

**DNR NATURAL RESOURCES EDUCATION
PLANNING INITIATIVE
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY REPORT**



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**NREC STRATEGIC PLANNING INITIATIVE
FOCUS GROUP/EMPLOYEE RESPONSE SUMMARY**

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**NREC STRATEGIC PLANNING INITIATIVE
I. FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of conducting focus groups was to receive information to help clarify DNR's role with respect to environmental/natural resources education. Natural Resources Education Committee (NREC) members facilitated focus groups in all DNR regions. Participants included educators, natural resource education specialists, and representatives from sporting groups, conservation groups, and local industries. NREC also facilitated a focus group with DNR staff. All focus groups answered six questions the NREC developed to achieve the purpose:

1. What do you believe are the most important needs today?

- Understanding Ecological & Biological Principles
- Understanding How People Affect the Environment
- Defining & Targeting Audiences
- Integrating Environmental Education into School Curricula
- Developing Partnerships
- Improving Materials
- Building Internal Support for Environmental Education.

2. What do you believe are DNR's strengths and weaknesses in this area?

Strengths:

- Staff Expertise
- Organizational Structure
- Current Materials and Programs

Weaknesses:

- Public Awareness of Programs
- Cooperation with other Agencies
- Staff Skills in Education
- Fragmentation within DNR
- Internal Support
- Too Few Programs

3. What DNR services do you use or are you aware of?

- Resources and Facilities
- Organizational Services and Special Programs
- Materials and Publications
- Environmental Education Programs

4. What additional resources should the DNR provide?

- Define DNR Priorities
- Improve Support for Environmental Education
- Develop Ties with Educational community
- Consider Environmental Education an Integral Part of DNR's Work
- Develop Accessible Educational Materials
- Build Partnerships with other Environmental Education Providers

5. Are there services that DNR offers that could be better or more appropriately provided by other organizations?

- Rethink Project Management
- Improve Public Involvement
- Avoid Duplication

6. Do you perceive a difference between environmental education and natural resources education? If yes, what are the differences?

Environmental education is broader. Natural resources education is a subset of environmental education; its focus is on natural resource use and management. The difference matters little. We are more concerned about the issues surrounding environmental educational materials and facilities, and cooperation among providers.

II. CONSTITUENT FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

Introduction

As part of DNR's natural resources education strategic plan development, seven focus groups were conducted with selected educators, natural resource education specialists, representatives from sporting and conservation groups, and local industries in each of the DNR regions. The purpose was to receive information to help clarify DNR's role with respect to environmental/natural resources education. The results of these focus groups are highlighted in the following section.

In addition to the constituent focus groups, another meeting was conducted with department staff. The same six questions were asked of DNR staff as were asked of the public. These results are summarized in Section III of this report.

The following summary highlights what appears to be the most important themes and ideas expressed by focus group participants. The summary is organized by the focus group questions and topic headings. Beneath each topic is a concise paragraph which describes the combined view of participants from all seven focus groups. Views that are unique to a specific region are also listed under "region specific" categories.

As in any data compilation, details regarding specific comments or views are necessarily absent. Therefore, the reader who requires more information should refer to the Appendix which contains the compiled results of every focus group the NREC planning team conducted.

#1 What do you believe are the most important needs today?

Ecological Education

The public needs a better understanding of the interconnectedness of the environment. This can be achieved through increasing awareness on ecological and biological principles. Environmental education should include information about biodiversity and the benefits of a holistic approach to life.

How People Affect The Environment

People need to understand how their actions in everyday life affect the environment, which will lead toward a better understanding of trade-offs and an ability to make better choices. Stewardship is a personal and emotional commitment. We need an understanding of place beyond the factual base of information. There is a spiritual element involved in addition to the social and economic aspects of environmental education.

Target Audiences

The audiences for environmental education programs should be defined and materials developed to meet the needs of the young, youth, adults. In addition, programs should be targeted to political leaders and opinion leaders. We need to be able to influence decisions for the benefit of environmental education.

