

University of Wyoming Extension Reclamation Workshops¹

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Abstract: For effective restoration of stable, ecologically functioning plant communities after drastic disturbances, reclamation practitioners need knowledge about how to manage soils and plants in difficult ecological restoration settings. Reclamation practitioners represent a broad spectrum of professionals from energy, mineral, and natural resources fields, ranging from equipment operators and project managers, to ranchers, wildlife biologists, and soil scientists, who each have important skills and insights, but may lack specific knowledge about ecosystem functioning in semiarid environments. In order to effectively teach fundamentals of effective reclamation, University of Wyoming Extension and the Wyoming Reclamation & Restoration Center developed field-based, hands-on workshops and published Extension Bulletins on specific reclamation topics and techniques. By involving industry and agency professionals from the outset, and changing workshops to respond to stated needs of participants, we believe that we are able to address key needs for effective reclamation. Early in the process, it became clear that workshop participants possessed rich experiences and on-the-ground observations beyond those of the instructors. Many could quickly grasp soil, plant, and ecological concepts presented and apply them to their own experiences. One example of how we attempted to integrate the knowledge of the participants with that of the instructors was to form transdisciplinary groups for the field workshop activities. We had each participant state their name and area of expertise, then asked them to group themselves by expertise; wildlife biologists over there, plant experts over here, range scientists there, etc. Then they were asked to stand shoulder to shoulder and count off in fours (or the appropriate number of groups). This assured that each group had a broad range of the available expertise/perspectives, and that the participants did not group up by discipline. The workshops receive very positive participant evaluations and strive to respond to needs of the targeted professional reclamationists. This presentation describes the challenges of developing and holding effective reclamation workshops for experienced professionals, and our collaborative approach toward meeting those challenges.

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1. Oral paper presented at the 2019 National Meeting of the American Society of Mining and Reclamation, Big Sky, MT. Welcome Back to Montana: The Land of Reclamation Pioneers, June 3–7, 2019. Published by ASMR, 1305 Weathervane Dr., Champaign, IL 61821. This paper was part of a symposium entitled: Skill Set Needs for Natural Resource Managers.
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