

**Inaugural Policy Forum: Advancing Ecosystem Services
in Federal Resource Management Decisions**

**Hosted by the National Ecosystem Services Partnership and
A Community on Ecosystem Services**

at Resources for the Future, Washington, D.C.

May 8th, 2012

This document is not a comprehensive transcript of the event but rather a summary document that highlights many of the main points. We have used the abbreviation ES to stand for ecosystem services.

Meeting Purpose

This policy forum brought together representatives from federal agencies to share ideas and approaches for implementing ecosystem-services-based approaches to natural resource planning and management. Participants shared experiences from their efforts to evaluate ecosystem services and incorporate these assessments into agency decisions, with the goal of drawing from these experiences to inform future resource management processes and decisions. Participants were also asked to discuss the development of a guide to “ecosystem services planning and management,” a handbook to help managers understand more precisely how to incorporate the concept of ecosystem services into their existing planning processes.

Meeting Participants

Approximately 40 people attended the event. These were primarily representatives of federal agencies, agency staff and leaders currently grappling with or exploring the use of ecosystem services approaches in planning and program implementation, with a few experts from nongovernmental organizations and academia. The forum was facilitated by experts in federal agency processes. The list of participating individuals and organizations can be found at the end of this document.

Meeting Summary

A ecosystem services approach to planning and management can produce admirable benefits such as lower costs and better decisions, in ways that are collaborative and engaging to the public. While there is agency leadership support for the concept, and for pilots and trials; uncertainties about methods, lack of credibility, concerns about liability, and time commitment required can be barriers to accelerating and extending the use these new approaches. There are a growing number of agency processes that are calling for ecosystem services approaches including the new forest planning rule from the USFS, yet most agencies have yet to develop guidance on how resource managers are going to achieve new ecosystem services related objectives. Each agency and each project can develop its own approach but that is slow going and won't achieve broader objectives for national scale assessments and cross

comparability of benefits and outcomes. For example, the White House Office of Management and Budget will need national-scale metrics that are consistent and comparable at a high level yet are scalable and adaptable to the inherently local nature of ecosystem services. Agencies see the need for a common interagency language, core services of focus, agreement on units and metrics, and common accounting framework that is reasonable for resource managers to apply given their expertise and time available.

The day's discussion has been summarized under four major themes as articulated by one of the facilitators, Lynn Scarlett:

- Legal constraints and other guidelines
- Data and metrics needed
- Organizational or institutional design
- Partners and community input

Legal constraints and other guidelines: While there is not yet sufficient understanding of methods to develop formal guidelines, representatives from the Office of Management and Budgets (OMB) expressed their support for ES-based approaches. They see their potential to better inform decisions and thus suggested the need for continued development of these ideas within the federal agencies and for development of more consistent and transparent metrics and methods for accounting. Representatives from federal agencies asked for some clarity from OMB on their support for ES-based projects as agency budgets are being developed. In the future, work to strengthen and specify federal guidance on ES approaches may be helpful.

Data and metrics needed: There was consensus that standard metrics and methods are needed for quantification and valuation of services. However, several questions were raised about how much information is needed for adequate assessments, whether practitioners can assess when enough data have been collected, and how to assess whether the data in hand is the most useful data. Multiple participants felt that the scientific community could play a valuable role in helping develop and articulate best practices for ES data collection and analysis. It was noted that agencies collect a lot of data, but the question remains whether they are collecting the right data and how to coordinate data collection and use across agencies. A need for credible and comparable approaches for valuation and cost-benefit analysis were also raised.

Organizational or institutional design: Participants discussed the concerns of litigation holding back advancement on ES approaches until there are methods that are credible and defensible. However, there appeared to be a number of ways to use ES approaches in engaging communities in decisions that did not run up against concerns about litigation. Competing priorities for agency leaders were also cited as a challenge to the adoption of ES-based approaches, and several participants noted that institutional culture was slow to change. Participants cited the need for some sort of higher-level guidance (possibly from OMB) to help shift federal agency culture towards being more supportive of ES-based projects. Participants also felt a strong need to align incentives both across agencies and up and down the

agencies' organizational structure. They noted a possible role for OMB to ensure budget and roles for coordination.

