Monday's Opening session – The Value of Evaluation:

George Grob: *powerpoint*
- value is in the earth, a cleaner, safer earth
- evaluators want to make a difference
- Conference big picture:
    - bring together policy makers and evaluators
    - evaluation should be in entire life of program
    - value of evaluation in terms of economy and environment
    - getting policy makers to act on evaluation
- Conf challenges: standards, capacity building, communication, ideas sharing, networking
- Examples of successes: Declines in diseases, traffic death rates, cigarette smoking

Marcia Mulkey (EPA)
- Evaluation is not an innovation but a way of doing business
- Program evaluation is now a part of regular government
- She first recognized value and importance of evaluation through the presentation of a logic model
- Program evaluation is a need/ weakness of EPA

Rowan Gould (USFWS)
- we have to know what works and what is effective otherwise we will fail
- climate change meeting he recently participated in: need to monitor climate change and species response. Effective evaluation will allow us to change actions over time.
- Need evaluators to explain why change is necessary
- In conservation , need to look beyond our own species our own land, to what others are doing.
- Example: needed to look at how much habitat needed to be protected in Mississippi value. Organizations (USGS, NRCS, Ducks unlimited Nat Cons, etc) did an evaluation of different scenarios that showed ideal approach.
- Need to involve multiple organizations
- Working with USGS to develop climate change models at landscape level/ will establish new adaptive manage programs
- Many FWS successes due to work with other agencies and organizations.
- Evaluation will determine success or failure in 21st century

Mark Schaffer (Doris Duke Foundation) – *see power point*
- mission of environmental program is promote wildlife through flora and fauna
- Strategy: 1- ID critical lands, 2- land protection, 3- build conservation knowledge
- Evaluation cycle: 1- (see slide – not visible) 2- evaluation initiative, 3 external program rev
- monitoring and assessing grants
- external revaluation, approximately every 5 years – recommendations on what work to continue and on how to improve existing plans
- growing embrace in monitoring and evaluation in conservation community

- evaluate how much money and where to put money for effective habitat and land conservation
- climate change is a big challenge towards habitat cons
- result of external review is change of Strategy: look at water as well, add/expand monitoring and evaluation.
- Working on a protected areas database –also to show progress of developing national habitat program
- Help states on how to adapt wildlife plans to climate change
- Grant to ELI on how much money is spent on habitat mitigation annually
- Goal for next external review is to have quantitative assessments
- Grant to defenders of wildlife to create a conserve registry
- Looking at challenges to effective monitoring and evaluation

Questions:
Q: Attribution of responsibility across diff actors – to make adaptive management, have to adjust contributions of diff actors (NGO, public, private) – how would you attack the attribution challenges?
A: Conservation Leadership forum at NTCT – dealt with this issue – Rowan Gould – need eco-regions in country, create regional climate centers, develop meta-data to go out to monitoring programs in geographic area, have conservation planning and design that's coordinated (LCCs – landscape conservation cooperatives) – have to work together to define these LCCs, have several out there already (everglads, Chesapeake bay, CA water, Mississippi Joint Ventures) – challenge = to get everyone in same room to work together, divide up work, metadata standards everyone agrees to so we can compare – major challenge, we all agree has to be done

Debra Rog
Westat associate, President of AEA, etc
Importance of context in Environmental Evaluation

- How AEA can support your work and imp of context, how it influences practice
- Opps and challenges, context sensitivity, how AEA can support environmental evaluation
- Issues: complexity of interventions and causal paths, externalities, multiple indicators/pathways, long time frames, range or stakeholders
- Strengths/advantages – measurement technology for physical measurements
- Method-first evaluation – based on what they could study with the design (randomization) – now have developed more design strategies, more enlightened about stakeholder participation, macro and micro issues
- Debate over diff methods – more productive dialogue on how to match methods to policy contexts, need contextually sensitive evaluation practice, certain conditions need certain approaches to evaluation
- Need to balance rigor, needs, context to provide most actionable evidence

Addressing the context:
- Context: nature of problem, complexity of intervention, setting, parameters of decision making and evaluation context

- Phenomenon: what is known about the problem? (if you have to be design poor, be data rich)
- Complexity of the intervention – may need range of methods to address complexity (eg. Need variety of interventions to promote behavior change – multiple objectives and strategies)
- Setting: focus may blur with setting – community initiatives may intertwine type of community – how does intervention work given the broader context? How can results be generalized?
- Decision making/evaluation context: budget, time frame, data, constraints etc. affect evaluations you can do, who are the decision makers, what sort of decision are they making, level of confidence they need to make decisions (education process)

