

Public Involvement and Dispute Resolution Courses in Natural Resources Schools

In a survey of SAF-accredited natural resources schools, 36 of 40 educators said natural resource professionals needed more training in public involvement and dispute resolution, and 96 percent of respondents said such training was "important" or "essential." Despite budgetary and staff constraints, the number of SAF-accredited schools offering specific courses in these topics has grown dramatically, from a reported three in 1992 to 15 in 1997. At most schools, these topics also have been incorporated into already-required courses on policy, planning, and management. The authors describe a model course in public involvement and conflict resolution and list resources for educators.

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Forestry and natural resource management are increasingly characterized by controversy and conflict among a dizzying array of public and private interests. More and more, these interest groups demand a voice in making policy and management decisions when public lands and resources are at stake. Foresters and other natural resource professionals find they are spending more time grappling with conflicting interests or fending off criticisms than managing their assigned resources (Susskind and Field 1996). Lawmakers, too, feel the pull of interest groups and the frustration of riding the political pendulum, passing legislation only to see it contested in the media and contradicted in the courts or the next session (Floyd 1998; for an example of divergent views on pending legislation, see Imbergamo 1998 and Meadows 1998). Citizen initiatives and ballot measures on natural resource issues are common in many states. Many high-profile natural resource issues—roadless areas, endangered species, oil and mineral development, wetlands and water quality concerns, to name just a few—simply refuse to go away, revived by whichever interest group currently has the most clout.

Natural resources managers are responding to these challenges by rethinking the tools of their trade. In a survey of employers of entry-level foresters, Brown and Lassoie (1998) found, "Good public relations, service, and communication skills were viewed as requirements for most entry-level positions, regardless of employer category. The relatively high score...for 'use group interaction processes effectively,' for example, reflects the increased need for foresters to carry out public participation processes." Preliminary data from a survey by the Pinchot Institute for Conservation (1998)

support this, indicating that natural resource businesses, agencies, and non-governmental organizations consistently place public participation, team building, and communication skills near the top of their wish list when hiring new employees. If tomorrow's foresters, land managers, and natural resource professionals do indeed need new skills to manage public participation and conflict as well as resources, it seems reasonable to make such training available at the college level. We wanted to know: Are courses in public involvement and dispute resolution offered at natural resources schools, and how are these themes presented?

Methods

In 1992 we conducted a baseline study of public involvement and dispute resolution course offerings in natural resources schools (McKinney 1993). Administrators at 46 natural resources schools accredited by the Society of American Foresters (SAF) were asked the following questions:

- What is the need for more training and education in public involvement and dispute resolution in natural resources professions?
- How important is such training relative to the other needs of future natural resources professionals?
- Should such training be required of all undergraduate or graduate students?
- What courses in public involvement and dispute resolution are offered now?
- If no such courses are offered, are there plans to introduce them?

For the purposes of the survey, public involvement was defined as "the field of theory and practice for including citizens in planning, regulatory, and other administrative decision-making processes." Dispute resolution was defined as "the field of theory and

practice for resolving disputes among competing interests.”

The 1992 survey results showed a wide gap between the perceived need for training in public involvement and dispute resolution and the availability of such training. Thirty-eight respondents (90 percent) agreed that such training was “essential” or “important,” yet only three schools (7 percent) then offered courses specifically centered on public involvement or dispute resolution.

In September 1997 a second questionnaire was sent to administrators of the 48 natural resources schools then accredited by SAF (the two schools added since 1992 were the University of Alaska and Ohio State University). This survey, which asked the same series of questions, was intended to reassess the status of public involvement and dispute resolution course offerings at the schools and to compare course offerings in 1997 with those reported five years earlier. Had the gap between need and availability narrowed?

To discern trends from the results of the two surveys, we had to consider several differences in the survey population and frame of reference. Some schools that participated in the 1992 survey did not respond in 1997, and a few schools that did not participate in 1992 did respond to the 1997 survey. In cases where schools participated in both surveys, the forms may not have been filled out by the same administrator or professor. This accounts for certain discrepancies in the descriptions of courses (for example, whether a course was offered five years ago) and different personal opinions about the place of dispute resolution in the natural resources curriculum.

