Hands on the Land

Training Proposal and Communication Plan

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INTRODUCTION

Hands on the Land (HOL) is a national network of field classrooms that connects students, teachers, communities, and volunteers to America’s public lands. Within the communities of HOL sites, public and non-profit partners customize hands-on experiences using local natural, historical, and archaeological settings to bring classroom learning to life. Participating agencies include the Bureau of Land Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration–Marine Sanctuaries, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife, and US Forest Service.

Currently the BLM has about 50 sites that participate in the HOL program. In February 2013, the BLM released a new National Strategy for Education, Interpretation, and Youth Engagement. The five-year plan outlines several major goals, including expanding the BLM’s HOL program. Other goals included:

- Identifying and using communications media that will help BLM reach key audiences
- Strengthening the capacity of BLM’s education staff to deliver quality education programs
- Increasing knowledge and understanding of public land resources and land management challenges
- Expanding the capacity of BLM to deliver interpretive programs and products
- Expanding the Take It Outside! program
- Providing career opportunities for young people and strengthening their connections to the outdoors.

The BLM’s Hands on the Land Working Group (HOLWG) was chartered in 2010. This interdisciplinary team of staff, from all levels of the bureau, represents the needs and perspectives of the field and acts as advisors to the Washington Office. The HOLWG plays an important role in representing the needs and perspectives of the field and helps the Washington Office review policies and practices.

The BLM’s Division of Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships, the HOLWG, and the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands at Indiana University collaborated on the design, development, and production of a desk guide for HOL sites. The guide is intended to help BLM site coordinators expand and enhance their HOL programs and to establish HOL as the foundation for the BLM’s formal environmental and heritage education programs. The guide’s objective is to support both new and existing HOL site coordinators in achieving the following:

- Create and strengthen ties to local schools, communities, and other agencies
- Leverage resources from community partners
- Promote sharing of best practices through the presentation of case studies and additional resources
- Improve networking and interactivity among HOL sites
- Deliver high-quality, long-term educational programming tied to local curriculum standards
- Foster environmental literacy, stewardship, and awareness of public lands.
Topics covered in the guide include:

- Defining the HOL program
- How HOL differs from, and can incorporate, other BLM educational initiatives
- How to determine if an existing program fits into HOL
- Baseline standards established by the BLM for inclusion in the program
- How to apply for membership in HOL
- Communicating about the program and its benefits to others, including stakeholders, supervisors, and the community
- The benefits of the HOL program
- Developing relationships with schools and other educational entities in the community
- Developing a site-specific program
- Delivering a high-quality HOL program
- What is expected to maintain HOL status, including data collection and reporting
- Measuring and enhancing the quality of HOL programs
- Resources available to BLM HOL site coordinators
- Collaborating with other HOL sites through networking and interactivity
- Managing and developing HOL site funding.

The purpose of this training proposal and communication plan is to provide the BLM with recommendations for implementing the desk guide and expanding the HOL program.
COMPARABLE PROGRAM ANALYSIS

In order to provide recommendations for expanding the HOL program, the Eppley Institute reviewed other environmental education programs and events. BLM HOL program managers could use these programs, resources, and events to brainstorm program ideas, develop evaluation tools, and develop best practices for their site.

BioBlitz
http://www.publiclandseveryday.org/bioblitz
http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/program/bioblitz/?ar_a=1

BioBlitz is a wildlife scavenger hunt. Participants count as many different species as possible within a given period of time at a specific location. A BioBlitz can occur on school grounds, at a local park, or even at a national park. The amount of time needed to conduct a BioBlitz depends on the size of the land being surveyed. Big BioBlitzes at national parks are usually 24 hours long, but smaller events can be tailored to a school day or just an afternoon. New HOL programs might consider hosting this event to introduce the HOL to their community.

Classroom Earth
http://www.classroomearth.org/

Classroom Earth is a program that defines environmental education through interdisciplinary activities, processes, and experiences so that children may gain a better understanding of how nature and the earth’s resources work and interact with one another within a man-made system. The program is oriented toward teachers in any subject in grades K-12 and is sponsored by the Weather Channel. Classroom Earth is evaluated based upon the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) Guidelines for Excellence, which stipulate that all materials and information in Classroom Earth be fair and accurate in describing environmental problems, topics, and conditions from diverse perspectives; emphasize creative and critical thinking skills; be well designed and easy to use; orient students toward civic responsibility; and utilize effective instructional techniques that include learner-centered instruction, multiple intelligences, and relevant topics.

Community Geography
http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/program/community-geography/?ar_a=1

National Geographic has adopted the term “community geography” to describe activities that engage members of the public in documenting, understanding, and looking after the places they care about, including exploring maps and data to ask and answer questions about places; conducting fieldwork and sharing observations and stories; and participating in social and scientific networks to document and improve communities.
Earth Gauge
http://www.earthgauge.net/

Earth Gauge is a free information service designed to make it easier to talk about the links between the weather and the environment. The program was originally developed for weathercasters, but the information is readily available to the general public, educators, students, and parents. Earth Gauge’s core program donors include the Kendeda Fund, George Mason University, NOAA National Weather Service, the TogetherGreen Program, and the US Environmental Protection Agency – Office of Wetlands, Ocean & Watersheds.

