

GSN Best Practice Competition 2009



Application form

Applicant

Organisation, country	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Sweden
Name, surname	Suzanne Kolare, Cecilia Persson, Annmari Lindquist
Headline of best practice initiative	Dialogue for nature conservation

Description of best practice initiative

Describe the basis of your best practice initiative (why, what, when, where; budget in EUR).

A great improvement has been achieved for the dialogue between authorities and stakeholders in nature conservation. Almost two thirds of the government officers who work with nature conservation and wildlife management have been trained in dialogue, improved local participation and conflict management in 1,5 years. An overwhelming majority of those who attended the basic training courses think that the long-awaited competence building programme has been very useful in communicating nature conservation and wildlife management issues.

Sooner or later, nature conservation agencies in all countries run into problems when trying to fulfil their task to conserve nature and get public acceptance for their work. Landowners, farmers, hunters, NGO:s, neighbours and other stakeholders have their ideas of how to make best use of nature and the environment -- and all ideas are not in line with the Rio-declaration for preservation and sustainable use.

It is vital to have good relations with stakeholders when we try to fulfil the goals for the Natura 2000-network, create national parks or manage wildlife in a sustainable way. The communications skills of government officers on all levels - national, regional and local - are essential in order to have good relations and deal with eventual conflicts.

Most of the officers have studied biology or have other nature science exams, but environmental communication is not a subject in those courses. Therefore the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Swedish EPA) has created a skills development program called Dialogue for nature conservation. The subtitle outlines the task "Skills development in dialogue, local participation and management, and conflict management within nature conservation and the management of natural resources".

The program is intended for Swedish EPA and the 21 county administrative boards and we estimate that around 600 people work with these issues on our authorities. The first 1,5 years some 370 people have attended one of the courses and another 50 two courses. We have had to increase the number of basic training courses because of the great interest. There is a great interest from other agencies that also deal with nature, i.e. agencies for fishery, culture, farming, forestry.

In order to create a pedagogical program we engaged the leading specialists in Sweden in environmental communication - Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Unit for Environmental Communication. Their teachers also run the courses.

There are 8 different courses

- a basic course,
- a course for directors,
- advanced courses in management and site protection, local development and nature conservation, wildlife management, large carnivore issues.
- advanced courses in communication: co-operation and learning, conflict management.

The courses are largely based on the experiences of the participants.

The courses run between 2 and 5 days. The cost is 128 000 Euro for one year.

What was the main objective of the initiative and what were the results obtained (please quantify)?

The main objective is to ensure good communication in nature conservation and wildlife management, and to increase local participation by giving the officers theoretical background and practical tools for conducting dialogue, creating democratic processes and acquiring basic knowledge about conflict management.

What type of media did you use (TV, radio, print, electronic)? Why this choice of media?

Mainly the grapevine. This is a personal encounter project. We informed about the program on our website and on meetings and seminars with regional authorities. The interest for the courses has increased sharply through "the grapevine" - after the first basic course the number of applicants rose sharply.

Who was the target group?

The real target groups for the initiative are stakeholders, i.e. everyone that we communicate with, for example people in other authorities, landowners, farmers and other stakeholders, NGO:s. The primary target group for the courses are government employees on national and regional level.

What were the main messages?

Modern nature conservation concerns both people and nature. Dialogue is a prerequisite for nature conservation agencies to succeed in conservation and sustainable use of nature. Local participation is vital in regional landscape planning and the ecosystem approach, so many stakeholders are involved and there is no other way to success.

Who were the partners? Did you involve other institutions/ministries/agencies/NGOs?

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Unit for Environmental Communication

Who financed the activities, amount of finances?

Swedish EPA through our budget for biological diversity finance the courses. The cost is estimated to 128 000 Euro per year in 2008 and 2009. The Swedish EPA and County Administrative Boards pay costs for travel, food and lodging for the participants.

Did you experience any specific difficulties during the action that could be learned from?

There is a linguistic issue in creating courses in environmental communication for nature scientists. They are not trained in the vocabulary of social science, so we were afraid that the biologists would not be interested in the courses if we used too many communication terms. We took great care in editing the program in order to get acceptance and still not lose the message.

We discussed a lot about how long the courses should be, what would be most cost-effective. We did not want to compete with university classes on environmental communication, and we did want the courses to be based on the personal experience of the participants. Therefore we decided on short courses with homework and possibilities to get support from the teachers after the courses.

Did you receive any feedback after your activities? Did you carry out an evaluation of the results and if yes, what was the outcome?

We have just started an evaluation of the programme so far and have engaged a consultant that will report in October 2009. We have also gathered opinions from the participants in all the 20 courses that we have run so far. The result is overwhelmingly positive for the basic training courses, the course for directors and the conflict management courses.

Is any follow-up or duplication of this experience foreseen?

The evaluation will show the interest for new courses the coming years. We expect that Finland will start similar training courses, they were very impressed after attending both the basic training course and the wildlife management courses.

Why do you consider that your proposal should be selected as the best practice initiative of the year?

We must all develop our communication skills in order to get support for nature conservation, Natura 2000 and wildlife management. This program broadens the concept of information to active environmental communication and more democratic processes that will give room for local participation in modern nature conservation and wildlife management. It will increase the possibilities to work with and gain support for nature conservation and wildlife management.

Please feel free to attach any printed material, photos etc.
Send your application to the Secretariat by 10 June 2009.