

Workshops on Ecosystem Services in the Federal Government

A Standard Assessment Framework for Ecosystem Services

Dean Urban
Nicholas School of the Environment
deanu@duke.edu // 919-613-8706

Lydia Olander
Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions
lydia.olander@duke.edu // 919-613-8713

Patrick Comer
NatureServe
pat_comer@natureserve.org // 703-797-4802

Proposal Summary. Ecosystems services—the benefits that natural ecosystems provide to society—are increasingly the focus of public and private land management decisions. There is a growing demand for standardization of assessment tools (measures, metrics and standards) that can be applied in a consistent manner across ecoregions and by practitioners from agencies with differing programmatic mandates. This task will require agreement across ecologists, economists, social scientists, and practitioners from academia, state and federal agencies, nonprofits, and the private sector. We propose an NCEAS working group to focus on the ecological and biodiversity characteristics related to the production of ecosystem services, especially, the development of robust, consistent methods and metrics for measuring the quantity and relative ecological value of these services in a multi-criteria decision framework. This effort will be coordinated with parallel activities, focused on social valuation, conducted through the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC), and with a larger stakeholder audience represented by the National Ecosystems Services Partnership (NESP). NCEAS activities will include a series of workshops within interim tasks that will evolve as a national program on ecosystem services is refined and codified.

Incorporating Values and Assessing Social and Environmental Trade-offs in Managing for Ecosystem Services

Short Title: Evaluating Trade-offs

Lydia Olander
Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions
lydia.olander@duke.edu // 919-613-8713

Dean Urban
Nicholas School of the Environment
deanu@duke.edu // 919-613-8706

Proposal Summary. Ecosystems services—the benefits that natural ecosystems provide to society—are increasingly the focus of land management decisions. Social values enter into these decisions at multiple levels: how stakeholders value ecological performance (How good is good enough?), how they value one service relative to others (Is water quality more important than wildlife habitat?), and whether social outcomes are commensurate with ecological outcomes (especially, Are the flows of ecosystem service benefits equitable?). We propose to convene two workshops and a set of interim tasks to develop and ratify standard approaches for incorporating these values into management and policy decisions, and for explicitly evaluating ecological as compared to social outcomes of these decisions. Stakeholder values will be elicited using standardized survey instruments, while social outcomes will be estimated by mapping the flow of benefits from producers to consumers of services, using geospatial service-area analyses. Service areas will then be overlaid on socioeconomic markers from US Census data. Surveys and service-area analyses will be developed in the initial workshop, and then administered in parallel by participants in different regions of the country. Results will be synthesized into a set of ‘best practices’ guidelines during the second workshop. These guidelines will then be available to partners in government and nongovernmental agencies.