

## External Awareness

The Bureau of Land Management National Training Center presents Supervisors Audio Forum. Now the host of your program, Jessica Sabarzo.

Hello. Thank you for joining us again for our monthly supervisory audio forum with the Essentials for Supervisory program. Today we'll be discussing external awareness with Jody Weil. Jody Weil is the deputy state director of communications for the state of Washington/Oregon and has been an integral part of the leadership academy cadre for several years, and she specifically guides participants on the same subject, external awareness. So we really hope today's discussion will be integrated and involved, and we hope that you are able to call in and chime in and take part in the discussion today, and so if you want to do that, if you want to become part of the discussion, you want to dial star 1 on your telephone pad, and that will get you right into the cue and will get you right in to talk to Jody rather quickly. So today, again, we're with Jody Weil discussing external awareness, so good morning Jody.

Good morning Jessica. Thanks for having me, and I'm excited today to talk about external awareness because it's something near and dear to my heart and something I've been doing for a long time. I won't tell you how long, hahaha, but anyway, so I thought I'd just start today with talking about what is external awareness. What does it really mean? Really, I mean you look at technically the OPM leadership criteria says understand and keep up to date on local, national, and international policies and trends that affect the organization and shape

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stakeholders' views. People who have external awareness are aware of the organization's impact on the external environment. And one thing that's gonna be kind of a theme for today, and I'll talk more about it towards the end, but one thing I kind of try to remember in the back of my head is what might the headline in the newspaper read, and do we want that headline to be out there. So keep that in the back of your mind as we go through this, but I want to start out about just sort of talking about why it's important to have external awareness and how external awareness really affects really all of what we do or a lot of what we do. So we live in a democratic society, or as public officials we basically operate through the consent of the government. So if that's true, let's talk about how the public influences our abilities to make land management decisions, and I'd like to do that by actually doing what we call a decision-making pentagon. This will be a little bit of a challenge since we're on the phone, and typically when I talk to folks about this I actually go up to a flip chart and we actually draw a pentagon, so if you have a piece of paper in front of you, if you could imagine or draw a 5-sided pentagon and each side of the pentagon is going to represent things that constrain your ability to make decisions. So say at the top you have your top line that goes sort of horizontally across, and then you have – so what might be a challenge or a constraint when you're making decisions that might be represented by that line. So one of the things – and actually if anyone wants to throw out some ideas before I go through it, you're welcome to.

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So if you want to join the discussion by throwing out some ideas for Jody, just dial star 1 on your telephones and that will get you right in the cue and we'll get you in to chat with her.

So if not, I will go through and describe for you what I think those constraints are. So the top one would be fiscal, and then on the side you have laws or legal, and then you have technology, and on the bottom you have public opinion, and then you have one more line there and that would be our resource capacity. Basically what our resources can sustain. So basically you have these 5 sides of our pentagon, and really when you look at it, one is public opinion, and you could say okay, well that's the external awareness in the public opinion. But I would argue that components of the other side of the pentagon also include public opinion. So lets take them one at a time. Let's talk about fiscal. So basically who decides how much money we get as an organization, and basically if they choose to decide that would be congress? In this particular year they've chosen not to decide, but typically congress decides for us, and congress is elected by the people and is very, very concerned about public opinion. I wanted to just share a quick story from my experience. When I worked in Montana, and then I also worked in Alaska, and when I worked in Montana we were trying to get a visitor center built along the Lewis and Clark trail where Clark actually carved his name on Pompey's Pillar. So if there's anyone on from Montana you'll know what I'm talking about. But anyway, Clark carved his name on a rock that overlooks the Yellowstone River, and there is actually an exit on the highway I90 that says

