

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: CESU Network 10-year Program Inventory and Evaluation, Phase II

Type of Project: Technical Assistance
Discipline: Interdisciplinary
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: University of Montana
Effective Dates: September 30, 2009 - June 30, 2012
Funding Amount: \$65,000 (\$50,000 in FY08 for Phase 1)

Investigators and Agency Representative:

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Project Abstract: The CESU Network comprises 17 Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units, encompassing all 50 states and the U.S. territories. Each CESU consists of a partnership between a host university, multiple federal agencies, and numerous additional academic and other nonfederal partners. The CESUs serve a broad role as providers of research, technical assistance, and education to federal land management, environmental, and research agencies and their partners. CESU efforts bring together scientists, resource managers, and other conservation professionals from across the biological, physical, social, and cultural sciences to conduct coordinated, collaborative applied projects addressing natural and cultural heritage resource issues at multiple scales and in an ecosystem context. Currently, the CESU Network includes 13 federal agencies and more than 245 nonfederal partners (e.g., universities, state agencies, tribal organizations, museums and arboretums, conservation organizations), including more than 40 postsecondary minority institutions.

The CESU Network program will celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2009. Over the years since its inception, thousands of collaborative projects have been administered through the CESUs by partners across the country. Discussions among CESU Council members have highlighted the need for increased program accountability with regard to the distribution of projects and participating members, as well the characteristics (e.g., geographic location, dates, scope, target resources, disciplinary focus, outputs, outcomes) of each project, across the network. Discussions have also focused on the utility of increased (e.g., online) access to this information for periodic reporting, programmatic review, transparency, and program visibility. While many of the CESUs and associated agency partners have maintained project databases and archives, no inclusive systematic process for cataloging and characterizing projects across the CESU Network has been established. Additionally, no comprehensive reviews or evaluations of the program have been carried out.

The objectives of this proposed study are to:

1. Depict the typology and distribution of CESU projects across the 17 CESUs, partner agencies, partner institutions, years, and other useful delineations - based on the project database developed in Phase I of this project - through development of online resources and/or Web tools;
2. Determine vital statistics representative of the program's breadth, diversity, and utility;
3. Identify criteria for evaluation of program success and effectiveness and a framework of r periodic (replicable) program evaluation;
4. Gauge programmatic function and process effectiveness (through guided discussions with CESU partners and other qualitative and quantitative data collection methods);

5. Identify strategic avenues of the program for enhancing future program effectiveness, capacity building, federal and nonfederal partner recruitment, and program awareness;
6. Identify key lessons learned and areas for future program development.

Outcomes with Completion Dates: December 31, 2008 - Detailed project plan outlining project timetable, data collection methods, and inventory data format/management protocol to support development of online interactive GIS-based project database
Product due dates for the following will be determined by the project plan: (1) CESU project inventory including: federal agency partners, nonfederal partners, locations, project context/scope, cost, duration, outputs, and outcomes/applications (where applicable); (2) Project distribution/gap analysis maps; (3) Presentation of study findings (e.g., at regional or national meeting/conference); (4) Interim project reports (semi-annually).

Keywords: National CESU Network, inventory, projects, evaluation, gap analysis, University of Montana
