



Characteristics of High Quality Wetland Training

A Product of the Association of State Wetland Managers' Increasing Access to High Quality Wetland Training Project

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As part of ASWM's national project on improving access to high quality wetland training for wetland professionals, the workgroup conducted a review of characteristics of quality training. The workgroup and its partners across the country identified the following elements that are critical to the delivery of effective wetland-specific training (Table 2).

Most of these characteristics will be familiar to academics, as they are hallmarks of quality educational experiences across fields. However, in the wetland field, professional trainings do not always meet these standards. As part of this project, the national workgroup has sharing this set of characteristics with both those designing and those selecting from among options for training opportunities. These characteristics focus on different elements of planning, curriculum development, training content, delivery and evaluation.



ASWM Region 7 Restoration Training: Photo Credit: Jeanne Christie

Planning Training Opportunities

High quality wetland training is based on a thorough assessment of the target audience's training needs, is taught by high quality trainers, and identifies in advance the minimum skill levels/prerequisites for participating in the training. Selection of the appropriate delivery mechanism is key by matching the type of learning required with tools that can achieve these goals. For example, wetland plant identification or soils delineation training should, at some point, require a hands-on, experiential learning element in the field that allows participants to put to the test what they have learned in their classroom or through online training. Learning what something generally looks like on a PowerPoint (e.g. plant parts, soil characteristics, hydrology indicators) does not necessarily translate into the ability to differentiate and make decisions about those elements in the field.

Developers need to consider the pros and cons of different training options, including classroom training, field training, mixed classroom/field training, webinar-based, synchronous or asynchronous online training and others. Decisions need to be made that allows the trainers to connect where the participants are able to join them – perhaps by linking a training with an existing conference, workshop, meeting or educational institution’s offerings. Alternatively, if training is to be offered remotely, will all the target participants have access to the necessary technology and programs to participate effectively?

Table 1. Characteristics of High Quality Wetland Training

Is based on thorough assessment of target audience’s training needs	Limits participant numbers to allow for interaction appropriate to the training type	Provides opportunities for participants to ask questions
Is taught by high quality trainer(s)	Includes a diversity of participants and embraces different learning styles	Provides opportunities for participants to express personal perspectives
Identifies minimum skill-level required	Emphasizes how content could impact the work of participants	Provides opportunities for participants to interact with each other
Is based on sound science	Provides examples of the content/practices in use	Allows participants opportunities throughout to provide feedback to the trainer
Provides learning objectives	Includes experiential component, as appropriate for the training type	Provides opportunities to reflect on what was learned
Circulates a description of the training, speakers and agenda prior to the training activity	Provides opportunities for participants to share their own experiences	Includes evaluation and is accompanied by support resources
Is focused and well-paced; Has clear direction	Employs humor/fun in teaching	Has before-during-after strategies to ensure training is transferable directly to job
Is scheduled at convenient times and locations; regular schedule is provided for multi-session trainings	Utilizes engaging visuals	Provides a supportive post-training environment

Curriculum/Content Development

Content development should be based on sound science and delivered using teaching/training methods that embrace a diversity of learning styles. Especially critical in content development is making connections for the participants between the training content and how it can be incorporated into wetland work/impact outcomes of in-the-field application. Training should focus on established tenets of the field of learning, building on established research, theory, tools and approaches. Participants should have access to the citations and support materials that were used in this development process. Training should provide examples of the content and/or practices in use and include experiential learning opportunities, as much as is appropriate for the learning setting. Training must also take into consideration regional differences, as wetland training directed to specific wetland types from one area of the country is not generally transferable to another, given the diversity of the wetlands covered. Understanding the regional context and specializations required should be considered and conveyed to the participants.

Training Delivery

Quality training includes circulation of information about learning objectives, speakers and an agenda ahead of the training sessions to allow students/participants to make decisions about the quality of the offerings and determine if the training meets their needs. Research indicates that the ability to relate the concepts from their training to their personal work enhances knowledge acquisition. For this reason, training should endeavor to provide opportunities for participants to share their own experiences with trainers and their other trainees.

Delivery should include as much interaction as possible. Time for participants to ask questions of the instructor and engage in dialogue with others should be built into training, regardless of whether the training is in a classroom, in the field or offered remotely. Ideally, participants will be able to interact with each other, as shared learning is a powerful tool.

Hallmarks of quality training also include the use of engaging visuals, limiting the use of text in presentation materials, and sharing supplementary information for additional content. Design should include before, during and after considerations that allow participants opportunities to reflect on what they have learned through the training and ways that they can apply this learning to their wetland work.

Evaluation

Quality training incorporates evaluation from the beginning of planning by identifying learning objectives and metrics to measure whether those objectives are met through the training activity. Measures can include outputs, such as the creation and delivery of a training, the number of participants, and the material delivered. However, to understand the impact of the training, outcomes should also be measured, assessing the knowledge gains of the participants, as well as how they plan to apply what they have learned and the quality of their learning experience.

For More Information

For more information about this needs assessment or the Association of State Wetland Managers' Increasing Access to High Quality Wetland Training Project, please contact Brenda Zollitsch, ASWM Policy Analyst via email at brenda@aswm.org or by calling the ASWM Office at (207) 892-3399.