

# Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program

## The University of Montana

### Alumni Reflections as of Summer 2017

“The NRCR Program was the single most impactful element of my graduate studies. It formed a bridge between the conceptual world of academia and the applied world beyond, allowing me to engage in the messy and gratifying work of building relationships and solving problems. The knowledge and skills I gained in the program are proving indispensable in work I do now as the coordinator of a multi-stakeholder roundtable for a large, transboundary landscape. I know of no other opportunity to gain such insight into the world of conflict resolution, collaborative processes, and community-based solutions to natural resource issues. Truly a unique opportunity to dig into the most exciting and innovative elements of conservation today.” *Peter Gurche, Coordinator, Roundtable on the Crown of the Continent – 2017 graduate*

“The NRCR Program helped to better inform and compliment my career in journalism. It taught me to be a neutral party when in a place of conflict, and to lay biases aside when reporting or facilitating. It integrated a wide range of disciplines and emphasized the role of law, science, culture, politics, and history in understanding natural resource conflicts and seeking mutual gain solutions. In these types of multi-party issues, there are always more than just two sides. I highly recommend this program to any graduate student interested in and passionate about people and the environment, regardless of your background or future path.” *Madison Dapcevich, Reporter and Producer for NBC Montana -- 2017 graduate*

“This program allowed me to expand my knowledge and understanding beyond what many textbooks teach us by applying the skills from class to projects in the practicum. Students gain great insight into the practices of collaboration and conflict resolution, and are then able to apply this knowledge during the practicum. I am excited to have this certificate as I enter the workplace, and to serve as a resource on collaborative problem solving to agencies, stakeholders, and others. I am very thankful for the excellent program and the knowledge, skills, and abilities that I have learned. I feel very well prepared to encourage the appropriate use of collaboration and conflict resolution in my future careers.” *Kerry Sullivan, M.S. in Resource Conservation -- 2017 graduate*

“The experiences and skills harnessed through the NRCR Program are complimentary to one’s graduate studies, applicable to real-world scenarios, and transferrable to future job positions. The students and professors of this program quickly become a strong, supportive cohort as they engage in courses, practicum experiences, and purposeful, one-on-one interactions. Although the lessons and case studies we review are predominately focused on the western United States, I was able to directly apply these

lessons to my graduate research on indigenous communities in southern Guyana. As such, I know the program's requirements are flexible and complimentary to domestic and international studies, particularly students wishing to pursue both the NRCR and International Conservation & Development programs. Students across all academic interests will walk away from this program with a new worldview and understanding on how to catalyze, convene, and sustain collaborative processes that address the array of current natural resource management and governance concerns. *Julianne Savage, M.S. in Resource Conservation - 2017 graduate*

"As one of the most unique programs in the country, the NRCR Program was one of the principle reasons I came to the University of Montana. I was attracted to the program for its emphasis on the application and practice of natural resource collaboration and conflict resolution. Having gone through the program, I have also gained an appreciation for the theory that informs its practice and the critical thinking necessary to practice it well. Conflicts over the proper management, use, and value of natural resources are not going away. The NRCR Program gives you a knowledge and skill set to approach these conflicts with a solid understanding of both the opportunities and challenges in working towards resolving them. It is a skill set that I anticipate using frequently throughout my career." *Clancy Jandreau, M.S. in Resource Conservation - 2017 graduate*

"The NRCR Program provided me with a wide array of professional tools for following my interests in collaborative decision-making, watershed governance, and transboundary conflict resolution. The practicum project for this program even became the centerpiece for my environmental studies Master's portfolio. The program's interdisciplinary format contributed to skills in building social capital and developing creative problem solving strategies. Ultimately, the strength of the NRCR Program is that the faculty integrates in-depth theoretical knowledge with applied practices and approaches, allowing students to forge skills directly related to their interests and professional careers. I will immediately put to practice the knowledge, skills, and confidence I cultivated through this program as I begin Peace Corps service in a collaborative natural resource management position." -- *Dov Weinman, Coastal Resource Management, Peace Corps Philippines -- 2015 graduate*

