



Certification Program for Practitioners in Social Ecology

The Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy

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Enhancing Productive Harmony between Human and Natural Environments

Description

The Certification Program in Social Ecology and Public Policy provides learners with the opportunity to discover social ecological principles and the related theories and methodological approaches to creating or influencing public policy. Scaled certification levels discussed below allow for the student to determine the level of proficiency desired, from a Level One three-day course to learn the Discovery Process™ to a Level Four six-month mentored program of Project of Excellence.

Purpose

The purpose of the certification program in Social Ecology and Public Policy is to prepare individuals with the knowledge and skills to implement a social ecological approach to policy formation . Policy formation relates to a variety of applications, including watershed restoration, natural resource management, social service delivery, urban development, small town settlement energy facility siting, major infrastructure siting and others. A social ecological approach incorporates key aspects of both the social and biophysical environments in order to foster productive harmony. Social Ecology lends itself to the creation of sustainable and responsive policies at all levels of the public sector, from local to state and federal governments, as well as to the private sector of organizations and corporations.

One of our specialties is environmental policy with regard to natural resource and public land management. The certification program is well-suited to facilitate compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) Policy Section 101 and Environmental Justice Guidelines for the United States (US) as well as other national governments and international bodies that have adopted environmental regulations based on the US model. For example, Preister and Kent contend in their NEPA paper published in April 2001: "*..... that projects using this productive harmony approach will foster community, landscape, and ecosystem health in degrees unprecedented since the passing of NEPA 30 years ago.*"¹.

A professional cadre of certified Social Ecologists will be needed over the coming decades to assist the U.S. in shifting to a more sustainable society, one that integrates social, economic and ecological elements of community life. Today, from the smallest of local governments to the World Bank and other multilateral organizations, such integration in a policy framework is common. What is often missing is a theory and methodology of how to operationalize such policy in effective ways. To this end, Social Ecology is ideally capable.

¹ Preister, Kevin and James A. Kent, "Using Social Ecology to Meet the Productive Harmony Intent of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Hastings West-Northwest Journal of Environmental Law and Policy, Volume 7, Issue 3, Spring, pp. 235-250. Berkeley, CA.: Hastings College of the Law.

Standards for Certification

The standards for the Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy (CSEPP) certification have been developed by long-time practitioners in this field. The Center draws on a 35-year history, starting with the Foundation for Urban and Neighborhood Development (FUND), Inc., in 1967, and including James Kent Associates in 1988, Social Ecology Associates in 1997, the JKA Group in 1998 and CSEPP beginning in 2002. The theoretical developments and practical accomplishments of this effort have been documented in numerous publications. Its main features are summarized in a paper entitled, "Social Ecology: A New Pathway to Watershed Restoration."² The book which contains this article is scientific compendium of sources oriented to watershed restoration and provides a scientific grounding for social ecological principles when dealing with human society.

The CSEPP standards for certification in Social Ecology and Public Policy are based on demonstrated competency in the following areas:

1. Productive Harmony and Bio-Social Ecosystems;
2. The Functioning of Informal Network Systems;
3. The Discovery Process™
4. Social Capital Generation and Integrated Resource Management
5. The Human Geographic Issue Management System™ .

Level One Certification: The Discovery Process™ (22 hours minimum)

The heart of the Social Ecology process is learning community—the routines and everyday practices of residents who live in a culturally-defined geographic place. The central understanding of Social Ecology is that public policy based on cultural beliefs and practices makes the most effective, sustainable and responsive policy. Participants engage in a descriptive approach to community, learning to describe as a "disciplined stranger," the social, economic, and physical components that make up a community. This descriptive approach is called the Discovery Process.™ The Discovery Process is a means of "entering the routines" of a community, and through observations and interactions with residents, make visible the communication pathways, the informal networks, the gathering places, the major citizen issues, and the trends affecting people. Of central importance are the cultural mechanisms by which survival and caretaking issues are handled informally in a community, knowing that change efforts based on such understanding are more likely to succeed than change efforts imposed from without.

The two goals of Level One Certification are to learn how a community currently functions and to develop understanding about opportunities for "cultural alignment" between change forces and the host community.

² Preister, Kevin and James A. Kent, "Social Ecology: A New Pathway to Watershed Restoration." IN Watershed Restoration: Principles and Practices, by Jack E. Williams, Michael P. Dombeck and Christopher A. Wood, Editors, pp. 28-48. Bethesda, Md.: The American Fisheries Society, 1997.

Two courses offered at the BLM's National Training Center, "Community Based Partnership" and "Learning Community: Linking People, Place and Perspectives," will qualify for this level, as well as a stand alone course offered by the Center for Social Ecology and Public Policy.

Level Two Certification: Social Ecology Process (160 hours minimum)

Social Ecology Process goes beyond Level One by providing competence in social assessment, informal network communication, Cultural Descriptors, community archetypes, and Human Geographic Mapping.™

In addition to community assessment, participants will learn the Issue Management System that uses knowledge gained through the Discovery Process. Issue resolution with citizens is facilitated and responsive management practices are fostered on the part of governments, corporations and organizations which have involvement and responsibility in the host community. Identifying issues in their emerging, existing, and disruptive stages of development provides a perspective for strategic intervention in change initiatives that optimizes benefits and minimizes harm in the community.

Level Two Certification of Social Ecology Process can be accomplished through CSEPP's Summer Field School in Social Ecology and Public Policy, conducted on the campus of Southern Oregon University.

Level Three Certification: Human Geographic Issue Management Systems™ (320 hours minimum)

Human geographic mapping is a process to visually depict the "sense of place" residents have of their area by which they culturally distinguish their area from others. The mapping is accomplished at six scales of geography and is used to structure a public policy development process.

The additional features of Level Three Certification are a Productive Harmony Assessment and a recommended project management plan. For this level of certification, participants are expected to produce a professional-level community assessment, develop issue management strategies, and carry at least one issue through to resolution. The themes, issues, concerns and opportunities discovered through the descriptive approach to community are used to develop public policy strategies. For the Productive Harmony Assessment, participants search out elements of the community related to social, economic and ecological functioning, determine trends affecting these elements, and make recommendations about how change forces can be managed to foster ongoing citizen empowerment to sustain the survival and culture of the community.

Level Three Certification is accomplished through direct consultation with CSEPP and can be structured as an internship opportunity, participation in a hands-on project of CSEPP's, or as a stand-alone project of the participant.

Level Four: Project of Excellence in Social Ecology and Public Policy (420 hours minimum)

The Project of Excellence (POE), the apex of the certification process, is conceived as a six-month process. The POE will focus on the learner's ability to design and carry out a project that creates or increases productive harmony between the social and natural environments. The base of the learning will be experiential and virtual in nature, meaning the learner does not have to be in a physical place (on campus) to earn the designation or the credit, nor has to be in a specific classification or job in order to participate.

Level Four Certification is accomplished through direct consultation with CSEPP and can be structured as an internship opportunity, participation in a hands-on project of CSEPP's, or as a stand-alone project of the participant.