



# Fact Sheet: Selecting and Establishing CESUs

## Background

Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESUs) provide research, technical assistance, and education to federal land management, environmental, and research agencies and their partners. Their broad scope includes the biological, physical, social, cultural, and engineering disciplines needed to address natural and cultural resource management issues at multiple scales and in an ecosystem context.

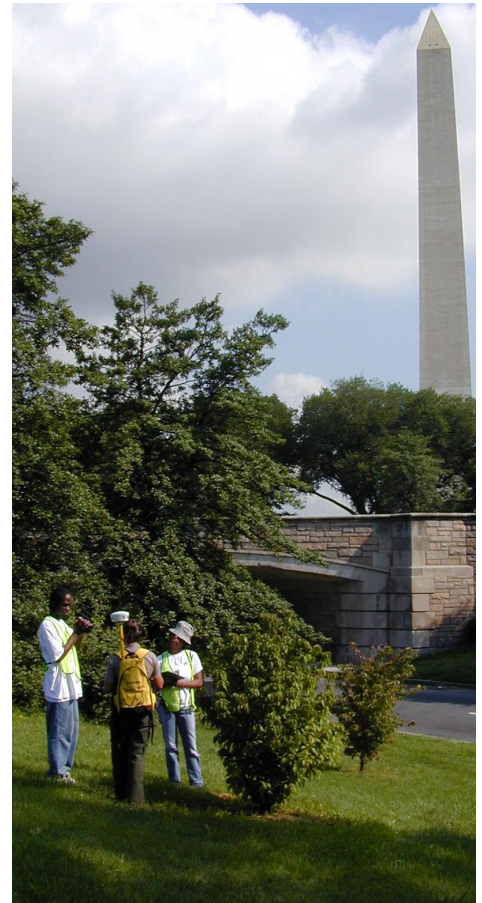
There are seventeen CESUs composed of federal agencies, a host university, and partner institutions. Individual CESUs are administered and managed at the field/regional level. An executive committee of partner representatives guides each of the CESUs. The CESU partners signed a Cooperative and Joint Venture agreement, which allows the participating federal agencies to efficiently transfer funds to nonfederal partners while retaining responsibility for agency-sponsored activities with CESUs. Federal agency participation in a CESU does not alter previous arrangements or cooperative agreements.

CESUs are linked together in a CESU Network, which is coordinated by the CESU Network Council. The Council includes representatives from each of the fifteen federal agencies who signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which guides the activities of the national CESU Network. A national coordinator works for the Council and is administratively hosted by the National Park Service.

## Competition

Between fiscal years 1999 and 2003, the CESU Network Council conducted five rounds of formal competition to establish the seventeen CESUs. All Research I universities were eligible to compete as a host university. Each CESU followed a formal process, developed by the CESU Network Council, and approved by the Department of the Interior Office of the Solicitor. The process for each competition is outlined below.

- A formal Program Announcement and Request for Proposals (RFP) was distributed to all Research I universities in the states in a CESU biogeographic area, published for 10 days in Commerce Business Daily, and posted on the CESU website ([www.cesu.org](http://www.cesu.org)).
- Proposals received by the postmark deadline were accepted for review. As each proposal was received, the postmark or ship date was checked, the proposal was stamped with the date of receipt, assigned an ID number, and recorded on a log-in sheet. An administrative review was conducted for each proposal to ensure that the submission instructions were followed.
- CESU Network Council members received copies of the proposals to review, accompanied by evaluation forms and instructions. The evaluation forms were constructed using the criteria described in the Program Announcement/RFP. Additional agency reviewers (one per agency) with specific expertise in the biogeographic areas were identified by CESU Network Council members and also received proposal review packets. All reviewers were instructed to complete the evaluation forms prior to the review session.
- The CESU Network Council met with additional agency representatives to review the proposals and select tentative candidates for each biogeographic region. The CESU Net-



■ **From anthropology to zoology.** CESU projects cover a range of natural and cultural resource management issues. Above, students and park staff inventory resources on the National Mall. (*Chesapeake Watershed CESU*)



work National Coordinator (non-voting staff) led the meeting and described the specific steps followed for the review:

1. Reviewers with a conflict or perceived conflict of interest were asked to recuse themselves from participating.
  2. Each CESU biogeographic region was considered separately.
  3. Each proposal from a potential host university and its partner institutions was evaluated.
  4. Each reviewer was asked to orally report their draft score (the score assigned prior to the meeting) for a proposal. Individual scores were recorded on an overhead transparency for all reviewers to see.
  5. Each reviewer was invited to comment on the proposal, and then the reviewers had a general discussion about the proposal.
  6. Each reviewer had the opportunity to revise their score.
  7. Each reviewer reported their final score. The formal score was the final score that each reviewer reported orally and was recorded on the overhead transparency. This procedure ensured an open process, where all reviewers could hear and see the final, reported scores.
  8. An average score for each proposal was calculated.
  9. Steps 4-8 were repeated for each proposal.
  10. After the average scores had been calculated and ranked, reviewers confirmed the highest scoring proposal.
  11. The host university (with partner institutions) with the highest scoring proposal was selected as the tentative candidate for the CESU biogeographic region.
  12. The reviewers then discussed clarifications and improvement that the tentative candidate would need to address during the site visit (keeping to the criteria of the RFP).
  13. Steps 3-12 were repeated for each biogeographic region.
- Site visits to the candidate host universities by CESU Network Council members and agency field representatives were organized. The purpose of each site visit was to learn more about the facilities and services of the host and partner institutions described in the proposal. Each site visit provided an opportunity for Council members to discuss clarifications or requested improvements identified in the proposal review. Each host university was asked to provide a proposal addendum responding to needed clarification and requested improvements identified in the proposal review.
  - Each member of the site visit team completed a formal evaluation form and made a recommendation to the full CESU Network Council about whether to establish the CESU with the candidate host university and its partner institutions.
  - Copies of each proposal addendum and site visit evaluations were made available to the CESU Network Council.
  - The CESU Network Council voted on formally approving the CESUs at each of the host universities and their partner institutions.
  - The CESU National Coordinator notified each host university of the approval of the CESU hosts.
  - After review by the host university, partner institutions, and federal agencies, the CESU Network National Office prepared cooperative (and joint venture agreements) prepared for signature.

■ **Through a competitive process, the CESU Network Council selected the following universities to host the seventeen CESUs:**

- Californian – University of California System
- Chesapeake Watershed – University System of Maryland
- Colorado Plateau – Northern Arizona University
- Desert Southwest – University of Arizona
- Great Basin – University of Nevada
- Great Lakes-Northern Forest – University of Minnesota
- Great Plains – University of Nebraska
- Great Rivers – University of Missouri
- Gulf Coast – Texas A&M University
- Hawaii-Pacific Islands – University of Hawaii System
- North & West Alaska – University of Alaska System
- North Atlantic Coast – University of Rhode Island
- Piedmont-South Atlantic Coast – University of Georgia
- Pacific Northwest – University of Washington
- Rocky Mountains – University of Montana
- South Florida-Caribbean – University of Miami
- Southern Appalachian Mountains – University of Tennessee