"The NRCR Program is one of the reasons I came to UM to earn an M.S. in Environmental Studies. The program allowed me to enhance my education at UM: the issues we study throughout the program are precisely the types of intractable disputes that pervade the field of natural resource conservation today. The NRCR Program provided me with a valuable education in communication, mediation, negotiation, and relationship building in a political, personal, and professional realm. Lessons focused on real-world issues and solutions, and guest speakers from many walks of life provided valuable insight. With this certificate I will not only stand out in the job market, but also will be able to implement a unique skillset throughout my career. Anybody who wants to learn how to communicate, negotiate, or mediate more

effectively in their field of study can benefit from this program." – *Rachel Gussin, Consultant in Boulder, Colorado – 2014 graduate.*

"The NRCR Program drew me to the University of Montana and proved to be the cornerstone of my education. The experience I gained through the program's core curriculum provided me with invaluable tools, and the hands-on experience I gained through my practicum was the most enriching experience I had at the University. The opportunity to apply skills taught in the classroom to design a collaborative process, work with the stakeholders and decision-makers, and see how these processes work in real-time was instrumental to my education. As the title suggests, the focus is on natural resource conflict resolution, but the lessons and application of theories and critical thinking are transferable to any discipline where conflict arises. I am very grateful for the opportunity to work with the NRCR staff and for the exposure to the art and science of facilitating, negotiating, and mediating that is increasingly important." -- *Sally Cathey, Southwest Montana Field Director, Montana Wilderness Association – 2014 graduate.*

"My career aspiration is to integrate environmental conservation and community health and well-being. The NRCR Program served as a vital element in bridging these two fields, both of which have their own sets of deeply rooted disputes and challenges. The program's unique blend of concrete theory and methodology, with experiential and critically relevant application, results in an invaluable set of skills. Core skills such as effective communication, collaborative problem solving and relationship building transcend any particular field. They are components of a toolbox you can bring with you to any situation that requires you to productively work with other individuals or groups of stakeholders. I would highly recommend the NRCR Program to anyone seeking a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach to their particular program of study and future path." – *Allie Perline, 2014 graduate*

"I am currently an attorney in private practice in Minneapolis, focusing on environmental law and consumer fraud. The NRCR Program substantially set me apart from my classmates and other young attorneys while interviewing for environmental law positions during my job search. Numerous panel interviewers with the EPA and DOJ recognized what an invaluable program it is for environmental lawyers as their role is almost always working to diffuse conflict and achieve results favorable to diverse stakeholders. Honestly, one of the first questions I always got was -- "tell me about that program, it sounds very interesting!" Beyond that, I have continued to use the knowledge, skills, and abilities I learned in the NRCR Program in my career as a young lawyer both in managing client expectations/relations and in strategizing for favorable settlements in lawsuits. As I learned on Day 1 in the NRCR Program, 90% or more of cases never go to trial and I am always keeping the BATNA and WATNAs in the back of my head from the moment I begin drafting a complaint." *Alyssa Leary, Attorney, Minneapolis, Minnesota – 2013 graduate*

"As an incoming graduate student in the College of Forestry and Conservation, I sought to build an interdisciplinary graduate program that fused my past experience in policy science with natural resource management. The NRCR Program served as the perfect vehicle to meet my goals. The NRCR's strong foundation in theory, coupled with applied practice of the most cutting edge tools in conflict resolution, resulted in classes and coursework that will influence my thesis work and future career endeavors. I firmly believe that the collaborative, alternative dispute resolution skills taught in the NRCR Program are the future of natural resource decision-making, so I'm thrilled to have a program like this as a resource and network." -- *Emily Olsen, Colorado Director, National Forest Foundation – 2013 graduate*

"My focus through my Master's program has been wildlife-human conflict resolution, working on issues such as federal de-listing of western gray wolves and grizzlies from the Endangered Species Act. Wildlife-human conflict resolution can be a highly contentious but extremely important part of conservation. I firmly believe that more universities need to be teaching this type of program and that wildlife biology and environmental studies graduate students should be strongly encouraged to take courses from it. The NRCR Program has provided me with a valuable toolbox for addressing major resource conflicts. Through simulated multi-party mediations I have gained practice in both negotiating as a party and running meetings as a facilitator or mediator; acquired insight into how to evaluate specific conflicts for the most effective solution, such as collaboration or litigation; and most importantly, gained experience in how to understand and interact with opposing stakeholder groups." -- *Alia Mulder, Environmental Studies graduate student at University of Montana – 2013 graduate*

