



Counting on the Environment

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We need to count on the environment

Research and experience in the Willamette Valley and other regions has shown farm and forest lands provide ecological services that go well beyond food and fiber. Those lands provide clean drinking water, healthy soils, habitat, and clean air, all services that are expensive or impossible to replace once lost. Markets are emerging that assign values to these services, expanding the opportunities for land managers capitalize on the investments they've made in sustainable landscapes. Yet, there remain gaps between the opportunity and the reality.

These gaps include an accounting system to turn known ecosystem impacts and benefits into credits that can be traded. That system needs to be transparent and accepted by the public and private parties operating markets. Secondly, tools and infrastructure are needed to connects land managers with credit supply to buyers with credit demand. If these tools are not cost-effective and usable, markets will struggle to deliver on their potential. The Willamette Partnership will work with stakeholders to begin filling some of these gaps to match the opportunity of markets with the reality of delivering ecosystem benefits we can count on. This project does not encompass the universe of market needs, but an important set of specific products.

Project Purpose and Objectives

- Work with stakeholders to obtain Oregon's first multi-stakeholder agreement to use a shared accounting system to quantify impacts and credits to ecosystem services for application in ecosystem markets.
- Lead a pilot project to demonstrate real environmental benefits, and compare results from this functions-based accounting system with results from current approaches.
- Develop the tools and technologies farmers, foresters, and other land managers will need to:
 - I. evaluate and participate in emerging ecosystem service markets
 - II. prioritize restoration actions when making land management decisions
 - III. access payments for a combination of water quality, habitat, species, and potentially carbon

Initial Working Group Participants

US Fish and Wildlife Service
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
USDA Forest Service
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Environmental Protection Agency
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Oregon Governor's Office
Oregon Department of Agriculture
Oregon Department of State Lands
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Department of Transportation
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

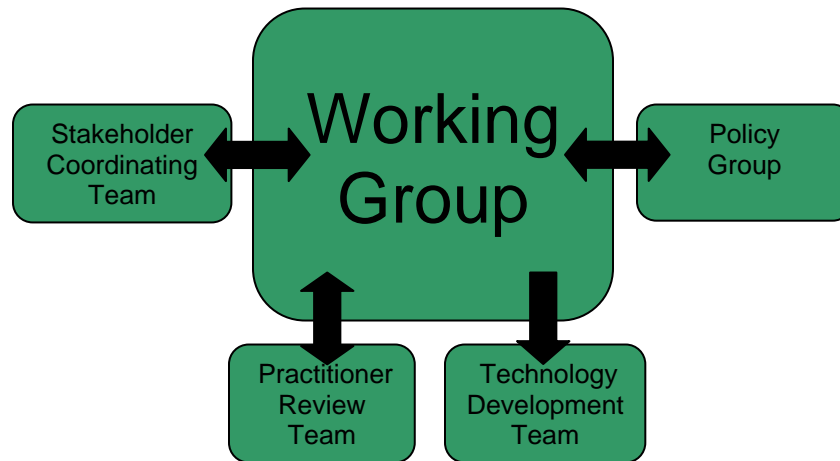
Oregon Department of Forestry
Oregon Department of Water Resources
Clean Water Services
City of Albany
City of Portland
City of Eugene
Cascades West Council of Governments
Institute for Natural Resources
The Nature Conservancy
Defenders of Wildlife
Ecotrust
Mud Slough Wetland Mitigation Bank



Project Process and Workplan

The project runs from July 1, 2008 to July 30, 2010. Early focus will be on reviewing and selecting an accounting system (Jul 2008- Aug 2009). The system will be piloted on a project in the Willamette Valley (Sept 2008- Aug 2009). As the accounting system and pilot project become more defined, technology development will begin for the tools landowners will need to access the accounting system and markets (Dec 2008-Dec 2009). The project deliverable will be rolled out to market participants January 2010-April 2010.

The project will include a diversity of stakeholders with several ways for people to participate. Stakeholders include state and federal regulatory agencies, local government and non-governmental agencies, business and private firms, and producers. The project will focus on the technical details of approving an accounting system and developing tools, but it will also sustain a process to elevate any needed policy changes to support markets in Oregon. The diagram below describes the decision-making bodies for the project.



The central Working Group includes all of those public and private parties steering the method development part of the project. Their organizational heads are represented by the Policy Group. The Stakeholder Coordinating Team is composed of some of the founding partners of the project and will provide strategic direction. The Practitioner Review Team, which includes potential buyers and sellers of credits, will comment on the Working Group's conclusions at key decision points. Finally, the partners that compose the Technology Development Team will design market infrastructure determined essential by the Working Group.

It is important to note that none of these groups are starting from scratch. The Willamette Partnership has built some of the prototype tools and protocol templates that can be used to support markets. The Oregon Department of Transportation has invested heavily in an ecosystem accounting system, and several approaches are available to build from.

For more information

This is a complex project with several moving parts and connections to similar efforts going on within Oregon and in other regions. Just as the accounting systems and tools within markets need to be transparent and inclusive, the process for this project will strive toward similar ends. If you have any questions, ideas, or comments, they are always welcome. More detailed information will be posted on the Willamette Partnership's website at www.willamettepartnership.org as it becomes available.