Some natural resources and dispute resolution programs are not accredited by SAF and are therefore not reflected in this study. The schools surveyed, however, represent the majority of professional natural resources schools in the United States.

1997 Survey Results

Forty of the 48 SAF-accredited schools responded to the 1997 survey. Of the 40 people who filled out surveys for their schools, 25 (about 63 percent)

held administrative positions at the dean, associate dean, or department chair level. Other respondents included professors and associate or assistant professors—in most cases, the people who taught the relevant courses.

Need for training. Thirty-six of the respondents said that there was a clear need for more training in public involvement and dispute resolution within the natural resources professions. Of the four respondents who differed, two questioned the need for “more” training, suggesting that the courses already offered at their schools were sufficient. The third said that training in public involvement was needed for natural resources students but that dispute resolution was better left to experts with specific, extensive training in that field. The fourth said that training resource professionals to improve their people skills might not be the best way to generate more effective public participation. This respondent suggested that resource managers should hire a wider variety of people, including those with a natural aptitude for dispute resolution.

Compared with the other needs of future natural resource professionals, 21 schools (about 53 percent) called training in public involvement and dispute resolution “essential.” Seventeen schools (about 43 percent) agreed that such training was “important.” Many of the respondents in this group said that training in dispute resolution had to be balanced with disciplinary and interdisciplinary training to provide the needed background.

Several respondents felt that some students would need such training more than others, depending on the type of natural resources jobs they held. Many students would be better served, they said, by emphasis on basic sciences with some exposure to public involvement and dispute resolution. Many of the schools in this group incorporated public involvement and dispute resolution concepts and techniques into other courses, such as policy and administration classes, communications, and capstone courses.

Two respondents (5 percent) said that training in public involvement and dispute resolution was “not criti-

cal.” One such respondent said those courses were better offered through the business college, where the subjects had been incorporated into other courses. The other respondent believed future employers should be responsible for such training. This, he argued, would avoid unnecessarily training students whose eventual jobs would not include public involvement or dispute resolution duties.

Minimum requirement. When asked whether students should be required to receive some minimum training and education in public involvement and dispute resolution, 33 schools (83 percent) answered yes for both undergraduates and graduates. Two schools (5 percent) said a minimum requirement should apply only to undergraduates. Such a requirement does not yet exist at most schools, though many do require students to take policy or general management courses that include public involvement and dispute resolution as topics.

Five schools (13 percent) said that training in public involvement and dispute resolution should not be required, but all five agreed it should be available as an elective. Respondents in this group said that students already face too many required courses in a wide range of subjects, sometimes leaving them with only three credits of “wiggle room” for electives.

Specific courses. Fifteen schools responding to the survey (about 38 percent) offer specific courses in public involvement or dispute resolution (table 1). This is a fourfold increase over five years ago, when only three schools (Humboldt State University, University of Idaho, and University of Michigan) reported offering such courses.

Some of the increase may be due to underreporting in the original 1992 survey. Three schools offering such courses that participated in the 1997 survey—University of Alaska, State University of New York, and Ohio State University—either were not surveyed or did not respond in 1992. And at least two schools—Pennsylvania State University and University of Washington—say that the conflict management courses they now offer were also offered before 1992, even

Table 1. SAF-accredited natural resources schools that teach public involvement and dispute resolution. Courses listed in parentheses incorporate but do not necessarily emphasize public involvement and dispute resolution. An asterisk (*) indicates courses initiated since 1992. A dash indicates that information was not available.