Partners and community input: Participants noted that public engagement and support is critical to the success of these projects and discussed various methods for achieving that engagement, including establishing public dialogue before the project exists and building on existing community relationships. Participants also felt that agency leadership and the public might be more supportive of these issues if ecosystem services concepts were raised in a visible and compelling way.

Next Steps

Participants identified several specific ideas that could help accelerate the adoption of ES-based approaches in federal resource planning, management and decision making.

- Continuing the day's discussion as a federal agency shared learning group.*
- Developing shared principles, purposes and uses for ES approach.*
- Developing a guidebook for incorporating ecosystem services approaches into federal planning and management processes working in partnership with agencies on selected case studies to test and refine such guidance.*
- Developing a framework to integrate different types of data, evaluate trade-offs and incorporate changing values over time.*
- In the development of the guidebook and framework, work across agencies and with OMB to develop a consistent yet flexible framework to allow comparability and transparency for accounting and assessment of programs at a national level.*
- Developing a common language, list of services, and consistent and coordinated metrics.*
- Consider how existing datasets and information collected by agencies to inform national accounting of ecosystem services, as called for in the PCAST report, can also be used for the development of common metrics and accounting processes for federal agencies considering ecosystem services in their planning and management.*
- A valuation guide to help practitioners better do valuation.*
- Develop some agreement on methods to analyze ecosystem services trade-offs.*
- A coordinated federal effort (possibly spearheaded by OMB) on how to solve a small number of very large environmental problems like dead zone in the Gulf (including R&D and policy design) to provide a clear focal point for coordinated investment and engagement across agencies
- Guidance from WH or CEQ on use of state revolving loan funds in ES based management.
- Federal level declaration on the importance of ES that all feds (perhaps all NESP partners) can sign on to.

All ideas noted with an * are currently being incorporated into the development of a work plan for NESP and the federal agency shared learning group initially convened for this policy forum.

Convening Organizations

The **National Ecosystem Services Partnership (NESP)** engages both public and private individuals and organizations to enhance collaboration within the ecosystem services community and to strengthen coordination of policy and market implementation and research at the national level.

<http://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/ecosystem/nesp>

NESP is a project of the **Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions at Duke University**.

<http://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/about/>

A Community on Ecosystem Services (ACES) brings together government, non-governmental organization, academia, tribal, and private sector leaders to advance the use of ecosystem services and related science in conservation, restoration, resource management, and development decisions.

<http://www.conference.ifas.ufl.edu/aces/#>

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Supporting Partners

United State Geological Survey

US Forest Service

USDA Office of Environmental Markets

US Environmental Protection Agency

Bureau of Land Management

National Oceans and Atmospheric Administration

Resources for the Future

Rights and Resources Initiative

Defenders of Wildlife

American Forest Foundation

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, Duke University

Agenda

Advancing Ecosystem Services in Federal Resource Management Decisions

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Resources for the Future, Washington, DC

8:30 Welcoming comments

- Molly Macauley, Resources from the Future
- Tim Profeta, Director of the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, Duke University
- Sally Ericsson, White House Office of Management and Budget and Michael Boots, White House Council on Environmental Quality

9:00 Introductions around the room and plan and purpose for the day

- Lydia Olander, Director of the National Ecosystem Services Partnership and the Ecosystem Services Program at the Nicholas Institute, Duke University

9:15 Facilitators introduce process:

- Sally Collins, Fellow at the Rights and Resources Initiative, formerly head of the Office of Environmental Markets at USDA and a longtime career level leader at the US Forest Services
- Lynn Scarlett, Resources for the Future, Visiting Scholar and Co-Director, Center for the Management of Ecological Wealth; formerly Deputy Secretary and Chief Operating Officer of the U.S. Department of the Interior

Leaders will present their examples and give their perspectives to catalyze conversation. Presentations and discussion will focus on understanding the opportunities for integrating ES approaches, observed or expected benefits of the new approach, how ES is being incorporated, approaches and tools being used, as well as primary questions, uncertainties and critical barriers that are hindering progress.

