

## Conservation Education in the Northern Region

### *Mission*

The Northern Region conservation education program will be an effective, dynamic means to connect people with the land. The region will assist in providing tools the public needs to understand issues and make informed decisions on the sustainability of natural resources.

### *Objectives*

- CE is viewed at all management levels as:
  - integral to the overall mission of the Forest Service,
  - a long-term commitment to permit consistency in program support and effective results,
  - an important component of routine project planning,
  - an activity requiring financial support.
- R1 has the capacity to deliver quality CE programs and materials by having:
  - organizational structure through lead CE contacts in each forest, grassland, district, and appropriate RO unit.
  - CE activities coordinated across discipline, unit, district, or forest boundaries,
  - clear goals, objectives, and priorities at every organizational level,
  - messages on core topics delivered by many venues integrated in programs across the region,
  - a monitoring and evaluation program in place to test the effectiveness and quality of programs and materials,
  - coordination with local community CE associations/partner groups where CE needs are assessed and partners work together to fill those needs,
  - partnerships for CE projects whenever possible and appropriate,
  - status of CE programs of other agencies, organizations, partners, and cooperators monitored to capitalize on new programs developed.
- R1 CE program tied to WO CE goals and objectives.
- Regional CE Council is an effective advisory and leadership body in providing direction to CE efforts.
- R1 units support professionalism in development and delivery of programs and materials through trainings. Units offer quality training opportunities through the Regional Training Academy and other venues easily accessible to employees on a wide variety of CE-related topics.

### *Background*

The Northern Region has long been a leader in conservation education, providing a wide array of programs and services. Every unit and discipline is involved--from frontliners at the information

desk, to wildlife biologists in the field. Our programs reach children in the classroom, adults in local communities and families recreating on National Forest lands. Most Forest Service employees participate at some time, in some way, in delivering or supporting conservation education messages to the public.

In Region One, conservation education is a decentralized team effort, which is to say units set their own priorities. Many employees from many disciplines contribute a small portion of their time to public education as a part of their overall duties. Of our 12 forests and 1 grassland, almost half have specialists devoted largely to conservation education or fire conservation education activities. Those positions are located on the Bitterroot, Flathead, Gallatin, Helena, Idaho Panhandle, and Lolo National Forests. These specialists serve as centers of excellence for their own forests and for the region.

An important regional body, which speaks on behalf of the field and RO units for conservation education, is the Regional Conservation Education Council, chartered by the Regional Forester in 1996. The council is composed of forest, grassland, station, and regional office representatives who lend professionalism and coordination to environmental education activities throughout the region.

The link between conservation education and the mission of the agency is made clear in the Forest Service Natural Resource Agenda. The agenda recognizes the value and importance of conservation education, interpretive services, watchable wildlife and high quality recreation information and calls for improvements in these programs.

### ***The Core Network***

Many people and many units throughout the Northern Region have a part in the development or delivery of conservation education services. There are certain units that do play a more prominent role on a routine basis. The **Public and Governmental Relations** unit (PGR), for example, provides a staff person to serve as the coordinator between staff in the field, the regional office, and the Washington Office involved in conservation education. Public Affairs Officers often facilitate coordination or networking of field employees carrying out disparate environmental education programs in support of an organized and effective program.

The **Recreation** staff is also a primary sponsor of conservation education activities. The regional interpretive specialist and interpretive/recreation specialists in the field provide technical assistance and direction to employees involved in providing oral presentations or written interpretive materials on a wide range of natural and historical resource subjects. Interpretive services are generally directed to visitors on National Forest System lands and include indoor and outdoor exhibits, trail signs, visitor centers, and guided walks and formal presentations.

**Fire, Air and Aviation** includes staff who have fire conservation leadership duties. These individuals are active in networking internally and with partners to encourage the greatest participation possible in public outreach programs. They have provided leadership in the development of fire conservation education materials and trainings for both regional employees, educators, and the public.

The **Bitterroot, Flathead, Gallatin, and Helena National Forests** have interpretive/natural resource education community outreach specialists who develop and coordinate a forest-wide or (in the case of the Gallatin) zone-wide natural resource education program. The objective is to integrate Forest Service natural resource education programs into a broader community planning and customer service-oriented effort.

