

# Combining Consensus and Environmental Analysis

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In the current public rangelands debates, only those who seek nonuse, or status quo management, succeed by gridlock. Well-meaning laws and policies have greatly increased the cost of rangeland management. The increased time needed for paperwork, decreases the time left for field work. The Modoc Washoe Experimental Stewardship Program has struggled with these problems through fourteen years of experimentation.

A combination of substance, process, and interpersonal relationships becomes the basis for land management. With this paper I offer a few suggestions that may avoid gridlock. Some of them I learned from active participation in the Modoc Washoe Experimental Stewardship Program. Some were learned by us after spending too long making certain allotment management plans. The article entitled *Viewpoint: Integrating CRM (Coordinated Resource Management) and NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Processes* (Swanson 1994) presents many of these ideas in more detail. Both CRM and NEPA processes seek public involvement and consider a wide array of ideas or alternatives. Both processes seek an interdisciplinary resolution that best balances diverse environmental effects with human needs. Figure 1 shows the flow chart for an integration of these processes. The strengths of each process lead to better decisions and land resource management. The integrated process offsets some weaknesses of each individual process.

Land management decisions or actions with established objectives and analyses may not require the full process. For example, a rancher and range conservationist could use guidance from established plans and monitoring information to adjust management actions using standard range management tools. They would record agreements in an annual operating plan or a set of preseason notes. For an area with no conflicts, their agreement could become an allotment management plan.

Land management in other areas generates important questions, conflicts, or opportunities. Public involvement for both CRM and NEPA requires substantial volunteer effort. One should ask the public to become directly involved only when opportunities to adjust management become substantial. At this stage, it is important to ask for and accept help from all who are willing to develop a solution.

The current emphasis on ecosystem management suggests new boundaries for management plans. Many allotment boundaries look as much like historical artifacts as

homesteaders' cabins. However, some ecosystems or watersheds cover too large an area for site specific land management plans. Ecosystems nest and overlap. Furthermore, most management decisions concern land units defined by one or more overriding issue. Resource conflicts, or opportunities for improved management, create the need for a new plan. Therefore, identifying the most appropriate area for planning comes from studying the issues. When feasible, planning areas should usually include: 1. the whole area grazed by herds of important large herbivores (wild and domestic), 2. whole watersheds, and 3. the entire habitat of threatened, endangered or sensitive species. Defining the planning area predetermines who should be involved and the information needed for planning.

Interdisciplinary coordination has become the normal process. Achieving the desired goal starts with analyzing the management situation using all pertinent information (Swanson 1994). However, there is an art to selecting and packaging the most useful information. When agencies place a high priority on management of specific lands, they may assign staff to an interdisciplinary team. If the agencies become over extended, they must rely more on outside help. An agency may rely on the public for analysis of the management situation. However, agency or contractor-analysis of selected issues must balance otherwise slanted reports.

Along with interdisciplinary coordination, public involvement has become a standard operating principle. However, different people involve themselves in different ways. Some are happy to, comment, or review a document. The NEPA scoping and review processes satisfy these desires. Others, especially those most directly affected or knowledgeable want to help craft the plan. Coordinated Resource Management capitalizes on this.

Collaborative planning builds on the premise that teaching and learning are principal activities of land managers and involved citizens. The Modoc Washoe Experimental Stewardship Program emphasizes planning by small groups of technicians, land owners, and advocates who both know and care about specific landscapes. We stress the inclusion of all interests and recruit representatives of key interests. We use CRM with its emphasis on multiple-use objectives and mutually acceptable management practices at the local level. Consensus is a standard operating procedure.

We have found that CRM teams use good information and consensus to create and carry out mutually beneficial management. However, we have learned that these teams also need guidance. At the start, the lead agency and oth-