9:45 First panel – 3 speakers: Ecosystem services evaluation in resource management planning: approach, what's working, what's not, what's needed to make this work.

- Rob Winthrop, Senior Social Scientist, Socioeconomics Program, Decision Support, Planning, and NEPA, DOI Bureau of Land Management; The case of San Pedro: Testing ecosystem services models
- Robert Deal. US Forest Service Science Team Leader, Deschutes National Forest.
- Margaret Davidson, NOAA Coastal Services Center: Marine Spatial Planning Ecosystem Services Tool and Use

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10:45-11:00: Break

11:00 Second panel: 3 speakers: Ecosystem services in program applications: what's working, what's not, what's needed to make this work.

- Paul Friday, DOD, Eastern North Carolina Land Use Sustainability program: incorporation of ecosystem services into a 25-county planning and implementation effort
- Claire Harper, Forest to Faucet Program with USFS
- Valerie Ringold, US Army Corps of Engineers, Northwest Division: Lessons Learned on the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project

12:00 – 12:30 – Discussion of examples – summation, general themes, lessons learned

12:30 – 1:30: LUNCH – Keynote Speaker: Janet Ranganathan; experience with their guidebook “Ecosystem Services: A guide for decision makers”

1:30: Summary from Facilitators

1:45 – 3:15: Discussion—Facilitators give ground rules for open group discussion

3:15 Break

3:30-5:00: Framing Next Steps: What is useful to managers and agency staff that are pioneering these approaches? What is useful to help expand application of such approaches to new planning and management processes? Is cross-agency coordination and consistency an important objective?

Meeting Participants

Advancing Ecosystem Services in Federal Resource Management Decisions

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Resources for the Future, Washington, DC

Name	Organization	
Michael	Boots	White House Council on Environmental Quality
Jim	Boyd	Resources for the Future
Frank	Casey	United States Geological Survey
Sally	Collins	Rights and Resources Initiative
Janet	Cushing	Army Corps of Engineers
Margaret	Davidson	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Christine	Davis	Environmental Protection Agency
Bob	Deal	United States Forest Service
Becky	Epanchin-Niell	Resources for the Future
Sally	Ericsson	Office of Management and Budget
Olivia	Ferriter	Department of the Interior
Tom	Fish	National Park Service
Paul	Friday	Department of Defense
Claire	Harper	United States Forest Service
Christopher	Hartley	National Resource Conservation Service
Tomer	Hasson	Office of Management and Budget
William	Hohenstein	United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Environmental Markets
Jay	Jensen	Council on Environmental Quality
Carl	Lucero	United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Environmental Markets
Molly	Macauley	Resources for the Future
Kit	Muller	Bureau of Land Management
Lydia	Olander	Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions
Linwood	Pendleton	Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
John	Powers	Environmental Protection Agency
Tim	Profeta	Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions
Janet	Ranganathan	World Resources Institute
Jake	Reilly	Office of Management and Budget
Valerie	Ringold	Army Corps of Engineers
Paul	Sandifer	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Kathryn	Saterson	Environmental Protection Agency
Lynn	Scarlett	Resources for the Future
Mark	Shaffer	Fish and Wildlife Service
Carl	Shapiro	United States Geological Survey

Mary	Snieckus	Forest Foundation
William	Sonntag	Environmental Protection Agency
John	Thomas	Environmental Protection Agency
Tony	Tooke	United States Forest Service
Abby	Van de Bogert	Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions
Sara	Vickerman	Defenders of Wildlife
Emily	Weidner	United States Forest Service
Cindi	West	United States Forest Service
Ken	Williams	United States Geological Survey
Bob	Winterbottom	World Resources Institute
Rob	Winthrop	Bureau of Land Management
Rob	Wolcott	Environmental Protection Agency
Heather	Wright	Moore Foundation
