

Making Connections: Interactions among landowners, institutions, and ecosystem services in rural Eastern Ontario, Canada

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The extent to which environmental governance systems are structured around and align with the ecosystem services people value can be expected to strongly influence their long-term supply. Understanding the human dimensions of ecosystem services, in terms of the governance systems that influence their supply, has emerged as an important area for further investigation. Challenges posed by institutional misfit continue to persist in many social-ecological systems and can take a variety of forms relating to spatial, temporal or jurisdictional boundaries, as well as a misfit of thematic priorities between institutions and the services supplied by an ecosystem. The purpose of this paper is to examine the challenges posed by issues of fit within social-ecological systems and to test these critiques in the context of the Bonnechere River watershed (BRW) in Eastern Ontario, Canada. Like many rural Canadian regions, the BRW is undergoing a period of transition that is characterized by a shift in dominant resource sectors, demographic trends towards an older population, the growing influence of urban centers, and external forces of economic and environmental change. Whether and how governance systems have the capacity to adapt to these changes has implications for the long-term supply of desired ecosystem services. Through an approach that combines interviews with stakeholders and representatives of governing organizations and social network analysis based on project collaboration among governing institutions, an analysis of fit reveals some of the barriers as well as opportunities for securing the future supply of ecosystem services in the watershed.