

**Great Plains Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit
Joint Executive and Managers' Committee Meeting
April 13-14, 2004, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Meeting Summary**

Tuesday afternoon several of us attending the meeting received an excellent tour of the E. Kika de la Garza goat research facilities on the main Langston University campus. The goat research involves meat, dairy, and fiber production. We even sampled an excellent variety of goat cheese and ice cream that were developed by the center. Thanks!

After the tour, Kyle Hoagland presented an overview of the GP-CESU to some of the Langston faculty. This included a description of our members, mission, strategic themes and highlights of the variety of projects that the GP-CESU has funded (PowerPoint included with this mailing).

Discussion:

-Sherman Lewis emphasized that Langston wants to participate in the research opportunities provided by the GP-CESU, and to be able to benefit from the funding that is available. We need to determine how to best do that.

-Smaller university partners may not have all of the skill sets/knowledge that is necessary for a project, but can help fulfill needs when partnering with a larger university. This is one way in which smaller universities (Langston) can increase their involvement.

-Interest in partnering with parks, etc with projects involving goats as control for fire/invasive species. Langston has the biology, NPS has the infrastructure to be able to partner in such projects.

-A challenge is to increase awareness among faculty and to think beyond natural resources as well.

Wednesday Meeting

After introductions, we started off the meeting with an **update of the National CESU Network**. The network is now complete with 17 CESU's (the Hawaii-Pacific Islands is currently being established). Thirteen federal agencies participate in the CESU Network, including the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey, National Park Service, Agricultural Research Service, USDA Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration. A total of 120 universities (including 22 minority institutions) and 34 state, tribal and non-governmental partners participate in the CESU Network.

Gary Willson presented a table outlining the NPS participation in CESUs. A total of 540 projects worth more than \$19 million dollars have been funded through the CESUs by the National Park Service!

GP-CESU Update

There have been 64 individual projects funded through the GP-CESU for 2.4 million dollars. The majority of projects have been research and technical assistance type projects, and biological in discipline. However, we have projects in each discipline category (biological, social, cultural, physical, interdisciplinary). NPS and BLM have provided the most funding, BOR has several on the table for this fiscal year, and it is hoped that USGS participation will increase now that all disciplines are able to take advantage of the CESU. About 20% of the total funding has gone to UNL, this includes the initial start-up funds from the federal agencies.

-Linda Wallace mentioned that some parks in the southern plains are actually in the Intermountain Region of the Park Service and therefore they tend to go to other CESUs (RM, DSW) to their work done. Gary Willson said that an effort is being made to have Inventory & Monitoring Networks outside of the Midwest region use the GP-CESU and its partner expertise when appropriate (ie – park in the GP region).

We reviewed the current work plan, several items will be discussed:

- We need to verify the involvement of state agencies – can they be members? GLNF CESU does have state agencies that are members (Minnesota Dept of Natural Resources). Would funding be a problem since the agreement provides a method for transfer between federal agency and university partners? Look into the Kansas Geology Survey as a potential member.
- Look into having research foundations join – GLNF also has foundations as members.
- Technical assistance needs: Steve Cinnamon requested TA needs of parks in MW region. The response he received far exceeded the capabilities of NPS. Maybe we can post these TA needs on the web site?
- There needs to be way to access the information found as a result of the research projects: post the final report in full as well as an abstract on the web site. We need to make it easy to access the end products.

Agency involvement with HBCU & TC

Gary Willson talked about the NPS commitment/objectives to meeting the needs of HBCU and TCU's. These include providing more NPS presence on campus, attending career fairs, making classroom presentations, etc. Hire (mostly seasonal positions) more students from TCUs and HBCUs and expose them to the wide variety of park operations. Ensure that TCUs and HBCUs are notified when solicitations go out for contracts, work with CESUs to determine what partnering with TCUs and HBCUs is available, consult with TCUs and HBCUs to determine what their assistance needs are. Gary also presented information on a recent news release that talked about Historic Preservation Grants Awarded to Historic Black Colleges and Universities. \$4.3 million in matching grants was recently awarded to assist HBCUs in repairing historic buildings on their campuses. The point here was to show that substantial funding does exist in NPS to assist HBCUs. We need to find a way to tap into that. Langston University is located in the Intermountain Region, so their contact would be located in Denver.

Langston University

Environmental Resources Center: Dr. George DaBai on 3-year loan from DOI/BLM to establish this center.

