

Sustainability for State Park/Public Lands Conference Call ***Implementation of the Green Parks Environmental Toolkit***

Call in details: October 31st at 3:00 p.m. ET (2:00 p.m. CT, 1:00 p.m. MT, noon PT).

Attendees: Elizabeth Bird and Thatcher Young

Agenda:

1. Thatcher Young will describe the process and lessons learned so far in the Georgia program to assist parks in developing Environmental Management Systems, making use of the Green Parks Environmental Toolkit.

Thatcher Young, P2 Advisor for the Pollution Prevention Assistance Division (P²AD) of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, presented to conference call attendees the work he has been doing with Georgia parks, using the Green Parks Environmental Toolkit published by the Peaks to Prairies Pollution Prevention Information Center. Thatcher made a point at the beginning of acknowledging and thanking Marie Zanowick of Region 8 EPA who recommended the Toolkit to him. When his agency agreed to enter into a partnership with Georgia parks, he found great value in having a parks-specific EMS (Environmental Management Systems) tool. It saved him a huge amount of time and energy not to have to take another EMS guide and make it fit for parks.

Thatcher sees specific value in the way the Toolkit divides up environmental aspects and concerns for parks operations, and has already heard from park managers how valuable that is. They like being able to share one section with their ranger staff, another with their housekeeping manager, etc., so no one feels the burden of having to do it all. Another benefit of the Toolkit is that it saves the EMS team the time and resources required to identify the aspects and impacts within a park operation. Thatcher sees this as the biggest challenge for an EMS, and most of it is already there in the Toolkit. The Toolkit also is on target by building on a park's current policies and procedures. An example Thatcher gave is in the area of green chemical use: the Toolkit specifies that the user should look at the park's chemical use policy, and then provides a list of substitute chemicals for common uses (e.g. housekeeping and maintenance). That makes it easy for a park to make the switch. The Toolkit also gives an example of a policy if the park doesn't have one already. So far the parks that have engaged the Toolkit have found the recommendations fit well with their existing policies and procedures. Thatcher also liked that the Toolkit has a lot of great tip sheets and worksheets and examples, finding them really helpful.

In his project, Thatcher is working with seven state parks that have lodges (the shorthand is "lodge parks"), and one that doesn't. The latter park is currently evaluating the Toolkit for possible use. It is quite short-handed (only two full-time staff – the park manager and the assistant manager), and may not have the resources to build and follow through with an EMS infrastructure. A ninth park is currently training an assistant manager, and will get on board with the project next spring. Thatcher has also introduced the Toolkit to one park concessionaire. This concessionaire is part of a larger corporation, including private resort properties, that has its own policies and procedures. The park concession manager too is evaluating use of the Toolkit – he has to get corporate leadership on board before the individual park manager can engage with the P²AD team.

On September 15 P²AD held a kickoff workshop with the managers (and in some cases their teams) of the seven participating “lodge parks.” Thatcher’s PowerPoint presentation with which he introduced the Toolkit is now available on-line at the Green Parks web page that offers the Toolkit (<http://www.peakstoprairies.org/library/greenparks.cfm>). Each workshop participant received a copy of the Toolkit. Thatcher led them through two exercises: creating a roster for their park’s green team; and drafting an environmental policy. Each park team or manager returned to their park with a plan to meet with their team, and finalize the environmental policy.

The parks managers responded very well to the Toolkit and the workshop. Some expressed excitement and enthusiasm (“Wow, we’ve been looking for this for a long time”), viewing the Toolkit as a terrific resource. Some had tried greening initiatives in years past but had gotten frustrated, not able to get the initiative off the ground beyond some minor steps. They saw the Toolkit as a major step forward. The Toolkit also helped some understand steps that had happened previous to their tenure, e.g., the installation of single soap and shampoo dispensers, and low-flow water fixtures. Thatcher has found it is not uncommon for parks rangers and managers to not be fully aware of environmental conservation measures related to parks operations, even though they’re dedicated to conservation of the park’s natural environment. They may not have been attuned to this kind of “systems thinking.” In any case, the workshop helped them to coalesce actions they already were engaged in or thinking about, and put those into a systems framework. Participants also had concerns, of course, about the level of resources they would need for full implementation. Thatcher’s team will be examining throughout the project what it does require, and barriers to Toolkit implementation (most parks in Georgia are running on a skeleton staff), and will document their findings for others interested in undertaking similar projects.

The next step for each of the participating “lodge parks” is to receive assistance from the “Georgia Environmental Partnership,” a team made up of P²AD, a University of Georgia Engineering EMS specialist, and the member of Georgia Tech’s Engineering Outreach Program. Over the next 10-14 months, this team will visit each of the parks and conduct an environmental assessment to identify the park’s gaps in effective environmental management of its operations. The team is creating a protocol based on the Toolkit to ensure thoroughness. In each case, two park personnel will join in the assessment team’s process. To the extent applicable, the team will meet with each of the managers who oversee each park operation, and these managers will have their portion of the Toolkit ahead of the meetings. Four of the parks have already requested to schedule the gap assessment. That procedure will initiate the hands-on implementation of the Toolkit for each park. The team will provide a baseline of each park’s water use, energy use, solid waste generated, and fuel use and focus further assistance according to each assessment. The baseline will allow the parks to measure what they’re saving – and this should help in addressing budget constraints other parks face in implementation.

Thatcher sees four keys to the success of any “green parks” program that involves the intervention of an outside group:

- ❖ Top-level support (state and regional management);
- ❖ The right tool (like the Toolkit – specific to park operations);
- ❖ Sensitivity to staffing and resource constraints that parks are dealing with, including a focus on augmenting and improving existing policies and procedures whenever possible; and

- ❖ Examples. P²AD will develop these as a matter of practice as they move forward. In addition, direct experience may yield some areas in which the Toolkit needs to be customized for Georgia parks-specific issues, to make it more of a living document.

Regarding the first key, the regional manager who supervises all the participating parks is very supportive of this initiative. He was instrumental in recruiting P²AD to get involved in helping the parks with environmental management planning and implementation. Further, the Parks Operations Director at the state level (the regional manager's boss) is extremely supportive; he even attended the introductory workshop. He wants to make the Toolkit and the program with P²AD's support available to all the parks in Georgia. He's mindful of wanting to figure out what kinds of state resources need to be directed to continue the work. Georgia state government has a progressive culture, with the most LEED certified buildings on state property of any state in the U.S. It also has eight certified structures in state parks, including the only LEED Platinum building (out of 8 total) owned by state government.

2. Future conference calls.

The proposal on the floor is for participants to take turns organizing and convening the calls. This does not require any expenditure of funds, as www.freeconferencecall.com is available as a resource for setting up calls for free (participants incur their own long-distance charges).

Prospective topics for future calls include:

- ❖ Templates or examples for "greening" the management of water-based recreation areas, specifically state parks.
- ❖ Strategies for overcoming resource shortages (people or money) for "greening" of parks operations. (Some ideas include having pre-packaged information for grant applications, or public/private partnerships.)
- ❖ Social marketing as a strategy for promoting green parks implementation.
- ❖ Your suggestion here!

3. Listserv: So far, the following individuals have signed up. The question is whether everyone else receiving these call minutes wants to be left off the list for future conference call notices and minutes. For now, we're not yet using the Listserv to allow for an extended "sign-up" period!

Please let us know!

Listsर्व participants to date:

- Elizabeth Bird (MT)
- Sue Dalbey (MT)
- Marcia Deegler (MA)
- Karen Edlin (MI)
- David Goggins (MO)
- Doug Habermann (MT)
- Billie-Gwen Russell (WA)
- Thatcher Young (GA)