Integration of Environmental Education

Environmental education needs to be integrated into other school curricula, such as the social sciences and the arts, not just the natural sciences. Students need more "hands-on" and interpretive learning opportunities.

Partnerships

DNR must develop partnerships and cooperate with other agencies so that it is not spread too thin. Specifically, DNR and the Department of Education should cooperate to work within school systems. Also, the public should be more involved in making decisions.

Improved Materials

We need more resources and up-to-date materials that take advantage of current technology. We also need a clearinghouse of environmental education materials so that the public knows what information is available.

Internal Support

DNR needs to support environmental education with more than words; an effective program needs funding, staff, and action. The public needs to know what DNR's mission and role are with regard to environmental education. Currently the DNR's efforts appear to be focused too strongly on enforcement.

Region Specific Responses

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Region 1 specific: | The increasingly metropolitan population in Minnesota needs greater awareness about environmental issues facing rural residents. |
| Region 5 specific: | Environmental education programs must reach out to and include ethnic communities. |
| | State park interpretive programs have a great potential to meet environmental education needs. |

Region 6 specific:

There is a need to develop
Environmental Learning Centers.

A multi-ethnic DNR staff is needed to
improve the participation of ethnic
groups in natural resource
experiences.

Educate and work with the business
community to develop partnerships.

Inner city youth must learn the
connection between themselves and
natural resources and how this
connection affects their survival.

**#2 What do you believe are DNR's strengths and weaknesses in
this area?**

STRENGTHS:

Staff & Programs

DNR has a pool of expertise. Its staff is dedicated, cooperative, and knowledgeable. Staff members are willing to help and give a lot of time to community groups. The current environmental education programs that DNR provides are excellent.

Organization

DNR manages land and water to protect resources; many of the state's most precious resources are in the DNR's trust. DNR controls rules and regulations. DNR's presence throughout the state creates visibility and public recognition. Through its administrative structure, a dissemination system is in place that has the potential for good delivery of services. As exemplified by this study, DNR recognizes need to involve citizens in planning process.

Materials

The subject matter is fun! DNR has a good library of audio-visual materials and serves as a source of technology and research. Printed materials, such as the Volunteer, oak wilt, and exotic and endangered species, are very good.

WEAKNESSES:

Awareness of Programs

DNR needs to make better use of its expertise and information dissemination system. The currency of materials needs to be improved as well as the knowledge of how to get them. A directory of contacts within the department would help. The DNR does not always clearly communicate the intent of its educational programs or effectively publicize them.

Cooperation with other Organizations

DNR needs to work better with school systems and develop partnerships with other organizations, agencies, and sectors, particularly local governments. There needs to be ongoing, consistent public participation in making decisions.

Staff

DNR staff are primarily technicians, not educators, and they lack communication skills with lay persons. There is limited training to develop these skills.

Organization

Regulatory emphasis and political pressures limit DNR's ability to address environmental education needs. There is a lack of integration of environmental education into all programs. Cooperation among divisions is lacking, which results in an inconsistent, fragmented, and uncoordinated approach to environmental education. The size of the department can be difficult for the public to work with. Evaluation of programs and accountability is needed. Public perceptions are that DNR pushes its own strategies, gives censored messages, and ducks the issues.

Internal Support

DNR lacks the resources for environmental education. There is no unified approach to providing programs, which limits DNR's commitment and follow-through. Environmental education is not part of any division's mission.

Programs

DNR needs to build upon what currently exists. There should be an interdisciplinary approach to environmental education programs. Programs should be accessible to all populations and should be relevant to everyday life. There should be more ethnic diversity in DNR programs. Programs should provide a balance of information. DNR assumes people care and assumes a certain level of knowledge; however, this is not always so.

Programs should promote conservation and stewardship, as well as safety, and should include management issues.

#3 What DNR Services do you use or are you aware of?