- An organization to serve the underserved communities & community-based organizations (communities of color, tribal communities, Hispanic communities, low-income communities, small farmers).
- Provide assistance in the following areas to LU staff, students, and community-based organizations
 - Environmental Education/Stewardship
 - Information Transfer
 - Scientific Research
- Environmental issues facing these communities
 - Solid and hazardous waste management
 - Water quality
 - Pollution and health (air, water, & soil)
 - Environmental Justice
 - Brownfields redevelopment
- Formal education
 - Educate LU staff and students
 - Develop MS degree program/curriculum in environmental science/studies with options (water quality & watershed systems/environmental policy & management natural resources/environmental education outreach)
 - Educate watershed partners in watershed management
- Scientific Research
 - Conduct watershed-based water quality assessment studies
 - Assist in site assessment and monitoring
 - Remediation cleanup technology studies
 - Partnership in cleanup & economic development
 - Other research as needed by the communities
- Status
 - ERC is at its infancy stage
 - Strategic plan is developed
 - Funding is limited
 - LU technical staff for consultation only
 - Current focus is to secure grants and assistance agreements for community assistance and outreach- esp water quality assessment.

Comments:

- There are gaps in Environmental Science programs between University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University – the ERC could complement these programs very well and help fill the gaps. Could even look into utilizing their on-line classes (Linda Wallace, OU)
- The BOR is shifting from engineering design to more rural water issues. Rural communities need help with water treatment, this is a tremendous need that they get requests for all of the time (more than they can assist with). There is a need for design/expertise on how to fix the problem. This sort of thing seems to fit in very well with the goals & objectives of the ERC.
- There is an Oklahoma Rural Water Association: they may be interested in working with the ERC

Expertise, facilities, centers at LU

LU has 7 Centers for Excellence, Sherman Lewis commented on the four that are relevant to the GP-CESU.

Grasslands Center for Excellence: NRCS, ARS, BLM: serve small farmers, underserved communities. ARS has placed 5 employees here doing research on grassland management. Research involves extending the grazing season for farmers, cool

season grasses. Grasslands Summit: 17 southeast states with 1890 land grant universities, meet to identify technical needs of farmers as relates to grassland management.

Environmental Research Center: see above

Outreach Center: reach out to small, underserved farmers, and communities to assist them in: finding funding for water systems, sewer systems, economic development. Provide technical assistance and funding assistance – all funding comes from federal agencies, state agencies, or non-profit.

Renewable Energy Research Center: Department of Energy. Primarily work on wind energy. There is one wind farm currently in Oklahoma and another is being developed. They would like farmers to think of this as a cash crop.

Langston currently has one GP-CESU project (funded by BLM): Develop Colorado On the Move Guidebook.

LaDonna McCowan and Jack Eckroat are working together to develop a Colorado trails guidebook. Langston is partnering with BLM and Colorado State Parks to develop a more complete guidebook for approximately 20 trails. Information on the trails is collected (such as trail length, level of difficulty, water fountain locations, etc). GIS technology is used to compile all of the information and present it in an appropriate format. LaDonna McCowan has taken this opportunity to develop a class project to assist in the completion of this project. This provides the students with hands-on experience in the field and also in their state-of-the-art GIS lab. It is likely that this project would not have gotten off of the ground if it were not for the CESU.

Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory Membership Presentation

RMBO made a nice presentation on who they are, what they do, and why they would be a good member of the GP-CESU. Their mission is bird monitoring, research, outreach and education. Monitoring is some of the largest work they do – they detect long-term trends in birds. Most RMBO work does not compete with universities because it is at a larger, ecosystem scale. Their objective is to conserve Rocky Mountain and Great Plains birds and their habitats.

Partner Fit:

- Expertise
- \$1.7 – 2 million budget
- right size
- experience with landscape scale projects
- leverage own funds with private, ngo's, to fund projects
- have some different contacts within agencies – help get different groups to talk to each other
- good relationships with state agencies, can bring them to the table

Don't currently have tallgrass projects yet, but are willing to take them on. Once the short-grass prairie is secure, they will be moving further east and north.

The RMBO application to join the GP-CESU will be provided to each member of the Executive Committee for review and vote.

Multi-agency projects

Gary Willson presented some information on potential research areas that a multi-agency project could focus on. The Cooperative Conservation Initiative (CCI) funds results-oriented conservation projects. BLM, FWS, and NPS share guidelines. The majority of projects involve restoring habitat, in areas such as invasive plants, fence habitats, and seeding native plants. Research in these areas is also being completed within other agencies and at our partner universities as well. Another area of collaborative interest may be bison management. The DOI Bison Working Group meets annually to discuss bison management issues on federal lands. NPS, FWS, as well as USGS and university partners have interests in bison research. A final suggestion is fire management. This is currently a big issue in the national parks. Every park area with burnable vegetation must have a fire management plan approved by the Superintendent by the end of the calendar year. Fire history proposals: fund fire history of Capulin Volcano NM (joint project between GP-CESU, DS-CESU, and University of Missouri), develop workshop on fire histories of federal lands in the Great Plains (include NPS, BLM, BOR, FS, and FWS).

