

Post Conference Report
ACES 2016 Town Hall
December 7, 2016 | 5:30-6:45

Title: *What's Next for Ecosystem Services in Decision Making: Priorities and Pathways*

To effectively incorporate ecosystem services into decision making, a rapid and efficient process is needed to move knowledge held by the research community into forms, processes, and tools that can be used by practitioners and decision makers. We will likely achieve better outcomes if this is an efficient and coordinated effort both within and outside governments.

In the next few years, significant investment of time and resources will be put forward for this transition. Government will need to put forward sufficient capacity and initiative to move things forward internally, researchers will need to focus attention on the critical needs of decision makers and in translating their knowledge for use, consulting firms will need to build necessary expertise and capacity, and private sector data gathering, data serving, analysis and decision support tool building will be needed. Bridging and coordinating organizations will be critical to bring these communities together and keep momentum, and foundational support can be the instigator helping to push the agenda and the glue that helps keep the coordination in place.

This town hall presented the perspectives of a broad representation in the ecosystem services community. The presentation provided a sense of the current landscape and near term priorities of the ecosystem services decision-maker and practitioner communities, focused on the critical needs for moving forward (and improving) the integration of ecosystem services into public and private decision-making.

Panelists

The town hall began with panelists representing a variety of government agencies, non-profits, and the private sector. Each was meant to describe how ecosystem services are used in their organization, and what the goals and needs are for ecosystem services in the coming years.

Chris Hartley, the Deputy Director of the [USDA Office for Environmental Markets](#), spoke about the importance of organizations like the National Ecosystem Services Partnership and its role in maintaining momentum in the ecosystem services space. He noted the need for consistency in ecosystem service assessment across federal agencies and the need for increased efforts in ecosystem service valuation (not necessarily monetary valuation).

Carl Shapiro, the Director of the [Science and Decisions Center](#) at USGS and representing the Department of the Interior, praised the steady progress of the ecosystem services field over the past 10 years. He noted the need for a priority assessment, to help determine where primary studies regarding ecosystem services are needed most.

Pete Wiley, an Economist at the [NOAA Office for Coastal Management](#), praised the current momentum ecosystem services has gained in his agency, however he noted that NOAA is currently examining where

there is room to incorporate ecosystem services even more, and to do it more consistently across the agency. In the future, he foresees the need to add social science capacity to NOAA to fully incorporate ecosystem services.

Elizabeth Murray, a Research Biologist at the [US Army Corps of Engineers](#), spoke about the need to incorporate ecosystem services more broadly—only some services are incorporated some of the time—and that should change in the future.

Stephen Posner, a Policy Engagement Associate at [COMPASS](#), spoke about his desire to use evidence to show that using ecosystem services frameworks really do make decisions better. He noted that within COMPASS he is looking towards connections between ecosystems and human health as well as natural capital accounts to help make the argument for increased ecosystem service integration.

Lydia Olander, the Director of the [National Ecosystem Services Partnership](#), stated the importance of reaching out to other audiences and making them aware of ecosystem services. She noted NESP's focus on helping federal agencies incorporate ecosystem services into decision making, and that looking to the future NESP aims to help increase consistency in how agencies do this.

Sara O'Brian, the Director of Strategy and Business Development at the [Willamette Partnership](#), is pleased that ecosystem services is becoming such a well-developed field, however she does not want it to become internally focused. She shared her worry that those involved in the field will focus too much on getting better and better at what we are comfortable with, but won't branch out enough. She also noted that those involved in the field assume that people use information to make decisions, but we cannot necessarily make that assumption. We must work on telling ecosystem services stories in a more salient way.

Sarah Murdock, Director of US Climate Resilience and Water Policy at [TNC](#), shared her hope for increased collaboration between the ecosystem services field and the industry and insurance fields in the future, and the importance for making a business case for ecosystem services.

Edie Sonne Hall, the Manager for Sustainable Forests and Products at [Weyerhaeuser](#), stated honestly that not much has been explicitly done for ecosystem services yet at Weyerhaeuser, however her presence at the conference shows their interest in getting involved. She emphasized that forests and forest landowners are diverse and complex, and that ecosystem service assessments must be sure to encompass that complexity.

Erica Goldman, the Director of Policy Engagement at [COMPASS](#), closed out the speakers by asking the panelists and the audience: how do we capture and transmit the momentum gathered in the ecosystem services field and propel it into the future? How can we try to ensure that this momentum does not falter?

Emerging themes from the panelists' remarks and the following discussion:

A need for a new level of consistency in ecosystem services assessment and management, especially within and between the federal agencies.

The need to maintain momentum in the ecosystem services space. Many remarked on the incredible progress that has been made in a relatively short time span, but many also remarked on the need to do a bit of introspection and an examination of what we have accomplished, so as to best use our foundation to catalyze meaningful future action and research relating to ecosystem services.

The need for better storytelling and outreach beyond the "traditional" ecosystem services partners. There is a need to find ways to better share the need for incorporating ecosystem services into decision making to a wider audience and to engage other sectors who could be valuable partners, but are not yet fully integrated into the ecosystem services network.

Organizer

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