

**MANAGERS COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
CALIFORNIAN COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM STUDIES UNIT RENEWAL**

Prepared for the National CESU Coordinating Council  
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Managers Committee Members

The Californian Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CA-CESU) Managers Committee includes representatives from nine federal agencies. This committee has increased in membership as new federal partners have joined the CA-CESU during the course of the first 5 years of operation. Six federal agencies formed the initial partnership in 2003. They are: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), U.S. Geological Survey, Biological Resources Division (USGS), National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Amendment 1 executed in 2004 added the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Amendment 2 added the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2005. Amendment 3 in 2006 added Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Secretary for Installations and Environment (DoD).

The Federal Managers Committee like the Administrative host campus for the CA-CESU has functioned within a virtual organizational framework. To reduce costs, the federal partners have relied on email and phone to address issues of mutual interest coupled with interactions during the annual CA-CESU meetings. The federal managers also conducted a special meeting held at the NRCS office in Davis, California to discuss early operations of the CESU, identify bottlenecks, compare different agency internal operational procedures, and determine if specific items needed to be resolved to streamline the use by agency personnel of this relatively new resource tool. Each agency had to develop its own procedures for how CESU projects would be reviewed, approved, and subsequently obligated.

**Criterion 1: Were the formal commitments identified in the CESU Agreement (and Amendments) fulfilled?**

BLM: Yes. Several task orders and modifications to the Master Cooperative Agreement were developed pursuant to the terms of Agreement # BAA033001. In addition, the University of California-Davis has provided office space for BLM's CESU Coordinator pursuant to Article II.B.6 of the Master Cooperative Agreement.

DoD: Yes. DoD entered into one agreement with UC Davis. It was DoD's first project and there were a few issues on DoD's contracting side which the CESU assisted in straightening out.

NPS: Yes. Sixty-five national park projects were obligated during the first 5 years of operation through the CA-CESU. The University of California, Berkeley as the administrative host provided office space for the NPS CESU Coordinator who arrived on

campus in early February 2004. We view having a federal presence on campus has contributed to the collaborative working relationship with the academic host for the CA-CESU.

NRCS: Yes. Commitments were honored and fulfilled.

USBR: Yes, USBR developed one project with the University of California, Davis.

USFS-Management (National Forest System): Yes. The Forest Service progressively increased its collaborative partnerships with the CA-CESU network. The primary focus was for technical assistance and education in the biological sciences.

USFWS: Yes. At this time all has gone well with our twelve CESU agreements. The University of California, Davis has also provided office space for our use.

USGS: Yes. USGS developed two projects with two campuses of the University of California system.

**Criterion 2: Were the projects successfully completed, and was there effective delivery of relevant and high quality project results to managers consistent with the mission of the CESU?**

BLM: Yes. Of the nine new projects and six project modifications developed to date under Cooperative Agreement #BAA033001, four projects have been completed and the others are on track. BLM has obtained high quality products for the completed projects and anticipates that the ongoing projects will also yield high quality results that are relevant to BLM's mission and priority information needs.

DoD: No projects were scheduled for completion but progress is being made on the project that was issues last year.

NPS: Yes. Of the 65 NPS projects obligated through the CA-CESU since its establishment, 25 projects have been completed. The FY04 and FY05 obligated projects are planned to be completed in FY08. During this first 5 years, 24 projects were designed in phases so out-year modifications were done to add additional funding to complete the next phase of the project as originally envisioned. Fourteen projects required no-cost modifications to extend the project duration. In some cases, weather was a factor in the need for more time and in others the Principal Investigator and the Park Agreement Technical Representative underestimated the time the project would take, especially when graduate students are an integral part of project execution. Parks with completed CESU projects have been pleased with the results. Many of these park units now have a new CESU project or are in the planning stages to develop a new CESU project in the near future.

NRCS: Yes. The projects that were sponsored by NRCS are on-going, but are progressing on schedule. Cooperation from the participating institutions has been

excellent, and deliverables have been very consistent with the mission and goals of the CESU and NRCS.

USBR: Our CESU project is ongoing and progress has been valuable and consistent with the CESU goals and missions.

USFS-Management (National Forest System): Yes. Within the CA-CESU, 16 new joint venture agreements were executed. Five projects have been successfully completed, and 11 agreements have been modified for additional related project tasks and a few time extensions. The completed projects have yielded several scientific papers and produced credible scientific information for land managers within the agency.

USFWS: Our CESU projects are ongoing, but progress so far has been valuable and consistent with the CESU mission.

USGS: Yes. One of the two projects with USGS was completed in 2007 and the other has received a no-cost extension to complete the final report. Interactions with the UC campuses have been very positive and results have been high quality.

**Criterion 3: Was there involvement of partner institutions as appropriate in the activities and projects of the CESU?**

BLM: Yes. One of the projects involved UC Berkeley scientists. All of the other projects and project modifications are being carried out by UC Davis scientists, which have collaborated effectively with BLM personnel in developing the project proposals and performing the specified work.

DoD: Yes.