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Pompey's Pillar, and BLM acquired the rock and then the surrounding property and we wanted to put a visitor center there. Well there's obviously a lot of traffic, a major east-west thoroughfare and an exit on the highway, and we were trying to get money to do that and it was really difficult and we needed 4 million dollars at the time, and we ultimately ended up getting a 2-million-dollar appropriation from congress with a requirement for a 2-million-dollar match from the community. So I mean that was really hard work and tough in a very visible place. Well then I moved to Alaska, and I'm in Alaska and there's a visitor center, and if there's anyone in Alaska you'll know what I'm talking about, on the Arctic Circle, which is 350 miles from any populated area, and it is only open 3 months out of the year, and we were trying – it's an interagency facility, but we were able to get 8 million dollars for that facility on a road that's a lot less traveled than I90 because we had Senator Stevens in Alaska, and Senator Stevens was a long-standing senator and he was on the appropriate committees and that sort of thing. So my point is that being aware of those kinds of connections and who your members of congress are and the kinds of things that are going on, what committees they're on, the kinds of things that they are up against in terms of their constituents, makes a difference in how much money you get, and it doesn't always make sense in terms of how much visitation or the length of time things are open, that sort of thing. So that's my way of just explaining that the fiscal part of the pentagon is definitely influenced by public opinion and external awareness.

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And so then I would go next to our legal and laws, and the same body that we talked about in terms of fiscal also helps pass our laws, and then of course there's the supreme court that helps us interpret them, but the one example I want to give there in terms of the political opinion influencing the laws that get passed, and even I would go as far as to suggest how they're interpreted, is back in 1971, some of you may know this story, but the way we got the Wild Horse and Burrow Act in 1971 was based on a secretary in Reno, Nevada who was driving behind a truck of horses that were going to market, and she was outraged and started a campaign, and shortly after that we had Wild Horse Annie, and then we had in 1971 the Wild Horse and Burrow Act, and the interesting thing about the Wild Horse and Burrow Act is it was passed unanimously. There was not one dissenting vote at the time. So here we have this program several years later that was passed without one dissenting vote because of the public opinion and the emotion that was rallied around basically an event that happened one day when a person was behind a trailer with horses headed to market.

And so let's move on to the next side of the pentagon, and that is technology. And so technology and resource capacity, or capability, those ones seem like they have the least to do with public opinion, but I would actually argue differently. In terms of technology, we have this whole emergence of social media, which I'll talk a little bit more about in a little bit, and social media emerged as the technology emerged, but it is all about relationships and external opinions and a lot of our media and a lot of our news, and all of that is coming through

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technology as opposed to our traditional ways, and so definitely technology has influence. I can remember, I mean this is gonna date myself, but I can remember when the internet was new and people would say things like oh, nobody's gonna really use that, and look at how much it influences our daily lives, and not only a tool for us to be able to do our work but in the way that influences our opinions and our relationships with each other.

And then lastly there is the last side of the pentagon, which would be resource capability, and somebody's like well that's pretty – or science, you know, and that's pretty straight forward. We have science that says X, Y, or Z. But actually, if you really think about science, you can find different kinds of science. Like take climate change for example. You can find science that says climate change is happening and at this rate, and there seems to be a consensus around that science. But you could also – if you dig hard enough, you could find science that is not really happening. I can maybe say that today because it's raining on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June in Oregon today. But anyway, my point is just that depending on sort of where your opinion is and there things are trending and what seems to be the trend at the moment, you can find science to back that up. and of course, if you think about the things that we do on a day-to-day basis every day in terms of grazing or talking about wild horses again, the capacity for the range to be able to handle cattle grazing and wild horses and drought and which one comes first, I mean all those things, in lies some external opinions about that, and we really need to be – it's really important to be aware of that. So I would basically argue

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that when you're making decisions that while the last one of course is public opinion while one of them is the only one that talks specifically about external awareness and public opinion, that really all of the influences that help influence our decisions as natural resource managers have some component of public opinion and external influence involved in that.

So Jody, let me just ask you a quick question.

Sure.

So as the majority of the participants on line today are supervisors.

Mm-hmm.

