Management Assistance Team of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

HELPING STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AGENCIES TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE
“After many years of working with MAT, it is abundantly clear they understand and deliver the training and support needs of conservation agencies better than anyone in the business. They are highly effective and successful because they understand our issues, challenges and culture, and align their programs accordingly.”

— Nick Wiley, Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
The year 2009 was one of “things taking root,” for the Management Assistance Team (MAT). It was the second year in MAT’s three-year Multistate Conservation grant, and, in spite of a bleak economy nationwide, earlier MAT initiatives showed traction and impact in 2009. The year was also marked by increased demands for MAT organization development expertise and consulting.

MAT continued to deliver services in three program areas: state-focused leadership development, the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI), and agency administration consulting services. Again, this year there were significant accomplishments in each of these program areas. We take great pride in our little six-person team who work like beavers, remain flexible to incoming changes in plans while never losing their sense of humor. In 2009, Gina Main began working in a project leader capacity, and we also benefitted from the hiring of Colby Smith to head up graphic productions.

It was also a year of re-tooling, repurposing and finding economies in our operations. MAT was mainly developing courses in 2006, implementing them in 2007-2008, but in 2009, MAT did more evaluating, purging the unnecessary, and revising existing tools to make them better.

In 2009 MAT’s leadership training services and courses increased their reach to staff in state fish and wildlife agencies across the country. MAT’s training efforts showed both a maturing and a multiplier effect. For example, the online leadership courses really began to take hold. Twenty-seven online courses marked a 16% increase in the number of students taking MAT’s online courses in 2009. The Conservation Leadership Program of Study (CLPS) had graduates for the first time since its inception two years ago. In addition, there was a significant multiplier effect of MAT training efforts. In other words, the impact of MAT’s face-to-face courses and workshops did not stop with the initial 240 participants. An additional 112 individuals also benefitted from the material because some initial participants were certified by MAT to offer the courses in their agencies to others. And this number of enlightened learners continues to grow as subsequent trainings are conducted.

There were 13,740 hours of face-to-face and online learning, a 11% increase over 2008. Six hundred thirty-two employees from 30 states received MAT training services, 240 workshop participants and 392 online participants. Benefitting the state agencies were 112 different consulting projects serving 22 states directly as well as those of more national scope.

MAT certified additional professionals to its National Faculty, bringing the total to seven facilitators helping deliver and meet the increasing demand for the online leadership courses. Staff in two states, Utah and Wyoming, certified with MAT and began teaching MAT’s online courses to their agency staff as part of their own leadership development program.

The National Conservation Leadership Institute is also maturing as illustrated by the number of graduates, the depth of the projects, the advancements for graduates, and the enduring buzz. Its fourth cohort of Fellows began in the fall of 2009. MAT continues to serve as the NCLI staff, passionately working to insure the program’s success. To date there are 140 fellows and alumni, helping to enlarge the leadership capacity in natural resource conservation across the board. At this writing, we are receiving nominations for cohort 5 until mid-May.

In 2009 there were several trends: more train-the-trainer efforts, more training requests for dealing with conflict, effective communications, and adaptive leadership, and more requests for agency comprehensive effectiveness reviews. Also, MAT has seen a spike in interest from states in the Northeast for training in commission effective governance, a training previously requested primarily by western states.
AGENCY DNA

Providing state fish and wildlife agencies with organization development expertise and consulting has always been a central part of MAT’s services. Today, this demand appears to be on the increase. What exactly is the discipline of organization development (OD)? Broadly, OD looks at how organizations can respond to change resulting in improved effectiveness. The level of external pressures of the economic downturn on fish and wildlife agencies and the ever-increasing pace of change may be increasing the need for OD help.

Like people, organizations evolve. They respond to change and become more effective, or they don’t and become obsolete. Just as DNA is the hereditary material of life, organizational DNA is a metaphor for the underlying factors that together define an agency’s “persona” and help explain performance.

The MAT Team’s organization development work with state fish and wildlife agencies tries to help them look at their DNA and answer questions such as: Why are we getting particular behaviors or results? Which things do we need to tweak and in what order? How do we respond to identified trends? Does my agency have any gaps in its systems alignment? How are my agency’s structure, mission, and values lining up with the cultural paradigms and protocols to impact our results? What about the agency’s informal systems—How are they impacting effectiveness? Are my agency’s results lined up with the identified needs/expectations/wants of our constituents? How will we know if we need to make some drastic changes? How does all this work together?