Under **NatureWatch**, two Watchable Wildlife specialists in the Region--at the **Lolo and Idaho Panhandle National Forests**--have brought many highly successful interactive, imaginative programs to children and adults. NatureWatch, which includes Watchable Wildlife and Celebrating Wildflowers, is a national Forest Service program coordinated at the regional level by a liaison in the **RO Watershed, Wildlife, Fisheries & Rare Plants (WWFRP)** unit. NatureWatch supports both oral and written programs as well as interpretive wayside exhibits and signs. WWFRP is also active in sponsoring or partnering with other agencies to promote additional educational events, activities, or materials associated with wildlife or wildlife habitat.

The **Wilderness Education** program conducted by field employees involves highly effective education activities generally with a specific focus, such as the Leave No Trace program and the Wilderness Land and Ethic Box. These programs reach a wide audience, including children in the classroom, as well as adults in the community or visiting on forest lands. Wilderness staff have been extremely effective through working together on educational strategies and developing and presenting set messages to targeted audiences over a long period of time.

The **Rocky Mountain Research Station** in Missoula, Montana, courtesy of several of its employees, has contributed significantly to the development of innovative educational materials and programs in the Northern Region. Their skills as scientists and educators have been invaluable in improving the quality and effectiveness of R1 education products.

The **Regional Conservation Education Council**, formed in 1996, is a body that includes representatives from all forests, grassland, appropriate Regional Office units, and the Rocky Mountain Research Station. The council is an avenue where employees of all disciplines and locations across the region can discuss ways to support and improve Forest Service activity in natural resource education.

The diverse talents and energy of Forest Service employees have been a great asset to conservation education programs. The broad conservation mission of the agency and the responsibility to share the knowledge of its staff with the public mandates a diverse education program. It also demands broad-based coordination; otherwise the result can be waste, duplication, and inefficiency. With proper networking at the regional, forest and district levels, staff can learn from one another, make use of other programs and materials, and be more effective in influencing public awareness of natural resource issues.

## ***Current Organization***

### **Forest Level**

1. Public Affairs Officer or other staff advisor works with the forest supervisor to designate a lead individual/liason to coordinate a natural resource education program if one does not exist.
2. Forest liaison:
  - works with interdisciplinary team to establish broad umbrella strategy to support public education programs on natural resources. Plan is based on a needs assessment. Is visionary, incorporating life-long learning concepts. Seeks to ensure consistency in education messages. High-priority messages are reinforced through cooperation and coordination within forest.
  - champions conservation education programs on forest.
  - establishes a forest-wide computerized network to include staff from all disciplines who participate routinely or incidentally in delivering conservation education programs. Network would share information, resources, provide support for individual efforts, and promote periodic forest-wide meetings as needed.
  - works with staff to establish effective system to match public education requests with appropriate staff.
  - assists staff in securing needed materials and resources for projects.
  - networks with district and RO conservation ed coordinator in exchanging, disseminating information.
  - contacts local schools and other education partners to discuss what role of FS should be to support a natural resource education program that would link with partners to serve needs of school system, as well as education goals of forest.
  - pursues partnerships.
3. Liaison, along with interdisciplinary team and PAO support inclusion of natural resource education goals in forest plans.

### **District Level**

1. Liaison:
  - works with district ranger and interdisciplinary team to determine appropriate public conservation education programs to address issues. Coordinates with SO to support forest-wide objectives. Plan is visionary, incorporating life-long learning concepts.
  - networks with forest team/coordinator in sharing ideas, programs and materials for work with local schools and adults. Provides input to forest on local conservation education needs.
  - contacts local schools and partners to discuss conservation education needs of school system and what role of FS and its partners should be.

### **Regional Level**

1. PGR conservation education coordinator:
  - provides leadership in support of the field's efforts to provide quality conservation education to their local communities and forest visitors.

- serves as clearinghouse for conservation education information. Maintains region-wide network.
  - coordinates with interpretation, recreation, Watchable Wildlife, wilderness, research, rural development, and other R-1 program areas in support of conservation education programs.
  - coordinates with forests and RO to identify and meet training needs.
  - is chairperson for Regional Council.
2. Regional Council serves as a united voice to promote conservation education and work as a team to develop and implement region-wide education/interpretive projects. Among other functions:
- advises on direction and emphasis issues for conservation education in R-1.
  - recommends or sponsors training opportunities
  - advises on conservation education exhibits, displays or publications that showcase R-1 successes and raise visibility of region, forest and district programs.