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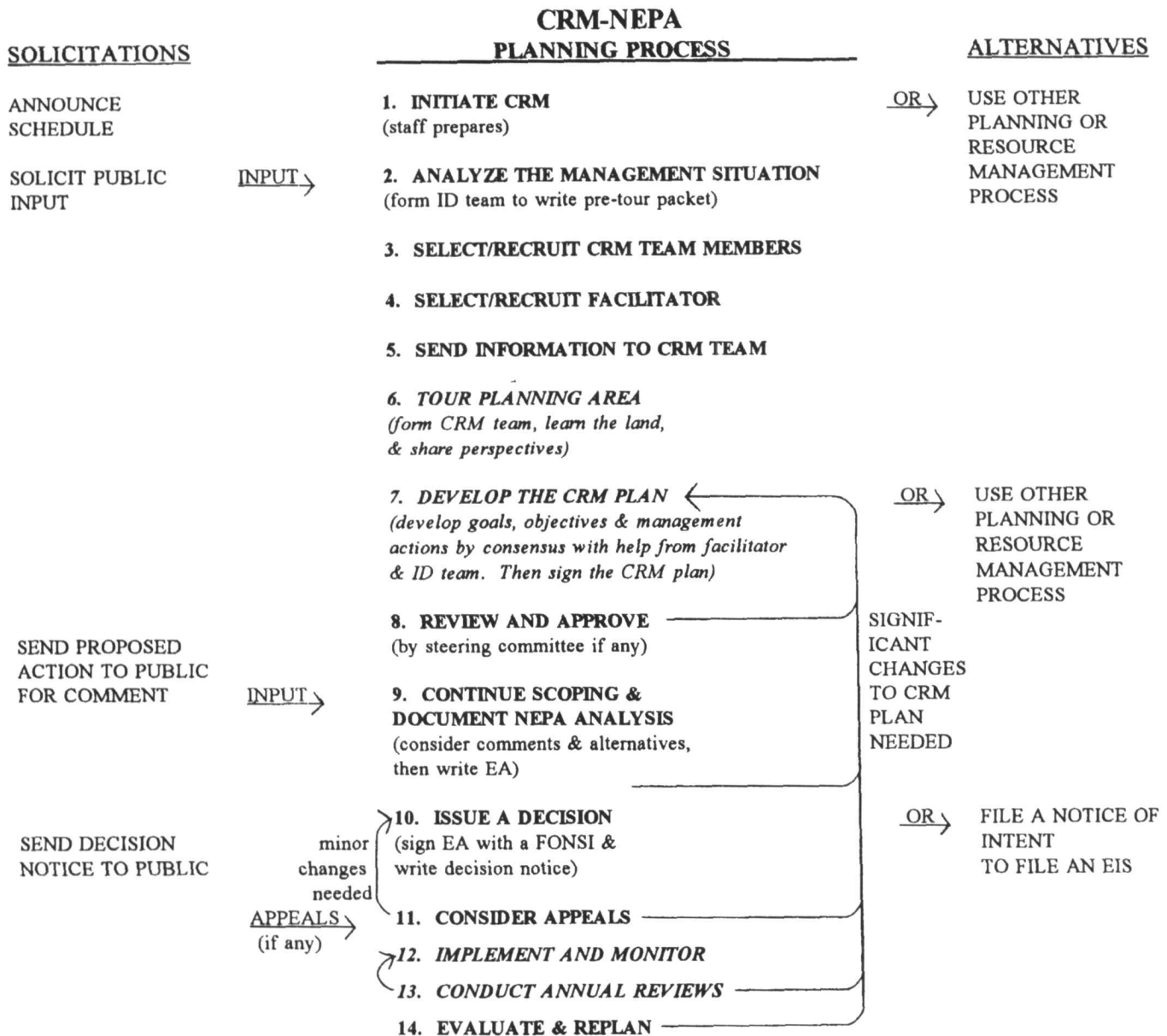


Fig. 1. Flow chart showing an integration of CRM and NEPA-mandated environmental analysis and documentation. The CRM team does the process steps in *italics*. The center column lists the principle steps in the process.

ers need to declare what technical expertise and data they can provide. They should also clarify important legal, policy, staff, funding or time constraints. A team also needs a skilled facilitator. Trained facilitators have learned much from experiences in alternative dispute resolution and principled negotiation.

Before carrying out most consensus decisions involving a federal agency, NEPA requires an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS). This NEPA analysis, which is normally agency centered, requires interdisciplinary teamwork. Thorough analysis of alternatives may uncover hidden costs or missed opportunities. The agency's final decision by the responsible official comes after environmental analysis.

Changing direction after a previous agreement creates communication challenges. Agency representatives should have made it clear to CRM participants, that a preliminary consensus would describe a viable proposed action that must become analyzed through the NEPA process. If environmental analysis discovers a problem with a proposed action, the responsible official should reform the CRM team. Then, he or she can clearly discuss public and agency interests. Together, they use the new information to revise their consensus if needed. The responsible official documents pertinent elements of the consensus in a decision notice.

In selected situations, environmental assessments become almost routine. They simply produce a written

record of issues considered. Volunteers or a private enterprise can prepare any NEPA document. Writing NEPA documents requires a good fit between the complexity of the issues and the knowledge and skills of the writer (s). Shoddy, too-long, or incomplete assessments or impact statements waste time.

Following the final decisions notices, consensus groups help apply on-the-ground actions. Many take pride in a management job well done and a plan that works. They feel ownership.

For the team of land managers, monitoring provides the information necessary to assess management effectiveness, and to adjust or fix plans that need improvement. Management is a continual process of adjusting actions based on information about past management effects. Rangeland managers who are not monitoring are not managing.

However, many rangeland managers worry about the difficult task of gathering long lists of monitoring information. Good managers call only for needed information, dedicate

time for monitoring, and share the task. When monitoring points out the need for adjustment, all key people play a roll. The CRM group should often reform to review information and adjust management.

Natural resource management faces a big problem. The court system or unnecessary paperwork can prevent optimum management. People who feel they have not been respected can eliminate the opportunity for enlightened management with costly appeals and litigation. However, people respected for their knowledge and point of view often want to help create or support the solution. Resource management, with the communication necessary for interpersonal respect, sustains the ecosystem and economy.

#### **Literature Cited:**

- Swanson, Sherman. 1994.** Viewpoint: Integrating CRM (Coordinated Resource Management) and NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) processes. *J. Range Manage.* 47(2):100-106.