NPS: Yes. One of our early goals was to strengthen the use of the CA-CESU by allocating a project with as many different academic partners as possible. We are pleased to report that of our 65 projects, we utilized nine different academic partners; six of the University of California campuses and three of the California State University campuses. The parks who first wanted to utilize the CESU had a particular PI in mind so projects were relatively quickly designed and executed. More recently, however, parks have a desire to collaborate with a researcher and his or her graduate students but have no particular PI in mind. This has provided NPS with an opportunity to advertise our desire to enter into a CESU working relationship to the broader academic community. We also realize that as more professors use the CESU the word about this program is cascading to a larger academic community. We hope that the development of projects will also come from the academic community seeking a federal partner to collaborate through the CESU where mutual interests overlap. This will enhance our outreach to develop additional partnerships and contribute to other ongoing research pursuits within an academic framework.

NRCS: Each of the projects is with partner institutions.

USBR: Yes, our project involves a UC Davis scientist, who has collaborated effectively with Reclamation personnel in performing the specified work and goals of the agreement.

USFS-Management (National Forest System): Yes. The cast of CA-CESU partnerships for the technical assistance was appropriate for the 16 projects. A wide variety of principal investigators, students, and agency personnel benefited from the joint venture agreements. Many of the partnerships involved two or more of the partner institutions. Additionally, the agency was able to partner with other CESUs for six joint venture agreements, which involved research, technical assistance, and education.

USFWS: Yes. Our projects and activities involve several of the partner institutions.

USGS: Yes. Both of the projects (with UCLA and UCB) were collaborative in nature and linked to appropriate faculty members at each participating academic institution, producing valuable data for both participants.

**Criterion 4: Did the CESU facilitate collaboration and substantial involvement among its participants?**

BLM: Yes. As BLM personnel have become more aware of the opportunities available through the Californian CESU, there has been an increase in the number of BLM projects and project modifications. In FY 2003, only one project was initiated through the Californian CESU. In FY 2004, there was also only one BLM project. In FY 2005, two new projects were initiated. In FY 2006, there were two new projects and three modifications. In FY 2007, there were three new projects and three project modifications. As a result of the relationships developed when collaborating with Principal Investigators in the Entomology, Plant Sciences, and Evolution and Ecology Departments at UC Davis, opportunities for additional collaboration were identified. This has increased opportunities for UC Davis graduate students as well. The BLM projects initiated thus far through the Californian CESU have involved one postdoc, four graduate students, and six undergraduate students. If the constraints imposed by the Department of Interior on BLM and some other agencies relative to Grants.gov can be favorably resolved, it is anticipated that the Californian CESU will facilitate even greater collaboration among BLM personnel and the partner institutions.

DoD: Yes. We are early in the project but it appears that all is going well with the collaboration aspect of the work.

NPS: Yes. Our leadership team realized early on that there would need to be directions from the regional office to the individual park units to ensure uniform application of this new tool. In a highly decentralized organization where communications take repeated reinforcement, the NPS annually sends out a CESU memo from the Regional Director to the individual park units outlining the NPS procedures for reviewing, approving, and obligating CESU projects. This has led to a high level of consistent application, an assurance that the project as designed is truly collaborative, and that substantial federal

involvement has been integrated into the project design. The CESU process on the other hand has offered park resource professionals the opportunity to work alongside the researcher for mutual benefit. This has had multiple benefits including designing and evaluating the project as information is acquired. Projects can evolve, be more flexible, and integrate the science in a more meaningful way that will likely influence stewardship decisions. Project involvement with the CESU program has also been a different operating norm for professors who are familiar with grants and contracts but generally have not been active in collaborative ventures. They see the benefits of having projects evolve in interesting ways too as new information becomes available. They also see the benefits of having their graduate students directly involved in the execution of the CESU project. Over half of the NPS projects have direct graduate student involvement. Many of these CESU projects are directly contributing toward Masters theses and Ph.D. dissertations.

NRCS: Yes. Dialogue was conducted with the host university when looking at the partnership of the CESU and who could supply the needs of the agency for a particular project.

USBR: Yes, The project design (with UCD) has substantial federal involvement.

USFS-Management (National Forest System): Yes. The CESU projects had substantial involvement among its participants. Because the projects were for technical assistance with an educational component, all parties were very involved with the planning and execution of the projects. All parties had substantial involvement on the agreed upon tasks and products thus making the projects truly collaborative. The educational component complimented many of the projects benefiting both the university and agency personnel.

USFWS: Yes. All projects designed are collaborative and have substantial federal involvement.

USGS: Yes. The CESU program enabled the USGS and university partners to join forces to enter into collaborative work that might not have occurred otherwise.

### **Managers Committee Recommendations:**

Based on the above narratives, the federal agencies party to the CA-CESU strongly support renewing the Californian CESU Cooperative and Joint Venture Agreement for another five year term.

1. Increase the level of awareness of the CA-CESU to agency cultural resource and social science staffs that have underutilized this collaborative tool.
2. Re-examine the CA-CESU Strategic Plan and revise it where appropriate.

