



Desert Southwest
Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Strategic Plan
2001-2005

Mission Statement

The Desert Southwest Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (DSCESU) executes and provides collaborative research, education, and technical assistance addressing desert ecosystem resource issues at local, regional, national, and international levels. The DSCESU partnership establishes interdisciplinary programs that involve natural resources, cultural resources, and social sciences information, with emphasis on involving communities and under-represented groups.

Introduction

The federal agencies serving as stewards of much of our nation's desert ecosystems share many of the same concerns and face many of the same challenges. The DSCESU provides a forum for dialogue and a framework for cooperation among federal agencies and institutional partners within which common issues/problems can be addressed. It provides a unique opportunity to join forces and address these challenges in a spirit, and an atmosphere, of fiscal restraint by minimizing duplication of effort. Furthermore, the fluidity of these partnerships facilitates ecoregional planning by transcending geographical, institutional and political boundaries to achieve unique collaborations and timely information exchange.

To effectively address the issues and concerns facing partner institutions and federal agencies, the DSCESU must first address the challenges inherent in the start-up of such a pioneering venture. The planning process focused on identifying tangible products/services, which the DSCESU is to provide, and the benefits to be realized by the recipients of these products/services. The DSCESU Executive Committee then worked backwards to determine what types of processes, and related inputs, are needed to achieve the desired results. The planning process was then taken one step further by focusing efforts on action planning, which involved specifying strategies and activities required to achieve our strategic goals. Rather than specification of an array of research topic possibilities inherent within the Desert Southwest biogeographic region, in this, the first organizational strategic plan of the DSCESU, attention has centered on the issues and opportunities facing establishment of the DSCESU as a cohesive, effective organization. Care has been taken to ensure that each of the strategic goals delineated in this plan are specific, measurable, attainable and challenging, and that each goal includes a realistic timeframe for its achievement.

Organizational Description

Established by a cooperative and joint venture agreement dated October 6, 2000, the DSCESU is a consortium founded by five federal agencies, five universities and two non-governmental organizations. It is part of a nationwide network of biogeographically

based CESUs dedicated to research, technical assistance and education in support of resource management efforts. The Desert Southwest biogeographic region comprises portions of five states (Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico and Texas) and spans three deserts (the Mojave, Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts). Desert ecosystem resource issues are addressed at the local, regional, national and international levels, with emphasis on lands located within the Desert Southwest Region.

Members List

Department of Defense
U.S. Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Geological Survey
U.S. National Park Service

University of Arizona (Host University)
Howard University
New Mexico State University
Southwest Texas State University
University of California-Riverside

Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum
Sonoran Institute

Guiding Principles

1. Research and educational projects are undertaken with the primary purpose of enhancing the knowledge base upon which resource management decisions are made.
2. All activities such as projects, workshops, and seminars are collaborative.
3. Collaboration facilitates planning and action on an ecoregional scale.
4. Cooperation and trust among local, state, tribal, federal, community and research organizations are built upon honorable exchanges in the process of working toward common objectives.
5. Activities bridge social, physical and biological sciences to provide for well-informed stewardship of both cultural and natural resources.
6. Inclusion of minority students in research, educational, and technical assistance projects will be emphasized.
7. As a member of a national network of CESUs, the DSCESU attempts to support the National Council (vision, goals and objectives), and complement our peers in the CESU community.

Goals

I. RESEARCH GOALS

- A.** Provide opportunities to extend the reach, value and impact of research knowledge.
1. Establish and maintain a database of completed and in-progress research projects to provide for sharing of research findings and encourage development of new collaborative ventures. [Host University]
 2. Develop research projects that extend beyond the geographic limits of individual federal land holdings to provide a more ecosystem-based approach and promote understanding of desert ecosystems on a regional level. [Federal partners]
 3. Solicit input, then compile, maintain and disseminate a record of projected research needs to support research planning and coordination: a) within and across organizational structures, and b) beyond political boundaries. [Host University]
- B.** Facilitate multi-institutional and interdisciplinary research projects. Wherever possible, research is conducted from a multi-disciplined and holistic perspective.
1. Develop process for addition of new members in order to enhance capability for developing opportunistic research projects. [Executive Committee (ExComm)]
 2. Enhance the DSCESU listserv to effectively reach across disciplinary lines of academic partner institutions in order to address both cultural and natural resources research needs, as a tool for publicizing requests for research proposals. [Host University]
 3. Funding entities shall establish and communicate to the DSCESU prerequisite proposal submittal and funding procedures (operational and administrative framework). [ExComm]

II. EDUCATIONAL GOALS

- A.** Contribute to understanding of complex land and resource management issues and serve to inform the general public, individual stakeholders and policy makers by presenting objective research findings based on sound scientific inquiry into issues affecting desert ecosystems.
1. Facilitate public access to research findings as a means of providing public education regarding resource management issues. [ExComm]
 2. Assemble and present for ExComm consideration a list of potential collaborative activities for workshops, conferences and trainings oriented toward concerns of land and program managers. [Managers Committee (MgrComm)]
 3. Demonstrate through research or technical assistance projects how social science influences conservation decision-making. [Federal partners]
- B.** Develop a pool of qualified candidates that will better and more equitably reflect the changing demographic of America's workforce.
1. Develop mechanisms to actively recruit, train and retain minority students in research, technical assistance and educational projects in the desert southwest. [ExComm]

III. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GOALS

A. Provide technical assistance to resource managers and other landowners to improve the stewardship of desert ecosystems.

