

The Need for Tribal Public Outreach: a Position Paper

The Glen Canyon Dam Adaptive Management Program (AMP) is a complex social institution that brings together people and organizations with diverse viewpoints, philosophies, mandates, and desired outcomes in an attempt to manage an equally complex ecological and sociopolitical system. Common to all participants in the process is the need for access to information so that decisions can be made based on a shared understanding of the system. Information needs to be made widely available, not just to the formal representatives of the various constituencies, but to any interested members of the constituencies and public. This means that information needs to be available in a format that is accessible, and not dependant on attainment of a certain level of education or technical sophistication. The AMP is ultimately funded by the American public and members of the public deserve access to the information that is being generated through the expenditure of public funds.

To date, the AMP has done a poor job of reaching the various constituencies and members of the public with information about the program and the ecosystem it was established to protect. Neither the specific results of scientific efforts nor the broader functions and decisions made by the program have been adequately shared with the public. The Public Outreach Ad Hoc group (POAH) was organized to address this failure. However, the group's focus to date has been on meeting the immediate needs of the program, specifically developing information for dissemination through press releases and other time-sensitive processes. Development of a broader outreach program is currently in the early planning stages and this program will hopefully be directed towards a broader constituency and incorporate more extensive information content.

An area of public outreach that has yet to be addressed in a comprehensive manner by the POAH group relates to the tribal participants. For the tribal constituencies, information transfer and translation cannot be readily achieved by the standard methods employed to reach broader American publics. Limited infrastructure means that standard media approaches (newspapers, radio, television, displays, science symposiums, etc.) often fail to reach the people. Of even greater concern is a cultural barrier: western scientific data often must be "translated" into a format that is culturally appropriate and relevant before it can be of use. Several of the tribes participating in the AMP have begun developing the social infrastructure necessary for transferring and translating information generated by the program to their members. These programs can serve as a model for other public outreach and education efforts, but they have been largely ignored.

Further development of and coordination with tribal outreach programs will necessarily require direct involvement of the tribes. Processes for making information available (and identifying what information is relevant and useful) will continue to depend on each tribe individually as each tribe has its own unique, culturally determined approaches. Both the mechanisms for making the information culturally relevant and the networks for making it available are critical to the success of these efforts, and tribes will continue to draw upon traditional approaches and modern technologies, as appropriate. As the tribes have already demonstrated, education is a key component for making any information presented useful. Without an understanding of the context for the information, it is simply "data" that has little relevance and will therefore be of no use in successfully understanding or managing the ecosystem impacted by the Glen Canyon Dam.

In order for the tribal participants in the AMP to be fully engaged and informed so as to provide the best, most useful feedback to the program, tribes must be actively engaged in the development and implementation of comprehensive, holistic outreach within the tribal communities. To this end, the tribal groups propose that the AMP incorporate a specific process for the inclusion of tribes in outreach efforts and that the Technical Work Group recommend to the Adaptive Management Work Group that funding be allocated in the out-year budgets for the purpose of meeting the tribal public outreach and education needs identified above.