

Abstract and Final Report
Connecting Our Land and Cultures Conference
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ABSTRACT

The “Connecting Our Land and Cultures: Resource Education on the Colorado Plateau” conference was designed to provide professional development for resource educators on the Colorado Plateau. The conference was scheduled to be held in July 2000 but was cancelled because the minimum number of participants was not met. Efforts to reschedule the conference were not successful. However, the secondary results of planning the conference strengthened resource education networks. As an alternative to the conference, materials, ideas, and products with the same components as the conference theme continue to be shared via alternative media.

FINAL REPORT

In 1999, an interagency/partner committee began planning for “Connecting Our Land And Cultures: Resource Education On The Colorado Plateau,” an interactive conference designed specifically for the professional development of resource educators on the Colorado Plateau. The conference was to be hosted by the National Park Service, Northern Arizona University, and Peaks, Plateaus, and Canyons Association. The conference was intended for resource educators from any land management agency, private sector organization, or educational facility with ties to the Colorado Plateau. It was based on the premise that resource educators on the Colorado Plateau share a common geography of place, diversity of cultures, and range of resource management issues, all of which can lead to strategies for sharing the significance of this place and its peoples through educational programs. The conference was designed to be interactive, with working sessions and an Open Space Technology forum that would provide opportunities for participant input, real learning, and action.

The goals of the conferences were to:

- ❖ ENHANCE understanding, development, and implementation of effective K-12 curriculum-based resource education programs on the natural and cultural resources of the Colorado Plateau
- ❖ CREATE a collaborative environment for future working relationships among individuals interested in resource education
- ❖ ENCOURAGE participants to share ideas, products, and opportunities already in use by individual parks and other land managing agencies and organizations in the areas of K-12 educational curriculum and program development
- ❖ IDENTIFY needs, issues, and options for public education and outreach in resource education
- ❖ PRODUCE participant-generated proceedings and action plans

CONFERENCE RESULTS

The conference was scheduled for July 9-14, 2000, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Although the committee received praise for the concept and many expressed interest in attending, registration did not meet the required minimum number of participants and we were forced to cancel in May 2000. The

committee surmised that the lack of registrations to attend this 5-day conference was due to numerous factors including an unpredictable fire season and inadequate numbers of agency personnel. The committee entertained idea of second attempt, under auspices of some sponsoring education organization. However, more obstacles such as federal funding shortfalls, staff shortages, and 9/11, precluded this from happening.

We believe it would have been the first conference of its kind, in that it was 1) designed specifically for all resource educators of a particular geographic area and 2) provided for participant input into the conference agenda while it was in progress. By focusing on common natural and cultural resources and issues, participants would have discovered new educational approaches which provide a broader perspective and/or new broader context for curriculum-based programs. In addition, the Open Space Technology format would have provided a means for individual participants to introduce and discuss issues they considered important and timely.

Planned events included:

- Working sessions addressing topics such as educational standards, program development, and natural and cultural resource education.
- A field trip session that models effective educational strategies and experiences.
- A K-12 Education Curriculum and Program Showcase providing an opportunity to share individual programs and products.
- An Open Space Technology forum allowing participants to identify, discuss, and develop collaborative action plans on issues, concerns, or ideas they identify as important and timely.
- An evening barbecue hosted by Friends of Red Rock Canyon bringing participants together in a social, relaxed setting.

Although the conference was unsuccessful, the efforts to create the conference resulted in a positive outcome. We were able to develop contacts, potential presenters and participants all interested in resource education of the Colorado Plateau. Through this interaction, the REN (Resource Education Network) has expanded and has increased collaboration among members and the community. REN is a voluntary organization established to promote and encourage communication and cooperation among individuals, organizations, and agencies to improve and expand resource education in Northern Arizona.

As an alternative to conference format, we are sharing our resources and products at already established venues. To facilitate this and to close out the project, equipment has been purchased required to promote professional development with messages similar to the conference via alternative media, such as the following:

- interpretive training
- on- and off-site presentations to interagency audiences and other partners
- interpretive programs for educational groups and the general public
- professional development to local/regional educators
- presentations to agency staff, educators, other partners, and the general public