

ONES Forum Presentation – M. Molnar

I've been invited here today to share an upcoming report that the David Suzuki Foundation has prepared – the Natural Capital Policy Review. The report will be available through our website by the end of this month where it can be downloaded free of charge.

The purpose of the report is to evaluate the efficacy of existing policy options and provide recommendations for new solutions that should be adopted in order to protect and restore ecosystem services. We kept the scope to local and regional governments. We did this because we recognize that local governments have a critical role to play in the preservation of nature, and its associated services. The realities of population growth that is sharply focused towards cities, coupled with the provincial downloading of responsibilities, have left local governments with the burden of managing much of our threatened natural capital, often with few resources and little guidance on how to implement or enforce provincial mandates and policies.

Now although the report is focused on the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, I think there is much that is of value to the municipalities of southern Ontario. So let me provide you with a very quick run-down of what the report covers, and what our key findings were. The report is broken-down into three sections:

- Section 1 explains the concepts of natural capital and ecosystem services, and identifies ecosystem services of importance to urban regions. It addresses the role of government in stemming the decline of natural capital and opportunities and challenges of implementing protection policies at a local scale
- Section 2 reviews and assesses policies available to local governments to protect, enhance, and restore natural capital. Policies are broken into 3 groups: public ownership (such as the Free Crown Grant Program or the purchase of property rights), regulatory instruments (such as planning and zoning tools), and market-based tools (such as environmental tax instruments and shifting subsidies). Case studies of promising, innovative, or successful policies are provided throughout
- Section 3 provides an analysis of three policy recommendations, which are crafted to address gaps in policy and are weighed against a set of 5 criteria.

So not surprisingly, we were unable to identify a silver bullet – a policy or group of policies that would be a perfect fit for all of B.C.'s urban regions and municipalities. Communities displayed a considerable

range of responses regarding threatened areas, public attitudes, government budget, capacity, and leadership. This in addition to wide variances in the number and type of policies that have already been implemented to protect and restore natural capital. A number of policy gaps did emerge however. There were 3 in particular that I would like to mention.

- Regional conservation tracking would address the most critical gap in local efforts to protect natural capital. The lack of knowledge regarding the extent and quality of our natural assets within each community is crippling the ability to respond effectively. Regional governments must take the lead in developing natural capital indicators and targets to track the health of ecosystem services, as well as the effectiveness of related policies
- Connecting our protected areas. Regional and municipal governments must collaborate to develop a comprehensive protected areas strategy to strengthen and connect protected areas at the municipal level. This addresses the need for governments to work together to incorporate connectivity into natural capital planning.
- Mainstreaming ecosystem services: Municipal governments must build ecosystem service considerations into economic and development planning to minimize ecosystem degradation and manage for ecological health. This recommendation calls upon decision makers to deliberately take into account the connections between how they grow their community and the health of both the ecosystems and residents that call it home. This requires an explicit accounting of the impact of proposed development strategies on the community's natural capital.

The ideal method for the implementation of these policies will differ with each community. The bottom line, however, is that there are a range of innovative policies and funding mechanisms to draw on.

Thank-you