

Perspectives

Television, online, and printed news of environmental challenges are quite discouraging. While often accurate they are incomplete and seldom convey any sense of optimism. Mass media seem more focused on shock value than enlightenment or education. Perhaps that's simply smart, effective marketing? If you are reading this in *Ecological Restoration*, you are undoubtedly aware of our challenges from local to global scales. You are also part of the solution! Individually, our contributions may be as local as restoring a backyard habitat, as commercial as operating an ecological restoration business, as academic as testing hypotheses relating to successional processes, or as political as voting to support environmental issues. Collectively, our actions have the power to effect change.

Clearly, there are serious global environmental challenges that continue to grow. Six billion people—rising toward 9 billion by 2050—have substantial impacts. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (www.maweb.org) indicated that the drivers of biodiversity loss, human poverty, and diminished ecosystem services are either “steady, show no evidence of declining, or are increasing in intensity.” Accelerated depletion of natural capital that further diminishes the provision of ecosystem services could potentially reduce food production by 25% by 2050. For biodiversity, the consequences of that scenario could be catastrophic. Before you quit reading to mix that drink—I'll stop describing the problems you already understand and move to more optimistic thoughts on how our perspectives can either facilitate or limit our progress.

Fortunately, there are many successes, reasons for hope, and growing legions of individuals and organizations focused on various aspects of ecological restoration. Every issue of *Ecological Restoration* provides positive examples that both inform and encourage. The *Society for Ecological Restoration* supports the Global Restoration Network website (www.globalrestorationnetwork.org) with thousands of informative case studies. A recent publication of the United Nations Environment Program “Dead Planet, Living Planet: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Restoration for Sustainable Development” (www.grida.no/publications/rr/dead-planet) describes a range of effective examples from

around the world. There are other examples, but I won't try to list them. I'll simply state that ecological restoration will be increasingly viewed as a viable strategy for addressing local to global environmental problems.

Many conservation and natural resource organizations list ecological restoration as a strength and one of their many priorities. The *Society for Ecological Restoration* is and has always been completely focused on ecological restoration. We will continue our leadership role, but the growing interest and participation in ecological restoration is entirely positive. The challenges and opportunities exceed the capacity of any single organization. Ecological restoration is an integrative discipline seeking integrated solutions to complex ecological and social problems. That requires effective communication and collaboration among many organizations and disciplines. Fortunately, this philosophy of disciplinary integration is becoming more common and increasingly effective.

Perhaps more challenging, for many of us, is the need to reexamine our own personal perspective on “restoration” relative to what is required for the future. Practical experience and contemporary science is challenging our prevailing paradigms—leading some to alter deeply held assumptions and perspectives. In many situations, our reliance on historical conditions as restoration goals limits our ability to build resilience into damaged ecosystems. Climate change, drastic disturbances, and human population pressures may render historic conditions irrelevant. The knowledge and tools of ecological restoration are valuable and should not be limited to returning historical conditions. Increasingly, we are confronted with circumstances where the more appropriate goals should be to restore resilience while returning natural capital and the recovery of ecosystem services. Our willingness to evolve our perspectives and practices will shape the future and determine our relevance in the future.

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