

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

8th Triennial National Wildlife & Fisheries
Extension Specialists Conference (1996)

Extension Wildlife & Fisheries Specialists
Conferences

June 1996

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY, STATE AGENCY, AND EXTENSION PARTNERSHIPS NEEDED FOR FORMAL CONTINUING EDUCATION OF WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS

Brian K. Miller

Purdue University, 1159 Forestry Building, West Lafayette, Indiana

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ewfsc8>



Part of the [Environmental Health and Protection Commons](#)

Miller, Brian K., "PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY, STATE AGENCY, AND EXTENSION PARTNERSHIPS NEEDED FOR FORMAL CONTINUING EDUCATION OF WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS" (1996). *8th Triennial National Wildlife & Fisheries Extension Specialists Conference (1996)*. 31.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ewfsc8/31>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension Wildlife & Fisheries Specialists Conferences at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in 8th Triennial National Wildlife & Fisheries Extension Specialists Conference (1996) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY, STATE AGENCY, AND EXTENSION PARTNERSHIPS NEEDED FOR FORMAL CONTINUING EDUCATION OF WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS

BRIAN K. MILLER, Purdue University, 1159 Forestry Building, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907-1159

INTRODUCTION

While professionals readily desire continuing education programs to sharpen and update their skills, distractions, demanding schedules, lack of employer support, and expense often create barriers for regular continuing education attendance. Many professions such as accountants, pharmacists, and lawyers have a formal certification criteria which requires post-graduate testing to obtain certification and then participation in continuing education to maintain certification. The prestige of becoming a CPA, a licensed engineer, or a member of the bar carries an assurance of a certain level of competence and often translates into higher salaries for those who have achieved it. Therefore, there is a motivation to obtain this certification and to obtain the continuing education requirements necessary to maintain it.

Unfortunately, the wildlife profession does not have this formalized structure. Certification can be obtained by merely proving successful completion of an approved array of courses. There is no accreditation of schools from where these courses are offered and no assurance of competence for those completing this coursework. In addition, once certification is obtained, there is no continuing education requirement to maintain certification. Besides creating very little incentive or prestige for certification, there is little incentive for individuals to seek and participate in formal continuing education activities.

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) is similar to the Wildlife Society in that they do not require post-graduate testing to obtain certification. However, they do require graduation from accredited programs, and experience is required in order for individuals to become certified. A continuing education requirement of 60 credit hours in 3 years is needed to maintain certification. Prior to their certification program, SAF required graduation from an accredited school to obtain full SAF membership. SAF also has a voluntary continuing forestry education and professional development recognition program (CFE program), which is similar to the Wildlife Society's Professional Development Program. Both programs are voluntary, and both societies issue certificates to recognize a required amount of continuing education credits within a specified period of time. The difference seems to be in the level of participation in the two programs. In Indiana, over 70% of active SAF members regularly attend in-state CFE programs and meet certificate requirements. Since 1993, 7 members have earned 11 CFE certificates. Only

three Indiana members of The Wildlife Society have participated in and obtained the Professional Development Certificate. The primary employer of foresters and wildlife biologists (Indiana DNR) does not offer a hiring or pay incentive for those participating in these programs. Therefore, the primary difference in participation rates appears to lie in the responsibility of the state chapter of the society in monitoring and recording an individual's progress towards this certificate.

The SAF CFE program is managed at the state society level by an SAF CFE contact. Primary responsibilities include: 1) evaluation and approval of continuing education activities held within the state, 2) thorough examination of all applications for CFE certificates from applicants in the state society, 3) forwarding of approved applications to the national office, 4) promotion of CFE programs and continuing education opportunities to foresters and employers, and 5) direct and continuing contact with the state education or continuing education committee.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP

Purdue University Department of Forestry and Natural Resources began a formal continuing education program with the Indiana Society of American Foresters in 1986. This partnership resulted in extension personnel in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources organizing and conducting four CFE continuing education programs per year. Advertisement and registration is conducted by the state Chapter of SAF. The chapter has a continuing education committee which polls its members and determines the next slate of programs to be offered. Extension personnel have responsibility and control of program quality and content. The SAF CFE contact determines CFE credit qualifications for each program and maintains all records.

The Indiana Chapter of The Wildlife Society did not have a parallel program for continuing education offerings. Initial attempts to establish a program in the late 1980s were unsuccessful due to lack of commitment by the key employer (IDNR) and restricted travel funds available to state employees. In 1993, a former president (Dean Zimmerman) of the Indiana Chapter of the Wildlife Society formed a continuing education committee for the state society. A partnership was developed between the Indiana Chapter of the Wildlife Society (ICTWS) and the Purdue Department of Forestry and Natural Resources

whereby the extension wildlife specialist (EWS) would be responsible for developing all educational programming (selecting and inviting speakers, selecting field tour locations, developing all handout materials, producing all program announcements, final programs, distributing all program publicity, printing all nametags, providing all AV equipment needed, and assisting with meeting logistical arrangements). ICTWS was responsible for selecting desired workshop topics, collecting registration fees, paying all bills associated with the workshops, and assisting with meeting logistical arrangements. An initial survey was distributed to all ICTWS members, which determined the demographics and willingness of members to participate in a formal continuing education program.