We would like to continue to consider ways in which a multi-agency can be developed.

Research needs, agency expertise, faculty expertise

One of the keys to making the GP-CESU work effectively is for us to create the critical linkages between federal agencies and our partner institutions. We would like to make information available on: information needs (research, technical assistance and education needs) of the federal agencies; agency expertise (especially those agencies who are doing the research – USGS, RMRS); and faculty expertise.

- 1) Agency information needs: generate organized, readily accessible information on agency research, technical assistance and education needs. An update on the NPS research needs catalog: All parks within the Great Plains CESU region have a short list of needs posted on the web site (derived from the internal PMIS database). These needs have been submitted by the park and reviewed at some level, however have not necessarily been funded. Our idea for the Research Needs Catalog is to expand upon this list by researching park documents, performing literature searches, and talking to the park directly. Currently, five parks have the expanded catalog page available on the web site. Two more will be added very soon. As an example, Wind Cave NP, had a list of 13 items that were posted on the web based on the PMIS database alone. The expanded catalog page now has a list of 88 items, thanks to the assistance of the park resource manager. The intent is that university faculty can look at these lists of needs and determine if their expertise can help the park meet these needs. The faculty and park can work together to prepare a proposal to submit for funding. In some cases a project may already have funding available. A possible benefit for the parks, and other agencies who make this information available, is increased technical assistance with preparing proposals which in turn, may lead to an increase in funding as a result of well-written proposals. To help us continue these efforts we are planning to submit a proposal to form a NPS Research Needs Assessment Team. The conceptual idea is to compile a team of faculty from a variety of disciplines who can assist the parks in identifying current and potential future research needs.
- 2) Agency expertise: we would like to compile a list of agency expertise for publishing on the web site. This is especially important for our partners who are doing research rather than just funding the research (USGS, RMRS – FS). I will be pulling this information from web sites where it is available and contacting them for additional comments/review.
- 3) Faculty expertise: we would like to enhance the list of faculty expertise that is available through the CESU. Currently, we have a list of expertise from 8 of the 13 partners available on the web site. However, it is somewhat hap-hazard. We would like to standardize and provide a searchable database to maximize benefit and ease of use. A list of possible key words was presented, and discussed. This list will be provided to everyone for comments. Once it has been finalized, it will be sent to the technical representatives and it will be their responsibility to forward it on to faculty and encourage them to take a moment to fill it out and return to the GP-CESU office. The end result will be a searchable expertise database.

How do we get partners involved or more involved?

Are partner university faculty aware of the GP-CESU? Do they receive the emails from us that are suppose to reach them?

Of the technical representatives present, it appeared that most were passing on relevant emails to other faculty at their institution (usually by forwarding it to someone who has a master list). Some have also been discussing it with other faculty in person. There needs to be an improvement though, in order to get the word out to everyone.

One impediment: (internal) a faculty member gets more perks if a grant comes from a higher lever (NSF, NIH, etc.) rather than the GP-CESU. On the university side, the more indirect cost you generate the better they think of you. This may be one reason why some faculty would not be interested in projects through the GP-CESU.

Brian Smith: BHSU does not see it that way – they think this is a great opportunity to increase research projects with federal agencies. May depend on the size of the university.

A good thing to remember is that a lot of the projects through the CESU would not have been done at all if the CESUs did not exist. 15-17.5% of \$400,000 is greater than 46% of zero!

The cost/benefit ratio of getting a CESU proposal is very low compared to the NSF's, etc. It does not take two months to write.

Another potential impediment: if a faculty member has had a previously bad experience working with a federal agency, they may avoid working with any at all.

USGS – Eros Data Center – can link to CESU web site to help advertise and spread the word about the GP-CESU. We should see if other agencies are also willing to link to our site.

Role of technical representatives/marketing:

- Help market the GP-CESU:
 - o brown-bag seminars
 - o discuss/present at faculty meetings
 - o hand out brochures (partners that were not at the meeting will be receiving updated brochures)
- Maybe need more than 1 tech rep at each university? One for natural resources, one for cultural? This would help in getting the word out to people in both areas, however may cause some other problems in terms of the committees and responsibilities (voting). Needs more consideration.

- Be aware of CESU projects that are being performed at your university (the GP-CESU office will provide this information as it is available).
- Hold research conferences at our meetings. This may help increase attendance and show everyone what is being done, etc.

Project Reporting

It was decided that the best way to handle this is to inform the federal agency contracting people the GP-CESU needs a copy of the task agreement. When they are sending out the final copies to the university, etc, include one to the GP-CESU office. This will enable the GP-CESU to know of all projects that exist under the GP-CESU by all agencies. Christine Lockert will make these contacts. The technical representatives at each of our partners will then be informed of any projects that are on-going at their respective institutions as the information is received.

