

Report from NNREC on EETAP3 Building State Capacity for EE Grant

The Nevada Natural Resource Education Council (NNREC) received a grant from the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) under the third Environmental Education and Training Program (EETAP3) of US Environmental Protection Agency funds. This report covers activities, successes and challenges from initiation on April 17, 2006 through September 30, 2006. All of the programs highlighted below have also received some funding from a Nevada Division of Forestry Conservation Education Program grant.

Nevada Environmental Education Training Plan

Nevada did not have an environmental education training plan, so the initial commitment under this grant was to create one during the first year of the three year grant. The training plan team which was convened to write the plan determined that it would be difficult to successfully create a training plan without having a curriculum and standards base from which to determine what training to focus on. Therefore, the team also created a Nevada Environmental Literacy Guideline. Both of these are working titles that may be changed before the final draft. The first drafts were written with input from many partners, including nonprofit organizations, state agencies, higher education faculty, and teachers, however, less input than desired was received, and the bulk of the plan was written by NNREC and our primary partner, Public Lands Institute, a part of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Work is now underway on the second draft of both documents. Meetings are scheduled in western Nevada and southern Nevada to work on revisions. Revision is also ongoing with comments from individuals and collaborative revision using a Wiki website. These revisions will result in final drafts of both documents complete by October 31, 2006. These documents will still be works-in-progress, with additional revisions in the future. These documents and the NNREC Strategic Plan, to be completed in early 2007 will constitute the initial core of a State EE Master Plan (element 12 of the Components of a State-Level Comprehensive EE Program), which will be completed over several years.

Creation of both the plan and the guideline has been a challenge. A number of people have claimed that they are too busy to participate, or committed to participation and then not followed through, including key individuals with key partners without whom the plan may be less robust and less likely to be adopted by partners. So in addition to the actual writing, there has been an effort to meet with partners to demonstrate the benefits to the mission of their employer of both participation and adoption. These efforts have had some success, with more people participating in the final draft. However, participation is still lower than desired, and efforts to encourage participation will continue. The training plan will include an implementation strategy.

Lamoille Institute for Educators (LIFE)

A separate report on the Lamoille Institute for Educators (LIFE) program, a week-long summer professional development experience for teachers and other educators, is attached. The program was very successful in content and participant evaluation, however, enrollment was much below the desired levels.

Other Professional Development

NNREC is the de-facto sponsor of Project Learning Tree (PLT) in Nevada. NNREC has made several efforts to offer additional educator trainings, however, none have succeeded during this time. Some were cancelled due to low enrollment. Others have not happened due to difficulties scheduling the workshops and facilitators. NNREC held a PLT facilitator workshop last fall which it was hoped would result in additional workshops on southern Nevada and the rural areas, however, this has not been the case, and it appears that workshops will only occur if the state lead facilitator, Dan Allison, schedules and facilitates each workshop. NNREC has supported Project WET workshops offered by the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and the US Bureau of Reclamation, and may become more deeply involved in Project WET. NNREC also offers River of Words workshops and supports Earth Institute Discussion Courses. Project WILD is not currently offered in Nevada, and NNREC is awaiting a Nevada Department of Wildlife Conservation Education Strategic Plan which may identify WILD or other curriculum as a sponsored program.

NNREC has held discussions with Clark County School District, Washoe County School District (the two largest in the state) and the Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program about bringing PLT and other offerings within their catalogs and better aligning workshops with teacher needs, however, no changes have been made yet.

Programs

NNREC worked with partners Nevada Outdoor School and the Tahoe Rim Trail Association to create a summer backpacking experience for high school students. A successful program was held in western Nevada, and another was scheduled for northern Nevada but did not occur because the late summer time conflicted with school schedules. The western Nevada trip brought six participants to an eight day backpack along a 50 miles section of the Tahoe Rim Trail. Sessions along the trail included Leave No Trace, wilderness survival and safety, orienteering, plant identification, wildlife and habitats, water ecology, and journals. Most importantly for long term capacity building was that the program was extensively documented, which another summer program that has operated for 14 years never accomplished.

NNREC has offered for three years a mini-grant program which awards up to \$500 to teachers and educators from nonprofit organizations to seed projects for K-12 students. The projects this year include substitute stipends so that teachers can attend an all-day workshop at a natural area outside Winnemucca, enhancing a school garden with a geology learning station, and starting a school water celebration day.

NNREC Capacity

The EETAP grant has supported NNREC efforts to increase its own capacity to provide and coordinate environmental education. Along with funding from the Nevada Division of Forestry, NNREC has moved forward with its first staff member, Director Dan Allison, who is serving as a part-time independent contractor. Having a staff member has greatly increased our capacity to coordinate with all of our partners in environmental education in the state, as well as other states and NAAEE. Our website continues to be updated and enhanced, we are publishing an e-newsletter on a regular basis, the Board of Directors is meeting regularly via conference call, and we have scheduled an Annual Members Meeting with innovative content.

NNREC has for many years been funded largely by the Nevada Division of Forestry Conservation Education Program, which is a USDA Forest Service funded program, and the PLT-Fire Initiative. This year we have focused on expanding our funding base. The EETAP Capacity grant was one such effort. We have received minor amounts of funding from other sources. NNREC has developed necessary documentation for future funding, including annual work plans, annual reports, budgets, letters of inquiry, and other supporting documentation which constitutes a case statement. We are investigating foundations, but have not made any applications yet.

Collaboration

NNREC has held meetings with nearly all of our existing and potential partners over this time period to discuss collaboration and funding. Agencies include Nevada Department of Wildlife, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection, Nevada Division of Forestry, Nevada Division of State Parks, Nevada State Museum and Historical Society, USDA Forest Service Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service. Businesses include the Mirage Dolphin Habitat and Secret Garden and Atlantis Aquarium. Education includes Clark County School District and Washoe County School District (the two largest in Nevada), the University of Nevada Las Vegas College of Education, and the Public Lands Institute. Others include the Parosol Community Collaborative and the Nevada Museums Association, CHOLLA, the Partners for Education About the Environment, and Carson River Coalition Education Working Group.

Collaboration with the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and Nevada Division of Forestry resulted in an application for the EETAP “Correlations of Project Learning Tree and Project WET Materials to State Standards and Assessment Tools” program, which we did not receive, and our collaboration with the Public Lands Institute resulted in an application for the EETAP “EE Certification Program Development” program, which was successful.

The most important outcome of our collaboration efforts so far has been an increased profile for both NNREC and environmental education. Many organizations, agencies and businesses now think of NNREC when thinking about education, and contact us for advice and participation in their efforts.