Resources and Facilities:

State Parks
State Forests
State Trails (Bicycle, Snowmobile, Ski, Canoe Routes)
Scientific and Natural Areas
Badoura Nursery
Wetlands
Wildlife Management Areas
Public Shooting Ranges
Trout Streams
Camping Facilities

Organization Services:

DNR Divisions (Enforcement, Fish & Wildlife/Ecological Services, Forestry/Entomologist, Parks, Waters)

DNR Bureaus (License, Information & Education, Planning/Environmental Review, Real Estate Management/Land Trust, Permanent School Trust Fund)

DNR Special Programs (MCC, Volunteers, Youth in Natural Resources)

DNR Regional Office Staff
Speakers, Personnel Expertise, Special Events Staff
Information Center, Phone Service
Internships, students

Materials and Publications:

Brochures, Posters, Maps
Non-Game Program, Natural Heritage Program
Boat and Water Safety
Forestry (Private Forest Management, Best Management Practices, Forest Stewardship)
Fisheries (Reservoir Plans, Surveys, Stocking, Rehabilitation Information)
Publications (Volunteer, Trail Explorer, Minnesota Mammals Book, Metro Region Newsletter, DNR Resource Review, DNR News, Water Talk, DNR Reports)
Film Library
Wolf Traveling Kit, Groundwater Display, Social/Scientific Projects, In-Service Science Workshops

Programs:

State Park Naturalists, Interpreters, Open Houses, Charlie Maguire--The Centennial Troubador, Lifetimes and Landscapes
Project Wild, Aquatic Wild
MinnAqua, Take a Kid Fishing, Fishing Clinics
Project Learning Tree
Advanced Hunter Education, Firearm Safety, ATV/Snowmobile Training, Boat and Water Safety, Minnesota Bowhunter Education
Clean Rivers
Ag-Stravaganza
Environmental Mini-Camp for the Disadvantaged
Conservation Day
Radio Interviews

#4 What additional resources should the DNR provide?

DNR Priorities and Principles for Action

The DNR needs to define its priorities and their rationale. In particular, the DNR needs to explain the principles behind its programs (e.g., the benefits of behind a specific project or regulatory action).

Internal Support

The DNR should either commit to supporting natural resources education and do it well, or let other agencies and private parties be fully responsible for educational programs. DNR managers need to be visibly supportive of educational efforts rather than merely talking about the importance of natural resource education. The DNR should concentrate on what it does best and provide quality programs. (Note: Support includes an emphasis on funding.)

Develop Closer Ties With The Educational Community

The DNR should develop closer ties and cooperate more effectively with the Department of Education, teachers, and other organizations such as environmental learning centers whose primary mission is to educate.

Consider Education An Integral Part Of DNR's Work

The DNR should include an educational component to all of its programs. As a part of this initiative, the DNR needs to hire more staff whose training and job duties concern primarily education. The educational role that existing staff play also needs more emphasis (e.g., conservation officers and Fish & Wildlife staff). The public, by virtue of its very size, has large impacts on the resource. Broader public understanding of their impacts and role with respect to natural resources, will assist the agency in maintaining these resources.

Accessible Educational Materials

The DNR needs to develop more accessible means to get its resource message and materials to the public and educators. The DNR should serve as a library or clearinghouse for these kinds of materials. In addition, the DNR should make more effective use of the media when communicating educational messages (e.g., there should be more public service announcements on the importance of resource conservation rather than just safety).

Cooperation & Partnerships

The DNR needs to place more emphasis on cooperation and partnership with other agencies, private organizations, and volunteers with respect to natural resources education. Each member of the partnership should provide its strengths and use the other partners to compensate for its weaknesses.

Region Specific Responses

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Region 2 specific: | The educational role of the Bureau of Information & Education should be increased. |
| Region 3 specific: | There is a need for additional environmental learning center and park facilities. |
| Region 4 specific: | There is a need for more interpretive programs at state parks. |
| Region 5 specific: | There is a need for additional state parks and educational facilities. |
| Region 6 specific: | DNR programs need to be accessible to inter-city youth (e.g., DNR should provide transportation). |
| | DNR natural resource programs should have an urban focus and emphasize gender diversity and people of color. |
| | DNR needs to play a very formal role in formal education. (Formal teaching.) |

#5 Are there services that DNR offers that could be better or more appropriately provided by other organizations?

