

Forest Service National Partnership Office ~ LEARNING LABS ~

The Forest Service National Partnership Office (NPO) has adopted learning labs as a way to expose and engage individuals and organizations to the best practices of working in a partnership culture. It is one way the NPO is working to build organizational capacity for collaboration and partnerships.

The National Riparian Service Team (NRST) has been 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.



The NRST leads the implementation of an interagency effort *Creeks & Communities (C&C): A Continuing Strategy for Accelerating Cooperative Riparian Restoration and Management:*

- ❖ Initiated in 1996, core agency sponsors include the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- ❖ Designed to substantially increase the number of people working collaboratively to improve the management of riparian-wetland resources at the landscape scale.
- ❖ Outlines a way of working with diverse groups at the landscape level (across political boundaries) to create a common vision for cooperative and coordinated management of productive and sustainable riparian-wetland conditions.
- ❖ Addresses riparian related concerns through specific, case-by-case design based on collaborative principles - working directly with people, in their location, focusing on their particular issues.
- ❖ Provides a model for managing conflict and promoting joint fact finding in support of collective, community-based decision-making.

The NRST works in conjunction with a diverse and extensive Riparian Coordination Network (RCN) comprised of individuals from federal, state and local governments, tribes, universities, and the private sector. The fundamental activity of C&C, service trips, are typically a combination of technical training and place-based problem solving among diverse stakeholders.

Recognizing that a 'silver bullet' or one-size-fits-all approach to collaborative, community-based resource management does not exist, the C&C strategy relies on a set of principles and practices for engaging in such efforts. Service trips are often multi-phased. Each trip or phase begins with a situation assessment and is customized (designed and staffed) to provide specific capacity-

building efforts to fit particular biophysical and socioeconomic needs and objectives based on assessment findings. A critical component of the revised C&C approach is building the capacity of local communities, including agencies, so that long-term success is not dependent upon a specific individual. Considerable attention is also paid to ensuring participation of key individuals and organizations.

The assistance provided utilizes concepts and methods for integrating science into collaborative decision-making. The objective is to address riparian-wetland function, while also equalizing stakeholder knowledge and supporting collaborative decision-making through a variety of capacity building efforts. Emphasis is placed on adaptability – trying different combinations of tools and techniques, evaluating them as a group, and adjusting as needed. These activities foster understanding and acceptance of the relevance of science and its application to community problem solving.

What will participants gain?

- ✓ Opportunity for developing a long-term (mentor) relationship with well-seasoned practitioners in collaborative efforts.
- ✓ Learn first-hand what incentives bring communities of interest and place “to the table” and what incentives *keep* them there.
- ✓ Experience on-the-ground, community-based problem solving
- ✓ Learn to put collaborative problem solving principles into practice by applying social science to natural resource issues.
- ✓ Work side-by-side with an experienced, *interdisciplinary* team of practitioners
- ✓ Learn techniques for maintaining productivity in the face of disagreement.
- ✓ Given each collaborative activity is different, discover common themes and strategies through a step-by-step process designed to enable joint problem solving and development of practical solutions to natural resource issues.
- ✓ Experience real-life challenges in adaptive management with structured time to process interactions through debriefing sessions.
- ✓ Build individual skills and core competencies for engaging in collaborative, community-based stewardship efforts both within and outside government.

Commitment:

- ❖ Learning lab funds will support travel and per diem for individuals to participate in C&C activities and work on contentious natural resource issues with diverse groups of stakeholders, in specific locations, as a member of an interdisciplinary team.
- ❖ Learning lab participants will make a long-term commitment to actively participate as a member of: (1) the Riparian Coordination Network to assist in the implementation of the C&C Strategy and (2) mentor networks/skill banks designed to assist others with a variety of collaborative/partnership efforts.



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