

# LEARNING LAB 2006

The Forest Service National Partnership Office adopted learning labs as a way to build organizational capacity for cooperative conservation by exposing individuals to the best practices of working collaboratively. Nine participants were selected to travel and work with the NRST over the 2006 field season.



*The National Riparian Service Team (NRST) was selected as the pilot project because of their success in applying national level policies regarding community involvement and collaboration through an operating framework that emphasizes joint fact finding, communication and learning while doing. Coaching and mentoring opportunities were centered around 'service trips,' which are tailored capacity building activities, blending technical and social dimensions, as needed over time to facilitate changed behaviors on the ground.*

## Custer National Forest



Partners: Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, South Dakota Fish & Game, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, Landowners, Permittees, Natural Resources Conservation Service, South Dakota & Montana extension, and County Weed Supervisors.

Request: Design assessment tool for local conditions and engage community to create a strategy for use before NEPA process.

Step #1: Three day workshop with Forest Service, University extension and Natural Resources Conservation Service technical experts to design riparian-wetland assessment tool for low-discharge, spring dominated flow regimes (August 2005).

Step #2: Situation assessment to identify stakeholders and understand their concerns, needs and advice for how best to design an effective community workshop (May 2006).

Step #3: Three day workshop with all stakeholders to discuss the assessment method and its use in allotment management planning; included an evening discussion about 2005 workshop, two similar classroom and group field sessions, and a half day close out regarding next steps (June 2006).

## PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

**Dave Hogen, Fisheries, Freemont-Winema National Forest** – “This opportunity reminded me of the power of listening. I plan to consider a few more factors when setting up a meeting or a workshop. For instance, the Custer workshop was very tailored to fit local schedules.” *Dave is a key player in the Freemont-Winema efforts.*

**Caitlin Bean, Biologist, CA Fish and Game** – “I do not have any formal training in social science, yet in order to be successful in fulfilling conservation mandates a good understanding of social processes is critical. Experiential learning about the NRST process has really opened my eyes regarding the potential success garnered through the use of key consensus and team building experiences...Experiencing these social processes with the NRST has provided me with new ideas and additional skills for designing collaborative approaches to problem solving in Siskiyou County.” *Caitlin is spearheading the Shasta and Scott Valley efforts.*

**Tahnee Robertson, U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution Roster Member** – “Lessons from this experience will be useful for my facilitation work, especially in land management contexts and where citizen science and adaptive management are key components....The learning lab approach – bringing us into your team field visit – is such an effective method.”

## Shasta Valley



Partners: Shasta Valley Resource Conservation District, Landowners, and CA Fish & Game

Request: Design a strategy to provide incidental take permits for landowners engaged in voluntary restoration projects for Coho.

Step #1: Three-day workshop focused on building relationships and addressing past conflict between the Resource Conservation District (administer the permits), the landowners and the CA Fish & Game (February 2006).

Step #2: Dinner and introduction to riparian-wetland function, followed by a one day (three sites) field discussion with Resource Conservation District, landowners and CA Fish & Game (July 2006).

Step #3: Three day workshop with all stakeholders (including community members from Scott Valley, a neighboring watershed embarking in a similar permit system) to discuss the Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) riparian-wetland assessment method and design management and monitoring plans as the basis for the permit system (October 2006).

## PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

**Rosie Mazaika, OR BLM Riparian Coordinator** - “I was reminded that we are doing great work in the federal agencies in evolving this discussion [relating to PFC, grazing management, water quality and ESA compliance]...I hope to have another opportunity to join the team in the field as I think these experiences make us all more effective in our day to day work.” *Rosie is contributing funds to the third workshop & attending as a NRST member.*

## Freemont-Winema Nat'l Forest



Partners: Lake County Watershed Council, Lakeview Soil & Water Conservation District, Forest Service, Landowners, Permittees, Lake County Resources Initiative, Ducks Unlimited, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and Oregon State University extension

Request: Work with partners to design system for prioritizing and creating options for cooperative, funded riparian restoration projects.

Step #1: Three-day workshop with partners to discuss proposed restoration activities proposed on Forest Service and private land. Included a half-day classroom session on riparian-wetland function and two and a half days in the field assessing streams as a group, discussing proposed activities and determining what actions best meet resource objectives (August 2006).

Step #2: Three-day technical training on PFC assessment method, which the group plans to use to prioritize and design future restoration projects (2007).

## PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

**Jim David, Soil Scientist, Ochoco National Forest** – “I learned how to professionally listen, ask questions and formulate answers in a politically sensitive manner. One of the most important concepts stressed was working with a group to set realistic and attainable goals for stream function.” *Jim is now helping group develop options for fixing headcuts using both rock and geo-textiles.*

**Chuck Petersen, Range Management, NV NRCS** – “The Learning Lab is a great way to assist in carrying out the NRCS mission to promote cooperative conservation which is an effective way of helping people help the land. I look forward to utilizing these learned skills in an effort to enhance natural resources.”

# ADDITIONAL PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

**Kelli Stone, Biologist, CO Fish & Wildlife Service** – “Stakeholders, particularly landowners, farmers and ranchers, have a lot to contribute and if agencies would work on integrating the various types of knowledge into a community approach for conservation, the resource would be better served in the long run.” *Kelli is working to incorporate the social processes that she learned into the FWS Middle and Upper Rio Grande Ecoteams, which have been created to conduct wetland reviews and host workshops to share and transfer technical information.*

**Bob Boyd, Natural Resource Specialist, NV BLM** – “I learned better techniques for organizing and maintaining the focus of a large group with competing interests. I also developed a better appreciation for the role of listening and considerate, respectful discussion in building consensus positions between disparate groups.”

## SOME LESSONS LEARNED

- Experiential training provides an opportunity to change participant beliefs about the importance of collaborative, community-based efforts (i.e., ‘it is important to listen to stakeholders and incorporate local knowledge’), as well as changing behaviors and imparting new skills.
- Building capacity for cooperative conservation requires a variety of training forums. Participants expressed interest in seeing multiple phases of service trips and how one phase helps inform the development of another phase. They also expressed interest in a more structured training after the trip, so they could better understand the range of process techniques and the rationale for using one tool versus another in specific situations.
- It is important seek out and build the skills of local cooperative conservation champions, regardless of what organization they work for.

## CAPSTONE: CONSENSUS INSTITUTE



At the request of Learning Lab participants, a three-day, hands-on workshop was held in Prineville, OR November 28-30, 2006. The workshop focused on human behavior and basic process tools for managing natural resource conflicts related to change, power, scarcity and diversity. Participants learned tools and techniques for conducting situation assessments, convening groups of people around difficult situations and creating an atmosphere of listening with respect that is critical to resolving tough issues.

Over 40 people attended the training, including university extension agents, private landowners and community members, educators, students, private facilitators, local government, Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Fish & Wildlife Service, community-based non profit organizations and State Fish & Wildlife agencies.

# PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

**Q 1: How did you feel about the past 3 days?**

**Q 2: What would you tell other people that you learned?**



It was a reinforcement of some of my basic beliefs – that I forget to act upon at all times and in all circumstances. It is eye-opening how profound, and simple these tools are. *It was a very worthwhile expenditure of my time and I plan to implement it in every facet of my life – work, community work, and with my family and animals and organizations and the world.*

I felt that the past few days have been extremely eye-opening. I've learned how to deal with internal and external conflict in a meaningful way the respects and values all viewpoints. I've learned not to be so afraid of conflict. *I would tell people that I've learned to slow down and listen and appreciate other ideas and opinions. I would also say that I truly learned what consensus is and how it can be reached in a civilized way.*

It was time well “invested.” I've learned from everyone here. Now I want to go back and use what I have learned. *How to involve people in decision-making in an honest, open forum that respects all participants.*



Intrigued, excited, interested in applying to our travel management working groups and follow-up public meetings. Joyful – I haven't laughed so hard with a group I barely know! We had fun! Confident that we can be successful and carry this out in some form. *Worthwhile. I learned skills in building relationships between people to develop a sense of “community” among themselves. I gained some tools to use to accomplish building trust and respect between people so they can work together in resolving conflict and problem solving.*

I felt the three days were very productive and I hope to apply these skills in the future. *I learned that it is important to address issues in a collaborative manner. It will take more time, but it will be more effective in the long run. The relationship and processes will help meet future challenges.*

Refocused, clearer on how to use the process as a facilitator versus a participant. *The process is flexible enough in its application to meet the needs of any age group or organization.*



I feel energized, invigorated and renewed. My belief in the power of human potential has been reinforced and I am reminded that because people are fundamentally insecure and self conscious that there is a real need for collaborative decision-making. *I learned that problem solving and conflict resolution cannot be addressed adequately by using conventional and unilateral methods. People need to be heard, valued and wanted and this process results in those things (especially in today's world of extremes, stresses and polarization).*

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