Strategies of producing actionable evidence:
- strategies to rule in or out strategies
- improving accuracy
- improving actionability
- Strategies to establish causality: systematic plausibility analysis of threats to validity – data on rival explanations, need strong theory on prob, a priori plausibility analysis – targeted info to explain
- Methodology/measurement accuracy: evaluability assessments to target studies – only systematic pre-evaluation study to show if you should conduct an outcome study, feasibility, helps guide methods you might use
- Focus on fidelity/integrity of an evaluation – to select programs for an assessment or incorporate fidelity data into an evaluation – how does it effect outcomes
- Analytic techniques to strengthen outcome – statistical matching strategies, U3 (for non-experimental), increasing technical efforts going on now

Explanatory Power (how to enhance)
- add methods (quantitative and qualitative to outcome studies – explain why or why not outcomes occur)
- understand variation in outcomes, understand unintended outcomes, patterns of change
- trajectory analysis (patterns of change – average and other patterns of change)

Involving Stakeholders
- if evidence is more sensitive to context it's more actionable
- include consumers or beneficiaries from very start
- consumer involvement can help guide design, measurement, interpretations
- involvement of range of stakeholders – builds in responsiveness to social justice issues, helps avoid further disenfranchisement of least advantaged
- promotes transparency of methods

Role of AEA
- professional community of evaluators that supports their work in range of contexts
- almost 6000 members, since 1986
- increasingly diverse in membership and contexts

- growth – shows increased demand for evaluation
- programs and supports: topical interest groups (environmental program evaluation, evaluation managers and supervisors, government and evaluation)
- workshops, summer institute on methods and approaches
- guiding ethical principles
- www.eval.org
- Active listserv 'EvalTalk' – see archives on website – ID people doing evaluations on your topic
- Website: networking, forums, access to 4 evaluation journals

Evaluation Policy Task Force
- started 2 years ago
- ongoing capability to influence evaluation policies (defining it, evaluation methods requirements, staffing needs, budgets, implementation/ethics)
- evaluations role on how it can foster good and effective government
- Evaluation roadmap developed (on website) – sent to a number of federal offices
- Road map/ Framework: scope and coverage of evaluation, management, quality and independence, transparency – roadmap is about context sensitive evaluation
- Scope and coverage: thinking about evaluation throughout life-cycle of programs and policies, range of approaches, context-specific match
- Management: need expertise in evaluation, planning, written policies
- Quality and independence: quality standards, infrastructure for robust methods, independence from political agendas
- Transparency: to all parties, findings made accessible to others in timely way, meta-evaluations

Implications for environmental evaluation:
- recognition of importance of evaluation, that it requires special skills
- range of designs and methods
- foster and promote culture of evaluation within government
- create demand for our work

Questions:
Q: for NFW: under threat of nonlinear transformation and climate change – species migration – are you considering (plans are static) IDing species and areas we're not going to conserve because we'll use – are you strategically planning? Triage?
A (Gould): tough issue, laws don't allow triage, policy issue – congress will have to deal with it
- if we decide to triage, we'll be sued, legal system will drive policy in that area (may be good or bad)
- until we get regulatory, legal consent process to tackle prob
- have to do it, don't know how yet

Q: for Mark: geographic check – should you be at international level? Scope of the mission?
- Doris Duke's will aimed to preserve wildlife in US and elsewhere and promote biodiversity, environmental health – has always been focused on US

Q: for Debra: evaluation = capacity builder for programs, neutral topic so brings people to table, process can help make ground by bringing people together – how much has AEA to make this case – beyond proving info and supporting, evaluation improves programs through its process?
A from Debra: focus on organization learning, more to the fore, using logic models to engage people in process
George: prior to the roadmap, many discussions were about impact assessment, evaluation belongs at the beginning, policy makers
NFW (Gould): policy leaders are confused about what evaluators do in terms of who has the clout – some orgs have clout, have to develop credibility upfront so when you're called in to evaluate community (oversight and ongoing evaluation community) needs to be seamless

- program managers know evaluators are valuable but needs to be seamless process with clear and defined roles (work to be done) – have to work WITH program people all along to define program