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How can we improve information delivery to support conservation and restoration decisions?

Ecologists have generated an immense amount of knowledge about how to manage and restore ecosystems. Yet identifying the most effective ways to incorporate this knowledge into conservation and resource management decisions remains an important challenge.

In a paper published in *Biodiversity and Conservation*, we report on the results of a survey distributed to restoration practitioners and public and private land managers.

Managers and restorationists were asked to rate the “importance” and “availability” of five methods of delivering information about the conservation and restoration of riparian bird habitat. Three of these methods (synthetic reviews, peer-reviewed publications, and unpublished reports) were based on printed formats. The other two methods were interactive web-based tools and face-to-face interactions between ecologists and decision makers.

The importance and availability ratings varied among the five methods of providing information for decision support. Synthetic reviews were ranked first in importance and second in availability. Peer-reviewed publications also had a high importance rating, and were rated as the most available method. Unpublished reports were moderately important, but they ranked much lower in their availability ratings.

Web-based tools received low importance and availability ratings. In contrast, face-to-face interactions received high importance ratings, similar to those of peer-reviewed publications and synthetic reviews. However, the availability of one-on-one interactions was rated lower than other methods.

The urgent conservation decisions we face today require interdisciplinary approaches to provide decision makers with the best available information. Our results indicate that ecologists and conservation biologists should prioritize face-to-face interactions with decision makers to enhance the delivery and utility of all types of decision support tools.

Management Implications

- Face-to-face interactions are important, but rarely available to land managers. Hence, developing information to support conservation decisions should include activities that provide in-person interactions to ensure that information is used effectively. Funders should support these activities.
- Peer-reviewed publications and synthetic reviews are important and available. There is a need for well-organized clearinghouses that make this information more easily available.
- Web-based tools are not perceived as important or widely available. If web-tools grow in importance, ecologists will need to engage with decision makers to provide the training they need to use these tools effectively – again supporting the need for in-person interactions.

Seavy, N.E., and C. A. Howell. 2009. How can we improve information delivery to support conservation and restoration decisions? *Biodiversity and Conservation* (open access at: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/c45573t33379n41n/fulltext.pdf>)