"The NRCR Program encouraged and facilitated my participation as a community and economic development professional dealing with urban growth management. From zoning issues and development boundaries to urban agriculture, water use and air pollution, conflicts over urban growth are as complex and emotional as those found in rural or wilderness areas and resolution of those conflicts is no less essential to the sustainability of nature and our culture. Through the NRCR Program, I received the knowledge and skills to understand and guide innovative resolutions to time consuming, damaging conflicts. More importantly, I acquired the skills and confidence to create scenarios where potential combatants can find creative solutions prior to conflict." -- *Chris Behan, City of Missoula Redevelopment Agency – 2012 graduate*

"The NRCR Program was the most practical portion of my studies here at the University of Montana. The certificate program encouraged me to actively engage in a new and sustainable approach to collaborative conservation. I was able to use the information learned through required coursework and incorporate into my graduate studies dealing with collaborative conservation of the world's largest salmonid in Mongolia. As a result we have created a conservation community that has begun to organize as a collaborative group to tackle fisheries conservation on a national level. The NRCR Program allows an individual to stand above the crowd, it shows that

you have what it takes to be a leader addressing today's complex conservation issues."  
*Dan Bailey, Montana State Director, Pheasants Forever -- 2012 graduate*

"The certificate program was not just an opportunity to think about collaborative conservation, but also to practice facilitation and be a part of actual, complicated, passionate discussions. This program allowed me to seamlessly transition from graduate school to the professional world and built a foundation of skills and knowledge that I utilize on a daily basis." *Molly Stenovec, Project Coordinator, The William D. Ruckelshaus Center, University of Washington - 2012 graduate*

"I completed the NRCR Program while pursuing a master's in Geography with an option in Community and Environmental Planning. I went back to school with the intention of gaining skills to enter the field of urban and community planning. However, the planning program was more academically oriented than I was looking for, and did not require anything experiential like a practicum or internship. I fully credit the NRCR Program with providing the type of hands on experience that made me competitive for my current place of employment. Not only did I have the opportunity to meet and learn from students and faculty from a wide range of fields and studies, but also I made important contacts and started rewarding relationships that initiated my current career, including a practicum that led to employment with the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation throughout the rest of my time in school and after. Beyond that, the types of skills, training, and exposure to issues related to mediation and facilitation that were presented in the NRCR Program have provided me with a superb foundation for dealing with the types of conflicts and disputes that come up often in my current place of employment." -- *Ben Brewer, Planner, Missoula City Development Services -- 2011 graduate*

"The NRCR Program was a vital component of my graduate experience at the University of Montana. While completing my NRCR requirements, I was able to build relationships with an interdisciplinary cohort and learn the skills I will need to effectively contribute to collaborative natural resource management. The NRCR Program faculty brought in a steady stream of interesting speakers and leaders in the environmental policy field to lead discussions and practical environmental problem solving exercises. I would highly recommend this program to any current or incoming graduate students interested in a wide range of environmental policy issues," -- *Matt Ehrman, Senior Planner, White River National Forest, Colorado - 2011 graduate*

"Going through the NRCR Program with the Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy was an invaluable experience that has aided my work immensely. While much of my work is focused on legal advocacy and strategy, this program gave me a very strong and in-depth understanding of the policy considerations and negotiation techniques that are essential in developing agreements that protect our environment and natural resources for all. I'd encourage anyone interested in the environmental or natural resources field to consider going through the certificate

program." -- *Derf Johnson, Clean Water Program Director and Staff Attorney, Montana Environmental Information Center – 2010 graduate*

"The NRCR Program was an essential piece of my graduate student experience at the University of Montana. The courses and practicum provided me with skills for dealing with diverse stakeholders on controversial natural resource issues. These skills were critical as a graduate student and now as a professional researcher working on climate change in the West. The program also allowed me to interact with students from a variety of programs across campus that I would not have had the chance to work with otherwise. Many of the people who I met through the program are still close friends and colleagues. Finally, the instructors provided excellent mentorship while I was in the program and throughout the rest of my time in Missoula as an early career professional." -- *Wylie Carr, Social Scientist, US Fish & Wildlife Service Southeast Region -- 2010 Graduate*

