

Minutes

Great Plains Cooperative Ecosystem Study Unit (GP-CESU)

Date & Time: February 28 - March 2, 2001

Location: Conference room, The Center for Great Plains Studies, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Attendees:

Dorothy Anderson, University of Minnesota
Gary Beauvais, University of Wyoming
Tonya Bradley, NPS (Friday)
Dennis Child, Colorado State University
Steve Cinnamon, NPS-Midwest Region
Ted Elliott, University of Nebraska
Bob Fenemore, US EPA - Region 7
John Helvig, US EPA - Region 7
Ron Hiebert, NPS, Colorado Plateau-CESU
Kyle Hoagland, University of Nebraska
Christine Lockert, University of Nebraska
Luis Maestas, BLM, Wy
Theora McVay, NPS (Friday)
Gene Schaaf, BLM, Wy.
Michelle Schoeneberger, US FS/NRCS
Pat Shea, University of Nebraska
Mike Soukup, NPS
Rick Sweitzer, University of North Dakota
Gary Vequist, NPS
Linda Wallace, University of Oklahoma
Gary Willson, USGS-BRD, Missouri

Thursday March 1, 8:15 AM

After introductions, Jim Stubbendieck, Director of the Center for Great Plains Studies opened the meeting by providing a few welcoming words and discussing the Center.

Next, **Mike Soukup** (Assoc. Dir.- Natural Res, NPS) presented an introduction and overview of what the CESU concept is and how it works. CESUs are longterm relationships with regional impacts on biological, physical, social, and cultural sciences. The CESU will conduct mission oriented research, provide technical assistance, and offer educational programs to federal agencies and partners concerned with natural and cultural resource management. Right now there are 9 federal agencies involved throughout the CESU network (NPS, BLM, USFS, USGS-BRD, DDD, DDE, EPA, USFWS, and the *Bureau of Reclamation*). Currently there are eight CESUs, expect to have ten by the end of 2001. These include 62 universities and partners and

nine federal agencies. There are 5 key elements of CESUs:

- host university
- collaborators
- role and mission statement
- managers committee
- strategic and annual work plans

The CESU Council meets regularly and have prepared a Report to Congress, CESU Network strategic plan, and an administrative guide.

Ron Hiebert:

He started his position as NPS Coordinator of the CP-CESU last December (99).

Will the concepts of the CESUs work in reality? YES, if the effort is put into them from everyone involved you will see results. CP-CESU has mission oriented research, technical assistance has been a major role, as well as educational opportunities (K-12 schools). There has been increased collaboration of faculty, students and scientists. NPS employees, as well as other federal agency employees act as augmented faculty (give seminars, sit on committees, etc.)

Keys to success: participation by all partners
 focused effort on 1 or 2 issues
 don't try to do everything
 communication: website development, conference calls
 project management, tracking, and information sharing
 dedicated effort by the host, partners, and federal agencies

Each partner university and federal agency representative gave a short presentation discussing their institution, what they bring to the CESU, and relevant natural resource issues.

Thursday afternoon session

The mid-afternoon discussion was led off by Ted Elliott, discussing types of CESU projects and funding sources for these projects. Funding sources can be separated into 4 categories:

- 1). Core funding
- 2). Unplanned agency projects - things that come up
- 3). Non-agency funding - agency facilitated funding
- 4). Multi-agency funding

The discussion shifted once it was apparent that there was a more relevant discussion to be had at this time. We needed to identify how the CESU would be beneficial to those involved and what is the vision of this CESU? These questions needed to be answered, or at least discussed, before sources of funding could be identified.

Rick Sweitzer: there is a need to create structure and to come together every 6 months to a year and see what projects have been put together. Is there a regional problem that is not apparent

individually, but can be identified when data is looked at as a whole? If a regional / ecosystem issue is apparent then this can be a goal of the CESU to work toward.

John Helvig: need a strategic plan with a question of sorts, ie ' what is the ecological health of the Great Plains? Then identify a matrix of information to enable us to answer this question.

-How does the information from different agencies come together?

-An issue for the EPA, they need to know what are the ecological problems in Region 7?

So different agencies are looking for different things from the CESU:

-EPA, Forest Service need a larger picture (broad, joint issues)

-NPS have more detailed, specific needs in addition to the broader view.

But what can a CESU provide you that you can't get by going through a contract with an individual? (Gene Schaaf)

Steve Cinnamon: the CESU will help parks get their individual projects done, BUT the NPS also has the broader view and will be an ecological player. A big benefit is the potential for all federal agencies to be working together in the host university.

Ron Hiebert: Advantages of CESU: 1). Administrative side - all admin. issues are negotiated already. 2). The group comes together 1 or 2 a year to talk about what is important, identify issues of concern, and make plans to work toward these issues, etc.

Kyle Hoagland: The CESU enable us to link things together that would otherwise not be linked together. Integrate the fragments of the Great Plains - at a landscape scale. One result of this could be a much more coordinated database of information, the CESU has to offer a coordinated effort, won't get findings of just one project, but a whole effort.

Gary Beauvais: Can get agency ideas at the university level and vice versa - everyone will know what everyone else is doing.

Public vs. Private lands

There was a discussion about why we are limiting ourselves to public lands. Linda points out that the matrix of the landscape is private lands, and perhaps we could bring in the Nature Conservancy as a partner. Michelle agrees and points out that the Forest Service works not only public lands, but private lands too. There needs to be an all lands approach to reach our goal (cultivated and noncultivated) - private lands will effect public lands.

