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Project POWER Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) received funding from the Environmental Protection Agency to create Project POWER: Protecting Our Wetlands with Educators and Regulators. Building on a model created by the New York Aquarium (a division of WCS), Project POWER was designed to train teams from around the country (referred to from hereon as wetlands leaders) to present wetlands workshops in their local area to reduce the frequency and magnitude of wetland violations by community residents. Each team consisted of one or two educators from a living institution (i.e., zoos, aquaria, nature centers) and one state regulator. A total of 13 teams comprised of 36 wetlands leaders were selected to participate. The New York Aquarium and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation facilitated the project.

As part of their participation in Project POWER, each team attended a two-day Leadership Seminar hosted at the New York Aquarium in March 2006. The Leadership Seminar provided each team the opportunity to review relevant wetlands and regulations content, experience the New York Aquarium's delivery model for their wetlands workshop, and begin an Action Plan for implementing a similar workshop in their local area. Team members also received a number of resources to help plan their workshops including books, PowerPoint slides, written lectures, and a video. Teams were expected to use the resources they received at the Leadership Seminar as they created and implemented their workshop.

Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), a research firm specializing in the evaluation of educational programs, materials, and services was contracted to conduct both a process and summative evaluation of Project POWER. The broad goal of GRG's evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the project in training wetlands leaders to implement workshops in their local communities. Specific objectives were to assess:

- the effectiveness of the Leadership Seminar,
- use of the materials provided to wetlands leaders as part of the Leadership Seminar, and
- the extent to which the project created new programs and partnerships around the country focused on wetlands education.

To accomplish these objectives, GRG conducted three Web-based surveys: a Pre-Program survey was conducted prior to the Leadership Seminar, a Post-Program Survey was conducted two to three months after the Leadership Seminar, and a Follow-Up Survey was conducted two weeks after each site hosted their POWER workshop.

KEY FINDINGS

Project POWER provided Partners with new experiences related to wetlands ecology and regulatory content. Most Educators and Regulators who participated in Project POWER had not previously been formally trained in wetlands ecology or regulatory content. Similarly, while some had presented

wetlands workshops in the past, those workshops did not balance content across these two areas.

The Leadership Seminar was a positive experience for POWER Partners.

Educators and Regulators provided positive feedback about their experience at the Leadership Seminar. In particular, they appreciated the way they were treated as professionals, the time devoted to networking, and the time spent working with their team to plan their wetlands workshop. The overall organization of the Leadership Seminar and the materials provided were also considered *very good*.

Action Plans, when used, were an important resource for POWER teams.

The idea of the Action Plan was introduced at the Leadership Seminar, and teams were expected to continue developing and using this resource throughout the project. Those who followed this model provided positive feedback at the conclusion of the project about the use of Action Plans. Those who did not continue to use this tool after returning from the Leadership Seminar provided lower ratings.

While wetlands leaders valued the materials they received as part of this project, the necessity of the books, videos, and DVD provided at the Leadership Seminar is unclear.

Two to three months after attending the Leadership Seminar, most wetlands leaders had reviewed a portion of each of the different resources provided, and they expected these resources to be generally to very helpful to them as they planned their workshops. While data were not collected to address the continued use of these resources in the planning phases, Follow-Up Survey responses indicated that few teams used any of these resources as part of their POWER workshop.

New wetlands workshops were implemented as a result of Project POWER.

Approximately one-third of the educational facilities hosted wetlands workshops for the first time as a result of Project POWER. For those sites, all aspects of the project were new additions to their programming. Importantly, all sites with existing wetlands workshops expanded on their current programming as a result of Project POWER. For example, a broader range of wetlands content was covered, regulations content was added, new recruiting methods were used, and new audiences were targeted.

Participation in this project has motivated Partners to continue working in similar areas.

All primary Educator Partners plan to continue offering wetlands workshops in the future, and most hope to continue working with their Regulator Partner. Primary Educator Partners also plan to continue using the materials they created as part of this project and to share POWER materials with others in their facility.

Project POWER was effective at strengthening relationships between educators, regulators, and their respective institutions.

Educators and Regulators worked collaboratively to both plan and implement their POWER workshops. In some cases, these relationships were new and created specifically for this project. In others, existing institutional relationships and/or relationships between team members were strengthened. Primary Educator Partners believed the project was *very to extremely effective* at strengthening these relationships.

Project POWER was less effective at helping Partners create connections at the local and/or state government level. While some POWER teams made efforts to reach out to and work with local and/or state government offices, many did not. Similarly, most did not view affecting policy as a goal for their participation in the project. Thus, not surprisingly, most primary Educator Partners did not believe the project had been effective at helping them strengthen those relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Project POWER was successful at strengthening relationships between Educators and Regulators across the country as they worked together to create new programming that featured wetlands ecology and regulations content. **GRG's primary recommendation is that the New York Aquarium use Project POWER as a model for other initiatives.** In particular, inviting teams of educators from different disciplines to share their expertise, hosting a Leadership Seminar, using teams of educators from around the country to increase awareness of a particular topic, and the overall level of support and monitoring provided to sites should be replicated in future projects. The Educational and Regulatory divisions of the EPA may also want to create a partnership within the Agency to encourage regulators to seek out and become involved with educational facilities. This internal partnership could increase awareness of the work being conducted within the different arms of the Agency and provide increased support for partnerships based on the Project POWER model.

The findings from this evaluation also provide valuable information that could be used to modify future programming. **GRG suggests that the New York Aquarium take wetlands leaders' feedback about the Leadership Seminar into consideration when planning future programs.** Wetlands leaders provided positive feedback about the Leadership Seminar, indicating that many of the characteristics of the Leadership Seminar should remain as is. However, wetlands leaders did suggest that future seminars include more time to work on Action Plans and approximately half requested that future seminar be extended into a three-day meeting. Wetlands leaders also provided positive feedback about the materials provided to them, but the extent to which certain materials were used is unclear. The New York Aquarium may want to reconsider the number and type of resources provided to Seminar attendees in the future.

Finally, GRG recommends that the New York Aquarium provide additional support to participants if a goal of future programming is to affect policy or work with government officials. Of the goals and relationships that were possible though Project POWER, these areas are those can be most improved. While working with government officials or influencing policy were not the primary goals of the current project, wetlands leaders were aware that these were still of interest to the project developers. If these goals become a more primary focus in future projects, the New York Aquarium will probably need to be more explicit about those goals and expected outcomes. They will also need to provide additional guidance and support to help Partners make connections and progress in these areas.