

Wicked Environmental Problems: Managing Uncertainty and Conflict

Managing Wicked Environmental Problems: Integrating Public Participation and Adaptive Management

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Abstract

It has been over three decades since "wicked problems" first appeared in the literature. However, there are still few viable approaches for confronting wicked problems. The most common approaches include the precautionary principle, adaptive management, and participatory processes. Each has significant limitations.

Building upon the National Research Council's proposal of a deliberative-analytic process involving multiple stakeholders, we propose a method that augments typical participation with sophisticated modeling of public preferences, thus enhancing both the efficiency and the potential success of public engagement.

To illustrate our proposal, we describe an experiment that we conducted in the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment context involving the USDA Forest Service, other agencies, advocacy groups, and the general public. The results of the experiment demonstrate how public preferences can be clarified for all parties and then linked to ecological models to better inform and guide decision making in the context of wicked problems.

Keywords

Wicked problems, public participation, learning networks, modeling public preferences.

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