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ASLA Reclamation & Restoration Professional Interest Group

Potential Practitioner's Certification Program

The Society for Ecological Restoration International (SER International / SERI; www.SER.org) is currently exploring a practitioner's certification program.

Permit me to give a brief review of the history of certification in SER International. All the way back in 1993 the Society for Ecological Restoration's first board passed a motion to develop a practitioner certification. While this motion has remained dormant for more than 10 years, the motion was never rescinded. As a precursor to this motion, certification sessions were organized by John Rieger, (a founding member and past board president) and held at SER's annual conferences in 1990, 1991, and 1992. In 1999 the Science and Policy Working Group, lead by Keith Winterhalder began the development and subsequent completion of the SER Primer (see www.SER.com), which sets forth standards for ecological restoration. Specifically, Section 3 highlights nine attributes of restored ecosystems and Section 8 provides a framework for planning restoration projects. As Andy Clewell clearly states, "Before the Primer was issued, we had no standards. Anyone could claim to be doing restoration without challenge. Most of us were, and are still engaged in mitigation projects that simply do not measure up". But is the SER Primer enough? Maybe, and maybe not. That is one reason the SER board has decided to explore a certification program.

SER International has appointed an Ad-Hoc Committee to examine certification from a wide-ranging perspective including individual certification, a professional code of ethics, site 'designation' and education accreditation. There are many compelling reasons to begin exploring a certification program for SER International. A certification program will help establish that there is a recognized profession that engages in restoration activities. Further still, it will elevate the practice of ecological restoration on the same level with civil engineering, landscape architects and planners. The elevated presence of ecological restoration will provide a compelling argument for why other disciplines cannot exclusively practice restoration activities. Certification will help improve the practice of true ecological restoration in several important, for example, it will help keep restoration focused on the ideals espoused by SER International and facilitate the ongoing refinement of restoration standards. Certification will also provide much needed recognition to practitioners who possess the skills, training and ability to appropriately practice ecological restoration. Finally, certification will help define the practice of ecological restoration, expand the relevance of the SER International Primer and set basic standards for the training and practice of ecological restoration.

Why should SER International do this? SERI desires to take a leading role in the promotion and practice of ecological restoration throughout the world.

Nevertheless, SER International is sensitive to the fact that some may view certification as exclusionary, self-serving, or too generic to fit the diversity of ecosystems and cultures worldwide. To address these concerns the vision for the practitioner's certification program is described on the following page.

Recognizing that their may be misconceptions about certification for SERI, one of the first tasks of the Ad-Hoc Committee was to develop the following vision statement.

- Certification assumes a common basis of knowledge that is shared by practitioners. The SERI Primer identifies the core of this common basis. This knowledge is process-oriented and includes restoration principles, protocols, strategies, and methods that are applicable in any ecosystem or biome.

- Certification should build a community of practitioners who have chosen to unite for the purposes of collective self-improvement and self-examination.

- Certification should be inclusive, not exclusive. The purpose is to build a profession rather than an elite club.

- Certification should encourage innovation, not standardization, in terms of how restoration is practiced.

- Certification should empower all practitioners who desire it, including volunteers and amateur practitioners.

- Certification should encourage the practice of “focal restoration” that embodies personal and cultural ideals, as well as advocating “technofixes” as may be required by permit stipulations and contract conditions.

- Degrees of certification are preferable to a single certification category.

At our Chicago Board meeting, the Ad-Hoc Committee presented a roadmap for exploring individual certification, a professional code of ethics, site designation and education accreditation. A draft of the Professional Certification program will be reviewed at the next SER International Board meeting in March 2005.

Upon initial acceptance of the draft, the program will be posted on the website for review and comment.

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