School	Course	Graduate, Undergraduate	Required
California Polytechnic	Human Resources and Conflict Management in Natural Resources* (Natural Resource Policy)	U	—
		U	Y
Humboldt State University	Communication in Natural Resource Conflict Resolution (Environmental Ethics)	U	—
		U	Y
Iowa State University	(Forest Resources Management)	U	Y
	(Forest Resources Policy and Administration)	U	Y
	(Forest Resources Case Studies)	U	Y
Louisiana State University	(Forest Policy)	U	Y
Louisiana Tech	(Forest Policy)	U	Y
Michigan Technological University	(Natural Resource Policy)	U	Y
North Carolina State University	(Introduction to Natural Resources)	U	—
	(Renewable Resource Management and Policy)	U	—
	(Natural Resources Advocacy)	U	—
Northern Arizona University	Environmental Dispute Resolution*	G	—
	(Policy Process in Multiresource Management)	G	N
	(Issues in Recreation Management)	G	N
	(Multicriterion Decision Making in Natural Resource Management)	G	N
	(Forest Science)	U	Y
(Wilderness Management)	U	N	
Ohio State University	Resolving Social Conflict	G	—
Oklahoma State University	(History Issues, Forest Policy)	U	Y
	(Forest Administration and Policy)	U	Y
Pennsylvania State University	Natural Resources Decisions	U	—
	(Natural Resources Public Relations)	U	N
	(Forest Policy)	U	Y
	(Watershed Planning)	U	N
State University of New York	Negotiating Environmental Disputes	G	—
	Environmental Conflict and Citizen Groups	G	—
	Public Participation and Decisionmaking: Theory and Application	G	—
	(Social Processes and the Environment)	U	N
	(Sociology of Natural Resources)	U	N
	(Principles of Management)	U	Y
	(Natural Resources and Environmental Policy)	U, G	N
Stephen F. Austin State University	(Environmental Attitudes and Issues)	U, G	N
	(Natural Resource Interpretation and Communication)	U, G	Y
University of Alaska	Environmental Mediation	U, G	—
	(Resource Planning)	U	Y
University of California—Berkeley	(No title given)	—	—
University of Florida	(Natural Resource Communication)	U	Y
	(Natural Resource Policy and Administration)	U	Y
University of Georgia	(Forest Resources Policy)	U, G	Y
University of Idaho	Public Involvement in Natural Resource Management	U	—
	(Society and Natural Resources)	U	Y
	(Interdisciplinary Natural Resource Planning)	U	Y
	(Forest Policy and Administration)	U	Y
(Social Ecology of Natural Resources)	G	N	
University of Massachusetts	(Natural Resource Policy)	—	—
	(Human Dimensions in Natural Resource Management)	—	—
University of Michigan	Natural Resource and Environmental Conflict Management	G	—
	Negotiation Skills in Environmental Dispute Resolution	G	—

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Table 1 (continued). SAF-accredited natural resources schools that teach public involvement and dispute resolution. Courses listed in parentheses incorporate but do not necessarily emphasize public involvement and dispute resolution. An asterisk (*) indicates courses initiated since 1992. A dash indicates that information was not available.

