A Strategy for Conserving Canada's Natural Capital

Canada's natural capital is essential to our environmental and economic well-being. *However, we continue to lose our natural capital because of a lack of policies, instruments and programs that encourage the retention of these natural areas. A new series of fact sheets entitled* A Strategy for Conserving Canada's Natural Capital *highlights DUC's recommendations for ecological goods and services programs and policies in Canada. This new series builds upon the previous fact sheet series –* Natural Values: Linking the Environment to the Economy *– which focused on the economic and environmental benefits of different types of natural capital. Other installments in this series as well as the previous series can be found at* **www.ducks.ca/conserve/wetland_values/conserve.html**

1 Advancing the Conservation of Canada's Natural Capital

Natural areas are the ecological cornerstone of our natural capital and produce a range of ecological goods and services (EGS) that our society depends on. Despite this, natural capital is regularly undervalued, degraded and lost along with the EGS it produces. One of the primary barriers to the conservation of natural areas is the difficulty in capturing and accounting for their economic value. Canada's natural capital produces many EGS such as timber and fuel that are traded on the open market, however there are many other invaluable EGS such as carbon sequestration and water purification for which there is currently no market. In addition, many EGS are produced on private lands at a cost to the landowner, but it is usually society at large who benefits from them, which creates difficulties in identifying sellers and buyers for the goods and services. These and other factors require that we find innovative ways to conserve our natural capital.

Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) believes that a sound Canadian EGS policy that recognizes the role of land managers in the production of EGS is one component of a sustainable landscape approach that will retain our natural capital and the goods and services it produces. An integrated approach to programs and policies that includes regulations to meet minimum standards; incentives to go beyond the minimum requirements; extension programs that inform land managers about the importance of natural capital and ways to conserve it; and education for the public who benefit from the conservation of natural capital is essential given the complexity of the issue.

Canada needs innovative ways to address the problem so articulately identified by the following quote: "Many services are degraded precisely because they are free to use but costly to provide."

– Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations[1]

Advancing EGS Policy in Canada

The first step in advancing an EGS policy in Canada is to develop a common vision and subsequent goals for the policy. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Government of Manitoba co-hosted a National EGS symposium in cooperation with Environment Canada in Winnipeg in February 2006 to begin this process. One of the first necessary actions participants identified the need for was the establishment of a national group or a structure to continue the information exchange and build on the momentum generated by the symposium, stakeholder work to date, and forums.

A second step is the use of well-designed pilot projects to test research assumptions, delivery methods and instruments, and valuation of natural capital in order to advance EGS programs and policy. AAFC is currently supporting research and pilot projects across Canada that will help to inform EGS policy development. DUC is leading one of the EGS pilot research initiatives, which examines the role of wetland restoration and retention for water quality improvements in Manitoba. DUC is also involved in the Lower Souris EGS Pilot in Saskatchewan that will provide a case study of how EGS tools can be used to achieve desired environmental endpoints in a landscape. In order to truly learn from the work being done through the EGS pilots, it would be useful for AAFC to initiate a subsequent workshop that brings together the proponents and researchers working on these pilot projects to review findings and determine how the information can be used to support and contribute to an EGS policy.

Finally, it is important that EGS programs show value for money. DUC supports the use of cost-effective program delivery that provides real, measurable environmental benefits. In order to ensure that results are realized, these programs should be delivered with a science-based approach that links land management practices to the provision of EGS. An adaptive management framework that involves planning, implementing and evaluating actions to inform and modify future work should be used to guide all programs and policies in order to ensure their efficacy and environmental performance.

Important Links

• DUC's fact sheet series	www.ducks.ca/conserve/wetland_values/conserve.html
• AAFC's EGS policy development process	www.agr.gc.ca/pol/egs-bse/index_e.php?page=process
• Millennium Ecosystem Assessment	www.millenniumassessment.org/en/index.aspx
• 2006 National EGS Symposium	www.agr.gc.ca/pol/egs-bse/index_e.php?page=symp06
• Prairie Habitat Joint Venture EGS fact sheets	www.nawmp.ab.ca/phjv/publications.html

What's Next? **Fact Sheet 2: Ecological Goods and Services Programs**

Endnotes

1. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. 2007. The State of Food and Agriculture 2007: Paying Farmers for Environmental Services. Accessed January 2008 at www.fao.org/docrep/010/a1200e/a1200e00.htm.