

Breakout 3A: Ethical Issues and Concerns with Ecosystem Markets

Panelists:

- Curt Meine, The Aldo Leopold Foundation
- Sally Collins, Rights and Resources Initiative Fellow, Former Director of the USDA Office of Environmental Markets and member of the American Forest Foundation Board of Trustees
- Sally Duncan, Institute for Natural Resources, Oregon State University
- Moderated by Ted Toombs, Environmental Defense Fund

Abstract:

The panel explored the ethical/social issues surrounding ecosystem markets. We've been getting these benefits for free all these years, why pay now? What is "fair"? Who should pay? The panelists asked what the rights of landowners are to damage/degrade their land—some of whom are they compensated for improving the damages they caused in the first place. Are ecosystem markets a triumph or a failure of the Land Ethic?

1. Brief description about what each panelist covered in their respective discussions

- Curt Meine, The Aldo Leopold Foundation, looked at the philosophical/moral/ethical dimensions of ecosystem issues. Aldo Leopold once said that by changing a society's wants, we can change the economic factors bearing on land. Wendall Berry has said, "environmental movement failed because it never came up with an economic plan". Meine asked if we can rethink the concept of "the environment".
- The panelists also asked if ecosystem service markets are ethical or unethical?
 - Ethical – assigning a value to things previously not ascribed monetary value
 - Unethical – commodify everything, put a price tag on everything

2. Overarching themes and key takeaway:

- What is the nature of relationship between nature and the economy?
- The panelists' plea: allow the ethics discussion happen at the same pace as economic discussion.
- Market and government are not solutions to every problem. Sometimes neither of these options is sufficient.
- The market needs the same adaptive/robust management that we apply in regulation.

3. How this panel outlines (or contributes) to where we might go (as ecosystem services/markets professionals) from here:

- The panelists emphasized the importance in including ethicists in the conversation of ecosystem markets—involve ethicists in discussions at every step—this concept is not an afterthought.
- If our processes don't serve land health, then it's a failure regardless of whether it makes money or not
- Economists ought to be equally well schooled as they are in dimensions of ethics.
- For the future, how can we as a society to ensure alignment of health of economy and health of land that supports that economy?