

Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program

The University of Montana

Alumni Reflections Spring 2014

"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, Deputy Communications Director, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Office of Water), Washington, D.C. -- 2006 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 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*

"Going through the Natural Resources Conflict Resolution Program with the Center for Natural Resources and 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, Program Associate and Lobbyist, Montana Environmental Information Center -- 2010 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, Presidential Management Fellow, Willamette National Forest – 2011 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, 2012 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*

"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 Schembra, Associate, Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy, The University of Montana – 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 NRCCR 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*