Possible partners that could be added: TNC, Land trusts, State, County, large private land owners (non-federal agency partners - use a separate agreement between them and university, etc.)

Ted: there needs to be some focus though, perhaps focus on public lands in context of private lands. This was agreed upon.

The following is a list of important issues to the Great Plains - the goal of the CESU could be to take on projects that encompass these issues, thereby helping answer the question within the

mission statement.

- Exotic/invasive species
- Rare or declining species
- Changing disturbance regime (fire, grazing, etc)
- Restoration Ecology
- Collapse of agricultural dominance (market) of Great Plains - economics
- Global change
- Distribution/movement of people (fragmentation)
 - changes in social capital - changes in demographics
- Urban sprawl
- Loss of wetlands
- Water quality/quantity

Vision:

The Mission of the Great Plains CESU is to determine the ecological state of public lands of the Great Plains and examine its future within the context of private lands.

This will be revised, added to and will include the following points (a draft will be circulated):

Steve: be sure that it is known that we are not taking over these lands, a need to keep in mind who our stakeholders are - we are not doing this for government or university per se, but to provide science for purpose and decision making.

Gary B: add an intent statement (in order to....)

Ron: add historical, archeological issues, classical deterioration, etc.

Friday, March 2 - 8:00 to 11:30 am

A discussion on the draft protocol developed by CP-CESU led by Steve Cinnamon.

First, it was made clear that we should look at this protocol as an expectation of how things will be done and get accomplished. It may be that each agency would prefer a separate protocol, but in any case, they would be similar.

The CESU Council is developing an “Administrative Handbook” which will probably closely follow the CP-CESU protocol. This will help everyone understand the processes to take in different situations, etc.

The following are the major points that came out of the discussion regarding the protocol:

- *Add mission statement to Protocol
- *Refer to agency manager throughout the protocol as AM to keep in line with AR and PI
- *A question about who, what exactly are each of the terms AR, AM, and PI referring to?

AR - delegated to work with CESU issues

AM - could be at various levels in the agency, could be plural?, land mgr, research mgr, etc.

*Need to include other positions in list of terms: technical rep, and contracting officer

Modification: This term is used to describe the act of funding a new project proposal. **The term will refer to an 'instrument' for funding and/or issuing a new project under this agreement (in lieu of using task order or other term more common with contract law.**

Proposal Development: there is a need to address the criteria to be applied by AR's for inclusion under the GP-CESU - we need to identify these criteria

Ways to initiate work within the CESU:

- could differ between agencies
- good to have searchable expertise database as well as a searchable directory of agencies/contacts etc.

Peer Review: a discussion regarding the level of review that was necessary for incoming projects was heard. There was a concern that if there was not a peer review process then CESU projects would not be 'up to par', considering the level of peer review in other agencies, programs.

*It was proposed that by being in the coop agreement, you agree to be involved in the peer review process. University level peer review for proposals developed at Univ, require to submit proposal along with proof of peer review. This process would include a need for review by 3 people, with one person being outside the university where it was developed. Also need to have conflict of interest criteria.

*It was proposed that the Host university could receive all proposals first and then send them out to partner institutions. This would serve as a check on the projects coming in - coordinate.

*Peer review comes at a cost and not all projects will need a detailed peer review, some may only need 'scientific review or discussion'. A relevancy review.

****It was decided that the need and level of review necessary will vary depending on the project. We need to develop a process to determine what projects need a full review and what projects don't.** For example, when dealing with a large amount of money and in a competitive arena, then yes a peer review is necessary. But if have a project that is pretty much following standard methods, the need for a full review is much less.

A matrix regarding this has been proposed by Steve and will be reviewed

*within matrix regarding project implementation - need to add a box or paragraph explaining the role of the CESU (host) = coordinate projects, check relevancy, a link

Multi Agency and/or Multi Partner proposals

* A lead University will be identified for coordinating a multi-institution project. A single PI will be identified for coordinating the efforts (the lead University should default to lead PI).

* The AR's will identify a lead agency through a general agreement or memorandum of understanding. This lead agency is willing to oversee the entire project, separate agencies may (but do not have to) be identified as the lead agency for fiscal and technical issues. There will be flexibility towards whether or not all money comes through the lead agency or if each agency gives money directly to the lead University. All money needs to go to lead university for them to disperse to partners (how the money gets to the lead university can vary).

Completion and oversight of a project - Need to develop criteria for what is a completed project

- role of individual agencies and AR's
- ensure completion through substantial involvement

*Hiring of student employees - when PI is writing a proposal, it is important to identify/clarify how the role of student workers is being handled - address the student role.

It has been suggested that we create an Access database to use as a master program to track all GPCEU projects. This database will include the minimal information such as names of institutions and agencies, principal investigators, contact persons, address information, duration of the agreement, award date, amount, an abstract of the project, account numbers and project numbering systems. This will be maintained in cooperation of the AR's and the Host University to satisfy this record-keeping requirement and assist in year-end reporting.

Bringing in new partners or agencies

*for additional partner universities, the universities need to supply an appropriate application proposal with information regarding the university facilities, expertise, etc. A formal presentation is not necessary. Approval of CESU Council is not necessary, but it does need the signatures of all Managers and to modify the original agreement. Vote could be held via email or written proposal.

*for additional agencies (federal and non-federal) the approval of the CESU Council is necessary. The Council is working on providing a template of what to do.

Conclusions

*The draft Protocol will be revised to include what was discussed at this meeting. There will be an opportunity for everyone to review a final draft.

*Ted and Kyle will work on incorporating the vision statement and important issues concerning the GP that were discussed into the beginnings of a strategic plan.