

Towards Stewardship

Developing a Suite of Programs: Part 1



By Will Husby

Stewardship, engagement, community involvement, life-long learning, sustainability and leadership are terms appearing more often in goal statements of Canadian organizations. But how can we shift the awareness and appreciation aims of traditional interpretation towards goalposts like these?

There are so many ways to deliver interpretation and environmental education services. How do you decide on the content and presentation media? Some agencies prescribe content and have developed preferences for specific types of programs, such as a guided walks for schools and evening drama presentations for family visitors. Other agencies leave content and presentation decisions to front line managers, interpreters and educators. This case study is for those of you who make these decisions, developing or adjusting a suite of programs each season or year.

I strongly believe that the first step—the key foundation—is a clear understanding of the people who will be participating in your programs. Not just where they come from or their ages and so on, but where they are in their learning and attitudes.



Volunteer and partnership programs, skills training workshops and real projects are some ways to reach learners already beyond the awareness and appreciation levels.

Our company, EcoLeaders Interpretation and Environmental Education, was contracted by Parks and Protected Areas Division in Alberta (PPA) in 2003 and in 2004. We developed new Heritage Appreciation Development Plans for two major protected areas:

- the Alberta section of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, a vast treed island of high land surrounded by a sea of rolling prairie that straddles the southern Saskatchewan–Alberta border
- the Beaver Hills, a relatively wild knob and kettle region just east of Edmonton, including Miquelon Lake Provincial Park, Cooking Lake/Blackfoot recreation areas, and a number of other protected areas.

I was pleased to be working with this agency. In the 1980s I had worked for them as a field interpreter and program manager. At that time they had a well-developed system for planning and evaluating interpretation offerings, and EcoLeaders has often used their system as a good-practice example for other clients. I was pleased to see that they are still taking good practice very seriously.

An Expanded Mandate

As part of the planning process, we reviewed their mandate. The agency had evolved over the years from being primarily recreation-focused to having a clear land stewardship mandate. They are currently conducting an extensive review of their guiding principles, but there is already clear direction to engage Albertans and visitors in the care and preservation of the province's natural and cultural heritage.

What Is Stewardship?

“Environmental stewardship involves the wide range of voluntary actions that people take to conserve and protect the environment. ... Such actions range from protecting and conserving soil, water, air, and other natural resources, to monitoring and managing wildlife species and habitat.”
Alberta Species at Risk
(www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/speciesatrisk/prevention.html)

Alberta PPA is in the process of developing their own definition of stewardship, which is likely to include “Safeguarding Alberta’s natural and cultural heritage preserved within the parks network is everyone’s responsibility.”

We concluded that their new directions required changes in emphasis of their existing services. The traditional interpretation model had focused mostly on the initial steps of the learning process—awareness, appreciation and, to some extent, understanding. The new stewardship directions require more involvement in other levels of learning associated with environmental education and environmental literacy. We also saw an increased need for participant empowerment through involvement in stewardship activities and training in leadership. The ideas of interpretation and environmental education needed to be brought together.

For the purposes of our plan, we selected the following definitions:

Interpretation:

“Any communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships of cultural and natural heritage to the public, through first-hand involvement with an object, artifact, landscape or site” (Interpretation Canada, 1976).

Environmental Literacy:

“The desired outcome of environmental education programs. Environmentally literate individuals understand both ecological and social-political systems and have the inclination to apply that understanding to any decisions that pose consequences for environmental quality. It includes four strands:

- personal and civic responsibility
 - skills for understanding and addressing environmental issues
 - knowledge of environmental processes and systems
 - questioning and analysis skills.”
- (Environmental Education Training Partnership website, based on Disinger and Roth, 1992).

A Wider Target Audience

PPA staff now interpret their goals to include not only serving visitors to its sites, but also park neighbours (landowners and people living in communities near the parks and protected areas), and people further afield that may not ever visit spe-

cific sites. This is to bring the role, value and importance of protected areas to people beyond the present park user base and build a strong constituency and support for the entire Parks and Protected Areas program.

The PPA Stewardship Model

How were we to address the agency’s wider stewardship mandate and expanded target audience?

We developed a new tool that identifies audience groupings based on their level of awareness, knowledge and engagement in environmental and heritage stewardship. The model was based in part on the Environmental Stewardship Citizenship Scale developed by Parks Canada in 1992 and similar models.