School	Course	Graduate, Undergraduate	Required
University of Michigan (continued)			
	Culture and Conflict Management	G	—
	(Introduction to Natural Resource Problems)	U	Y
	(Introduction to Environmental Policy-Making)	U	Y
	(Ecological Issues)	U	Y
	(Conservation Behavior)	U	N
	(International Environmental Policy)	U	N
	(Applied Social and Behavioral Science)	U	N
	(Organizational Theory and Change)	U	N
	(Applications of Environmental Justice)	U	N
	(Resource Policy and Administration)	G	Y
	(Institutions for Sustainability)	G	N
	(Ecosystem Management Seminar)	G	N
	(Social Impact Assessment)	G	N
	(Conservation Biology)	G	N
	(Strategies for Environmental Management)	G	N
	(Water Resource Policy)	G	N
	(Forest and Land Policy)	G	N
	(Politics of Environmental Regulation)	G	N
	(Evaluating, Managing, and Communicating Risk)	G	N
	(Ecotourism for Ecodevelopment in National Parks and Protected Areas)	G	N
University of Minnesota			
	Managing Natural Resources Conflict*	U	—
	(Leadership for Natural Resource and Environmental Management)	U, G	N
	(Ethics and Leadership in Natural Resource Management)	U, G	Y
	(Colloquium on Issues in Environmental Management)	U, G	N
	(Natural Resource Policy and Administration)	U, G	Y, N
	(Economics of Natural Resource Management)	U, G	Y, N
	(Natural Resource Planning)	U, G	Y, N
University of Missouri			
	Natural Resource Policy	U	N
University of Montana			
	Policy and Administration Seminar*	G	—
	Collaboration in Natural Resource Decisions*	U, G	—
	(Natural Resource Policy and Administration)	U	N
	(Social Forestry)	U	N
	(Ethics and the Management of Public Lands)	U	N
	(Managing Recreation Visitors and Resources)	U	N
	(Outdoor Recreation Planning)	U	N
	(Policy and Administration Seminar)	G	N
University of New Hampshire			
	Resolving Environmental Conflicts and Public Involvement*	G	—
	(Natural Resource Policy)	U	Y
University of Tennessee			
	(Managing Natural Resource Organizations)	U	Y
University of Washington			
	Natural Resource Conflict Management	U, G	—
	(Forest Policy and Law)	U	Y
	(Natural Resource Policy and Administration)	G	Y
University of Wisconsin—Madison			
	(Integrated Resource Management)	U	N
University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point			
	(Natural Resources and Public Relations)	U	Y
	(Leadership Development in Natural Resources)	G	N
Utah State University			
	Conflict Management in Natural Resources*	G	—
	(Human Dimensions of Natural Resource Management)	U	Y
Virginia PolyTech			
	(Human Dimensions of Fisheries and Wildlife)	U	N
Washington State University			
	Resolving Environmental Conflicts*	U, G	—
	(Principles of Community Development)	U	N
Yale University			
	(No title given)	G	N

though they were not reported at that time. At the very least, then, the number of schools offering specific courses on these topics has nearly doubled—from eight to 15—since 1992.

Different schools choose to emphasize different parts of the collaborative problemsolving spectrum. For example, public involvement is the focus of the sole course offered at the University of Idaho; courses at the other 14 schools include dispute resolution, conflict management, and environmental mediation. Most of these courses include instruction in the history of environmental conflicts, the benefits and costs of conflict management, and the basic principles of dispute resolution. Course reading lists are varied, but most include case studies of environmental conflicts and general texts on negotiation, such as the widely popular *Getting to Yes*, by Roger Fisher and William Ury (see “Resources for Educators”). Some courses use role playing and case study exercises to hone students’ dispute resolution skills.

Other course offerings. Thirty-one of the schools responding to the survey (about 78 percent) reported that the topics of public involvement or dispute resolution are included in existing courses on policy, planning, communications, and management, as shown in table 1. Some of these courses are part of the core natural resources curriculum and are required for undergraduate students.

Integrating these topics into required core courses may offer advantages over creating separate dispute resolution courses. Many respondents cited tight budgets and limited staff as constraints on adding courses in dispute resolution. Others expressed concern that students have too little room in their schedules for elective courses. The best way to ensure that most students are exposed to public involvement and dispute resolution concepts, they argued, is to incorporate these themes into existing required courses. Some suggested that students may accept the ideas more readily when they are presented in context as part of a planning or general management course.

Several respondents noted that pub-

lic involvement and dispute resolution are often taught through other departments, including social sciences, public administration, communications, management, and political science. For example, the University of Minnesota offers a course in managing natural resources conflict, but courses in public involvement and conflict management can be found in nearly 20 other departments. The university also offers a

minor in conflict management. Three other schools reported that dispute resolution was taught through the schools of law affiliated with their universities; such courses may not be readily available to natural resource majors.

