

Meeting Multi-Agency Wilderness Training and Education Needs with Limited Fiscal and Human Resources

Gregory Kroll

Abstract—The Wilderness Act of 1964 created a National Wilderness Preservation System that currently comprises 104 million acres of Congressionally designated wilderness, managed by four Federal agencies: the USDA Forest Service, the USDI National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Demand for training for wilderness managers, as well as the need for interagency management consistency, resulted in the creation of the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center in 1993. This paper addresses the Carhart Center's administrative structure, oversight and funding, its needs assessment process, courses offered, instructional philosophies, and public education efforts. The applicability of this model to other countries is discussed.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 created a National Wilderness Preservation System that currently comprises 104 million acres of Congressionally designated wilderness. These areas are managed by four federal agencies: U.S. Forest Service (USFS), National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Although one would expect consistent National Wilderness Preservation System management across agency boundaries, there has existed little overarching coordination and few professional training opportunities. To address this need, and at the urging of Congress, the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center (Carhart Center) was established at the Forest Service's Nine Mile Ranger Station, Huson, MT, with the purpose of training wilderness managers and educating the public about wilderness.

The Carhart Center was named for one of this country's earliest wilderness advocates, a Forest Service landscape architect who, in 1919, successfully argued for the preservation of a scenic lake and its primeval environs as an alternative to planned recreational development.

By intention, the Carhart Center is not a destination training facility; rather, staff identifies training needs, designs curricula, and presents wilderness training to interagency audiences throughout the United States. The Center strives to take a balanced approach to wilderness management controversies and does not set national wilderness policy.

In: Watson, Alan E.; Aplet, Greg H.; Hendee, John C., comps. 2000. Personal, societal, and ecological values of wilderness: Sixth World Wilderness Congress proceedings on research, management, and allocation, volume II; 1998 October 24–29; Bangalore, India. Proc. RMRS-P-14. Ogden, UT: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station.

Gregory Kroll is the National Park Service Representative at the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, 32 Campus Dr., Missoula, MT 59812 U.S.A. e-mail: gkroll/wo_carhart@fs.fed.us

Mission

The mission of the Carhart Center is “to foster interagency excellence in wilderness stewardship by cultivating knowledgeable, skilled and capable wilderness managers and by improving public understanding of wilderness philosophy, values and processes.”

The Carhart Center's vision is to be a “national and international leader in the development and implementation of wilderness information, training and education programs.”

Administrative Structure

The Carhart Center was created in 1993 through an interagency agreement signed by the directors of each of the four wilderness-managing agencies (USFS, NPS, BLM, and USFWS). Oversight is provided by a Steering Committee comprising one member from each of the four agencies. The Steering Committee sets overall direction and selects annual priorities.

The Carhart Center staff consists of a director (who may be employed by any of the four agencies), one representative from each agency, and administrative or support staff. Each agency is responsible for the salary of its representative, and for one-quarter of the director's salary, support staff salary, and overhead.

Needs Assessment Survey

In order to most effectively use the Carhart Center's limited staff and funding, a survey was conducted in the winter of 1995-1996 to identify wilderness management issues and training and educational outreach needs. Surveys were sent to the 893 offices of the four agencies that manage the National Wilderness Preservation System. Two surveys were mailed to each office: one to the manager and one to the staff person most responsible for wilderness management. Sixty-four percent of the offices responded; 49 percent of the surveys were completed and returned.

Respondents were asked to identify their top three wilderness issues. The responses were first categorized into broad, general issues, and then into specific issues. “Recreation management” was the most important general issue for all agencies except the BLM. Additionally, “administration,” “special provisions,” and “illegal activities” ranked in the top five for all agencies.

“Overuse” and “prescribed natural fire” were the specific issues common to all agencies except the BLM. “Off-highway vehicle use” was the most important issue for the BLM and was common to every agency except the NPS.

Course Development

Annual course offerings are driven by the needs identified through a needs assessment survey. Course location priorities and timing are likewise based on the survey results. This responsiveness to the field ensures that the most is made of limited staff and funding.