Just like the four nucleotides that comprise human DNA, MAT emphasizes four basic building blocks in your agency DNA—decision making, information flow, motivators, and structure. How these interdependent blocks combine largely determine how an agency will behave and whether it can achieve results. Often, organizations will respond to external pressures by first making structural changes; however, it is important to know that for success with any changes in motivators or structure, the organization must first have done the necessary work in Decision–Making and Information Flow. Some of this may sound familiar to those who study principles of adaptive leadership. MAT’s assistance is a good fit in helping agencies think about their DNA and how to get better results.

The delivery of MAT’s OD assistance may vary from one-on-one consulting with an agency director to putting on a regional workshop for several states to a comprehensive agency review. But, a basic belief of OD practitioners is that for effective, lasting change to take place, the system members must grow in their competence to master their own fates. And this is what makes MAT’s work as an OD resource for state fish and wildlife agencies so important.
EXAMPLES OF MAT’S ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT HELP IN 2009:

DECISION-MAKING

Ideally everyone knows which decisions and actions they’re responsible for and high level managers delegate operational decisions and build collaboration cross-units.

MAT works with agencies to figure out who “owns” each decision and who must provide input before a decision is made. Often MAT consults occur as part of an agency or programmatic review, but sometimes it will be as simple as several hours face-to-face with a Director or their Deputy regarding a specific agency issue. MAT also provides insights through some of their online courses such as “Going from Good to Great” and face-to-face courses such as “Team Leader Skills” and “Leading at the Speed of Trust” (FranklinCovey). The National Conservation Leadership Institute that MAT staffs provides leadership training and skill development with emphasis on adaptive leadership. MAT consulting can bring to bear many of these skills as well as the experiences of other states in dealing with critical events.

INFORMATION FLOW

Information flows across organizational boundaries, between organizational silos and all the way up and down the organizational hierarchy.

MAT course offerings help in this area too. Examples are the online leadership course “Visionary Leadership” and the face-to-face courses “Mastering Agency Change” and “Team Leader Skills”. Information flow is also one of the key areas MAT explores when conducting an agency comprehensive effectiveness review.

MOTIVATORS

Realigning incentives to support decision-making and flow of information...just telling people to do stuff differently is not enough.

During an agency review, MAT provides expertise on how to get the workforce to support a change initiative and how to get traction with a new initiative. MAT also provides an online course entitled “Power” that teaches three kinds of power, one of which will provide you with power for the long-term. Face-to-face courses “Emotional Intelligence” and “Publics, Problems, and Politics” also provide motivational elements.

STRUCTURE

Altering any structure to better support the changes made with respect to decision-making and information flow.

Agency reviews typically will address structure elements. MAT’s online course “Secrets of Agency Assessment and Development” addresses how to adjust and align all the major components of an agency to get the desired results and allow full empowerment.
A comprehensive agency review provides a fact-based picture of your agency’s strengths and weaknesses; however, it is not for the faint of heart. It takes real leadership courage. A review provides useful recommendations for the best improvement leverage points. MAT has conducted reviews of state fish and wildlife agencies for over fifteen years. MAT’s model for reviewing an agency is one founded in organization development science, holding up time and again under the most severe scrutiny.

MAT’s focus is on discovering misalignments or gaps between the agency’s desired results and factors such as work processes, reward systems, development and training systems, information flow, structure, and/or work culture. Identified misalignments can reveal the greatest leverage points for maximizing the agency’s effectiveness. This is not an individual employee performance audit, but a much more comprehensive look at areas for improvement.

Typically, MAT collects data through focus groups, surveys and face to face interviews. Data may be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. MAT provides a final report that highlights strengths and offers recommendations for improvements. The total time for a comprehensive review process is usually six to eight months. MAT, of course, does not charge for its time, travel, or per diem since it is supported by a multi-state conservation grant.

The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies’ Leadership and Professional Development Committee, who advises the MAT Team, has asked MAT to limit its comprehensive agency reviews to no more than two per year. This is due to the large commitment of MAT time and resources required to complete an agency review and the needs for MAT services to state fish and wildlife agencies in many other areas.

The third year of the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) witnessed an important milestone—the germination of what had been a grand idea in 2004–2005 had matured. With the first cohort in 2006–2007, an exciting concept had taken form; it was refined with the second cohort in 2007–2008. By the completion of its third cohort of Fellows in 2009, it was apparent that the Institute had earned significant traction for moving forward as one of the most respected leadership development opportunities for natural resource conservation professionals ever in the nation.