## ***Strategy***

### Issues

#### **1. Conservation education will have effective leadership and clear goals and objectives.**

##### Action:

- Regional Council will meet once annually to discuss issues and advise on policy and direction of program. Conference calls will be held quarterly.
- Regional CE coordinator will work with Regional Council to revise CE strategy and set short and long term goals of program.
- Regional CE Board of Directors will be pro-active in their support of CE by the following actions: .....
- Increase corporate support through visible accomplishments:
  - Annual report by CE coordinator, securing data on all field CE programs from CE coordinators in order to demonstrate accountability for time & funding investment

#### **2. Build the region's capacity to deliver effective CE.**

##### Action:

- Regional Council and units throughout R1 support capacity building through trainings, technology, partnerships, centers of excellence, CE visibility and credibility among R1 employees,
- Increase effectiveness of CE programs by supporting use of consistent, targeted messages. Regional Council will recommend theme areas for p

#### **2. Regional staff involved in CE and the Regional Council will work to assure that CE is coordinated across units and disciplines.**

Action

- PGR director will continue to support the active involvement of Regional Board of Directors to encourage cross-unit and cross-discipline CE activities.
- Regional Council members will be leaders in voicing support of multi-discipline participation in CE planning and product development.

**3. Core themes will be emphasized in CE programs across the region by:**

Action

- utilizing existing programs or initiatives, such as NatureWatch, Smoky Bear/Woodsy activities, First Century of Service, Leave No Trace, etc.
- Regional earmarked CE funds will target projects that emphasize core themes.

**4. Knowledge of available educational tools (programs, materials, etc.) will be available to R1 employees and the public.**

Action

- Regional CE coordinator will complete CE website on intranet by 10/31/01, to include reference materials and internet by 6/1/02.
- Fire education staff build databases for efficient storage and sharing of information.

**5. R1 will actively pursue partnerships and working in concert with community CE organizations to assure more effective, efficient, and improved CE products.**

Action

- R1 staff continue to participate in such local CE groups as BEEP (Bitterroot EE Partners), MEEP (Missoula EE Partners), Northwest MT EE Core Group (Kalispell), .....others???. Such groups are ideal in conducting a CE needs assessment and, through group discussion, determining overlap, where gaps in education are, etc.
- Regional Council members will lead in assuring through use of previously-mentioned community CE groups or discussions with partners that: (1) a specific FS activity or material does fill an identified need (2) a critique is completed of FS CE programs and materials, to determine where and what FS should concentrate on, i.e., to validate what our niche is and that what we're doing is the best use of our time.
- R1 regional CE coordinator will have increased contact: (1) with other public agencies and state forester staff in MT, ID, and ND to initiate better routine networking with government partners (2) with R1 staff and partners on CE on tribal lands.

**6. Effective monitoring and evaluation will be improved for all regional CE products.**

Action:

- Programs, activities, materials will be given periodic re-examination to assess if they continue to fit with regional CE goals.
- Regional Council will discuss ways for FS to determine effects of programs on behavior, attitude, etc.

from "A Framework for Conservation Leadership" 8/20/96

*Organizational Values*

- We perform quality, "on the ground" resource management and conservation.
- We offer exceptional public service.
- We value integrity and professional excellence.
- We are good neighbors and citizens of our communities.
- We keep institutions of conservation, the National Forest System, and the Forest Service vital and relevant to people.
- Our performance expectations, accountability, and empowerment are intertwined and essential to cumulative success.
- Our organizational structure, style, roles, and systems facilitate accomplishment of our mission.

*Organizational Behavior*

- Be proactive.
- Begin with an end in mind.
- Put first things first.
- Think win-win.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Synergize - creative cooperation.
- Sharpen the saw - continuous improvement.
- Integrity beyond honesty.
- Super courtesy.
- Strategic, ecological thinking.
- Commitment to vision; pride in FS and what we are about; doing things right and doing the right things.

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