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# INNOVATION

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# **THE INNOVATION PROGRAM**

**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

*Innovation: a unique and creative approach with  
potential for improving management of people and resources by  
bringing new problem-solving ideas into use*

**PREPARED BY THE DNR  
INNOVATION BOARD**

**OCTOBER, 1988**

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## i. INTRODUCTION

*"He that will not apply new remedies must expect new evils; for time is the greatest innovator."*

**Frances Bacon**

Nothing is so constant as change. The last twenty years have seen enormous change in the DNR and in the environment of resource management. If the precepts of Future Shock are credible, the next twenty years will witness even greater change. Either we embrace change, or change embraces us.

Institutions prosper or wane depending on their ability to weather change. History is cluttered with the shells of institutions that would not or could not adapt. There is growing awareness that an institution's ability to harness the innovative spirit of its people is crucial in adapting to change.

Minnesota is known as a bell-weather state for the ability of its institutions to manage change by capitalizing on the innovative spirit of its citizenry. Private sector corporations, foundations, citizen groups and even the political system are highly regarded for their innovative capacity. The state's innovation has strongly benefited resource management. Minnesota has pioneered a number innovative management and administrative initiatives with national implications, e.g. the Water Bank Program, RIM, lake classification to name a few.

Innovative spirit within the DNR has helped mold those programs. DNR creativity already has been demonstrated by many past successes. But a compelling case can be made for the need to do more. Future challenges and opportunities, new and troublesome issues, and expanding responsibilities coupled with future funding limitations suggest that the DNR will need to accomplish more from a dwindling resource base. To respond to the expectations of an increasingly sophisticated society, the DNR must rely on its creativity and innovation. The DNR can do this by creating an environment that nurtures and values new ideas.

DNR choices are clear; manage change by unleashing the creative potential of staff or allow change to manage the DNR.

## I. THE NATURE OF INNOVATION

The concept of innovation is not easily defined. It does include some of the following concepts.

- \* *Innovation is the process (generation, implementation, acceptance) of bringing new problem solving ideas into use.*
- \* *Innovations can be technical, social, or organizational in nature and can be processes, products or services.*
- \* *Innovation can be perceiving a new opportunity for improving some aspect of DNR operations.*
- \* *Innovation can be finding ways to rise above the rigidity and routine of bureaucracy.*

Implementing innovation can involve new and unorthodox ways of doing business. As a result, it often is disorderly and may require the following:

- \* *greater risk-taking, initiative and discretion by employees;*
- \* *acceptance by the organization, especially supervisors and managers, that such behavior is beneficial; and*
- \* *tolerance of failure experienced in developing a creative or new concept to improve DNR operations.*

The following questions can be posed to help assess the innovative value of an idea:

- \* *Is it new and creative?*
- \* *Is it unique? (A concept may be unique to the DNR even if it has been introduced elsewhere.)*
- \* *Is it a new twist of a previous idea?*
- \* *Does it require greater risk-taking and discretion by employees?*
- \* *Will it help the DNR function better and not just with less cost?*
- \* *Will it increase customer satisfaction?*
- \* *Will it result in measurable improvements in quality, quantity and cost effectiveness of services?*

Accomplishments can be categorized as "basic" or "innovative". A basic accomplishment is done solely within the framework of doing one's job. It includes:

- \* *doing the basic job well - simply carrying out a defined assignment within the bounds of one's responsibilities.*
- \* *Advancing incrementally - achieving a higher level of performance within the basic framework of expected responsibilities.*

In contrast, an innovative accomplishment is a new or fresh way of addressing the broad range of DNR management objectives including a change in direction that may:

- \* *effect a new policy - create a change of direction that could result in a new policy or program,*
- \* *develop a fresh method - introduce a new process, procedure, or technology for continued use,*
- \* *find a new opportunity - develop a new product, process or service.*
- \* *Design a new structure for changing the formal structure, reorganizing, or introducing a new structure or forging a different link among units.*

Accomplishments can be innovative if they are addressed outside of assigned job objectives, involve new methods repeatable elsewhere, open new opportunities or have new impact on the organizational structure.