"The NRCR Program has refreshed and expanded my credentials in ways that would otherwise not have been possible. As a mid-career professional supporting a family, relocating to meet my interests and advance my career was not a realistic option. As a recent graduate, I have been able to apply the collaborative problem-solving principles taught by the NRCR program into my otherwise technical work in ways that make my environmental consulting services unique and sought after. Moreover, I find that my education was of high quality, enabling me to be fully conversant with other national leaders in the field. The successes and societal benefits of the collaborative work we do can often go unnoticed in the general media however. It can be found in all those cases where conflict does not rise to the point of headlines, when parties with differences learn how to work constructively together and make real progress. Much more work is needed however to gain wider recognition of and appreciation for the principles taught by the NRCR Program. I'm delighted with the insights and skills I learned, and I encourage promotion of the NRCR Program at every opportunity." -- *Steve Ackerlund, Principal Scientist, Risk Management, Kleinfelder -- 2009 graduate*

"While in the NRCR program I was able to gain 'textbook' skills through core classes like negotiation and dispute resolution, but, more importantly, the NRCR program provides outstanding opportunities for hands on learning. In one course I was able to produce a situation assessment for a real-world transboundary international water resource issue. We gained skills in interviewing professionals, agency representatives, politicians, and members of the public and learned how to compile a report and recommendations for the organizations to use as they moved into treaty negotiations. In starting out in my career in natural resources planning, I've learned this hands on group work is invaluable. Upon graduation from the University of Montana, the NRCR certificate and my experiences in the program were viewed favorably by hiring organizations and now by my colleagues and supervisors. The program provides unique skills that more and more natural resources organizations are learning that they need to bring to their team. Similarly, it seems every step I take in my career brings me back to seeing the great value of the skills I obtained in the NRCR program, whether it

be leading a team of Forest Service employees on projects or planning efforts, enhancing collaboration with my agencies partners on landscape scale watershed restoration, or participating as a member of the public in discourse on natural resources issues in my community. *Christine (Paulu) Handler, Supervisory Natural Resources Planner, Ottawa National Forest -- 2009 Graduate*

"The NRCR program's focus on critical thinking and negotiation skills development provided me with the professional tools I needed to succeed after graduate school. If you believe that there are at least two sides to every story, that innovation is as important as legal standing, and winning can be defined as your ability to build durable relationships with your "opponent" - then this program is for you. Anyone interested in participating in contemporary policy debates should take a hard look at the Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program." -- *Shoren Brown, Bristol Bay Campaign Director for Trout Unlimited -- 2007 graduate*

"The NRCR program is the only program I am aware of that allows students to fully understand how natural resource policy, law, and science come together in the decision-making process. I went through the program while I was a law student and working on my Ph.D. in Forestry. The NRCR program allowed me to seamlessly connect the two. I immediately put my skills to use after graduating, working on numerous environmental and natural resource cases for the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, the United States District Court for the District of Montana, and now as practicing attorney. Better decision-making means understanding the interests involved, as well as the legal, political, and scientific backdrop. The NRCR program undoubtedly helps students better understand how it all fits together and to develop strategies for resolving conflicts when it doesn't fit." -- *Randy Tanner, Private Law Practice, Missoula - 2007 graduate*

"The NRCR program opened doors professionally and opened new ways of thinking about conflict. First, the program introduced me to thinking about communication in conflict as a process and changed the way I approach disputes using methods of building connection, commonalities, and shared values. Second, the programs opened doors for job and education that would not have been available to me otherwise. Working for a stint with Montana, Fish, Wildlife and Parks the hiring committee stated that I became the front contender because of this certification. When I applied to Ph.D. programs, the selection committee also expressed that this credential helped secure a place in my PhD program." -- *Maria Blevins, Assistant Professor, Utah Valley University - 2007 graduate*

"The NRCR program gave me the unique and invaluable opportunity to work on critical real-world natural resource and environmental public policy issues, often times directly with stakeholders and decision-makers. Additionally, NRCR faculty are tremendously dedicated to ensuring each student in the program is able to hone skills and identify opportunities related to their particular interests or field of study." -- *John*

*Senn, Acting Communications Director, Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C. -- 2006 graduate*