

Natural Resources Management Issue Paper

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NATIONAL PROGRAM MANAGEMENT ISSUES

1. Where should the Corps Natural Resources Management (NRM) Program be headed?

Over the years, the NRM program has moved from a “big brother knows best” management style to one of participatory management. As the nation’s citizens have become more educated, they have demanded a voice in management decisions that are made at all levels of the Corps. As a result, CECW-ON has established leadership advisory teams to assist in providing future direction for the Recreation Program, (Recreation Leadership Advisory Team - RLAT) and for the Environmental Stewardship Program (Stewardship Advisory Team - SAT). These teams are composed of individuals from all levels within the Corps - project, district and division - and provide a cross section of perspectives for the overall programs. The direction of the Environmental Compliance program is guided by the Environmental Compliance Policy Steering Committee, which meets annually. Our leadership teams provide us with the ability to actively engage stakeholders and rapidly adjust to changing conditions. As a result, we have begun conducting stakeholders meetings to obtain input from the citizen viewpoint about how we are doing, what we can do better and where we should be headed in the future. Our basic goal is to provide the management style, facilities and service that the citizens want and need.

a. Stakeholders Meetings. In October 2002, the Corps conducted its first national stakeholder meeting for its Recreation Program. The meeting purposes were to:

- Foster an understanding for stakeholders of USACE role in providing recreation opportunities.
- Listen to stakeholder concerns and thoughts to discover ideas for improving recreation opportunities on USACE lands and waters.
- Obtain input to further develop Strategic Planning for USACE Recreation business program of the future.
- Document stakeholder views.

About 20 stakeholders from Federal and state government, industry organizations and NGOs attended the meeting. They provided significant input that we can now use in establishing the Corps Strategic Plan for its Recreation Program. The Recreation Management Support Team (RMSP) and the Recreation Leadership Advisory Team (RLAT) are currently reviewing this input. Our intent is to hold additional stakeholder meetings on a regional basis to attract additional stakeholders.

We had intended to also hold a stakeholders meeting at the same time and place for the Corps Natural Resources Stewardship Program at Corps lakes. Unfortunately, we were unable to attract a sufficient numbers of stakeholders to make the meeting worthwhile. As a result, that portion of the effort was canceled and we are currently rethinking our options.

The general results of the stakeholders meeting were that we do not do enough to keep our stakeholders informed. Also, our stakeholders have a very strong interest in seeing the Corps succeed and are willing to help financially and otherwise. They wanted more stakeholder meetings.

b. OMB Involvement. In recent times, the Office of Management and Budget has also become a stronger influence, taking more interest and participating more directly in the Corps NRM programs than in the past. OMB is actively pursuing the President's Management Agenda. This affects the Corps NRM program in the areas of E-government and interagency business processes. As a result, a great deal of CECW-ON staff time has been devoted to Recreation One Stop, Volunteer.gov/gov, and other E-gov activities. This includes the identification of business processes across agencies, as well as the development of business data standards. To date, this emphasis has been primarily on the Recreation program; however, there is no doubt this trend will continue and expand into the Corps other business areas, including Environmental Stewardship and Environmental Compliance. The future of the Corps NRM programs will involve much greater coordination with other land management agencies, to include consolidation of business processes and tools to support those processes. As a result, "seamless, citizen centric service" will be the hallmark of Corps NRM programs in the future.

2. What are the current emphasis areas for the Corps NRM program?

a. Promote Our Recreation Opportunities, Natural Resources and Cultural Resources. Over the last two years we have begun to focus attention on our "Value to the Nation" brochures and websites. This effort should be continued and expanded. We know that the Corps Recreation Program promotes economic benefits. We can effectively show the impact of recreation on local and regional economies in terms of spending by visitors and jobs for American workers. It is also true that interacting both physically and mentally within a well-managed natural environment promotes personal and social well being. First, we must complete our natural resources inventories. Next, we will derive the facts linked with the economic benefits associated with sustaining environments, personal and social benefits. Then we will have the ability to promote Corps natural resources as a valuable component of our mission. Although not as well defined in terms of economic impacts, cultural resources have significant potential as far as interpretation, conservation/protection and marketing are concerned.

b. Inventory Natural Resources (Level I and II) on Corps Lands. This involves establishing an inventory of Corps lands to determine the nature and extent of the resources entrusted to the Corps care. We have a wealth of biological diversity at our water resources projects and in many cases they have not been inventoried to determine what does exist, or its condition. Once the extent of our resources is known, the value of these resources on a local, regional and even national scale can be assessed. Where these inventories have been completed, we have found there to be diverse plant and animal communities containing unique species requiring protection and management. Inventories must be funded and conducted to properly manage our lands and waters and meet our Stewardship obligations.

c. Master Plan/Operational Management Plans. Master Plans and Operational Management Plans (OMP) need to be developed, or updated and kept current to effectively convey to

stakeholders, the public, Congress and other agencies our mission and stewardship goals for the land and resources that have been entrusted to us. The Level I inventory is the basic building block for the Master Plan. The Level II inventory is a measure of the success of the OMP. We cannot manage our own lands using either our own forces or those of others under any kind of instrument or agreement without accurate and up to date OMPs.

d. Accessibility. The Corps has no comprehensive policy or guidance in place for the management of the accessibility program for persons with disabilities for our recreation opportunities. Although the governing legislation was passed 30 years ago, implementing standards have not been developed until recently and are still not codified. In FY03, CECW-ON obtained funding to partner with the Bureau of Reclamation in the use of a computerized system to manage our accessibility program. A MOU is now under development to formalize this partnership. Also under development is comprehensive policy and guidance for the Corps accessibility program.

e. Program Management Plans. CECW-ON has identified the development of Program Management Plans (PMPs) for all NRM programs as an emphasis area, pursuant to the Corps commitment to the PMBP process. The development of these PMPs will clarify our thinking about how NRM programs fit into the PMBP box, permit us to align ourselves properly in the order, and communicate our commitment throughout the program.