*(The above material was adapted from Rosabeth Moss Kanter's article "The middle Manager as Innovator" Harvard Business Review, July-August, 1982, Boston.)*

## **II. PROGRAM MISSION**

*The mission of the DNR Innovation Board is to stimulate and encourage innovation by developing an environment for our DNR staff that will:*

**EDUCATE** *staff to recognize, encourage and implement new ideas*

**NURTURE** *positive approaches to new ideas,*

**FOSTER** *development of those ideas,*

**RECOGNIZE** *effort and accomplishment,*

**PROMOTE** *and REWARD* *creativity and risk taking,*

*all of which will result in better service to the various interests that rely on the DNR.*

## THE MISSION STATEMENT ANALYZED

### **"The mission of the DNR Innovation Board is to stimulate and encourage innovation"**

*The DNR staff already is highly innovative. Innovation often is stifled by inflexibilities of the state bureaucracy. Thus, the challenge is not just to improve innovation but to seek ways in which existing innovative ideas can be forwarded.*

### **"by developing an environment"**

*The Board will stimulate innovation by fostering conditions which are more receptive to innovation. This implies development of a DNR corporate culture that places high priority on innovation.*

### **"for our DNR staff at all levels"**

*Creativity and innovation must continue to be a priority to all DNR staff, regardless of tenure, position or location.*

### **"that will educate staff to recognize, encourage and implement new ideas"**

*Success will depend on how well DNR staff understands that that the innovation program benefits individuals and the organization as a whole. Each individual must have an opportunity to play a more productive role by introducing new ideas and by having the opportunity to implement those ideas. This will give employees a greater sense of "belonging".*

### **"that will nurture positive approaches to new ideas"**

*The DNR must be supportive of individuals so that they will be comfortable in proposing new ideas. This nurturing environment must be established in the DNR workplace. Encouragement by peers, supervisors and managers can help establish such an environment.*

### **"that will foster development of those ideas"**

*The DNR must make a firm commitment to accomplishment. The DNR environment must not only be receptive to new ideas, but must seek ways in which good ideas can be implemented. This implies a can-do attitude to overcome constraints facing new ideas.*

**"recognize efforts and accomplishment"**

*Growth and development of individuals and the organization requires satisfaction for contributions. The DNR must establish a rewards system to recognize past accomplishment and to encourage future innovation. Public recognition programs are an important component of that effort.*

**"promote and reward creativity and risk taking"**

*Innovation can involve risks since many new ideas may prove unfeasible and may not be implemented immediately or ever. However, the DNR must continue to promote and encourage new ideas regardless of the ultimate feasibility of the proposals. Since the primary goal is to encourage innovation, the DNR must encourage all employees to be as creative as possible and to take risks in proposing new ideas that may prove unfeasible.*

### III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The DNR innovation program has two basic objectives.

*The first objective is to help foster an environment that is more open and receptive to new and creative ideas.*

*The second objective is reward innovation and creativity wherever it occurs in the organization.*

DNR staff does not lack for creativity and innovation. But often the system, be it the state bureaucracy or other constraint, tends to stifle innovation and the willingness of people to accept new approaches. The innovation program will not change the system overnight. However, it hopes to encourage measures that will establish in the long term a more creative and innovative environment within the DNR.

Initially, it will do this by recognizing innovations that already are occurring in the organization. This will be Phase I of the program. This report focuses on Phase I information. Over the long term, the Innovation Board will look for opportunities to actually encourage or support the implementation of innovative proposals. Such efforts will be part of a Phase II which will be considered after the experiences of Phase I are evaluated.

#### IV. NURTURING A CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Creative environments do not happen; they are made to happen. They are crafted by an understanding management that realizes survival hinges on the talents of a highly motivated and creative staff. The DNR hopes to nurture such an environment.

Bureaucracies discourage innovation. Studies of the private sector show that companies which fail to encourage innovation have some characteristics in common. These include:

- \* *isolation of top management*
- \* *intolerance of fanatics*
- \* *short time horizons*
- \* *accounting practices*
- \* *excessive rationalization*
- \* *excessive bureaucracy*
- \* *inappropriate incentives.*

(Jane Brian Quinn, "Managing Innovation: Controlled Chaos", Harvard Business Review, V63N3, 1985.)

Companies known for innovation tend to have the opposite characteristics including the following:

- \* *a need orientation (e.g. customer demand)*
- \* *organizational and technical experts*
- \* *toleration of fanatics*
- \* *long time horizons*
- \* *multiple approaches*
- \* *flexibility and quickness*
- \* *incentives. (Quinn)*

Additionally, a creative environment requires the following:

*The creative environment must be tolerant.*

Since innovation can be disorderly and devitalizing, the organization must be able to tolerate a degree of disruption.

*The creative environment must be patient.*

Innovative ideas are like frog eggs; out of a thousand eggs, two survive. Ideas are born small with more potential than fulfillment. (Peter F. Drucker, "If Nurtured, Ideas Yield Innovation", Chicago Tribune, Sept. 8, 1987.) The creative environment must be realistic since failures outnumber successes.

*The creative environment must be supportive.*

Instead of explaining why new proposals may not work, the creative environment seeks opportunities to test concepts. It encourages individuals to seek and explore new ideas. For example, 3M expects each research scientist to spend 15% of their time on projects of their own creation.

*The creative environment must be adaptive.*

Innovation implies change. If the environment cannot accommodate change, it cannot embrace innovation.

