposed on the public reflectors. A lesson learned from this experience is that CAC representatives need to do a much better job of assessing opinions of the contesting community, as required by the rules for ARRL Advisory Committees.

Yet, while it's helpful for the CAC to hear opinions and proposals from the contest community, in this case the process by which the information became public is unacceptable.

5. Temporary Suspension of CAC Activities

I do not see how the CAC can conduct its business when anything posted on the CAC reflector will be forwarded to persons outside the ARRL, and from there to the public reflectors and the press. Under such circumstances, most members will be reluctant to make proposals, express opinions or vote, even when our discussions are purely theoretical, and even though our votes do not determine the final outcome. It seems likely that CAC representatives will come under intense pressure from the contest community on all issues we discuss, curtailing any chance of a free and creative forum.

Further, as mentioned earlier, I have not forwarded to the CAC results of re-scoring the 2010 and 2011 ARRL DX logs using distance-based scoring. If I did so, it's highly likely that the results would be spread all over the Internet before the CAC had a chance to analyze and discuss them. Further, the 2011 results haven't been published yet, and it's clear that at least one member of the CAC can't be relied on to keep them confidential.

Accordingly, I have temporarily suspended CAC activities until I can confer with the PSC on the best course of action.

6. Possible Solutions

After much reflection, I've arrived at the following possible solutions to the leak:

A. Continue with business as usual and tolerate the leaks
B. Make all CAC deliberations public
C. Catch the person who is leaking CAC reflector traffic
D. Disband and reorganize the CAC

Option 6A: I do not believe that tolerating the leak is a viable solution, but will do so if that is the recommendation of the PSC.

Option 6B: Making CAC deliberations public will, in my opinion, undermine freedom of thought and expression by CAC representatives. That said, it would admittedly improve the CAC's ability to gather input from the contest community on the issues we study. In any case, the way the CAC operates would change dramatically.

Option 6C: There is a way to catch the person who is leaking emails, but it would require deceiving the perpetrator. This may be viewed by some as perfectly justifiable, but by others as unethical. Personally, I don't believe it's in the best interests of ARRL to condone or be associated with a deception, no matter how unacceptable the behavior of the perpetrator.

Option 6D: The only way to be sure that the leaker has been neutralized is to disband the CAC, dismissing all current representatives, and create a new CAC. If this path is chosen, I urge that the opportunity be taken to restructure the CAC to be a more effective group. In particular, the CAC needs to be smaller, and therefore should not have a representative from each Division. Also, specific eligibility requirements for members should be established, including experience,

expertise, and willingness to put in the required time. Representation of the major geographic areas in the US and Canada should be required. I believe the best process would be for the President to appoint the Chair, Vice Chair, and one other member, and for that group of three to nominate 4-6 additional representatives from the ARRL membership who would be approved by the PSC.

After giving the matter much thought, I recommend Option 6D: The ARRL Board should disband the CAC and reform the group under a more effective structure.

I will be travelling the week of July 11, but will be available by cell phone should the PSC wish to discuss the matter further.

7. Administrative Notes

A. There have been no changes in CAC membership since January 2009.

Respectfully submitted,
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CAC Chair
New England Division Representative

CAC Tasking
ARRL DX Contest
January 25. 2011

The PSC asks the CAC to evaluate the ARRL DX Contest and the existing rules in order to provide recommendations for changes/updates, if the CAC so decides.

Topics to be evaluated should include, but are not limited to:

*Creation of a 24-hour category for single operator stations. Should this category be created, and should it also:

- encompass a 24-hour contiguous period
  - -options to be evaluated could include:
    - (a) first 24 hours;
    - (b) last 24 hours;
    - (c) 24 hours from the first QSO'
    - (d) any 24 hours with a pre-determined number of off times of some minimum length

*QSO Point structure

*DX and W/VE exchanges

*Clean Sweep Award for DX Stations

*Incentives to increase DX participation

*Incentives to increase DXpeditions

*Incentives to increase activation of rare Sections

*Separate reporting for US and Canada

*Addition of XE and XE States (world works North America)

Some of these suggestions would be a significant departure from the current rules. They should be reviewed and discussed, but the CAC is not required to include any of them in its final recommendations.

Contest Advisory Committee
July 2011

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