Rethinking Project Management

The DNR needs to rethink how it will achieve its educational initiatives. DNR needs to look for connections with other organizations and be more involved with co-production (e.g., work with the Department of Education to implement its programs; develop curriculum with DNR expertise for use by others, etc.).

Greater Public Involvement

The DNR needs to involve the public more in its projects and programs. "Don't do the work for us, involve us."

Avoid Duplication

The DNR should not duplicate what is already being done. DNR should concentrate on its area of expertise and assist or provide resource materials where it is not the expert. DNR cannot do it all.

Region Specific Responses

Region 2 and 3 specific: Obtain more feedback from sporting groups about the public's information needs.

Region 5 specific: Work more closely with organizations such as 4-H on natural resource and shooting sports classes.

Region 6 specific: Continue to develop cooperative relationships with other agencies (e.g., metro. enforcement efforts).

#6 Do you perceive a difference between environmental education and natural resources education? If yes, what are the differences?

The Natural Resources Education Committee presented this question to focus group participants for several reasons. First, within DNR there has been much discussion and disagreement on whether a difference exists between natural resources education and environmental education.

Second, conservation and sporting groups have voiced concern that the growing state-wide environmental education effort has ignored their opinions and interests. Sporting groups appear to be wary of programs marketed within the context of environmental education--there is a growing view among some constituents that preservationist values are being taught without equal time devoted to explaining conservationist values as well.

Focus group participants offered many interpretations of environmental education and natural resources education. Even so, three general themes appear to emanate from the diversity of focus group viewpoints.

First, focus group generally consider environmental education to be the broader of the two terms with natural resources education fitting within it. Second, natural resources education as a subset of environmental education, focuses more on natural resource use and management.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, focus group participants generally expressed little concern whether the term environmental education or natural resources education is used. They were more concerned with the issues surrounding specific educational materials, facilities, and cooperation among educational providers.

III. DNR STAFF RESPONSE SUMMARY

Introduction

DNR employees also responded to the six focus group questions. NREC planning team members facilitated a DNR focus group in central offices. Participant responses are included below. In addition, NREC members asked for written responses to the six focus group questions from central office, regional, and field discipline staff. The combined responses from DNR focus group participants and discipline staff are listed below. For the specific results of the DNR focus group, please refer to the Appendix. For copies of DNR written responses, please contact Bob Bystrom, chair of the NREC Planning Committee at (612) 296-6522.

Response summaries are organized in a similar manner to Section II. Beneath each question is a topic heading with descriptions of the combined views of DNR employees listed beneath. Views that are unique to a specific discipline are listed within separate "discipline specific" categories.

Perhaps what is most interesting about the responses from DNR personnel as compared to the public's responses, is the similarity of opinion between the two groups. For example, both DNR employees and the public believe that schools and educators need to be more involved in environmental education efforts. Views of the public and DNR staff with respect to perceived differences between environmental and natural resources education are alike as well.

The similarity of responses among DNR staff and the public suggest that DNR is generally aware of the issues and needs with respect to natural resources education.

#1 What do you believe are the most important needs today?

School and Teacher Involvement

Schools, teachers, and educational administrators need to be accepting of and involved in environmental education. The DNR should provide them with better up-to-date materials and to motivate their involvement in environmental education issues. The DNR can assist in developing broader in-service training opportunities for school teachers.

Public Information

DNR needs to do a better job of getting the facts out to the public, educators, and to government agencies including the Legislature. The concept of conservation in addition to preservation needs more public discussion.

Ecological Education

The DNR should more clearly communicate with the public about the direct connection between their needs and wants on a finite resource. More public information about the links, interconnectedness, and interdependence among humans and the natural environment is needed. DNR staff should strive to impart personal meaning to the concept of ecology. It is important to assist children and adults towards recognizing the various components of the natural world--the first step towards appreciating it.

