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Total Resource Management: A Successful Professional Development Program

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Total Resource Management: A Successful Professional Development Program

Abstract

The Total Resource Management Program provides an example of how professional development programs can implement participatory approaches to professional development. The pilot project of the Texas Cooperative Extension and collaborators provides opportunity for natural resource management professionals to participate in training exercises relating the principles of strategic management to natural resource management while interacting in a multi-disciplinary training workshop that allows for not only learning from the instructors, but also from their colleagues and peers. The Total Resource Management program is one of the Natural Resource Education & Management Flagship Programs for the state of Texas.

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Introduction

Traditional approaches for Extension programming in natural resource management have tended to be reductionist in nature. Many traditional educational materials/topics are subject specific and have limited integration to provide an overall view of natural resource management.

The Total Resource Management Professional Development Program was designed and developed to provide educational outreach to natural resource management professionals from a "holistic" approach. The program provides an opportunity to gain knowledge through participation in cross-discipline activities that focus on integrating ecological, economic, and socio-political aspects into a strategic management process of planning and decision-making.

Renewable natural resource sustainability is dependent upon managing all resources to achieve healthy functioning ecosystems and financial survival of the landowner. Success depends upon the ability of the manager to manage and utilize all resources to meet personal goals and those of society. Through the development of professional training programs, the Texas Cooperative Extension along with its partners, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, have implemented a program that will increase educational outreach for natural resource management from a "holistic" approach.

Methods

Participation and cooperation of inter-disciplinary and inter-agency representatives in the planning, development, and implementation of the Total Resource Management Program was critical to a successful program. Therefore, through steering and advisory committee input, the program was developed by a multi-discipline team to address the multiple needs of training for Total Resource Management. The Steering Committee and Advisory Committee were made up of a diverse group

of professionals including:

- Texas Cooperative Extension
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Texas Parks and Wildlife
- Private Landowners
- Rangeland Consultants

Participatory learning is the key approach to the development of the workshop series. It is understood that the interaction between natural resource managers would strengthen the learning experience and provide for a more "holistic" learning experience. Workshop participants were drawn from a diverse audience and asked to team up with others, not necessarily from their own agency. This allows for learning from different perspectives that each agency brings to the management of the natural resource base. Participants represented multiple agencies from three states:

- Texas Cooperative Extension (Specialist & County Agents)
- Texas Parks & Wildlife (Regional Director -- District Wildlife Biologists)
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (Regional -- Field Office from Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana)
- Texas General Land Office
- United States Fish & Wildlife Service
- Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program
- Noble Foundation (NGO)

The diversity of the participants provided for a greater learning experience through the participatory learning approach.

Participants were tested through a post-/pre-test that asked them to compare their understanding of topics prior to the workshop and after the workshop. For all topics, there was an increase in knowledge gained. Figure 1 illustrates the results.

Figure 1.
Cumulative Results of Participant Knowledge Increase for TRM Workshop Series



Discussion

The conservation of the nations' renewable natural resources ultimately is dependent upon the values that society places on their functions and processes. Therefore, it is not possible to separate the societal influences from the purely ecological or economic. This integration of ecological, economic, and socio-political concepts is the cornerstone of the Total Resource Management approach.

Through the use of strategic management concepts centered upon the strategic planning process, TRM provides educational programs that integrate multi-level planning to provide a tool for rangeland managers to use in the decision-making process.

The initial focus of the "Total Ranch Management" program was geared towards individual landowners as the target audience. In the first 4 years, the original team of educators worked with over 200 families and county Extension agents to provide detailed instruction. As is often the case, the extent of the individual contact usually stopped at the ranch gate.

With the resurgence of the Total Resource Management, a new approach was developed that focused on the "assistance agent" as the primary target audience. The concept was that the "assistance agent" can gain the instruction from the program and carry that knowledge to the individual clientele in their respective locations. This approach provides for development of a "snowball" effect that can potentially expand the educational experience beyond that which could be affected by one team of instructors.

Participants are encouraged to develop their own Total Resource Management programs at the county or regional area and then draw upon their knowledge as well as input and information from the core instruction team to expand the audience. This provides for a more localized application of concepts thus bringing it closer to home for those who participate.

Conclusion

To date, 74 "assistance agents" have participated in the TRM program in Texas. As indicated, the program provides for not only professional development of the participant, but also the professional interaction of natural resource management professionals. The current program is a 2-year pilot of the TRM approach, and with its successful completion, the objective is to increase the influence of the program beyond the boundaries of Texas and into the training regimes of agencies that effect the management of the nations' natural resource systems.

Total Resource Management is applicable in multiple facets of natural resource management as well as business and family management. The concepts of strategic planning provide a foundation for decision-making that can be of value to all who choose to plan rather than be planned for!

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