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 these efforts aim to achieve and what strategies they use to get there.

**What are the goals of EM projects?**

EM projects are primarily concerned with restoring or maintaining biodiversity, often including threatened and endangered species, and with improving collaboration among multiple parties.

Overall, ecological and process goals tend to be rated as more important than social and economic goals.

Specific goals that are less important for most projects include maintaining soil or air quality and the inclusion of under-represented groups in decision-making.

**Many projects aim to restore, increase or maintain...**

- Biodiversity, ecosystem, habitats
- Populations of threatened or endangered species
- Water quality
- Public environmental awareness
- Recreation opportunities
- Economic health
- Community character
- Collaboration or communication among participants
- Coordination of activities
- Multi-party agreement
What strategies are projects using to achieve goals?

Projects use a combination of resource management, organizational process and socioeconomic strategies. Overall, process strategies, such as coordinating, planning and collaborating, are used more than economic- or policy-related strategies.

Infrequently used strategies include setting aside land as reserves, reintroducing rare/protected species, creating a new organizational structure, and economic strategies such as creating jobs in sustainable industries or attracting outside investors.

How do project goals and strategies change over time?

As the box to the right shows, the importance of some goals and strategies depends on the phase of a project, probably because factors such as funds and organizational support are prerequisite to implementing certain strategies.

Projects that are younger (have started more recently) are more likely to have goals related to economic health and community character and resilience. These younger projects are also more likely to engage in economic strategies such as creating jobs in sustainable industries or attracting outside investors. It may be that this reflects a recent shift in EM approaches or that these difficult strategies are attempted early on but not continued.

Sources

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.