Geo-Literacy
http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/geoliteracy/?ar_a=1

Geo-literacy is an understanding of Earth systems and interconnections necessary for making good decisions. Whether we are deciding where to live, what precautions to take for natural hazards, or how to set up a manufacturing supply chain, we all utilize geo-literacy throughout our lives.

Public Lands Every Day
http://www.publiclandseveryday.org/

Public Lands Every Day is a program that encourages Americans to enjoy, protect, and maintain public lands through public engagement, professional development, and partnerships. Oriented to individuals of all ages, Public Lands Every Day is nationally supported by a $3 million sponsorship from Toyota Motor Sales, Inc., Toyota Northrop Gumman, and Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI). REI also sponsors National Public Lands Day. In 2012, some 175,000 volunteers from across the country contributed $18 million in services to improve public lands. Volunteers removed 500 tons of trash, built and maintained 1,500 miles of trails, and collected over 23,000 pounds of invasive plants. This collective contribution made National Public Lands Day 2012 the biggest in history.
GUIDE ROLL-OUT

The development of the desk guide followed standard research, analysis, and design best practices for training materials. That is only the first step, however; the actual implementation of the guide will be the best measure of success. Simply sending this guide to HOL sites may not be sufficient. The guide is designed to deliver essential information in an easy-to-follow format. But the roll-out of the product is as important as the product itself. Using multiple inexpensive delivery channels will create awareness of the new guide.

The following list provides recommendations to the BLM for implementing the desk guide:

- Use the BLM blog, the BLM Daily, to announce the availability of the desk guide. Consider using the BLM Daily to highlight HOL success stories, such as "HOL Field Notes."
- Send copies to all existing BLM HOL sites.
- Use the HOL national website and national newsletter to announce the availability of the desk guide.
- If possible, develop a BLM HOL Facebook page where the guide can be announced and where BLM HOL sites can collaborate with one another.
- If time allows, contact the larger sites via phone to discuss the roll-out of the guide.
- Clearly designate a contact person(s) to assist in the use of the new guide by answering any questions.

The following list provides recommendations for strengthening the BLM HOL program:
Host annual or semi-annual webinars to connect sites. Have three or four sites share what they are doing, how it’s working, etc., at each webinar.

As budgets allow, host annual meetings for HOL sites. Meeting in person will help sites connect with one another, which will lead to more collaboration when site coordinators return to their programs. The meetings could be at the national level, or several meetings could occur at strategic geographic locations.

Establish a mentor program where well-established sites work with newer sites to develop programs, partnerships, etc.

Develop some sort of takeaway (e.g., postcard, sticker, hangtag, etc.) that all children who attend an HOL program can take home. This would encourage them to tell their parents about their field trip, advertise the BLM, and inspire families to return to the field trip site.
EVALUATION

The BLM HOL Desk Guide is the response to a need for further explanation and information about HOL, including the program’s benefits, application process, development, and funding opportunities. Evaluating whether this guide covers the needs, problems, and opportunities it was intended to address ensures its effectiveness. Specifically, evaluating the guide involves determining what outcomes, or results, the BLM has achieved.

The project team identified the overall goals of this project early in the process: design, develop, and produce a desk guide for BLM HOL site coordinators. The objectives included:

- Develop a Learning Needs Analysis to determine goals, objectives, audience, and content needs for the desk guide;
- Collaborate with the BLM Division of Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships on the desk guide; oversee all publication layout and design work for the desk guide;
- Make the desk guide available in electronic format for printing and web purposes.

All of these goals and objectives have been accomplished.

The project team also identified outcome and success measures for the desk guide, specifically:

- BLM HOL site coordinators will be able to grow their programs, develop new partnerships, and accomplish the goals of the HOL program as a result of this guide.
- New BLM HOL sites will be established as a result of this guide.
Determining whether these specific outcome and success measures have been met requires further evaluation. The following list provides recommendations for long-term evaluation of the desk guide:

- Develop a survey schedule to contact guide users (e.g., six, nine, and 12 months after the release of the guide) to determine how helpful it has been with developing programs and new partnerships and accomplishing the goals of the HOL program.
- Develop an easy method for users to suggest additions and revisions to the guide, such as an area of the website, a wiki, or some element of the Facebook site. Consider appointing a steering committee to do an annual review and revision of the guide.
- When new sites apply for inclusion in the HOL program, ask if the guide was helpful during their application process and ask for revision recommendations.
CONCLUSION

This document proposes several recommendations for implementing the desk guide, strengthening the BLM HOL program, and evaluating the effectiveness of the guide. If the recommendations outlined here are followed, the desk guide will be an effective tool and the BLM HOL program should continue to grow. Specific steps forward will be determined by the Bureau of Land Management's Division of Education, Interpretation, and Partnerships.