

NRST EVALUATION #1 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Survey results indicated high levels of satisfaction with network members and the products and services provided during PFC training sessions; however, this did not mean that overall program objectives were being met. While most respondents noted their knowledge of riparian-wetland function had increased as a result of PFC trainings and the PFC assessment method helped generate common ground and open lines of communication; most also noted considerably less success in terms of encouraging diverse participation in the trainings and in designing and implementing cooperative riparian restoration and management plans after the trainings. In addition, when asked to rank 22 potential barriers to cooperative riparian restoration and management, the top six were social issues – lack of communication and trust, resource constraints, conflicting objectives, politics, fundamental differences between stakeholders and the fact that not all stakeholders were represented. Considerably less people ranked ‘technical issues’ as extremely serious barriers. Thus the conclusion was drawn that while PFC training sessions are important to building awareness and shared understanding, the initiative’s goal cannot be fulfilled through activities aimed solely at technology transfer. Further findings indicated that service trips, a combined PFC training and place-based problem solving session that strives to incorporate all stakeholders, demonstrated considerably higher levels of success than training sessions alone in facilitating on-the-ground cooperation. In those instances where a service trip was less successful than others, some of the noted factors were lack of upfront participation by all stakeholders, insufficient opportunities for dialogue and mutual learning and limited follow-up (service trips were typically one-time interventions).

In response to the evaluation findings, a number of **recommendations** were developed.

- Solicit diverse participation using deliberate and personal outreach.
- Use pre-assistance interviews to better understand the dimensions of a situation, identify key players and ensure their involvement, and provide important insights that can help design an agenda to move the group forward.
- Work to increase the opportunities for dialogue, mutual learning and relationship building between diverse and often conflicting stakeholders (consider using facilitators and consensus building techniques).
- Identify instances where follow-up activities may help move a group forward (work with groups over the long-term rather than just one time interventions).
- Where practical, combine training with place-base problem solving for improved results.
- Diversify network skills through recruitment and additional training.
- Improve the network’s ability to respond to the needs of individuals and groups in a variety of ways (such as helping them work through continuing conflict, learn specific management/monitoring techniques, or acquire resources or support to implement changes on the ground) to improve overall effectiveness.

Additional evaluation feedback identified **institutional and individual level barriers** to strategy implementation and effectiveness in terms of facilitating on-the-ground change. Three categories of

institutional barriers emerged, including: the institutionalization process, organizational hierarchy, and workforce constraints. These categories were often discussed within a broader context of agency support. Interviewees noted that the initiative has received differing levels of support across partnering agencies. This is compounded by the fact that current organizational cultures, in general, do not create time or priority for activities associated with partnership building and cooperative problem solving, and bureaucracies, by nature, resist the type of innovation, risk taking, flexibility and integration required for this initiative to be successful.

- Institutionalization Process - Since agencies are marked by constant change, the long-term success of an individual initiative is linked to whether – and in what way – programs and activities have been institutionalized within an agency. Currently, there are few incentives and for acting outside of traditional problem-solving and decision-making approaches. Actually, disincentives exist because current budget and performance structures do not include mechanisms for reporting the benefits gained from employee participation in this initiative.
- Organizational Hierarchy - The network has struggled to garner support over the years because there has not been a clear and consistent message across all appropriate lines of authority supporting innovative approaches to problem solving - such as this one.
- Workforce Constraints
 - Organizational Downsizing – A decreasing workforce and increasing responsibilities have left remaining employees with expanded duties and little time for other equally important tasks such as outreach, relationship building, and more time in the field working with people. Because of these factors there is often decreased receptivity to new programs or approaches because they are seen as more work rather than as a way to do things differently with possibly better results.
 - Biophysical Expertise – Many agency employees are trained in the bio-physical aspects of riparian-wetland resources and some are disinterested or lack the skills to address the social dimensions of natural resource management. Furthermore, retiring specialists are being replaced by individuals with a more generalized background and considerably less experience. As a result, there are not enough experienced specialists available with the background to effectively participate in the interdisciplinary dialogue needed to fully understand diverse riparian systems and conditions.
 - Sharing Resources - Watersheds are often geographically nested within a management complex of jurisdictions, agencies and individuals. Agencies typically do not have effective mechanisms and enough commitment to sharing resources across disciplinary, programmatic and jurisdictional boundaries.

Additional evaluation feedback also identified **individual barriers** to strategy implementation and effectiveness in terms of participation in the C&C network and application of C&C concepts on the ground. When asked to reflect on factors that facilitate and constrain successful implementation of the initiative, almost all respondents highlighted factors that reside within an individual. These individual factors can be described in terms of (1) whether an individual feels a sense of ownership in the decision to participate in the initiative, and (2) whether s/he is able to participate effectively.

- Ownership - The extent to which an individual feels a sense of ownership in the decision to participate in the initiative is an important factor in determining its success. A sense of

ownership arises from a personal connection between an individual and the problems at hand, and a sense of responsibility for doing something about it. Ownership in the decision to participate in the initiative (as a solution to the problems at hand) is created when individuals are involved in the decision making process and feel that the outcomes reflect their interests.

- Voluntary Decision to Participate – In order to encourage a sense of ownership in the decision to participate in the initiative, it must be voluntary and cannot be forced. While it is important that participation in the network, the use of PFC or cooperative problem solving is supported by institutional entities, mandates alone will not suffice. In describing the notion of voluntary decision making, interview respondents outlined a number of factors that make an individual choose to voluntarily participate in the initiative. At the most basic level, each person who is confronted with the decision to participate in the initiative faces the same fundamental question: Is it worthwhile for me to personally invest in this initiative? According to respondents, the personal importance that an individual places on riparian areas or the initiative itself directly influences their decision to participate. As does their individual assessment of costs and benefits accrued through their participation or non-participation. An individual's decision to participate is also influenced by their outlook, or the manner in which s/he views the world. Respondents note that individuals who choose to participate in this initiative share similar outlooks marked by a breadth of perspective (e.g., myopic view versus interconnected view) and an openness to innovation.
- Ability to Participate Effectively – As with most things in life, individuals who possess certain traits are able to perform some tasks better than others. With regard to the riparian initiative, a sense of ownership in the decision to participate is a necessary prerequisite to success; however, it alone does not guarantee success. According to respondents, truly successful participants (in terms of implementing and applying the initiative) are very committed to the initiative and have a certain degree of initiative, motivation or passion that drives them to go the extra mile. Additionally, effective participants have a certain predisposition or personality that enables them to successfully interact with others.
 - Commitment – When asked to reflect on the factors that influence the success of the riparian initiative, respondents noted the importance of individual commitment in terms of willingness and ability to shoulder additional responsibilities and to build interest in and support for the initiative through formal and informal networking.
 - Personality - Personality was cited as another key factor in determining the success of the initiative. Respondents noted that success was linked to the willingness of network members to facilitate the building of trust and relationships, and the establishment of common needs across public and private landowners. Certain personalities or character traits (e.g., humility, empathy, respect for each other and ability to communicate in a non-threatening fashion) enhanced an individual's ability to foster such an environment. Additionally, respondents noted that an individual's reputation and credibility was also an important factor in determining the success of the initiative.