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Planning a Human Dimensions Inquiry

Module 11 self-study — Chapter 12

NRES 315: HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Last updated: November 2, 2626

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How to use this self-study lesson

There is **no class meeting today**.

Set aside about **25–30 minutes**. Read each explanation, pause when prompted, and write your answer before advancing to the check.

Keep the Willow Bay case brief open. Nothing from this deck is submitted by itself; it prepares you for the entry ticket and Friday.

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Start with the decision—not a favorite method

The Midland Wildlife Commission must decide whether to create a seasonal quiet-water zone in Willow Bay.

"Send a survey" is not yet an inquiry plan. A defensible plan starts with the **decision need**, then identifies the question or participation purpose, and only then selects a design and method.

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Research and participation do different work

Research uses systematic, standardized empirical observation to answer a question about actions, beliefs, values, needs, experiences, or patterns.

Participation gives relevant and affected publics a structured role in a decision process. It can surface knowledge and improve legitimacy, but its participants are not automatically a representative research sample.

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Both may be necessary

Research might estimate how often defined users support several alternatives.

Participation might let affected publics help define those alternatives and explain constraints that the agency missed.

One cannot silently stand in for the other. State the job each will perform.

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Design, methodology, and method

- A **research design** is the logic and plan: purpose, questions, sampling, timing, analysis, and interpretation.
- A **methodology** supplies principles and justification for those choices.
- A **method** is a specific data-collection technique, such as a questionnaire, interview, focus group, observation, or analysis of existing records.

The same method can serve different designs; naming a method does not justify it.

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Four purposes sharpen a research question

A study may seek to:

1. **explore** a topic that is not yet well understood;
2. **describe** a phenomenon or population;
3. identify **relationships** among variables; or
4. **explain** causes.

Do not claim causal explanation from a design that can only describe.

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Suitability and feasibility are separate tests

Suitability: Would the inquiry actually answer the decision need in a credible and ethical way?

Feasibility: Can it be completed with the available time, money, expertise, access, and organizational support?

A useful idea can be infeasible; a cheap plan can be unsuitable.

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Need to know beats nice to know

Chapter 12 separates information into:

- **essential:** directly serves the decision purpose;
- **useful:** improves the decision but is not indispensable; and
- **interesting:** worth knowing, but not needed now.

Willow Bay's ten weeks and $48,000 make that ranking consequential.

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Existing information is evidence—with limits

Counters, complaints, petitions, enforcement files, and nest counts may prevent duplicating work and reveal what remains unknown.

But each record was created for a purpose. Twenty-two complaints do not mean 22 verified violations, and petition signatures do not estimate support among all bay users.

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Ask who cares—and who can act

An inquiry needs support from affected publics and from people inside the agency who will use its results.

Early leadership involvement can reduce the chance that findings are ignored. Early public involvement can reveal missing needs, knowledge, and risks.

Neither guarantees agreement.

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Inquiry creates expectations

Asking people to invest time can imply that action or influence will follow.

Before inviting participation or collecting data, MDWP should say what remains open, who decides, how results will be used, and what cannot change.

Do not study an option the agency cannot implement without explaining that limit.

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Rigor must fit the claim

Rigor means confidence in the truthfulness of findings.

Quantitative work emphasizes reliability and validity. Qualitative work emphasizes credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

More rigor takes resources. The standard must be high enough for the intended claim—not an excuse to make a larger claim from weak evidence.

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Time changes what is defensible

A high-quality survey commonly requires months. Meaningful advisory or collaborative work may take longer.

Willow Bay has ten weeks. The responsible response is to narrow the claim or the task, not to call a rushed process representative or collaborative.

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Ethics begins before data collection

The foundation is **do no harm**: minimize risk, seek benefit, respect self-determination, obtain informed consent, and secure culturally appropriate authorization where needed.

Avoid paternalism, colonialism, and "parachute" inquiry that extracts knowledge without relationship or return.

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Pause: diagnose the Willow Bay plan

For component B, the probability survey, write one sentence for each:

1. What useful claim could it support?
2. Who is absent from its two sampling lists?
3. Is that absence a suitability problem, feasibility problem, or both?

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Check your diagnosis

The survey could estimate views among the **defined listed populations**.

It omits unregistered paddlers, many visitors, shore anglers, and people with cultural ties who are not registered owners or shoreline households.

That is a suitability problem if MDWP wants to describe *all bay users*; fixing it may also create feasibility problems within ten weeks and $48,000.

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A compact planning chain

Decision → essential need → research question and/or participation purpose → public or target population → design and method → feasibility and ethics → claim and decision use

If one link is vague, the next link cannot repair it.

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Before Wednesday

Read Chapter 13 and the Willow Bay statements.

Bring forward one question: **Who needs evidence about them, and who needs a meaningful role in the decision?** Those are not necessarily the same list.

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