

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

The articles in the program management section of these proceedings are a strong sampling of what real people and real programs are doing to actually manage risk. In this section, theory takes a backseat to the practical realities of developing systems to inspire staff, participants, management, and others to do the tough work of managing risks day in and day out.

For any given situation, assuming simple yes or no choices and ten variables, a practitioner is faced with over 1,000 potential outcomes. Increase this to 20 variables and the potential outcomes leap to over a million. This illustrates that risk managers for wilderness programs are nearly always dealing with complex systems that defy both simple rule-based solutions and the complete faith in the judgment of others.

As a practical matter, the most challenging risk to manage is human error. It occurs with regular frequency and can undermine best-laid plans. Fortunately, hand in hand with the potential for errors in judgment, comes the opportunity for nuanced evaluation and incremental modification of plans and tasks in such a way as to subtly and intentionally manage risk.

Silver bullets, easy answers, and paint-by-numbers solutions are not offered here, but well-conceived practices ripe for modification to another program's needs stand at the ready. The community of wilderness risk managers is small, friendly, and open. These proceedings and the conference itself are examples of individuals striving to contribute their own knowledge and experience for the betterment of all.

Please build on the ideas and practices that follow, and if you find something that works, please seek opportunities to share it with others—maybe by submitting it to these proceedings in the future.

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