1. Land and resource managers and scientists will be provided a centralized contact at each partner institution. This contact will respond to queries regarding requests for technical assistance by providing a listing of resources within their respective organization. Such resources may include, but are not limited to, expert databases and listservs. [Partner institutions]

IV. INFORMATION GOALS

A. Demonstrate and communicate to potential cooperators within our membership, to political leaders at local, regional, state and national levels, and to the public the value of the CESU model in general, and the DSCESU specifically.

1. Provide support to member organizations and National Council to facilitate tracking and reporting of results, cost savings, etc. attained by partnering. [Partner institutions and Host University]

2. Develop a marketing plan for the DSCESU program targeting member agency field units/installations and partner institutions. [MgrComm and ExComm]

3. Initiate media and public relations program to include quarterly news releases to regional, federal and state entities. [Host University and MgrComm]

B. Ensure that the DSCESU becomes a major clearinghouse for technical assistance to resource managers in the desert southwest.

1. The DSCESU website provides information transfer for projects. [Host University]

2. Provide Host University with list of prioritized, multi-disciplinary research, technical assistance, and education needs for federal lands in the desert southwest. [Federal partners]

C. Develop evaluation criteria, and related implementation plan for knowledge gained by program evaluation, to ensure preparedness of the DSCESU for the five-year performance review, which is to be conducted by the CESU National Council at the end of the term of the DSCESU Joint Venture and Cooperative Agreement in 2005.

1. Develop specific criteria, both quantitative and qualitative, based on 27-element matrix (x axis= research, education and technical assistance; y axis = strategic, tactical and opportunistic; z axis = natural resources, cultural resources and social sciences). [MgrComm]

2. Facilitate a demonstration project(s) that exemplifies the CESU ecosystem and collaborative approach to research, education and technical assistance. [ExComm]

Appendix

The Planning Process

Development of a final strategic plan involved three distinct phases, each resulting in a document: 1) the Initial Draft Strategic Plan, 2) the Draft Strategic Plan, and 3) the Strategic Plan, 2001-2005, respectively. This final product, the Draft Strategic Plan, 2001-2005, has been produced at the end of our first year of operation. It addresses strategic planning through the remaining life (four years) of the five-year cooperative and joint venture agreement, which is dated October 6, 2000, and remains in force through October 6, 2005.

The Executive Committee convened organizational meetings December 11-12, 2001 in Tucson, Arizona and April 10-11, 2001 in Irvine, California, and began the strategic planning process by defining the organization's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. An exhaustive list of potential strategic goals was developed.

Larry Norris (NPS) agreed to head up production of the first draft of a strategic plan, and was supported in this effort by the DSCESU Program Coordinator. The Executive Committee began review of portions of the Initial Draft Strategic Plan via a web conference, which commenced on September 13, 2001. In this way, an opportunity to make additional contributions and comments to hone the definition of our organization's strategic direction was afforded to all of our partners' designated representatives (located across the country, from California to the District of Columbia). This Initial Draft Strategic Plan was introduced at the Managers Committee Meeting and discussed at length at the Executive Committee Meeting, held in Las Cruces, NM, on October 17-18, 2001 and October 18-19, 2001, respectively. The Program Coordinator incorporated comments from these meetings to generate the Draft Strategic Plan, which was presented to the Executive Committee via web conference. Comments made via web conference by December 20, 2001, contributed to production of the DSCESU Strategic Plan for 2001-2005, which was presented at the April 25-26, 2002 Executive Committee Meeting held in San Marcos, TX. After incorporation of comments made at that meeting, and an additional 30-day post-meeting web discussion, the DSCESU Strategic Plan 2001-2005 was finalized.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Plan

On a monthly basis, the DSCESU ExComm and the DSCESU MgrComm will review progress toward attainment of goals via their respective web conferences.

Communication of Plan

The DSCESU Program Coordinator will provide each Executive Committee member with a copy of the Strategic Plan, 2001-2005 and this appendix. The Executive Committee member from each of the partner academic institutions and non-governmental organizations will in turn distribute the Strategic Plan, or a summary of its highlights, throughout their organizations to potential principal investigators, experts, etc. Federal partners will likewise inform their respective resource managers who work within the Desert Southwest biogeographic region. The Strategic Plan, 2001-2005, and selected appendices, will be posted on the DSCESU web site and submitted to the CESU Coordinating Council for posting on the CESU National Network's web site.