

**ACES 2014 Tuesday Lunch Town Hall**  
**December 9, 2014 | 12:15pm-1:20pm | Grand Ballroom Salons F-G**

**Title:** *Ecosystem Services and Municipal Planning: Engaging Local Decision-Makers*

**Description:**

In towns and small cities, local decisions or recommendations about land-use planning, infrastructure, and development are frequently made by planning boards, zoning boards, conservation commissions, and similar groups often comprised of volunteer citizens. These local planning units are faced with the very difficult task of making the on-the-ground decisions to balance a host of competing public and private resource use and protection decisions. Yet, these organizations often consist of volunteers who have limited awareness of environmental science and ecological principles, little time to search for technical information, and no access to natural resources professionals, let alone funds for data collection. Many communities face issues such as stormwater management, flood prevention, water quality protection, and the need to balance the provision of nature-based recreation with resource use; resource management problems that we suggest could be beneficially approached using an ecosystem services framework. However, we suspect that many challenges present themselves in trying to extend ecosystem services concepts into local planning decisions. For example, a community may be required to meet a specified level of nitrogen in their wastewater, but not have access to the information and tools needed to evaluate the costs and benefits of meeting the target with green infrastructure instead of a standard tertiary wastewater treatment system.

The goal of this town hall is to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with making the ecosystem services framework accessible to decision-makers without scientific training and at the scale of municipal planning, as well as assess interest in building a community of practice among local planning organizations and natural resources professionals. The purpose of the community would be to share knowledge, tools, and success stories to enable smaller local planning organizations to consider ecosystem services in their planning processes, and for planners, managers, and scientists to identify ways to improve the use of ecosystem services methods in a practical context at the local level. We aim to gather feedback on which ecosystem services are most relevant for smaller municipalities, and what type of tools, training, and information would allow local land-use planning groups to incorporate ecosystem services into their planning process.

**Who Should Attend and Why:**

This session provides participants the opportunity to share their experiences and ideas on the topic of applying an ecosystem services approach to planning for small municipalities. We invite participation from a wide range of fields; planners, natural and social scientists, and those involved in local governments are especially encouraged to attend.

Planned discussion topics include:

- What is the general level of understanding of and interest in ecosystem services among these groups?
- Which ecosystem services are the most appropriate to address at the local planning level?
- What tools are currently available for quantifying and valuing ecosystem services, and how accessible are these tools to users without scientific training?
- To what degree are ecosystem services, particularly green infrastructure, considered in the municipal planning process?
- What services/support are currently available to assist local groups if they wanted to adopt an ecosystem services approach; e.g., who is currently offering assistance/training?
- What impediments exist at the local planning level to embracing an ecosystem services approach?
- Success stories. Are there specific examples of communities who have embraced an ecosystem services approach?

**Proposed Session Agenda:**

- *10 minutes:* Coeli Hoover and Stephanie Snyder will introduce the topic, with an example from a Conservation Commission member from a small New England town.
- *40 minutes:* Hoover and Snyder will lead a facilitated discussion about the questions outlined above.
- *10 minutes:* Synthesis of findings and discussion of directions for research, funding opportunities, and partners.

**Workshop Organizers:**

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**Organizer Qualifications:**

Coeli M. Hoover is a Research Ecologist with experience conducting research and training on forest carbon sequestration, engaging audiences ranging from local Audubon chapters to international resource managers. Stephanie A. Snyder is a Social Scientist with the U.S. Forest Service with expertise in the development of decision support models that assist land managers, planners and land owners in making more efficient, effective and equitable resource planning decisions.