

Draft

Conservation Education Programs the Southwestern Region: A Consolidated Effort

Conservation education and Interpretive Service programs are strong elements of the Forest Service mission, vision and guiding principles. These programs offer the American public opportunities to better understand forest ecosystems and the active role people play in the future of these systems. As human relationships with the environment become increasingly complex, people look to the Forest Service for a better understanding of their natural world and shared participation in managing natural resources. Educational programs provide the agency with opportunities to contact the public at a personal level in some of the Nation's finest outdoor classrooms.

The goals of conservation education programs are:

- To increase awareness and understanding of interrelationships in natural systems and between people and the land.
- To enable people to recognize the increasing complexity of natural resource management and to give them information that will allow them to make choices within social, cultural, political and scientific realities.
- To foster the individual's responsibility to conserve and wisely use natural and cultural resources in forest, grassland and aquatic ecosystems.
- To deliver programs that focus on riparian health, wildland/interface fire problems and recreational opportunities.

Target audiences for educational programs are:

- Youth: providing conservation educational experiences in a variety of environments from rural to urban forests.

- Urban communities: providing a connection to the land for those who are becoming increasingly disconnected from it.
- Visitors: enhancing the recreational experience of forest and grassland visitors; influencing visitor behavior and providing information that protects and conserves resources.

The guiding principles of conservation education are:

- Use factual information about natural resources as the basis for structured educational experiences.
- Compliment and enhance programs through partnerships.
- Encourage educational partnerships between field units and the office of the State Forester.
- Whenever possible, use existing delivery systems such as schools and the media.
- Acknowledge cultural diversity and regional differences in perspective regarding natural resource management.
- Recognize and encourage successful, innovative conservation education efforts.

Conservation education funding is made available to regions through the Washington Office of State and Private Forestry. There is no separate funding mechanism for interpretive programs. Funds are made available once a year and can be awarded to field units once the new fiscal year budget has been approved. A request from the Washington Office of Conservation Education has been made to Chief and staff for increased program funding because of the importance of these programs to the agency. Guidelines for field units applying to the regional conservation education coordinator for possible funding are:

- All funding requests from forests or districts will be written and submitted to the regional conservation coordinator by designated forest conservation education coordinators when called for.
- Forests are not required to submit proposals.
- The regional conservation education coordinator will select a committee of 5 reviewers from Public Affairs, Recreation and State and Private Forestry to review all submissions for possible funding.

- Please realize that a slow national budget approval process can reduce the effective program work time to the last 6 or 7 months of the fiscal year.

- Criteria for funding consideration are:

- Programs that further the regional emphasis areas of riparian and watershed management, urban/wildland interface problems and recreation enhancement will be given priority over other programs.

- Programs that involve other agencies, institutions, special interest groups, private businesses and communities will receive special consideration.

- Funding may be used for materials, supplies, hiring a summer seasonal educator or for the assistance of an outside specialist but cannot be used to finance the salaries of permanent full-time Forest Service employees.

- Forests and districts may submit multiple programs for consideration.

- It is prudent to divide larger projects into two or three stages based on possible funding levels. The reviewing committee might decide to fund the first stage or the whole program.

- An accomplishment report is due in Washington at the end of each calendar year. Failure to complete the provided accomplishment form can result in removal from the next year's program review. The results of all conservation education programs are compiled by the Washington Office Conservation Education staff each year and presented to the Chief and staff for accountability and to warrant continued funding.

Some forests may not have personnel available for conservation education, but it is hoped that some form of conservation education is folded into all public contacts when appropriate. If a forest is not able to apply for funding this fiscal year, it is hoped that they will be able to accommodate future conservation education programs.

The intent of this document is to set the stage for our visitors and the public to discover, become interested in, and understand

multiple use ecosystem management on Southwestern National Forests and Grasslands. Out of this understanding can come respect for public lands and creative involvement in Forest Service management efforts. Providing information and sharing experiences through positive personal contacts are the most effective tools we have to maintain public trust, share our expertise and reach the greatest number of people with our conservation messages.