

Appendix 2

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL WORK GROUP BRIEFING SHEET

Decision by consensus is a leadership behavior of problem solving and decision making in groups in which all the parties involved actively discuss the issues surrounding the decision. The subgroup thus pools the knowledge and experience of all its members. For a successful leadership process any final decision must be supported by each member of the subgroup. The ideas and feelings of all the members are integrated into a subgroup decision, thus allowing several people to work together on a common problem, rather than producing a “we-they” stand-off.

As you might imagine, decision by consensus is usually difficult to attain and will consume more time than other methods of deciding an issue. As the energies of the subgroup become focused on the problem at hand (rather than on defending individual points of view), the quality of the decision tends to be enhanced. Research indicates, in fact, that this approach to problem solving and decision-making results in a significantly higher-quality decision than by implementing other methods such as the use of majority power (voting), minority power (persuasion), and compromise.

In the decision-by-consensus process, each subgroup member is asked to:

1. Prepare his or her own position as well as possible prior to meeting with the subgroup (but to realize that the task is incomplete and that the missing pieces are to be supplied by the other members of the subgroup).
2. Recognize an obligation to express his or her own opinion and explain it fully, so that the rest of the subgroup has the benefit of all members’ thinking.
3. Recognize an obligation to listen to the opinions and feelings of all other subgroup members and to be ready to modify one’s own position on the basis of logic and understanding – a very important leadership skill.
4. Avoid conflict-reducing techniques such as voting, compromising, or giving in to keep the peace and to realize that differences of opinion are helpful; in exploring differences, the best course of action will make itself apparent.

You have just completed an individual solution to Wilderness Survival: A Consensus-Seeking Task. Now your subgroup will decide on a subgroup solution to the same dilemmas. Remember, decision by consensus is difficult for leaders to attain, and not every decision may meet with everyone’s unqualified approval. There should be, however, a general feeling of support from all members before a subgroup decision is made. Take the time you need to listen for understanding, consider all members’ views, make your own view known, and be reasonable in arriving at a subgroup decision.