And again really quick, let me just shout out. If you want to join the discussion dial star 1 on your telephone. So as most of the participants today listening in are supervisors, I was thinking when you were talking about – when you were talking about the challenge in fiscal as well as legal, how important is it – I think you said how important it is, but how important is it and what are some of the resources we can go to to educate ourselves on those. To educate ourselves on what the law is, on what the committees are that affect our programs, on where to find that information. What is allowed and appropriate contact with those committees and with those, you know, making those connections, because I

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think sometimes there's a little bit of a gray area in regards to how we do that and what processes we take to kind of build those networking relationships. So can you speak on that a little bit?

Well sure. Absolutely. First I'll talk a little bit about how you just become aware of those things. For example, today before this call there's a hearing going on right now in the senate energy committee of which Senator Widen, who is from Oregon, is the chair, and it's about the challenges of managing forests in the federal government. And so you can actually, interestingly enough, I could sit at my computer and watch that live webcast of that hearing and watch the questions and the interaction with the panel and the department's witness. So I can just sit and watch that and be aware of the kinds of things - the senators on that committee, so for BLM, the committee that usually – the committees that we pay attention to and that do a lot of work in natural resources in the senate energy and natural resources committee, and you can look that up and you can see each day what hearings they're having, what their calendar looks like, what kinds of – if they're marking a bill, what kinds of bills they're looking at, and then in terms of the – then you can also, what we do is we actually have a witness who is a departmental witness, Ned Farcore, there today, and Ned, we have helped develop testimony and questions and answers, and so you can work with your local public affairs staff and just – they can let you know kind of what kinds of things are going on, and if you're interested they might even be looking for some expertise, and we're preparing our witness for questions and answers they

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might get from the senators, or we're preparing testimony and we're always looking for feedback from folks. Then I would also say another way to sort of – but we do have to be careful when we're working with our legislators because we can't appear to be lobbying because we are the executive branch and we are the implementers, so we are there to provide information and expertise, but it's still important to know where things are trending and what kinds of questions are being asked, and so you can certainly tap into those and watch a hearing when you have a minute or 2. You can just go to the senate energy and natural resources committee. In the house side it's the house natural resources committee. We also monitor, and there's a lot of interesting things that happen on the appropriations committee in terms of back to this fiscal piece. We work closely with our budget people on what's happening on the appropriations committee, and certainly if there are members of congress in your state that are on those committees, it's really important to just sort of know what kinds of things they're looking at. The other thing I wanted to mention in terms of a tool to help sort of know what's going on, there is – you can set up what they call a Google alert, and some people might know that. you can set up – you can go to Google and you can find a Google alert and you can set it up and say that it will send you an E-mail each day, so each day I get an E-mail that has all of the articles across the country that have the words Bureau of Land Management in the article. So I can get a sense, and it will give me the first 2 or 3 sentences of each article and then I can click and get the whole article if I'm interested, but really at a glance I can get a sense for across the country what our reporters and the public

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interested in terms of our business. Then I can look at these, quickly look at these websites and I can get a sense in terms of the legal piece or in terms of where congress is going or where we might be getting some congressional letters that folks are going to be asked to respond to, and that sort of thing.

Great. It sounds like technology is a huge piece.

Mm-hmm.

You know, a huge part of this pentagram in external awareness and communication and how it feeds into public opinion and how we kind of do our part to stay knowledgeable of kind of what's going on and what the expectations are for our bureau. So thanks for kind of going into that. And again a reminder, if you're interested in joining the discussion or if you want to kind of talk about maybe how you do things where you're at or what some of your challenges are with public opinion or external awareness, feel free to just dial star 1 on your telephones, and then we'll get you right in to speak with Jody. So go ahead.

Sorry about that, Jody.

