



Redeeming Sins of Omission: Accounting for People in Mitigation

A new approach for identifying potential ecosystem services winners and losers

EMBARGOED UNTIL: Saturday, February 16, 8:30am Eastern time

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Location: AAAS Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, Hynes Convention Center, Room 309

Session: From Promise to Proof: How Ecosystem Service Science Is Transforming Real Decisions

Date & Time: Saturday, February 16th, 2013: 8:30 -11:30am

BOSTON, MA - February 16, 2013 –Billions of dollars are spent every year on development projects such as mines, energy plants and transportation systems. While most countries require mitigation to offset environmental degradation that results, none requires an explicit accounting of people in these efforts. Scientists at the Natural Capital Project (NatCap), led by Lead Scientist Heather Tallis, have developed a new approach to mitigation and habitat restoration that identifies winners and losers – people who would lose ecosystem services and those who would gain them in these circumstances.

Measuring the impacts of natural resources to people is possible through the use of newly developed tools for mapping and valuing landscape elements that provide benefits to different groups of people. Using these “servicesheds,” scientists can determine what impacts can and cannot be mitigated and for whom. NatCap Ecosystem Services Modeler Lisa Mandle revealed the latest research on the serviceshed approach to impact assessment and mitigation today at the American Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting in Boston.

To illustrate the serviceshed approach, Mandle presented case studies on proposed development projects for coal mines in Colombia and a road through the Peruvian Amazon. In each case, she illustrated how the new tool could map the different flows of ecosystem services to different populations such as indigenous and urban communities, and how those flows might change under various mitigation proposals.

“Using servicesheds to guide decisions about where to mitigate can help insure that mitigation truly offsets environmental impacts,” said Mandle. Addressing mitigation in this manner “avoids the creation of social injustice that occurs when ecosystem services like clean drinking water or recreational opportunities are restored to some people but not others,” she added.

This serviceshed approach clarifies what can and cannot be mitigated from the perspective of people. It is a promising foundation for future mitigation policy that places a premium on human well-being. This revolutionary approach could play a powerful role, considering the billions of dollars spent on development projects every year, as well as emerging requirements from multilateral institutions (such as the International Finance Corporation) to account for natural capital in environmental impact assessments.

Media Resources:

AAAS Session Information: <http://aaas.confex.com/aaas/2013/webprogram/Session6052.html>

Natural Capital Project: www.naturalcapitalproject.org

Image -Mockup of NatCap's new servicesheds tool: www.naturalcapitalproject.org/images/servicesheds.jpg

The Natural Capital Project (NatCap) is a partnership among Stanford University, The Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Fund and the University of Minnesota that works to develop and provide practical ecosystem service approaches and tools, apply them in select areas around the world, and engage influential leaders to advance change in policy and practice.

