

## WHAT FACILITATES AND IMPEDES THE PROGRESS OF ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT?

Ecosystem management (EM) is an approach to managing natural resources that considers multiple species in whole ecosystems, involves the collaboration of multiple participants, and balances social needs with ecosystem protection. Since 1995 the Ecosystem Management Initiative has been tracking EM approaches across the country to characterize and learn from this experience. Based on phone and written surveys of 100 cases in 1995, 1999 and 2003, here is a picture of *what helps these efforts be successful* and *what hinders progress*.

### Cases at a glance

**Age** of a project ranges from two to 32 years old in 2003, with an average age in 2003 of 10-15 years.

**Area** ranges from 60 to 410,000,000 acres, with the majority of projects less than 500,000 acres, on both private and public lands, frequently with federally listed threatened or endangered species on site.

**Ecosystem** types vary widely, but most projects focus on wetland, river, forest and/or grassland ecosystems, while fewer are based on desert or coastal systems.

**Resource use** commonly in project areas includes development, agriculture, timber and/or recreation.

For more information and additional fact sheets see:

[http://www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/research/em\\_trends.htm](http://www.snre.umich.edu/ecomgt/research/em_trends.htm)

### What gets a project off the ground and what keeps it going?

Younger projects, or those that are still in the planning or early implementation phase, rate the following as being especially important in facilitating their progress:

- Strong project leadership
- Well-defined management plan and project boundaries
- Availability of baseline data
- Collaborative or consensus-based decision-making
- Meeting on a regular, ongoing basis
- Support of private landowners

Later, when a project is in full implementation, other facilitating factors become more important, including:

- Well-trained personnel

### Overall, what is considered important for progress?

#### More important

Dedicated, energetic individuals  
Adequate funding  
Support of government agencies  
Interagency cooperation  
Sense of ownership among participants  
Collaborative or consensus-based decision-making  
Broad stakeholder involvement

#### Less important

Outreach to the public or media  
Support of elected officials  
Monitoring programs  
Formalized partnerships  
Laws or court decisions

- Involvement of NGOs
- Trust among stakeholders
- Willingness to take risks

### What are the biggest obstacles to progress?

**Funding and personnel shortages** were rated as the top two barriers to success. Many groups are also affected by insufficient scientific information and the severity of ecological stresses.

*Few* EM projects report that they are impeded by opposition from interest groups, land owners, elected officials, or agencies.

### What do successful projects have in common?

Another way to understand what moves projects forward is to assess what are the characteristics of groups that report greater ecological, social or process outcomes, such as improvements in on-the-ground management practices. These successful groups tend to have several features in common:

- A structure in which oversight responsibility is vested in federal agencies or program managers.
- Increased engagement in certain strategies, including:
  - plan development,
  - locating project office/staff in the project area,
  - training project staff in data collection and/or analysis,
  - conducting education and outreach,
  - fundraising, and
  - monitoring.

They also have unique factors they find move their project forward, such as support of landowners, well-trained personnel, adaptive management approaches, and/or a well defined management plan.

### Sources

Schueller, Sheila K. and Steve L. Yaffee. Trends in Collaborative Ecosystem Management from 1999 to 2003. *In prep.*

Brush, Mark, Allen Hance, Kathleen Judd, Elizabeth Rettenmaier. 2000. Recent Trends in Ecosystem Management. A Master's Project completed for the School of Natural Resources & Environment, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Yaffee, Steven L. Ali F. Phillips, Irene C. Frentz, Paul Hardy, Sussanne Maleki, and Barbara E. Thorpe. 1996. Ecosystem Management in the United States: An Assessment of Current Experience. Washington, DC: Island Press.