3. Improve Manager Committee communications between its members and the administrative host campus. Annual reporting of projects need to be provided to the administrative host in a timely manner to maintain an accurate cumulative record of all projects obligated each fiscal year.
4. Seek opportunities to develop a landscape type project that would involve multiple federal partners.
5. Increase opportunities for sharing best management practices and science acquired through CESU projects so other agencies can directly benefit from the work that has been accomplished.
6. Ensure we do not lose the point of contact lead with the University to facilitate requests from member institutions and agencies as well as requests from new entities seeking membership into the CA-CESU.
7. More effort from the University needs to be invested in the CA-CESU website to keep it current and useful to all members and for faculty and students seeking information on how to propose a collaborative venture to conduct research, technical assistance, or educational projects.

**Specific Agency Recommendations:**

**NASA:**

The CESU agreement should be retained as it removes the long-standing and seemingly intractable barrier to multi-agency ecosystem level research of inappropriate augmentation of appropriated funds. The CESU agreements allow each agency that participates in a particular project to use a pre-competed mechanism to directly fund task orders to participating institutions for a multi-agency project. Requests by other Federal agencies to become signatories to the CA CESU should be honored to assure fulfillment of the original intent of the CESU approach.

NASA Ames has multiple mechanisms for funding ecosystem research but has chosen to limit use of CESU cooperative agreements largely to operational issues at its Centers. NASA Ames, as the lead NASA Center for the CA CESU, intends to use CESU cooperative agreements to a greater extent in the future to leverage scarce resources in addressing critical ecosystem and cultural resources needs especially at the operational level at Moffett Field.

NASA Dryden Flight Research Center located at Edwards Air Force Base and the NASA Management Office at the Cal Tech operated Jet Propulsion Center near Pasadena (including NASA Goldstone Deep Space Network located at Ft. Irwin Army base near Bakersfield, CA) would work in cooperation with the USAF and Army respectively to carry out studies of broad scope. Otherwise, these

NASA Centers would have highly specialized requirements for CESU projects related to operational issues.

**USFS-Management (National Forest System):**

The USFS would like the CA-CESU to continue providing resource managers with quality technical assistance and educational opportunities, particularly relevant to the Agency's mission, which is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands with particular emphasis on reducing *threats* to these lands. These threats include (1) the risk of loss from catastrophic wildland fire caused by hazardous fuel buildup; (2) the introduction and spread of invasive species; (3) the loss of open space and resulting fragmentation of forests and grasslands that impairs ecosystem function; and (4) unmanaged recreation, particularly the unmanaged use of off-highway vehicles.

**USFS-Research:**

The CESU provides some of its Federal Members with a mechanism that allows for collaboration with university scientists to perform research at a relatively low cost of overhead. However, Forest Service Research and Development has an array of instruments already in place that satisfies the needs of its researchers at the Pacific Southwest Research Station. We don't see the central role of the CESU to be a "grants and agreements" mechanism. Instead, the value that the CESU can bring to the participants is to be a convener/facilitator for collaboration among institutions/agencies to undertake research on "Big Science Themes." For example, the California CESU would benefit by organizing around a central theme (e.g. climate change), or a number of themes. By developing cohesive programs of research, the CESU would evolve and continue to grow in its objective of providing research, technical assistance, and education. The development of cohesive programmatic areas would increase participation from member agencies that have not fully utilized the Unit since participation could involve increased opportunities for partnerships and collaborations (across different projects, federal agencies, and universities).

**NPS:**

It is the goal of the NPS during this next 5 year phase to seek opportunities to link science needs at various landscape scales in partnership with adjacent land management agencies. Such a shift from individual park projects to larger integrated projects would provide a mechanism for mutual benefit where research and technical assistance efforts can become more efficient and cost effective. In our view, the two federal research agencies to the CA-CESU can assist in framing research questions and technical assistance type projects. This would create a framework whereby agencies can then bring their financial resources and staffing to the table to develop more meaningful and integrated projects. Such a shift in CESU operations and vision would increase the science delivery available to all of the federal partners.

**NRCS:**

I think we need to look at the language in the agreement and clarify what is an amendment and what is a modification. There are distinctions between the two, and my

agency is strongly against calling these modifications, because we are not changing nor modifying the language of the original agreement, we are making amendments to it and the agency feels that we need to deal with this issue for the sake of the CESU Network as well as the agencies involved, come audit time.

**USBR:**

Our agency supports the renewal of the CA-CESU for another 5 year term.

**USFWS:**

Our agency supports the renewal of the CA-CESU for another 5 year term.

**DoD:**

Our agency supports the renewal of the CA-CESU for another 5 year term.

Respectfully submitted to the CESU Council

Date January 31, 2008.

Tom Suchanek, USGS, Chair  
Ed Lorentzen, BLM  
John Jordan, BOR  
Dawn Lawson, DoD  
Ann Clarke, NASA  
Jim Shevock, NPS  
Fred Reaves, NRCS  
Peggy O'Connell USFS-Management  
Larry Rabin, USFS-Research  
Kim Webb, USFWS