

What would success look like for Ecosystem Services in Ontario?

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First of all I would like to welcome participants on behalf of Conservation Ontario, a member of Steering Committee for ONES

One of the reasons for a ONES is to bring individuals and organizations with diverse interests and from all parts of the province, on the topic of Ecosystem Services in Ontario together. I think we have succeeded in terms of the attendance at this Forum today.

We have representatives from non-government groups, municipalities, academia, provincial and federal government, individual landowners, business and industry and consultants.

The interest in ES is also very diverse from interest in researching, understanding and communication Ecosystem valuation to applying this knowledge towards a range of policy tools, from land use and watershed planning to incentive mechanisms and more.

We have organized quite a jammed pack day – with opportunity for facilitated discussion and the steering committee thought that it would be important to start off the day with an opportunity for people to meet each other and get people warmed up for the later discussions. To facilitate this we have assigned you tables to sit at. Through the day we encourage you to mix – during breaks and lunch. But for the next 30 minutes, with people at your tables, we would like you to tackle the question “What would Success look like for Ecosystem Services in Ontario?”

I have been asked to start off by letting you know what I think. Simply for me – at a very high, ultimate level, success would be that all citizens of Ontario appreciated the value of Ecosystem protection and restoration and their role in achieving that. At another level from the point of view of Conservation Ontario and the Conservation Authorities we represent, we have been involved in watershed management for over 60 years in the province and have collaborated with communities, organizations and individuals in the protection and restoration of watersheds through tools and approaches that include, planning, flood protection and management, regulations, land securement, providing technical support and incentives to landowners for water quality improvement, fish and wildlife habitat management, tree planting and more.

Over the past few years a number of CAs have led and collaborated with others in the room to advance our understanding of ecosystem services valuation, and how we might use this information to assist in promoting and developing and enhancing existing and new tools and approaches for protecting watersheds. You will hear about some of those today. As a means of sharing information between CAs and others we have established a CO EG&S Working group and we have even circulated an e-bulletin as recently as yesterday an initial attempt to share with others how we view ecosystem services in relation to the work we do. But as you all probably can relate, new information about EG&S initiatives, research and organizations seems to arrive in my in-box on a weekly if not almost daily basis these days. How do we make use of this information to communicate to citizens of Ontario the importance of their role in Ecosystem restoration and protection. How do we use this information to advance, improve and develop the tools we already have, as well as any new ones? ONES has been launched as one means to facilitate this. One of the objectives of today is to hear what you think about that.

Finally, I think it's also important to acknowledge that while we have all kinds of tools that include planning and regulations and incentive mechanisms there are many organizations and individuals in business, including agriculture and private landowners who are voluntarily implementing and investing in practices because they already recognize the value and benefits of protecting ecosystem services to their businesses, good for their bottom lines, and for human health and well being. These stories also need to be shared. I know we will hear about some of these today as well, and will lead to achieving that ultimate vision of success being that all citizens appreciate, understand their role in the protection and restoration of ecosystem services and act on that.