DNR Efforts

DNR needs to improve its internal coordination and define its audiences and markets. The agency also needs to improve its funding and staff for its environmental education, information dissemination, and public awareness efforts.

Discipline Specific Responses

Forestry Specific: We need to get the message out about subjects including the forest as a renewable resource, fire prevention, and basic forest management.

We need more ready to use slide and video programs for use by DNR Foresters.

We need to convey DNR's mission to the urban forest land user.

Wildlife Specific: The public needs more awareness on the importance of wildlife managers and their work.

The public needs to learn more about user and hunter-ethics, the anti-hunting movement, the impact of technology on the resource, the importance of wetlands, and the importance of experience rather than the number of animals or fish bagged.

The public needs more information about the role that hunting and trapping play in wildlife management.

Fisheries Specific: Fisheries personnel should share more of their knowledge of aquatic systems with youth and teachers.

The DNR needs more "Take a Kid Fishing" events and special event coordination from central office.

#2 What do you believe are DNR's strengths and weaknesses in this area?

STRENGTHS:

DNR Facilities & Programs

The DNR currently has many excellent environmental education programs. The agency also has good facilities and natural "outdoor labs" located in all regions of the state.

Information

The department has extensive information and materials on environmental education and is good at getting that information out to the public.

Public Expectations & Contact

The public expects environmental information from the DNR. DNR works well with adult organizations and there is a willingness within DNR to work with these groups., The DNR's regional structure provides greater accessibility to the public. The lack of statewide leadership with respect to environmental education provides the department with an opportunity to become a leader in the field.

Staffing

DNR has many motivated professional staff who are concerned about environmental stewardship and willing to provide environmental education services. DNR's staff have much knowledge on environmental education issues. Schools in particular use DNR professionals as a resource. DNR also has a large cadre of volunteer instructors.

Discipline Specific Responses

Forestry Specific: Forestry does a good job of getting their message across, especially on fire prevention issues.

Wildlife Specific: Nongame wildlife does a good job of educating the public.

Fisheries Specific: DNR programs including MinnAqua, Project Aquatic Wild, Project Wild, and Take a Kid Fishing projects have been effective.

WEAKNESSES:

Information & Education Materials

We need to provide more attractive up-to-date information to the public. This includes resource materials and presentations. The information we send out should be proactive; too often our materials consist of "damage control" information. Our information does not reach enough of the urban people, that's where the voters are. The DNR needs to be more organized on how it disseminates information.

Time, Resources & Skills

There is insufficient time and resources to devote to environmental education. DNR staff recognize the need but fail to address these issues because of other pressing commitments. There is not enough environmental education work by local or field staff--environmental education should be a full-time job for some field personnel. Many staff do not possess the public communication skills to inform constituents about DNR's mission and views.

Staffing Direction & Role

The DNR hasn't defined its role with respect to natural resources education. Often it's the employee's choice to inform and educate the public rather than a part of one's routine work via an organizational directive. The DNR has had an internal lack of leadership in the area of natural resources education; as a result, there are varying levels of commitment among disciplines for educational initiatives.

The Information & Education Bureau in its present form is not the appropriate discipline to coordinate DNR's educational efforts--information is their forte; let them focus on what they do best.

Agency Attitude

DNR employees exhibit too much professional egotism. We don't listen well and often are perceived as not being objective. In responding to general resource issues, we don't use our friends enough; in fact, the DNR is less willing to work with smaller, less organized groups.

Our mission to preserve/conserve and promote development of resources results in internal inconsistencies. It is also difficult to get environmental education issues elevated in other agencies. Environmental education issues must be tied to other priority issues. Environmental education is no one's number one priority.

Discipline Specific Responses

Forestry Specific: Our foresters need more guidance and incentive to promote education and serve as examples for other DNR personnel. They need to learn to talk without using excessive jargon and be more oriented towards the public relations aspects of natural resource management.

