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Watershed Education – Regional Satellite Conferences

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Abstract Text:

The Pacific Northwest Water Quality team developed a series of three regional (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington) watershed issues satellite down-linked conferences that were delivered in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 using a regional steering committee. This presentation will highlight the first three conferences. These conferences were down-linked to a minimum of 38 educational sites each year with an annual attendance ranging from 300 to 1,000 educators, agency and non-profit personnel, and members of local watershed groups. Evaluations indicated that regional programming on certain topics is an efficient and effective alternative to individual state programming when both financial and human resources are limited in individual states.

The Pacific Northwest Water Quality Team was able to develop successful water quality programming on a regional basis effectively using broadcast technology coupled with local facilitation. The five land grant institutions in the region (Northwest Indian College, Oregon State University, University of Alaska, University of Idaho, Washington State University) were able to successfully develop a steering committee and work together to achieve successful regional water quality programming. In addition to being able to work well together, the team successfully partnered with EPA Region 10 which programs on a regional basis in the same four Pacific Northwest states. Strong partnerships forged with state, local, and tribal governments and environmental agencies through their inclusion on steering committees continue to inform regional educational programming. The development of successful case studies to highlight and grass roots (steering committee and program participant) selection of conference topics forged an outstanding partnership with local watershed groups.

Regional water quality programming accomplished something that would not have been probable on a state-by-state basis. Based on the human resources available for water quality programming at land grant institutions, it is unlikely that the University of Alaska and University of Idaho would have been able to develop and deliver statewide watershed issues conferences. In addition, Northwest Indian College does not have the capacity needed to deliver watershed issues programming to the many tribes in the Pacific Northwest. Washington State University (Washington) and Oregon State University (Oregon) likely have the human capacity to deliver a state-wide conference on a one-time basis, but are not in the position to make this an annual event.

In 2002, the state-of-the-art technology was satellite-down-linked conferences. Today, conference production would be similar but the product would more likely be delivered by video streaming to educational sites and/or to personal computers. A central fixed-site traditional conference would not be able to draw the targeted audience in as large of numbers as the down-linked conferences. Basing this observation/supposition on attendance for traditional regional water quality conferences, which have averaged 225 people per regional conference over the last six years. Another consideration is the limited budgets of watershed councils that makes attending traditional conferences cost prohibitive. The

satellite/video stream conferences are free to the public. Consequently, the conference delivery method brought in crowds to be educated about watershed issues in greater numbers than any other format that has been tried in the Pacific Northwest.

The high quality of the watershed issues regional conferences in 2002, 2003, and 2004 has been affirmed by increasing attendance, high evaluation scores by attendees, partnerships that have held together and strengthened, and a national award from educational peers. The success of the regional watershed issues conferences suggests that in the future we must pay less attention to state boundaries and concentrate on regional audiences to make a significant difference in the effective management of natural resources.

Impact Statement:

Regional water quality programming accomplished something that would not have been probable on a state-by-state basis. Based on the human resources available for water quality programming at land grant institutions, it is unlikely that the University of Alaska and University of Idaho would have been able to develop and deliver statewide watershed issues conferences. In addition, Northwest Indian College does not have the capacity needed to deliver watershed issues programming to the many tribes in the Pacific Northwest. Washington State University (Washington) and Oregon State University (Oregon) likely have the human capacity to deliver a state-wide conference on a one-time basis, but are not in the position to make this an annual event.