No problem. So another thing I wanted to just mention about – one of the things that – and this will kind of lead into an example I wanted to share. One of the things that happens I think to us a lot and happens to me all the time, and it's kind of we need to just kind of put in the back of our minds this reminder, to step

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back. We get so involved in whatever project we're working on or whatever happens to be the crisis of the day, and we sort of forget like how does that fit into the big picture, and so one of the things – and so that's why I think it's really important for us to have this external awareness. So I wanted to say two things. One is to understand sometimes – now I mentioned the specific committees in congress, and those committees are much more focused on the kinds of things we do, but if you – I pulled up this morning – I pulled up the Washington Post, and on the Washington Post congress is talking about immigration and they're talking about the latest security leaks and things like that, so we're not on the big screen right now. In terms of legislation, one of the things I like to share is that there are a thousand bills that are introduced a year, and only like a couple hundred of them even make it through committee and get voted on, and then there's only about maybe 75 or 100 that actually get to go to the floor, and then probably of that 100 or 150 there's probably only 10 that are BLM related, maybe 20 if it's a big year, and then probably only 5 of those are related to Oregon and Washington and maybe one gets passed into law. You know, so there's this whole big world out there that we're competing with is my point, but at the same time, when people are interested in what we're doing and we get that single focus, and I'll tell you – I want to give you an example of a situation where it was really important for us to think about what was going on outside of our own mission or what we were currently focused on. So I was on a fire team when I was in Montana, and we were fighting a fire near the town of Hamilton, Montana, which is in western Montana, and we were kind of out from the town away and

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sort of on the other side of the hill. There was this hillside, and you could see the front of the hillside from town, and we were fighting fire on the back side. So people in town could see smoke but they couldn't really see flames, they couldn't really see what was going on. And we were getting to a point in the fire where we were getting really close to having a line around it and getting containment, and so the team and the operations folks were getting really excited about how close they were, and we were having a tactical meeting and talking about if we could just get these 3 engines or these resources, we could just – in 1 day's time we could get this whole thing tied up, and you know it would be sort of critical timing to have those resources and we could really get a handle on this fire, and the team was really excited about it. the same time I was monitoring that there was a small start – a small fire had started on the other side of the hill that you could see from town, and it was pretty small but it was starting to spread, and I had been monitoring the local radio station, and the radio station was giving a live play by play of here comes a helicopter doing water drop. Well we were doing water drops all day long on the other side of the mountain and nobody could see, but here was one, and it was getting a play by play. Well so that fire wasn't big enough yet to get the kind of resources that we were getting on our side of the fire, and so – but it was looking like it could become that so that the folks that were fighting the fire on the other side of the hill called over and said hey, can you spare a couple of engines. Well those were the engines that we were gonna use to get a handle on our fire that day, and the whole team was like well we can't spare them because then we might be here another couple of days,

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and that was when it was my role, or it could be your role in terms of having this external awareness to say okay, so the headline in the paper, fire near town, explodes because the other fire couldn't spare an extra engine, so I think – and they all just looked at me like oh, but I mean the point is that we can get so focused on our mission that we forget what's going on outside, and here that fire could've threatened that town, and we were gonna be selfish because we wanted to accomplish our goal and not really think about – so we did end up sending over a couple engines and they were able to get that fire under control, and we were there maybe a couple days longer. But I think it's just a really good reminder, and that's kind of how I wanted to wrap things up in terms of how it's a really good reminder of we just need to be aware of what's going on outside of our own project or we can get so easily focused and we just need to pay attention to what's going on outside of that and whether or not we are the big news of the day, and there's also – I mean and that kind of leads into this whole other class that we give about media relations and how you can use the media to help not only to monitor and be aware of what's going on but also try to influence it. the new thing, the new trend, as Jessica pointed out in terms of technology, is social media, and we the bureau have started using social media quite a bit, and social media is about developing relationships, which is another piece of external awareness is that you're gonna know and learn about things if you have relationships with external stakeholders, if you go to other meetings with key groups or other organizations and you develop those relationships, and social media we develop relationships where we're putting out stories, we're letting

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people know based on things they're interested in so that when we have a story that we want to tell them, that we want to message about – maybe about resource management plan we're working on or we want them to be engaged in something, we already have built the relationship with them through those tools and then we can use that relationship as leverage to get the information and the messages out that we want to get out. So it all really ties in together, and then there's a whole other class on how you do that in terms of using the media as a tool, but it can be used as a tool to disseminate our information, but it certainly can be used as a tool to learn about trends and monitor and be externally aware, which is what we're talking about today.

