Editorial

Ecological Applications aims to showcase research that supports management, policy, and governance of the world's ecosystems. It is both a venue for advances in ecological science relevant to decisions, and for innovations in applying that knowledge. These goals lead to a distinctive style in the journal that has several components to be considered by successful authors. Our editors look first for a clear statement of the scientific unknown and the impact of that unknown on an application or applications. Next comes a key judgment in deciding whether to even review a paper or not. We seek to publish papers that will inform researchers and managers broadly and use this as a primary criterion in selecting which papers to review.

We generally review papers that use case studies or broader surveys to develop more general theory or practice. We generally do not review papers that report on an application of existing or new theory to a specific species, site, or situation where the focus is on that specific case. We recognize that these more specific studies have great value and refer many of them to *Ecosphere*. However, our ideal paper is one where a manager in a different region, or in a distant ecosystem, or working with a different species will recognize a commonality and find something of use in fulfilling their responsibilities.

What does this mean? We look for papers that make the effort to explore how a result might be applicable broadly, with discussion of where a result might be useful, as well as where it might not apply. For example, a paper about a specific natural area whose abstract concludes with discussing the implications for managing that particular reserve will get more scrutiny than a paper that ends with a sentence discussing the broad application of the result in other settings. We allow authors to take the space in their papers to flesh out these issues. While other journals might consider such discussion speculative, most successful papers include a section in the results and discussion speaking to a broader audience about the significance of the result.

Ecological Applications has a number of other policies aimed at allowing authors to present information in the most usable way. We do not have a separate Concepts and Synthesis section, but we do not require new primary data in research papers. We welcome synthetic papers, surveys, and meta-analyses that harvest data from the literature to derive new scientific conclusions and management approaches. We do not publish review papers, but we are happy to consider papers presenting new concepts, conclusions, and methods based on already-existing and published data.

A few years ago, *Ecological Applications* took a major step towards making results published in the journal more usable and more transparent by requiring that data presented in the journal be openly available in an appropriate archival home. In the next year, we will extend that policy to include code, workflows, and scripts used to produce the analyses. This requirement, already in place for many journals, will aid in peer reviewing papers with complex analyses and will support replication by interested colleagues. We will publish guidelines and specific policies around the requirement, and the announcement will be accompanied by a paper on current best practices in archiving of data and code. This policy will be periodically updated as changes occur in this fast-evolving area.

The topics considered by *Ecological Applications* authors continue to expand. In the past year, we've published important papers on a number of conservation issues of national and global concern, including complex and contentious issues such as management of fragile fisheries, ecosystem response to climate change, the ecology of Gunnison's Sage Grouse, and human–environment interactions in wildfire dynamics. Some of these papers have generated significant attention, in both public and scientific circles, and produced responses through additional research and management investigations. As issues in the journal remain current in scientific and public debate, our policies aiming papers at a broader audience, and supporting transparency and replication become more and more important.

Our authors' and readers' enthusiasm for the journal and our response to trends in publication have kept the journal healthy. Submissions have held relatively steady with 793 new submissions in 2017. We've made some significant improvements in the time spent handling manuscripts. Manuscripts not sent for peer review receive a decision within 12 days on average. The time to a first decision for peer reviewed manuscripts (which are slightly less than half of submitted manuscripts) has been reduced by 9% in the past year, down to an average of 79 days. We gratefully rely on the

volunteer services of our Editorial Board and expert peer reviewers, and are dependent on their ability to fit these roles into busy professional lives. We generally ask for reviews to be completed within three weeks and are pleased that many do make the deadline, as the average time for review has been ~24 days.

The most notable advance we have made since the move to partnership with John Wiley & Sons is the ability to post fully copy-edited and typeset papers in Early View as soon as they are ready, rather than having to wait for a journal issue. This and other improvements in the production process resulting from coordination with ESA staff and Wiley has resulted in a 50% reduction in the time from acceptance to publication in 2017 compared to previous years. Instead of waiting seven months to see their papers appear in print or online, authors and readers now can see the version of record published online within three to four months of acceptance.

—David S. Schimel
Editor-in-Chief