3. What are the critical issues requiring resolution?

a. Maintenance of Professional Staff. Several dynamics are affecting our ability to maintain a professional staff that is adequate to manage our NRM programs effectively. At the most basic level, problems stem from inadequate and still shrinking staffing allocations at the project level to accomplish the Corps NRM mission. Further, many of our senior, experienced staff are approaching retirement age, and we have done little succession planning to assure junior staff is provided the training and experience necessary to prepare them for these senior positions. The numbers of developmental assignments have been severely limited due to budget constraints. The new A-76 guidance has serious implications for recruiting and retaining our professional NRM staff. Regarding this last issue, the Chief has signed a memo to the ASA asking for an exemption to competitive sourcing for the Corps Park Rangers.

b. Barriers to Partnerships. The Chief and the DCW have challenged us to seek out partnerships to accomplish the Corps mission and better serve the American public. The elimination of the requirement for a partner to provide up-front financing and acceptance of in-kind services are examples of tools that Corps Operations Managers need to become successful in partnering. We also need the ability to make partnering a two-way street. This requires some type of granting authority so we can give our partners money as other agencies do.

c. Modernization. Many Corps recreation sites and facilities are inadequate for current use, poorly designed, unattractive, inaccessible for persons with disabilities, and unsafe. Most were designed during the 1960s and 70s and have reached the end of their useful lives. They do not accommodate the recreation preferences of our customer base, which includes persons of many

ethnicities, nor do they accommodate the vehicles and equipment our customers bring to their recreation experience. This is a worsening problem that continues to erode the quality of service we provide for our recreation customers. A modest investment in site and facility modernization could improve our service provision and customer satisfaction enormously.

d. Inconsistent Delivery of Public Service Across the Corps. Inconsistent delivery of the Corps NRM products across the Corps is a difficult problem resulting from several causes. Historic budget and manpower inequities have created widening gaps in service delivery among the "richer" and "poorer" districts and projects. Customer expectations are difficult to meet, when the amenities and service provided vary widely across the Corps and do not relate directly to the level of fees charged. Inconsistent recruitment and retention of staff specialists in areas such as fish and wildlife, forestry, range management, park administration, and recreation management compromises our ability to manage the breadth and diversity of the our NRM program consistently and effectively. As our customers become more mobile, visiting more projects in different states and districts, this disparity becomes more difficult to explain and accept.

4. What "Good Ideas" should be implemented to improve the program?

a. Recreation Area Modernization Program (RAMP). The RAMP is a comprehensive solution to address the problem of aging and outdated recreation infrastructure in the Corps. We have tried twice over the last few years to include a funding package in the Corps budget for RAMP, once in O&M, General and once in Construction General. Both times our efforts have failed. We should renew our efforts in this regard so that we can better serve the visiting public and protect the resources for which we are responsible. Our experience with past modernization projects shows positive results in terms of increased visitation, reduced vandalism and visitor behavior problems, increased fee collection and increased customer satisfaction.

b. Peer Review Program. Reestablish the Peer Review Program that was implemented in the mid 1990s to assess district programs and share ideas. This program was an excellent tool for sharing ideas and increasing efficiencies. Teams, made up of subject matter experts from different districts/projects, visited other districts/projects, reviewed programs and made recommendations for improving those programs. This benefited both the district/project that was being reviewed, as well as the team that was performing the review. "Good ideas" were shared and recommendations for making improvements were exchanged. The Peer Review Program was eliminated because of budget constraints. Reestablishing this program would be money well spent. In conjunction with our new facility and customer service standards, soon to be published, the Peer Review Program could improve our delivery of consistent recreation products and services across the Corps.

c. Partnership Funding Pool/Seed Money. The establishment of a partnership "seed money" fund at the district level and the ability to provide funds to partners outside the federal agencies would greatly facilitate the implementation of recreation partnership agreements and projects. Potential partnership projects could compete for funds that would be used strictly to secure and execute NRM partnerships. The USDA, Forest Service uses this type of program and it works. Corps Operations Managers at the project level have many opportunities to partner but lack the

seed money to make things happen. Under our current system, any partnering that is accomplished can only be done by freeing up funds through the elimination of other work items from the project O&M Budget.

d. Environmental Management Systems (EMS). Implement EMS at appropriate facilities in accordance with DoD, DA policy and Commander's Policy Memorandum #11. Environmental management systems will use the ISO 14001 specification. Implementation guidance and step-by-step tools are being developed by the EMS implementation PDT.

e. Retention of User Fees at the Project Level Without Budget Offset. For many years, OMB has seen fit to allow the Corps to collect user fees and then offset our O&M budget by that amount. As such, there is no incentive for local managers to increase the use fees they collect at the project level. Allowing the projects to keep the fees they collect would go a long way in reducing the Corps maintenance backlog and improve customer service. CECW-ON has proposed this idea under our legislative initiative for this year (WRDA 2003). Our proposal allows the projects to keep the majority of the funds they collect and establishes a national account using the remainder of the funds to provide for the construction of user fee facilities and other improvements where user fees are not currently collected.

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