

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

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

Type of Project: Technical Assistance

Discipline: Interdisciplinary

Funding Agency: National Park Service

Other Partners/Cooperators: University of Montana

Effective Dates: September 15, 2010 - June 30, 2012

Funding Amount: \$35,250 [\$65,000 in FY09 for Phase II \$50,000 in FY08 for Phase I]

Investigators and Agency Representative:

NPS Contact: Dr. Thomas E. Fish, National Coordinator, CESU Network, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Room 2723, Washington, DC 20240; 202.208.5972;
Tom_Fish@nps.gov

Investigator: Neil Moisey, Department of Society and Conservation, College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812; 406-243-6673;
mosiey@forestry.umt.edu

Project Abstract: The CESU Network program celebrated 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. A consistent suite of vital statistics pertaining to the program and its operational elements would be invaluable for program evaluation, strategic planning, outreach, and recruitment of new federal agency and nonfederal institutional partners. This project represents the continuation of efforts begun in FY2008 and serves as the only comprehensive review and evaluation of the program conducted to date.

This project also expands the CESU 10-year program inventory and evaluation efforts beyond development of a comprehensive CESU project geodatabase. Specifically, the project initiates qualitative data collection regarding the ability of existing CESU partners to operate within the network to produce applied research, develop and deliver technical assistance, and to increase the quality of natural and social science education relevant to the nation's public trust lands. Qualitative data collection will occur through a series of "listening sessions" held at select CESU annual meetings. Federal managers, academic researchers, as well as other individuals who are CESU partners will be solicited to participate in these sessions. The primary purpose of the sessions is to gain contextually rich data that will be utilized to (i) gain a better understanding of variations in CESU operational procedures as well as strengths and weaknesses across the country and (ii) to provide input to concurrent efforts aimed at revising the National CESU Network's Strategic Plan. The solicitation, collection, and analysis of this qualitative data is intended to produce a more holistic, and contextually relevant, evaluation of the CESU Network than the project inventory and geodatabase development alone could produce.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Currently, a Strategic Plan published in 2003 guides the National CESU Network. The 2003 CESU Strategic Plan was based upon two working retreats held by the CESU council and national staff. Given the infancy of the Network at that time, much of the strategic plan's focus was on developing the core-infrastructure to meet the needs of the network. In the seven years since the writing of the original CESU strategic plan,

the network has expanded from nearly 100 partners in 13 cooperative study units to nearly 300 partners in 17 study units. Because of this expansion, the strategic plan needs to be updated with a greater emphasis on the growth and sustainability of the network. This project engages the CESU council and national staff in an active process of revising and updating the plan based upon existing knowledge as well as results produced from the qualitative evaluation efforts noted above and throughout this project description. Upon completion of the revised plan, it will be distributed and commented on by federal agency representatives, CESU Network university representatives, as well as other CESU Network partners. Based upon comments received from CESU network partners, the plan will be revised and subsequently reviewed by the CESU council and for final review and approval.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this proposed study are to:

1. Continue to 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 and II of this project - through development of online resources and/or Web tools;
2. Develop and implement a qualitative data collection protocol to be implemented in a series of "listening sessions" held at select CESU annual meetings.
3. Assist in the development of a revised National CESU Network Strategic Plan based upon information gathered from the CESU Council, the CESU National Coordinator, and other solicited experts.

Outcomes with Completion Dates: June 30, 2012 - Final report due

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