SURVEY RESULTS

A continuing education survey was distributed to approximately 90 professional wildlife biologists in Indiana at the Spring meeting of the Indiana Chapter of the Wildlife Society (ICTWS) 5-6 March 1992. The balance of the 120 members of ICTWS not able to attend the meeting were notified of the survey through the January ICTWS newsletter. Sixty (60) surveys were completed and returned.

The top four desired workshop topics identified in the survey (in priority order) were:

1. Comprehensive Wetland Workshop
2. Changing Agricultural Practices
3. Recent Changes in Wildlife Management Ideas
4. How to Positively Influence the Public

The demographic profile of respondents was as follows: Seventy-five percent are IDNR Division of Fish and Wildlife employees. About 1/3 (38%) are administrators, 60% hold bachelor's degrees, 28% have a master's degree, and 8% have Ph.D.s. Respondents averaged 13.7 years experience and have been out of school for an average of 14.5 years. Ninety percent are members of ICTWS, and 63% are members of the National Chapter of TWS. Seventy-eight percent are currently qualified to become certified or associate wildlife biologists or have obtained certification.

The two methods used most frequently by respondents to keep up-to-date in their profession in order of importance are scientific journals and professional and technical meetings. Conference proceedings, workshops, lectures, and seminars were of medium importance used by 43%-63% of respondents. The most important professional journals (in order) are JWM, Wildlife Society Bulletin, USFWS Research reports, and in-service publications and reports; journals were read an average of 3.5 hours on the job and 2 hours off the job per week.

Continuing education programs are strongly supported (avg. 4.75 on a 5.0 scale). However, respondents felt their employer considered continuing education programs of

medium importance (avg. 3.3 on a 5.0 scale); 52% did not know how many days per year they were permitted for continuing education activities. In spite of this, 100% said they would attend one workshop per year. Sixty-five percent would attend on their own time, and 63% would attend without per diem. The best time for a workshop is a weekday (73%) in the winter (63%); 43% would support registration fees of \$40-\$60, while 80% would support registration fees ranging between \$20-\$40.

Professional dedication and the commitment to personal improvement is obvious. However, the lack, or perceived lack, of employer support for continuing education and professional improvement is also apparent. It was clear that if ICTWS wished to initiate a regular continuing education program, clarification of the major employers' attitudes, level of support, and policies on this issue needed to be sought and publicized to the respective employees before the workshop series was initiated.

AGENCY PARTNERSHIP

Meetings were initiated between the Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) Administration, ICTWS Continuing Education Committee, and the Extension Wildlife Specialist. Survey results were presented, and potential alternatives for DFW support and endorsement of such a program were discussed. The DFW had a training officer who provided required training (e.g., Total Quality Management, blood-borne pathogen training, training on the American Disabilities Act, etc.) for division personnel. The division had a training budget which was separate from (and larger than) their travel budget for employees. Previously, all expenses for DFW employees to attend a ICTWS meeting or event were paid from travel funds. Due to funding limitations, employees were limited to one meeting per year and selected the ICTWS Spring meeting as their choice event. These meetings usually contained an educational program with invited speakers and a technical paper session from volunteer contributors. However, these events did not provide concentrated training on a selected subject. The DFW recognized that they needed to include training on critical wildlife-related topics to round out their training program but did not have the manpower to conduct such an effort. All parties recognized that a partnership between the DFW, ICTWS, and Purdue University would provide an ideal arrangement to suit everyone's needs.

DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

In order for the DFW to use training funds for workshop activities, they had to enter into a formal arrangement with one entity who would provide the training activity and were required to write one check for this activity. The ICTWS served as the organization formerly charged with providing the training. The

ICTWS then "subcontracted" with Purdue University to provide the educational component of the training sessions. The EWS worked closely with the ICTWS continuing education committee to design a workshop on a topic selected by the committee (with input from all members of ICTWS). Once the topic was selected and a general workshop outline developed, it was the responsibility of the EWS to invite speakers, design sessions and handout materials needed to conduct the workshop. The education committee and the EWS divided responsibilities for logistical arrangements. These two parties worked together to establish a registration fee to cover the cost of all meals, lodging, and workshop costs. However, in order to accomplish this, an estimate of attendance was needed. The EWS worked with the DFW training officer and provided a draft program for the training session fees and a ballpark estimate of the registration fee required. The training officer then polled all employees of the DFW to determine interest levels in this proposed workshop and provided a minimum attendance number to the EWS. This number was then used to calculate the final registration fee. A final workshop brochure was then printed and mailed to all ICTWS members and other appropriate mailing lists within the state. Any non-DFW employees were instructed to mail their registration fees directly to the ICTWS and were responsible for making their own lodging arrangements. All DFW employees registered for the workshop through their training officer. He provided a final list to the ICTWS, who then made lodging arrangements for all involved and had these rooms direct-billed to ICTWS at the conclusion of the workshop. Meals for all attendees were included in the registration price.