Students at several schools can take advantage of dispute resolution training offered by special programs on and off campus. California Polytechnic State University maintains its own

Resources for Educators

Educators looking for resources to help them add or expand course material on public involvement and dispute resolution can start by examining the scope and content of similar course offerings at other universities and schools. The network of dispute resolution professionals and organizations in the private sector has also grown significantly during the past decade, particularly for environmental conflict management. Following is a list of resources for educators and others interested in public involvement and dispute resolution.

Newsletters

Consensus, published by the MIT-Harvard Program on Negotiation, reports on consensus-building efforts and lists dispute resolution practitioners, businesses, organizations, and training programs by region across the country. 131 Mount Auburn Street, Cambridge, MA 02138-5752; (617) 492-1414, ext. 21; e-mail: consensus@igc.org.

Participation Quarterly is published by the International Association for Public Participation. 1-800-644-4273.

Resources is a quarterly published by Resources for the Future, Inc., 1616 P Street NW, Washington, DC 20036-1400; (202) 328-5025.

SPIDR News, published by the Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution, lists conferences and news from SPIDR’s Environmental and Public Policy Sector. 1527 New Hampshire Avenue NW, 3rd Floor, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 667-9700; e-mail: spidr@spidr.org.

Tomorrow’s Management is a quarterly published by the Organization of Wildlife Planners. 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620; (406) 444-4758.

Books

Breaking the impasse: Consensual approaches to resolving public disputes, Lawrence Susskind and Jeffrey Cruikshank. Basic Books, 1987.

Collaborative approaches to decision making and conflict resolution for natural resource and land use issues, Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development. (503) 373-0050.

Community and the politics of place, Daniel Kemmis. University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.

Environmental disputes: Community involvement in conflict resolution, James E. Crowfoot and Julia M. Wondolleck, eds. Island Press, 1990.

Getting past no: Negotiating with difficult people, William Ury. Bantam Books, 1991.

Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in, 2nd ed., Roger Fisher and William Ury. Penguin Books, 1991.

The mediation process: Practical strategies for resolving conflict, 2nd ed., Christopher W. Moore. Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Public lands conflict and resolution, Julia M. Wondolleck. Plenum Press, 1988.

Public participation in public decisions, J.C. Thomas. Jossey-Bass, 1995.

Using assisted negotiation to settle land use disputes: A prescriptive guide for public officials, Consensus Building Institute and the University of Colorado at Denver. Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1998. 1-800-LAND-USE.

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center for dispute resolution, which offers short courses and seminars. The University of Kentucky hosts the Kentucky Natural Resources Leadership Institute, a program of the campus cooperative extension service. The institute offers three-day seminars for natural resources students and professionals and covers collaborative problemsolving, consensus building, conflict management, and

interest-based negotiation. Participants also travel to Washington, DC, to interact with national policymakers, lobbyists, and representatives of nongovernment groups.

Humboldt State University offers research and study opportunities through its Institute for the Study of Alternative Dispute Resolution, which also oversees dispute resolution courses in the sociology and political

science departments. At Washington State University, workshops on dispute resolution are available through cooperative extension. The university is also developing training modules that will be offered over the Internet and at university learning centers around the state.

In some cases the surrounding community supplies dispute resolution training opportunities. Respondents at the University of Minnesota in St. Paul and the University of Montana in Missoula said that such training was widely available through continuing education and private sector seminars and workshops.

Plans for the future. Eight schools (20 percent of those responding to the survey) said they do not currently offer courses that feature or include public involvement or dispute resolution. Of these, three schools said they plan to develop such courses in the near future. The College of Forestry at Oregon State University is considering adding such a course at the graduate level. In addition, Colorado State University and the University of Illinois hope to add such courses to their curricula.

Some schools that already offer some coursework on public involvement and dispute resolution also plan to continue developing these themes. At the University of Massachusetts, public involvement and dispute resolution will be part of a capstone course and will be featured in an existing human dimensions course. And the School of Natural Resources and Environment at the University of Michigan planned to add at least one new undergraduate course on environmental conflict management and negotiation skills during the 1998-99 academic year.