Wildlife Specific: Wildlife has made education a low priority; there is no money to operate an effective program.

The Wildlife Section does a poor job of getting its message out on wildlife and habitat management issues.

Wildlife's A Few Words is a good publication but should be available to a much wider group.

#3 What DNR services do you use or are you aware of?

DNR Library

Volunteer

Information Center

News releases

DNR Reports

Discipline services and information

Boat & Water Safety information.

Firearms Safety

Snowmobile

ATV

Volunteer Services

Referrals from disciplines

DNR retiree group

Heritage Program Library

DNR publications

Personal contacts in the department.

MinnAqua

Bureau of Information & Education

Parks resource coordinators

Non Game Program

Sign Shop in Region II

Special events such as canoe and prairie days.

Bureau of Information & Education to advertise land sales through news releases

Documents from the Department of Administration

Combine discipline information with information from Nature Centers.

Don't use DNR resources when we probably could. This is an awareness issue.

BREM could be listed as a source of information, for example its land records.

GIS System. We need to monitor its development to be sure it is usable.

State Parks, Interpretive Centers

Bureau of Management Information Systems

DNR Regional and area offices

Other agencies, University of Minnesota, PCA, Department of Agriculture,
Publishers, Historical Societies

#4 What additional resources should the DNR provide?

Resource Materials

The DNR should better publicize the materials that it already produces. We should be providing good usable maps for hunters, fishermen, berrypickers, and other recreational users. We need prepared and packaged presentations to give to the public and cliental. Central office and I & E personnel should give presentations to foresters on how to interact with the public. DNR should place a priority on developing regional speakers' bureaus and presentation materials libraries (e.g., slides etc.). DNR should use visual media services and outdoor advertising more often.

The DNR should accelerate research activities associated with curricula development for schools and programs for adult, economically disadvantaged and disabled segments of the state's population.

Agency Cooperation

Agencies such as the DNR, PCA, Departments of Education and Agriculture should work more closely on cooperative projects.

Agency Emphasis

The DNR needs more school outreach and make its educational materials more accessible to teachers, organizations, and the public. The agency also needs to emphasize the I.R.M./ecological interconnectedness message in its work. Finally, DNR needs to give more financial and staffing support to natural resources education efforts.

Discipline Specific Responses

Forestry Specific: Host a regional day for scouts; there they could earn their forester, conservation and similar merit badges.

Create area or regional forestry information officer positions to handle information, education, and public relations functions.

Include interpretation as part of state forest silviculturalist job duties just as interpretation is a part of the job descriptions of park naturalists.

- I & E Specific:** Provide and train school speakers whose viewpoints include pro-hunting and timber-harvesting.
- Provide conservation education resource curricula for children.
- Provide more information to media personnel such as Paul Douglas (Channel 11); sometimes their facts are incorrect.

Fisheries Specific: More materials on fisheries as fairs and schools.

#5 Are there services that DNR offers that could be better or more appropriately provided by other organizations?

University of Minnesota - Extension

Several DNR respondents commented that the DNR should make better use of the U of M's extension services. No respondents suggest, however, that these services replace DNR environmental education efforts.

Sporting Groups

Sporting clubs could play a much larger role in hunter education workshops than at present.

DNR Internal

DNR must recognize that it needs to know about what other agencies and organizations are doing. Delegate or share our responsibilities with other organizations. Concentrate on the DNR's role in developing public information about resource issues by supplying the facts. We should discontinue being the spokesperson for conservation groups and industries that are capable of explaining themselves.

#6 Do you perceive a difference between environmental education and natural resources education? If yes, what are the differences?

DNR staff responses to this question were very similar to the opinions of the agency's constituents. Many respondents said there was no difference between natural resources and environmental education. For those that perceive a difference, they believe that environmental education is broader and more general in scope than natural resources education. Many respondents indicated that natural resources education is focused more closely on management and use. DNR respondents did not express concern over which term more appropriately applies to the DNR's work.