The PPA Stewardship Model represents a learning progression in environmental stewardship ranging from unsupportive and unaware, through levels of increasing awareness, understanding, changing values and behaviours all the way to leadership in the community. Of course, an individual’s learning does not really happen as a linear progression. People can be at various points on the scale at the same time. For example, a park visitor may support a park’s efforts to preserve rare and endangered species, but not be aware of all

of the habitats that are protected in the park. The model is best used to focus on learner-audience types rather than to reflect on an individ-

PPA Stewardship Model

Leads

- persuades others
- effects change in awareness, appreciation understanding and behaviour in others

Behaves

- displays positive behaviour in her/his actions
- tangible actions

Values

- considers the environment to have intrinsic worth
- the environment becomes an important part of her/his identity

Understands

- has in-depth knowledge
- precisely grasps meanings
- able to interrelate concepts

Appreciation

- can comment on the content and importance of specific environmental components

Aware

- has learned something about the natural and cultural environment
- can remember some elements

Unaware

- not equipped with specific or general knowledge

Unsupportive

- behaves in ways that do not support environmental citizenship

Based on Environmental Education and Heritage Interpretation Task Force Report, Parks Canada, March 1992.

Fan the Flame

Light the Spark

EcoLeaders



Interpretation
and
Environmental
Education

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ual's progress.

In the model, interpretation and environmental education are blended together. Using a phrase we recalled as being used within PPA, interpretation is described as "Lighting the Spark":

- applies mainly to the awareness, appreciation and understanding levels of the PPA Stewardship Model
- most effective with first-time visitors and with introducing repeat visitors to new aspects and features of the site
- includes a tourism aspect

To help staff focus on PPA's long-term environmental stewardship mandate, we applied the phrase "Fanning the Flame":

- applies mainly to the values, behaves and leads levels
- more effective with return visitors and communities
- includes a life-long learning aspect

Lighting the spark and fanning the flame can now be seen as part of the same spectrum. Developing, adapting and expanding services to engage learners at many levels of the model now becomes necessary.

Applying the Model

We looked at current theories and practice in several related disciplines for guidance in applying the model.

Many contemporary educational theories now recognize that learners need to be active—considering many ideas and engaging in discussion, reflection and debate. Knowledge is constructed and re-constructed by the learner. We concluded that in addition to the interpretation techniques currently in use, a combination of the following techniques and approaches should be incorporated:

- experiential education
- inquiry learning
- learner-centred
- life-long learning

Other related fields such as environmental literacy and education for sustainability have much to offer as well, including elements such as:

- feelings of responsibility
- sense of place
- vigorous fair debate
- skills for questioning, analyzing and addressing environmental issues

Community engagement is another area where new communication and learning models will be useful. For example, stewardship groups and sustainability program providers often engage in two-way learning, where organizations gain knowledge from community members as well as vice versa.

We also checked in with the old master to see how the Stewardship Model fit. For example, Freeman Tilden's fifth principle of interpretation is *Focus on the whole person*. This supports taking into account the participants' prior knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, and their needs to communicate and share their knowledge, discoveries and points of views.

These are all useful general approaches to help learning through the PPA Stewardship Model to be effective. But how to specifically address the various levels? Different types of approaches will be most effective for the different audiences

Continued on page 16

Towards Stewardship

...continued from page 10

described by the model, and we found some helpful ways of selecting these. A few examples are listed below:

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Leads | Volunteer program |
| Behaves | Restoration project |
| Values | Wildlife watching skills workshop |
| Understands | Guided hikes, evening programs, trail signs |
| Appreciates | |
| Aware | |
| Unaware | Drop-in activity tent at a busy beach |
| Unsupportive | Articles in local newspaper |

The above table provides a glimpse of the much more detailed parts of the two plans we developed. Needless to say, other factors such as detailed analyses of specific audiences, natural and cultural features, infrastructure and more played big parts in shaping the plans as well. However, the Stewardship Model played a key role in identifying main areas of effort. It is currently being piloted at Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park and the agency is considering the model for use system-wide.

A Suite of Services

Other groups and agencies that have a stewardship mandate can use the model. It's a useful tool for looking at all of an organization's programs and services together, and thinking about what is being accomplished. Interpreters and environmental educators can identify their target audiences and current offerings along the scale of the Stewardship Model (or similar scale if organization goals are not stewardship-based). Peaks and gaps revealed by this may indicate an opportunity to redistribute services to better meet the organization's mandate, leading to a more effective suite of offerings.

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Will has a consuming interest in nature photography and specializes in macro shots of plants and small creatures. Contact him at whusby@shaw.ca.



Stay tuned for the next issue of *InterpScan* where Sue Ellen Fast will flip the Stewardship Model on its side to create another useful service-planning tool in "Developing a Suite of Programs: Part 2".



The Bowen Island Conservancy plants trees in land soon to become a new park. Conservancies, land trusts and other stewardship groups make up the fastest growing part of the environmental movement in North America.