*The creative environment has a sense of timing.*

The creative environment can apply new approaches as they are needed and most likely to succeed.

*Leadership and management are key elements of a creative environment.*

Management must be fully supportive of establishing an innovative environment. Commitment must be carried through to middle management and supervisors where new ideas are evaluated and implemented (or rejected).

Within the confines of a rigid state bureaucracy, the DNR still has sufficient freedom to establish a creative environment that nurtures innovation.

## V. INNOVATION RECOGNITION CATEGORIES

Innovation award nominations will be evaluated for recognition in five categories.

**PUBLIC SERVICE INNOVATION:** *this award will recognize creativity in providing service to the DNR public. The public will be broadly defined to include citizens who receive services from the DNR or who use state resources, legislators, media, other state agencies, interest groups, and other disciplines within the DNR.*

**TECHNICAL INNOVATION:** *this award will recognize creativity in any technical area including research, equipment design, or development of a novel resource management technique.*

**ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES INNOVATION:** *this award will recognize creativity in all aspects of the administrative services function of the DNR.*

**PROCESS INNOVATION:** *this award will recognize creativity in development or improvement in any of the management processes including ongoing efforts such as the Planning Environmental Review Team, and short-term efforts such as committees and task forces.*

**COMMISSIONER'S AWARD:** *this award will recognize creativity in any area not included in the four categories above.*

Awards will be given in all categories with deserving recipients. Award numbers will not be limited. An effort will be made to balance the need to broadly recognize all worthy recipients without issuing so many awards that the award value is depreciated.

## VI. BOARD HISTORY AND MEMBERSHIP

### A. INNOVATION BOARD HISTORY

The concept for an Innovation Board was developed in 1985 at a forum attended by planning staff from all DNR disciplines and bureaus. The forum objective was to look at future challenges facing the DNR and to consider initiatives to address those challenges. A number of proposals were presented to PERT and the Senior Management Team. One of these, a proposal for an innovation board, was recommended for further development. A proposal was prepared under the guidance of Karen Loechler and approved by the Commissioner in late 1986.

The first task was selection of board candidates. The Commissioner requested division directors, bureau administrators and regional administrators to nominate candidates who had demonstrated creativity in their past work. The response was a large pool of highly qualified candidates. The challenge was to select a board that would be broadly representative of differing positions, disciplines, locations and gender. In December of 1987, the Commissioner appointed the present board for an indeterminate term.

One of the many challenges facing this board will be to determine the conditions of their own replacement. Although each would opt for permanent tenure, all recognize the need for new thinking on a regular and frequent basis. Consequently, immediately after the board has a program in place, it will recommend to the Commissioner a process and timetable for new board members to be selected.

**B. INNOVATION BOARD MEMBERS**

**AL BERNER,  
MADELIA WILDLIFE RESEARCH STATION,  
507 624-8478**

**JOHN CHELL, INNOVATION BOARD CHAIR  
REGION II ADMINISTRATION  
218 327-4402**

**DEBBIE ETHIER,  
BOAT AND WATER SAFETY PROGRAM  
612 296-3310**

**GENE HOLLENSTEIN,  
RETIRED, DIVISION OF WATERS  
612 459-2162**

**JANE HARPER,  
DIVISION OF FORESTRY  
612 297-2145**

**JOE KURCINKA,  
DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYEE RELATIONS  
612 296-8887**

**JUDY WINIECKI, INNOVATION BOARD VICE-CHAIR  
BUREAU OF ENGINEERING  
612 296-3589**

## APPENDIX A:

### INNOVATION DEFINED

The Innovation Board has developed an operating definition of innovation. Innovation in the DNR is defined as:

*"A unique and creative approach with potential for improving management of people and resources."*

The definition and its rationale is described further in the following text.

#### *"Innovation is a unique"*

Innovation must be unique, at least within the DNR. The concept may have been applied elsewhere but if the DNR has never applied it then, for the purposes of evaluating the concept, it will be regarded as unique.

#### *"and creative"*

the idea must be imaginative, although it need not be complex. Simple, but imaginative solutions often are the most effective.

#### *"approach"*

The approach can be almost anything, from a new equipment design, a novel policy development, an issue management initiative, a new administrative procedure. It can apply to the broad reach of all activities pursued by the DNR in accomplishing its mission.

#### *"with potential"*

Ideas must not be implemented successfully to be innovative. Many creative approaches prove to be failures, even though their potential was high. The timing may not be correct, funding not available, or many other reasons could constrain success. Risk-taking is a value in implementing innovation, since change often is troublesome and disconcerting.

*"for improving"*

The idea must have the potential to improve some aspect of DNR management.

*"management of people and resources"*

The DNR manages resources and people. As stated above, the innovation can apply to any aspect of administration or management conducted in the DNR.