As staff for the NCLI, MAT continued to listen in 2009 to participants and sponsors, identify various operational economies, and work together to make the remarkable even better.

In 2009, the third NCLI cohort of Fellows graduated, the fourth cohort began and the results continued to be extraordinary. See the NCLI Annual Report for Cohort 3 for a complete reporting. Feedback from participants and agency directors are powerful testimony to the program’s efficacy.

Praise for the NCLI experience in 2009:

“Attending the NCLI was a life changing experience. It strengthened the core principles that adaptive leadership consisted of and helped to clearly define terms of application. Once you are an NCLI Fellow you have a national network of career professionals with diverse backgrounds to lean on. These individuals represent distinguished brethren who possess the concern for the future of wildlife and wild places and the willingness and determination to work together to ensure a wildlife legacy for the next generation.”

~Tony Schoonen, Cohort 3 Fellow

Just as the NCLI has done, the Conservation Leadership Program of Study (CLPS) is a project that has matured and come into its own. In 2009, the CLPS realized its first graduates, with three participants from Florida, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania completing their final projects. Not far behind are four participants currently working in the final project stage, and 43 other enrollees heading towards completion.

The CLPS, launched in 2007, is an affordable, flexible, in-depth leadership development curriculum delivered from the perspective of fish and wildlife conservation. Through online and face-to-face courses, this program is designed to compliment an agency’s existing leadership development program or act as a stand-alone program for those states that currently do not have one.
In MAT’s hunt for ways to maximize “bang for the buck,” we have found the train-the-trainer principle is one that works pretty well. Unlike typical consultants, MAT’s modus operandi is to minimize client umbilical cords or dependencies that might develop when a workshop or other services are provided. As an internal professional consultancy “on retainer” so to speak for the state fish and wildlife agencies, MAT’s approach is more a “teach them to fish” approach. MAT teaches state fish and wildlife agency folks how to deliver most of these workshops and provides them with all the related start-up materials to get them going. The approach makes sense, especially with only a six-member team and a packed schedule.

Here are some numbers illustrating this MAT ripple effect in 2009: the Arizona Game and Fish Department trained 34 of their employees after conducting two MAT workshops, Emotional Intelligence and Managing Agency Change; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks trained 54 of their employees using MAT’s Emotional Intelligence workshop and materials; using MAT’s Managing Agency Change workshop and materials, New Hampshire Fish and Wildlife trained 136 of its employees on how to systematically adopt a significant agency change. Bottom line is there was a doubling of MAT’s reach through this ripple effect.

…and the return keeps on going.

VIRTUAL CAMPUS

In 2006 MAT launched an online learning program for working fish and wildlife professionals that focused on leadership development. The online courses offered by MAT have opened new doors to our clients, and we are proud of the response to this program.

MAT uses online learning approaches that are now standard at colleges and universities across North America: asynchronous, online learning. Learners work on their schedule, and there are no set meeting times. All the learner needs is an Internet connection and a word processor. Our courses are a learning revolution replacing older distance learning technologies like CD-ROMs.

### TOTAL ENROLLMENT IN ONLINE COURSES PER YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>392</td>
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*2006 represents only three terms due to its launch after the first of the year*
MAT delivers services in three program areas: state-focused leadership development through workshops and online courses, the National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI), and consulting services. In 2009, MAT had significant accomplishments in each program area. Our online courses continue to grow in popularity, and the NCLI continued to gain extraordinary recognition for the program quality and results from Fellows completing the program. From our state agency clients a high demand continued for our consulting services.
8 National Projects

- Consulted with National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) board on promoting and managing the NCLI
- Consulted with AFWA Leadership and Professional Development Committee regarding delivery of the NCLI and of the State’s Leadership Program Toolbox, direction for MAT during the next grant cycle and balance of NCLI and state toolbox efforts
- Consulted with AFWA Education, Outreach, and Diversity Committee regarding conservation education strategies
- Wrote white paper on conservation education for national distribution at National Conservation Education Conference in Arkansas
- Consulted with Organization of Wildlife Planners regarding their organization’s strategic direction
- Consulted with directors and employees of state fish and wildlife agencies who were NCLI Fellows. Through peer consulting helped them address leadership projects and issues
- Consulted with Dan Decker, and Cindi Jacobson as well as OWP regarding session at the March 2010 North American meeting.
- Conducted workshop for Commissioners at the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies meeting in July

