



Ecosystem Workforce Program

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THE MONEY DOESN'T DELIVER ITSELF: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERMEDIARIES IN ECOSYSTEM SERVICES PROGRAMS

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Payments for ecosystem services (PES) and conservation programs that compensate landowners improve the resilience of working lands by creating markets for services such as clean air and water, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat. However, landowners can face difficulty accessing and navigating these programs. Program administrators may lack the resources to strategically align participants for broader conservation goals or build networks for successful market development. In this gap, intermediaries have emerged. They connect landowners and conservation resource providers, improving program delivery and environmental outcomes. To better understand the factors in program delivery and success, we examined how intermediaries interact with both program providers and recipient landowners in the rural West.

Approach

We conducted over 130 interviews in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana with landowners and staff from nonprofit organizations and government agencies. We asked about barriers to participation in conservation programs and PES market development, and about how intermediaries worked with landowners and each other to address these barriers.

Results

We found that intermediaries play the following important roles in PES and conservation programs:

Increase and enable landowner participation.

Conservation programs, particularly federal programs, can require significant investment and paperwork. This is a barrier for many landowners who wish to practice conservation. Numerous nongovernmental organizations across the West actively increase landowner engagement by conducting outreach, identifying management needs, and assisting with program application and administration. Government staff, businesses, or other entities may also provide these services.

Examples of intermediaries

Increasing landowner participation:

The Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation in northern central Washington facilitates fish habitat restoration in partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation by working directly with landowners to identify programs that will fit their conservation needs and overcome barriers to participation by assisting with planning, paperwork, and implementation.

Strategically aligning resources:

Vital Ground, a nonprofit organization in western Montana, has developed a large landscape plan for crucial grizzly bear habitat. They use a range of resources including conservation easements to coordinate landowners and develop habitat and wildlife corridors across landownerships.

Building PES markets:

The Willamette Partnership, a coalition of government and other stakeholders in western Oregon, has developed "Counting on the Environment," a program that creates ecosystem credits and provides protocols and tools for both landowners and buyers alike to understand and participate in PES markets.

Strategically align resources and landowners to increase conservation impacts. Inconsistent adoption of conservation practices can limit the success of PES and conservation programs at the landscape scale. Intermediaries address this challenge by analyzing environmental conditions, prioritizing conservation goals, and deliberately organizing sources of funding and technical assistance that leverage and maximize ecological outcomes. Intermediaries also strategically engage landowners when conservation on their land will be crucial for achieving desired impacts across a larger area.

Build necessary connections and conditions for PES markets. Many PES markets are emerging, and are limited at this stage. It may not be clear how to analyze and assign value to services such as clean water, or to find willing buyers for them. Nongovernmental organizations have emerged to develop accounting and crediting systems. They also establish necessary technology for buyers to access credits and participate in ecosystem marketplaces.

Implications

Intermediary organizations in the West provide technical assistance that can overcome key barriers in participation and market development in PES and conservation programs. They improve government service delivery and effectiveness by working with individual landowners, government and other partners to efficiently align resources for common conservation goals. They also build new systems and tools that are essential for successful PES markets. Often, there are no entities that can fulfill these necessary roles. Our work suggests that intermediaries are often key to facilitating landowner access, aligning environmental needs across large landscapes, and delivering diverse socioeconomic benefits from programs. As providers of these essential services, intermediaries need support for their roles in conservation and PES programs.

More information

A description of the project, briefing papers, and fact sheets with examples of projects on the ground can be found on the project website at: www.tinyurl.com/SNWEcosystemServices.

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