Discussion: A Model Course

If the general trend is to include—and perhaps feature—public involvement and dispute resolution in natural resource curricula, what specific concepts and skills should be taught and to which students? What would a model course look like? Most of the educators responding to the survey agree that natural resource students and professionals need a working knowledge of the dynamics of public decisionmak-

ing and the techniques of public involvement and dispute resolution. Many educators believe that the need becomes more acute as their graduates move up the career ladder. But most also agree that all natural resource professionals, even those at the undergraduate level, should be exposed to the concepts of public involvement and dispute resolution in the area of natural resource management.

Following the lead of schools that offer such courses or incorporate the concepts into other courses, we can outline what we believe a public involvement or dispute resolution course should include. Based on our experience as educators, scholars, and practitioners, such a course should cover the following basic concepts and skills:

- The causes of environmental conflict.
- Strategies for assessing and analyzing complex, multiparty environmental disputes; how to judge the "ripeness" of disputes and the willingness of affected interests to resolve disputes through alternative processes.
- The range of processes available to resolve public disputes or develop public policy, and the value of a comprehensive decisionmaking system.
- Strategies for public involvement in natural resources decisionmaking.
- Strategies for selecting an appropriate public involvement or dispute resolution process.
- Principles of collaborative problemsolving and the step-by-step process for building consensus.
- Practical strategies for communication, negotiation, facilitation, and mediation.
- Techniques for resolving disputes over scientific and technical information.
- Strategies for deciding when third-party assistance is needed and how to obtain it.
- Strategies for implementing and monitoring agreements.
- Guidelines for designing systems for resolving chronic, recurring environmental disputes.

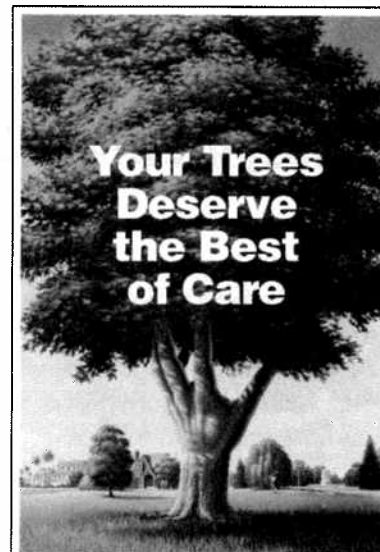
Many schools already teach these concepts and skills in a wide range of courses. They are offered in introductory form at the undergraduate level, often included in existing policy, plan-

ning, and administration courses. Some schools offer more in-depth training in specific courses; specialized graduate seminars allow for more experiential learning through case studies, role playing, and participation in real-world situations. (For a detailed description of an undergraduate course on environmental negotiation, including a bibliography of hands-on, role-playing exercises, see Kaplan 1998.)

The Next Generation

Employers of natural resources professionals will surely want to continue tracking trends in the schools that produce the annual pool of job candidates. As more schools integrate training in public involvement and dispute resolution into their curricula, researchers might want to assess the themes covered in class, the allocation of time to various topics, and textbooks and other teaching materials, such as case studies and simulations. It may also be worthwhile to interview alumni who have received such training to explore whether it has proven useful and valuable in their work, and how such training can be improved.

The debate over what courses belong in the natural resources curriculum will continue—as well it should, given the changing needs and interests of resource professions and society. Clearly, though, many natural resource schools have decided to include public involvement and dispute resolution training. Several of the educators who responded to the survey commented on their sense that they are building a "culture of collaboration" that goes well beyond coping with individual environmental disputes as they arise. This culture emphasizes adaptive strategies for engaging the public and affected interests before major disputes erupt. In part, these educators are creating such a culture by passing these concepts and skills on to the next generation of natural resource professionals. If courses in public involvement and dispute resolution continue to become more widely available—within other departments as well as at other universities—we will see greater numbers of graduates from all disciplines better prepared to participate in shaping public policy.



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