ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ONLINE: AN OVERVIEW OF WEB-BASED RESOURCES

FACT SHEET TEN • SPRING 2013

This fact sheet series highlights innovative ways that family forest and ranch owners are prospering from protecting and enhancing ecosystem services on their land. Ecosystem services are the benefits people receive from nature such as water quality, wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration.

As the concepts of ecosystem services and payments for ecosystem services (PES) have evolved, numerous web-based resources have been created to 1) provide and exchange information about ecosystem services, and 2) facilitate transactions between those who provide ecosystem services and those who wish to compensate those providers, also commonly referred to as "buyers and sellers" of ecosystem services.

In 2011, a broad internet search for web-based ecosystem services resources by the research team yielded many results which were reviewed and compiled into a catalog. In 2013, this catalog was updated with new information and made available on the project website. It provides a comprehensive listing of available resources to those interested in ecosystem services, including landowners. This fact sheet provides an overview of the different types of resources that are available in the catalog, along with points to consider while browsing them. An accompanying fact sheet highlights useful resources in each of the four categories outlined below.

RESOURCE CATEGORIES

Web-based resources fall into four broad categories. These categories are not exhaustive but generally represent the types of resources encountered:

Matchmakers: Sites where individuals or organizations can find PES programs and funding. The purpose of a matchmaker is to help connect someone providing an ecosystem service, such as a landowner, with those who wish to purchase or fund that service. This category also includes the web-based infrastructure that facilitates transactions between "buyers" and "sellers."

Evaluators: Sites that provide tools, standards, protocols and methodologies to measure the value of specific ecosystem services or the impact of development activities that may necessitate offsets or mitigation.

Libraries: Sites that aggregate ecosystem services-related reports, news and case stories of projects. Libraries are primarily used as information repositories, though they can also be used to inform and build networks.

Networks: Sites that promote collaboration between ecosystem services practitioners with the intent of exchanging information or developing resources, tools, programs and policies that promote ecosystem services both in concept and practice

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KEEP IN MIND

Although we have attempted to simplify the categorization of these online resources, there are some key points to consider:

Different Target Audiences. Although some websites may be useful to the public at large, others are geared towards specific users. For instance, some websites were created to assist private landowners, while others, especially complex valuation tools, may be more appropriate for organizations with technical expertise.

Various Scales. Each site covers a different geographic scale, ranging from international policy to highly localized programs. Some sites encompass multiple scales or transcend scale by compiling information available on ecosystem services regardless of geography.

Traditional vs. Innovative. Some sites focus on more traditional programs and sources of funding, such as Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm Bill funding, whereas others are pioneering new opportunities that leverage private capital.

Multi-Functionality. Sites that serve several purposes can fit into multiple categories. A site with a library of resources may also foster a network of practitioners across sectors. In addition, some site functionality may not currently be captured by our categorization.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

One of the biggest challenges facing organizations that create web-based resources is the continual need to update and maintain these resources given newly available information. The world of ecosystem services and payments for ecosystem services is evolving rapidly, and en-suring that the resources remain relevant requires a significant investment. Furthermore, resource developers must continually monitor and modify websites to ensure that user interfaces are intuitive and that sites remain relevant and responsive to their target audiences.

Ecosystem services span multiple scales, from the local to the global, and no single web-based resource can provide a "one-stop shop" for providers of ecosystem services and investors. Consequently, integration between web-based resources will become increasingly important, as will the need to continually involve and inform the appropriate intermediary organizations – non-governmental organizations, government agencies, businesses, and others – that connect ecosystem service providers with investors.

LEARN MORE

For more information about the project, the online resource catalog, and the full fact sheet series, go to: **www.tinyurl.com/SNWEcosystemServices**, or contact:
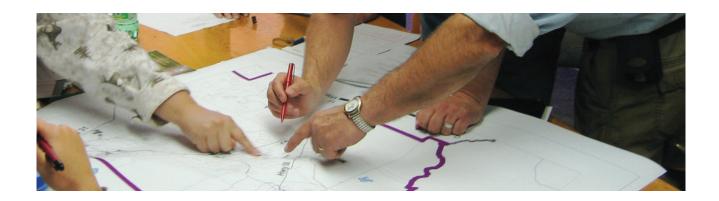
Hannah Gosnell, Oregon State University
gosnellh@geo.oregonstate.edu

Lauren Gwin, Oregon State University Extension
lauren.gwin@oregonstate.edu

Cass Moseley, University of Oregon
cmoseley@uoregon.edu

Alaina Pomeroy, Sustainable Northwest
apomeroy@sustainablenorthwest.org

Max Nielsen-Pincus, University of Oregon
maxn@uoregon.edu

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