Mitigation, Adaptation, Resilience: The Evolving Role of Climate Change in Restoration

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What I’d Like to Cover Today

• The climate change – ecosystem restoration link
• How the language describing that link is evolving
• Why that is important
• Suggestions for how to use that knowledge moving forward
Link Between Climate Change and Ecosystem Restoration

- Well established scientifically
- Understood more vaguely in other communities:
  - General public
  - Politicians

Successful implementation can be dependent upon understanding how that link is perceived.
Dialogue About This Link Keeps Evolving

Which link is emphasized as a driver for restoration depends upon time and place
Some Language Used Regarding the Restoration-Mitigation Link

“SER strongly urges local, regional, and national...”

“The core of the Forest Service response to climate change will center around adaptation (actions that reduce the vulnerability of species and ecosystems to the effects of a changing climate) and mitigation (activities that directly reduce or offset the greenhouse gas emissions that lead to climate change).”

US Forest Service, 2010

Society for Ecological Restoration International, August 2007
Moving on to the Restoration-Adaptation Link

"Target 15: By 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks have been enhanced, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification. “

Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010
And the Restoration-Resilience Link

“One of the most important ways in which we can safeguard our natural systems from climate change is to place a greater emphasis on managing for ecological function and protection of biological diversity. There is clear scientific evidence that healthy, biologically diverse ecosystems will be better able to withstand or bounce back from climate change impacts—indeed, they will be more "resilient."

This input has led the Task Force to narrow its focus to the following priority areas:

• Enhance Community Resilience
• Restore and Conserve Habitat
• Restore Water Quality
• Replenish and Protect Living Coastal and Marine Resources”

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, 2011
Why Does This Language Continue to Evolve?

Public Perceptions of Global Warming
(% of US adults, who evaluated “concern”)

[Graph showing public perceptions over time]
Why Is This Important?

- Climate change is not going away
  - Enhance understanding of link to ecosystem restoration
- Funding decisions affected more by public understanding than scientific understanding
- Language makes a difference!
  - Some language more politically charged than others
  - The wrong words can doom a project
  - The right words are dependent upon audience
Suggestions for Moving Forward

• Assess your audience before trying to “sell” the climate change benefits – Understand their decision-making context
• Recognize “hot button” words – positive and negative
  • “Resilience” may be the most “sell-able” concept at the moment – At least in the US
• Don’t let your knowledge get in the way
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