This arrangement allowed the DFW to enter into a turnkey contract with one organization to provide a complete training session for their employees. The ICTWS served as the agency that then subcontracted for all other needed services, (lodging, meals, and educational programming.) This also provided the ICTWS with an opportunity to provide regular continuing education training to the rest of its members and ensured a stable level of attendance on which to base registration fees and logistical arrangements. In addition, incentives were provided to the ICTWS to do a good job of publicity and quality assurance for the workshops. If attendance exceeded expected levels, excess funds could be collected. These funds were then placed in a Continuing Education Fund and used to conduct other educational activities conducted or sponsored by the ICTWS.

WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED

Initially the agreement between DFW, ICTWS, and Purdue University was to provide one formal continuing education program per year. It was agreed that if special needs arose or if interest increased, that additional workshops would be conducted. In 1993 and 1994 one workshop was conducted on topics selected by ICTWS membership on the initial survey (Table 1). In 1995, the selected workshop topic of "Increasing the Awareness and Knowledge of Natural Resource Issues with the Public, Media and Legislature" was selected by the membership at the 1995 spring membership meeting. Beginning in 1995 the ICTWS joined forces with ISAF and developed workshops that were included in both societies' formal continuing education series. This partnership ensured higher attendance, provided interaction between foresters and wildlife biologists, focused the attention of both disciplines on a common topic, introduced experts around the region on selected topics to these natural resource professionals, and focused both wildlife biologists and foresters on looking for ways to cooperatively manage for common resources. Primary responsibility for the workshops alternated between the two societies. Proceeds or losses for cooperative workshops were divided evenly. The cooperative arrangement with the ISAF is not permanent. The decision for cooperative workshops are topic driven and will change as different workshop topics are selected.

RECOGNITION AND INCENTIVES

While attendance in these workshops has been good, no formal recognition or incentives for continuing education participation are in place for the wildlife professionals in Indiana. While some argue that personal desire for excellence should be incentive enough to drive individuals to seek out and participate in continuing reeducation activities, no mechanism is in place to distinguish those who take the initiative to update their skills from those who don't. This is important when individuals are representing themselves to employers or prospective clients. While it exists in many other professions, it is absent in the wildlife profession.

In 1995, the ICTWS created a Certification and Continuing Education Credit (CCEC) committee. This committee was combined with the old certification committee. Discussions were then initiated with the main employer of wildlife professionals in Indiana (DFW). Potential incentives discussed included pay raises, preference for travel to meetings, or some form of formal recognition. While this definitely helps DFW employees, it does not apply to ICTWS members employed by other organizations. The CCEC committee is developing a survey to all ICTWS members to solicit ideas and opinions on how the chapter might structure continuing education

Table 1. Formal continuing education workshops conducted by the Indiana Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Year	Title	Sponsorship	Attendance
1993	Comprehensive Wetland Workshop	The Wildlife Society	130
1994	Changing Trends in Agriculture: Wildlife Implications and Opportunities	The Wildlife Society	55
1995	Impacts of Forest Management Practices on Neotropical Migrant Birds	Society of American Foresters The Wildlife Society	165
1995	Increasing the Awareness and Knowledge of Natural Resource Issues with the Public, Media and Legislature	The Wildlife Society Society of American Foresters	95
1996	Impacts of Forest and Wildlife Management Practices on Indiana Herptile Populations	Society of American Foresters The Wildlife Society	100
1996	Impacts of Forest and Wildlife Management Practices on Neotropical Migrant Bird and Herptile Populations: A Field Workshop	The Wildlife Society Society of American Foresters	50

recognition program to recognize those certified wildlife biologists who have participated in formal continuing education programs. The challenge will be to develop something that is meaningful, be recognized by employers and prospective clients.

Alternatives considered to date center around a system similar to that used by the Society of American Foresters where credit for workshops is determined by the state chapter and records of participation are maintained at the chapter level as well. Methods for granting credit for non-ICTWS workshops would also have to be put in place. A desire to keep continuing education credit criteria consistent with the national program has been expressed. The major undecided factors at this point center around how achievement of continuing education criteria will be recognized. A simple certificate or plaque does not carry the prestige or recognition required of employers or clients. Some form of title with a corresponding publicity campaign to employers and clients will probably be required.

SUMMARY

The formal partnership between the ICTWS, DFW, and Purdue University was necessary in order to establish a formal continuing education program for professional wildlife biologists in Indiana. This arrangement has provided benefits to all parties involved and ensures that a quality continuing education program is conducted with

minimal burdens placed on all parties. For this continuing education program to realize its fullest potential, a formal recognition program is needed which identifies Certified Wildlife Biologists who maintain an active continuing education program. The existing program implemented by the parent chapter of The Wildlife Society is not being utilized by the majority of state chapter society members. It is believed that assistance by state chapters in recording and granting credit (as conducted by SAF) may increase participation. The backbone for such a program is already in place in Indiana. However, no structure for increasing the prestige and importance of such an achievement is in place. Further efforts of the organizations involved in this partnership will be directed at accomplishing this last needed step.