



2025-2026

EXECUTIVE SEMINAR PROGRAM IN NATURAL RESOURCES LEADERSHIP

Responding to Uncertainty and Change With New Partnerships and Approaches

The Executive Seminar Program in Natural Resources Leadership (ESP) is a Portland State University Hatfield School of Government Center for Public Service case study-based professional program. ESP helps mid-career natural resource leaders explore and expand leadership competencies and pathways for career-long leadership learning.

Each year, the program visits communities throughout the West to connect with local leaders wrestling with their own natural resource challenges. Through presentation, conversation, guided study, field trips, and peer-to-peer sharing and teamwork, cohort members deepen their sense of leadership, build networks of support, and witness many different styles and approaches to solving complex leadership challenges.

Aligning Environmental Management with First Foods: The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) Example

October 20-24, 2025 Pendleton, Oregon

The CTUIR Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has organized its approach to natural resources management through a focus on traditionally gathered foods identified by the CTUIR community as "First Foods," including water, fish, big game, roots, and berries. The serving order comes from Tribal Creation belief, wherein the Foods promised to provide for the people, and the people in turn have an implicit, reciprocal responsibility to care for the Foods. The First Foods serving order is also an ecological knowledge system that can be used to inform management priorities and approaches. Finally, the First Foods inform key terms of the CTUIR's Treaty of 1855 with the United States, and this treaty helps leverage opportunities for intergovernmental collaboration. The ESP will visit the CTUIR reservation in Pendleton, Oregon and hear from Tribal members, DNR staff, and partners of the CTUIR about how this approach relates natural resources management more explicitly and clearly to people and how this approach is transferable to other natural resource managers.

Collaborative Governance in a Complex Situation: The Levee-Ready Columbia

February 23-27, 2026 Portland, Oregon

The greater Portland area relies on an extensive Columbia River flood management system that includes approximately 30 miles of levees, 45 miles of canals, culverts and sloughs, and 13 pump stations.

After Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers notified local drainage districts that they needed to improve their levee systems. At the same time, flood insurance accreditation for much of the aging infrastructure was beginning to expire. With many public agencies and stakeholders involved - often with competing interests - local partners launched a process that evolved into a formal collaborative approach for improving the flood protection infrastructure and attaining insurance accreditation. The class will hear from the people and entities who participated in this transformative effort and who are responsible for leading its implementation today.

Enough to Go Around: Managing Western Water Quantity - The Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative

May 18-22, 2026 Central Oregon

The Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative (Collaborative) provides a mechanism for water stakeholders to collaborate on critical water allocation and management issues. The Collaborative develops leading edge strategies, including irrigation efficiencies, groundwater management, and water banking to meet streamflow, ecological, agricultural, and community needs for water. Participants include multiple irrigation districts, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, county and city governments, environmental organizations, water and electric utility companies, and federal and state agencies. The class will hear from a wide range of voices associated with the Collaborative about how conflict over water management evolved to a shared mission to collaborate and about how they are navigating current uncertainties, changes, and challenges.





Capstone Session

June 16, 2026 PSU Campus

The capstone session integrates the leadership lessons learned over the course of the program with the practical challenges participants face in their agencies. Participants come prepared to discuss issues from their own work experience and apply principles from the year's cases to these issues. This summative learning experience also allows the cohort to connect, network, and transition into their role as ESP alums.

Registration & Cost

The 2025-2026 program fee is \$11,200 total or \$4,500 per individual case. Participants may register for the full program or any one of the individual cases. All participants are encouraged to join the final Capstone session in June at no additional cost.

More About ESP

Recurring themes include understanding the role of civic capacity, collaborative governance, empathy, engaging diversity, leadership self-awareness and situational awareness, operating in uncertainty and ambiguity, and coping with risk.

A total of four seminars are held during the program year. Three seminars of approximately one week each are held on site to explore each case. A fourth one-day session is held on the Portland State campus to conclude the program with a review of leadership principles, techniques for policy resolution, and a summarization of insights gained by the participants.

REGISTER BY SEPTEMBER 12TH: WWW.PDX.EDU/CPS/ESP

Executive Seminar Program Team



ELIZABETH HOLMES GAAR | PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Elizabeth leads the Executive Seminar Program in Natural Resources Leadership, bringing over 42 years of public service. She began her career as a District Fisheries Biologist with the U.S. Forest Service on the Siuslaw and Mt. Hood National Forests and joined NOAA Fisheries, where she served for over 35 years. At NOAA, her leadership roles included Chief of Endangered Species in the Pacific Northwest and Assistant Regional Administrator for Habitat Conservation West Coast-wide. She led Endangered Species Act salmon and steelhead recovery planning for the Columbia Basin, Oregon Coast, and Puget Sound, with a strong emphasis on locally-led solutions and on Tribal partnerships honoring Treaty and Trust responsibilities. She also facilitated NOAA's Emerging Leaders Development Program. Elizabeth serves on the Mt. Adams Institute Board, which serves veterans, placing them in natural resources internships, and also provides opportunities for connecting people of all ages with nature through science, education and outdoor experiences. **Contact:** elizabg@pdx.edu | 503-341-4019



PAUL MANSON | ACADEMIC LEAD

Paul is a Research Professor with the PSU Center for Public Service. For the past decade, he has combined his research interests in environmental policy with education and pedagogical skills to provide training for natural resource professionals across the US. Paul's research focuses on public opinion and governance challenges around critical issues facing the West, including wildfire, disaster resilience, and coastal and marine management. Paul is committed to a co-production model of training - a model that recognizes the power of academic research and practitioner experience to create opportunities for innovation. Paul holds a PhD in public policy and affairs and a Master of Public Administration from PSU.

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BRANDON KURTZ | PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Brandon is the Professional Programs Administrator at PSU's Center for Public Service. He supports various programs, such as the US Army Corps of Engineers Leadership Development Program, the Executive Seminar Program in Natural Resources Leadership, and the NOAA Fisheries Emerging Leaders Development Program. He earned his Master of Education degree from Marylhurst University in 2011.

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