So again, if you want to join the discussion dial star 1 on your telephones and that gives you the opportunity to kind of lend any ideas or barriers you may be facing in the current field you're working in regards to external awareness or public opinion or the technology or any of these aspects of the pentagon that Jody has spoken on today. Feel free to kind of join the discussion and ask any questions or share any insight you may want to share with the rest of the group. Okay. Jody, are you still there?

Yes.

I'm sorry. I thought we got disconnected from you.

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No. One of the things that - I was just trying to experiment because one of the things that reporters will do is they will on purpose be quiet because people will try to fill in the silence, but that's a trick you need to be aware of if you're having an interview because you don't want to fill the silence with something that you didn't already plan to say. But anyway, I could just sort of end with talking a little bit about sort of trends in government that are happening right now. Right now there is a tremendous sort of distrust in government and there's - it's just the environment we live in and it's certainly not one that we would choose, but it is sort of a trend, but just in terms of being hopeful, when you look back at previous trends and public opinion poles, and there's a pole that the University of Michigan does where it asks the question how much do you think you can trust government in Washington to do what's right, and what happens is different things that are happening in the world or in our country influence that, but it definitely trends upward and downward, and I would say that right now we are on a downward trend, but you can look back through the decades and things like when - of course in the '70s when we had Watergate, trust in the government was really low, but then you had some better times in economy in the '80s and things looked up, and then of course you had in 2000 we couldn't agree on anything. Before 2000 we had this steady climb in our economy but then in 2000 we couldn't agree even who won the presidency, and then we had 9/11 and everyone rallied and we had a lot of trust in government. So anyway, sometimes it's important to be aware of that in terms of what people are thinking and be aware of where their trust level is and be aware that right now the trust in

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government isn't high, we have congress that's not able to pass budgets, things like that, but that eventually something will likely happen that will change that trend, and just pay attention to those sorts of things because they can definitely have an influence on – so for example, when they don't trust government they don't fund us, and then that impacts our ability to make back to the decision triangles, the way we make decisions. It influences a decision we can make or we can't make.

So things to pay attention to: Trends in the media, polling, social media, and legislative branch. There are certainly all kinds of tools out there and technology that can help you do that really quickly. Spend 5 or 10 minutes a day browsing the different sites and being aware of what's going on externally and how that might influence our day-to-day work.

Absolutely. I think the biggest message that I'm hearing is being proactive and ensuring that we kind of stay aware with what's going on and how that affects us and how that affects public opinion of us in our agency and our bureau, so absolutely. Well I think you hit all your main points. Do you have any last comments before I end us today?

I think we covered it.

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Okay, awesome. So thank you so much, Jody, it was a very engaging discussion. I definitely was able to jot down some notes. The Google alert was a great tip, and if anyone has any questions on setting up that Google alert, your local IT should be able to help you with that.

Absolutely.

And I know that Yancy Brown here at the National Training Center does , I believe a quarterly newsletter for IT and what's out there and what's happening, so I'll definitely kind of chat with him about that and see if that's something he's put out there or not already. So thank you for those tips and tricks and that was really great. We just want to invite everyone to come back next month to our audio forum. We're gonna have Ray Suazo. He's the Arizona state director, and he's gonna be discussing resilience, which I think is perfect timing to kind of talk about that, and I think he'll be able to lend some great thoughts and insights on that from his experiences within the bureau. So I just want to thank everyone for joining us today and I hope everyone has a wonderful rest of your week. And again, thank you so much, Jody.

Thank you.

Alright. Bye-bye.

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This has been a production of the Bureau of Land Management's National Training Center.