Communication

Continue to update and enhance the web site, it is an open file system. However it was expressed at the meeting, that many well not go to the site just to find updates, etc. We will increase our overall communication via emails, etc. We are going to work on establishing a GP-CESU Newsletter as well, to be distributed quarterly in a pdf file. There was a suggestion to hold 1-2 conference calls a year to keep everyone up-to-date on what is going on and what is being done. It may be good to hold at least one after the NPS Comprehensive Call goes out in the fall. The conference calls are especially important if we limit the actual meetings to every two years. We will aim to interact more often, through the web, newsletter, conference calls, and additional mailings as appropriate.

Adding Members to the GP-CESU

The Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory made a presentation at this meeting to become a member of the GP-CESU. Their application to join will be mailed to each of you for the review and voting process. Kansas State University is expected to submit an application to join the unit any day now. We do not currently have geographical representation in Kansas. Other potential members that should be contacted: (if anyone has any contacts with these agencies, it would be helpful if you could provide us with names).

Natural Resource Conservation Service
 US Fish & Wildlife Service
 The Nature Conservancy
 NOAA
 NASA
 Kansas Geological Survey
 Research foundations
 EPA Region VI

Changes in Membership Policy

The National CESU Council has been adding a new article to Agreements as Amendments are written. With Amendment 3 to the Great Plains Agreement, the following terms of agreement were added:

Article III. CI.

*For amendments whose sole purpose is to add a Partner Institution and /or Federal Agency to this agreement, each Partner Institution and Federal Agency currently participating in this agreement will have 45 days from receipt of the amendment to either sign the amendment or object in writing to the Host University. **If a Partner Institution or Federal Agency has not responded after 45 days from receipt of the amendment, its signature will not be required to make the amendment effective.** The Partner Institution and/or Federal Agency being added to the agreement and the Host University shall sign the amendment.*

The initial vote to accept or reject a candidate member will still take place. With unanimous approval, the amendment will be written and delivered to each partner institution and federal agency for signature at the same time. **Each current member will therefore be on the same 45 day clock** (previously, the GP-CESU collected the partner institution signatures and the national office collected the federal agency signatures afterwards). This does give a partner another instance to object, however the initial vote takes place to try to make sure that everyone is on the same page in regards to the candidate member. This change will speed up the overall membership process.

At this meeting, it was also determined by those members present, to initiate a similar process in regards to obtaining the initial votes. Provide 30 days from receipt of application to review and respond to the Host University with your preference to accept or reject as a member (we will need to confirm receipt). **If there is no response from a current member after 30 days, their vote will be considered affirmative.** With this provision, the entire membership process once the application is sent to our partners for review should take about 3 months. This will be much better than the 6-7 months it has taken in the past.

As of May 1, 2004 the indirect cost rate for all projects through the CESU's will increase from 15% to 17.5%. Any project that is executed prior to that date will not be affected by this change, even if it extends beyond May 1, 2004.

Five Year Review

The initial agreements were signed for a five-year period, with the right to renew for another five years with mutual consent of all parties. The effective date of the GP-CESU was October 5, 2000, so it is up for review in 2005. The approximate review timeline is as follows:

March – April, 2005: Receive initial review and renewal instructions from National CESU Coordinator.

May – June, 2005: Host university and partners prepare a self-assessment and letter of interest to continue activities of the CESU.

July 2005: Manager's committee submits review and recommendation

July 2005: External review (committee selected by the Managers Committee) submitted

August 2005: CESU Council will examine review materials and decide on the renewal of each CESU.

General Criteria for Self-Assessment:

- Were the formal commitments identified in the CESU agreement fulfilled?
- Were the projects successfully completed, and was there effective delivery of relevant and high quality project results to managers, consistent with the mission of the CESU?
- Was there involvement of partner institutions as appropriate in the activities and projects of the CESU?
- Did the CESU facilitate collaboration and substantial involvement among its participants?

Administrative Costs

Discussion on how to assist UNL in providing the administrative support of the GP-CESU.

It was proposed that all new projects could include an additional line-item in the budget that would be for GP-CESU Administrative Costs. This could be either a flat rate (based on range of project total) or percentage of total budget. UNL could then invoice the partners for this cost. This sounded like a good, feasible idea to everyone in attendance. Kyle will work on calculating some numbers that may be appropriate for this support. A proposal will go out on this issue.

Meeting adjourned

Meeting Participants

Thursday, April 13th, 2004 at Langston University

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Wednesday, April 14th, Langston University, OKC Campus

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