

EXECUTIVE SEMINAR PROGRAM IN NATURAL RESOURCES LEADERSHIP 2026-2027

Responding to Uncertainty and Change With New Partnerships and Approaches

The Executive Seminar Program in Natural Resources Leadership (ESP) is a case-study-based professional development program offered by the Center for Public Service at the Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University. Since 1976, ESP has helped nearly 1,000 mid- and senior-level career natural resources professionals strengthen leadership capabilities and develop pathways for career-long leadership growth. Each year the program travels to communities across the West, connecting participants with local leaders confronting natural resource challenges. Through presentations, dialogue, guided study, field visits, and peer learning, participants deepen their leadership perspective, build lasting professional networks, and explore practical approaches to solving complex public problems.

What Participants Gain

- Tools for leading collaborative processes and navigating conflict
- Deeper understanding of governance systems and stakeholder dynamics that support improved transparency and accountability
- Approaches to decision-making amid uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk
- Understanding the importance of cross-organizational and cross-community partnerships that enhance efficiency in outcomes and service delivery
- A trusted network of peers from natural resources organizations in the West

2026-2027 Program

The program combines online learning, an immersive in-person field case study, and a capstone session.



Online Sessions

December 11, 2026, January 14, 2027, February 11, 2027, and April 1, 2027

Four interactive half-day online sessions introduce core leadership concepts and prepare participants for the in-person case study.

Topics Include:

- Leading change and managing transition
- Emotional intelligence, strength-based leadership and interpersonal skills
- Governance and collaborative leadership frameworks
- Policy and legal issues related to the case study

These sessions also prepare participants for the field experience and provide time to reflect on lessons learned afterward.

Case Study Week

Participants engage with community leaders working to address a complex natural resource issue. Through presentations, facilitated dialogue, small team exercises, and field visits, participants examine how communities develop collaborative solutions and reflect on how to apply those lessons to their own leadership challenges.

**Collaborative Governance in a Complex Situation -
The Levee Ready Columbia Partnership
February 22-26, 2027 | Portland Oregon**

The greater Portland area relies on an extensive flood management system in the lower Columbia River floodplain, much of which was built more than a century ago to support agriculture, but now protects the state's largest economic land base, including Oregon's only international airport. Upgrading this aging infrastructure



is critical to addressing modern societal, regulatory, environmental, financial, and operations and maintenance challenges. Following Hurricane Katrina, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers notified local drainage districts of the need to improve the levee systems just as flood insurance accreditation for much of the infrastructure was beginning to expire. With numerous public agencies, industries, and communities involved—often with competing priorities—existing governance and financing systems proved inadequate. In response, local partners pursued a more collaborative, resource-leveraging approach that emphasized efficiency, shared accountability and responsive service to stakeholders. This effort evolved into the Levee Ready Columbia Partnership, a formal initiative to improve and maintain reliable flood safety and to ensure flood risk was addressed in a coordinated, multi-disciplinary way that set a course for a more resilient future.

During the case study week, participants will meet onsite at the Flood Safety District’s campus on the Columbia Slough and engage with a diverse set of perspectives from individuals directly involved in this transformative effort. We will also hear from leaders currently advancing integrated floodplain management that provides flood safety while incorporating emergency preparedness, building resilience to future weather conditions, celebrating cultural history, enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, and improving

water quality - all delivered with a strong commitment to customer service, transparency, and operational efficiency. Central to implementing this work is a growing recognition of community values—how living and working in a managed floodplain and its watersheds shapes people’s lives, especially for those who depend on these systems for livelihoods and shelter—and how decisions in urban floodplains have lasting implications, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful, inclusive approaches that balance risk reduction with shared community outcomes and clear accountability.

Online Capstone Session

April 29, 2027

The capstone session integrates leadership lessons from the program with the practical challenges participants face in their own organizations. Participants bring forward leadership issues from their work and apply program concepts in a collaborative problem-solving setting. The capstone also provides an opportunity for the cohort to strengthen professional connections and transition into the ESP alumni network.

Registration & Cost

Program Fee: \$8,900

The program fee includes participation in all online sessions, the case study week, and the capstone session.

Executive Seminar Program Team



ELIZABETH HOLMES GAAR
PROGRAM DIRECTOR
elizabg@pdx.edu | (503) 341- 4019



PAUL MANSON
ACADEMIC LEAD
mansonp@pdx.edu | (503) 725-2955



BRANDON KURTZ
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR
brandonk@pdx.edu | (503) 725-5190

REGISTER BY JULY 6

<https://www.pdx.edu/center-for-public-service/executive-seminar-program>

