TRAINING IN COLLABORATIVE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

THE NEED

Today, governments face extraordinary challenges in managing land and water resources. The issues in this area have grown in scale and complexity, and the traditional “single agency” method of doing business often no longer works.

Issues of natural resources may involve government agencies, landowners, other private interests and the general public. Solving resource problems today requires a coordinated approach to creating among these groups an understanding and a sense of shared ownership of both problems and solutions.

Agency leaders have recognized the growing need for collaboration in support of their mission. They are increasingly asking their employees to support and participate in collaborative efforts. Some examples are:

- Secretary Norton’s 4 C’s
- The Forest Service’s promotion of collaborative stewardship
- The EPA’s community-based environmental programs, and
- The Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans crafted for Department of Defense lands

For many agencies, this approach challenges the time-honored status quo. But to be effective today, agency employees at all levels must change. They must develop a clear understanding of why, when and how collaborative conservation techniques should be used.

A SKILLS BUILDING TRAINING COURSE

We propose deployment of four courses conducted over 2002-2003 aimed at developing the skills of on-the-ground resource managers to participate in collaborative conservation. These courses will enhance the skills of participants and, at the same time, enable agency leaders to evaluate options for enhancing workforce capacity in a time of tremendous demographic change within the agencies.

Drawing on the experience of a pilot version taught at the National Conservation Training Center in November 2000, the courses will:

Focus on federal and state agencies and tribal governments. Collaborative processes present unique challenges and implementation issues for government employees. While the courses will explore collaboration as a process involving multiple governmental and nongovernmental groups, they will focus on the perspective of a government employee in these processes, and will highlight intra- and inter-agency dynamics (federal-federal and federal-state) as unique challenges.

Be grounded in real-world experience. To assure relevance to participants, the courses will rely on case studies, innovative simulations and exercises, and several manager-presenters that are experienced in on-the-ground collaborative conservation. Further, they will explicitly draw on participant experience with collaborative conservation challenges and approaches.

Take a regional or “place-based” orientation. The courses will each draw participants from one geographic region. As a result, they will enable federal and state agency personnel to develop a better understanding of the network of interests in their region. “Strategy clinics,” conducted as an element of each course, will allow participants to focus on collaborative opportunities and problems within their home region.

Highlight the realities of collaborative processes, warts and all. Collaborative processes can achieve a variety of beneficial outcomes at various scales. But they are more likely to do so when designed and implemented deliberately, and when their challenges are anticipated and met. The course will develop an image of collaboration as an important and inevitable tool of conservation and resource management in the 21st century. Governmental personnel will be called upon to participate in these processes. It is in all parties’ interests that they become more effective in them.

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