112 Consultations in 2009 (45 in 2008)

23 States received individual consulting services (some states received multiple consultations)

21 Consulting projects benefitted all states

Consultation Examples:

- Completed one comprehensive agency review and began another to be completed in 2010 (Estimated cost per review would be at least $50,000 if done by private vendor)
- Coached fish and wildlife employees through MAT process to graduation and their achieving a Certificate in Leadership Program of Study (CLPS)
- Consulted with WAFWA and several state commissions and boards regarding effective governance

41 Workshops and courses delivered in 2009

Number of states served directly: 30
Approximate number of participants: 632
Total number of training hours delivered: 13,740

1 New workshop developed and field tested “Team Leaders Skills”.

36 Fellows attended the NCLI to begin their residency as Cohort 4 in 2009. These 36 Fellows represented 25 states, 6 federal agencies, and 5 represented NGOS, tribes and industry.

33 Fellows from Cohort 3 completed their leadership projects and culminating event at Big Cedar Lodge in Missouri and graduated from the Institute in 2009.

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OUR FUNDING SOURCES:
73% Multistate Conservation Grant
19% US Fish and Wildlife Service
8% National Conservation Leadership Institute

MAT TIME:
46% went directly to developing leadership programs including the State Leadership Toolbox and the National Conservation Leadership Institute.
26% went toward providing assistance to state fish and wildlife agencies (e.g. personnel to assist states, training and consulting for states, and equipment and supplies to assist states).
29% of MAT time was spent on administration and coordinating programs to states.
* Total percentage adds to 101% due to rounding

MAT EXPENDITURES:
10% went directly to developing leadership programs including the State Leadership Toolbox and the National Conservation Leadership Institute.
77% went toward providing assistance to state fish and wildlife agencies (e.g. personnel to assist states, training and consulting for states, and equipment and supplies to assist states).
13% went for office space and for Association overhead charges.

*MAT TOTAL EXPENDITURE $625,996.70
PRAISE FOR MAT

“Our experience with the MAT Team was dynamic and insightful. Their staff of professionals helped make the monumental (and often difficult) process of agency reevaluation and restructuring a much more manageable and feasible endeavor.”
– Dave Chanda, Director
New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife

“Participation in the NCLI has become a “must-have” for all of my up and coming leaders. The experiences gained from this program and the networks and relationships built throughout the residency are critical to the functioning, and ultimately the success of today’s wildlife management community.”
– Dr. Jonathan Gassett, Commissioner
Kentucky Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Resources

“Our agency has an abundance of well-trained biologists who are experts in their fields, but few have come equipped with the supervisory or management tools needed to effectively develop and administer our programs. To address this, we’re taking as much advantage of MAT training as we can. The Management Assistance Team training workshops and workforce planning exercises have clearly shown their value, and we will continue to invest.”
– Denby Lloyd, Commissioner
Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game

“A LOOK AHEAD

MAT has many things scheduled for 2010:

• Develop a new tool for state fish and wildlife agencies—this will be a “tool” for leadership development efforts among state fish and wildlife agencies.

• Review two of MAT’s online courses and update them with the most current materials.

• Write a new online course (making a total of 7) to further help states develop leadership skills.

• Focus Groups and interviews for WV Agency Review.

• Conduct two day workshop and half day train-the-trainer on Publics, Problems and Politics for the UT Division of Wildlife.

• Graduate Cohort 4 of the National Conservation Leadership Institute.

• Consult with peer groups of Fellows from NCLI cohort 4 as they complete individual leadership projects.

• Meet Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife staff to finalize actions for implementing recommendations from MAT agency comprehensive review.

• Meet North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Staff to consult on reorganization and alignment for meeting strategic goals.

• Facilitate one-day workshop on Meeting Management for AFWA staff.

• Meet and consult for one or two days with Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation on development of their leadership program.

• Conduct Commissioners’ workshop on improving Commission effectiveness for Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

• Help plan and conduct a session at the North American with Dan Decker, Cindi Jacobson, and the Organization of Wildlife Planners.

• Conduct a two-day team-leader skills workshop for Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

• Conduct National Conservation Leadership Institute Cohort 5 residency for 11 days (Oct. 10 – 21).