Once the need for a course is identified, a Carhart Center staff member is selected to take the lead on following the course through, from initial planning to the final evaluation stage. In turn, course leaders appoint a course-development Steering Committee, comprised of at least one field member from each of the four agencies (and sometimes more), depending on needed expertise and workload. The interagency course Steering Committee is responsible for addressing all logistics associated with course development including location, agenda, speakers, transportation, meals, housing, and post-course evaluation. It has been found that small Steering Committees are more effective than large committees.

Presenters are chosen based on subject matter expertise, familiarity with regional and local issues and delivery skills, and can include Carhart Center staff or course Steering Committee members. It is requested that presenters submit an outline of their presentations in advance to avoid misunderstandings over intended content. Travel costs for presenters are underwritten and honoraria may be provided.

Written evaluations of each presenter and of the overall training session are completed by each course participant. These evaluations are carefully reviewed by the course Steering Committee, and future sessions are revised in direct response to recommendations made by course participants. This ensures that content is relevant to managers and that a high caliber is maintained.

These broad course development guidelines have evolved over time:

- Establish an interagency Steering Committee for each course.
- Establish clear course objectives based on needs identified by the field.
- Host courses at locations most convenient to the majority of the targeted audience.
- Use presenters having subject matter expertise, familiarity with issues, and professional delivery skills.
- Use case studies of actual wilderness management issues.
- Put course participants in direct contact with the wilderness resource when possible.
- Balance course attendees among agencies and include non-Federal participants.
- Revise future courses based on participant evaluations.

These courses have been offered by the Carhart Center, or are in the developmental stage:

- National and Regional Wilderness Stewardship
- Wilderness Visitor Use Management
- Wilderness Planning
- Wilderness Awareness
- Wilderness Lands Restoration
- National Park and Wilderness Fire Management
- Wilderness Interpretation and Education
- Wilderness and Land Ethics Curriculum/Leave No Trace
- Correspondence Courses (with the University of Montana)
- Agency-Specific Workshops (held at individual wilderness units)

Public Education

Hand-in-hand with the Carhart Center's mission of training wilderness managers is the goal of improving public understanding of wilderness philosophy, values, and processes. This has been approached through development of classroom curricula and other outreach products.

The Carhart Center has developed and distributed two different, comprehensive Wilderness and Land Ethic curricula—one targeting kindergarten through eighth grade students, and one designed for ninth through twelfth grade students. The curricula integrate wilderness concepts and values into an array of subject-matter topics, making it attractive and convenient for teachers to include wilderness in their lesson plans. The Carhart Center also offers courses that provide wilderness managers with the skills needed to present teachers' workshops locally to facilitate use of the curricula.

In concert with the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute and the University of Montana, the Carhart Center sponsors the Wilderness Information Network, the quintessential source of accurate and current wilderness information, available on the World Wide Web at www.wilderness.net. The Wilderness Information Network will eventually provide basic information on all wilderness units in the United States, texts of national wilderness legislation and policies, retrievable copies of Carhart Center and Leopold Institute publications, and wilderness news.

As demand is identified and resources become available, the Carhart Center strives to meet unfulfilled information needs. The Center is partnering in the development of an up-to-date map of all wilderness areas in the United States. It has compiled collections of state-of-the-art information, such as the "Fire Resource Tool Kit;" and it has produced publications, such as its "Wilderness Quote Book."

Applicability of the Carhart Model to Other Countries

The organization and role of the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center may have applicability to other countries. The Carhart model provides a number of benefits:

1. Highly efficient use of limited human and fiscal resources through the pooling of several agencies' personnel, funding, and efforts.
2. Increased level of participation because training is offered where demand is the highest.
3. Courses that are immediately relevant to field needs.
4. Continuous course improvement based on participant feedback.
5. Increased management efficiency that interagency networking provides.
6. Renewed enthusiasm and dedication to wilderness stewardship that trainees take back to their administrative sites after participating in training.

In a world where wilderness managers face increasingly complex and intractable pressures on the wildlands under their purview, the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center model may serve as a valuable component of an overall wildlands preservation strategy.