

What are the key performance indicators of a model landscape restoration project?

The physical conditions for optimising biodiversity are well known and targeted for funding by corporates and other foundations. They are:

- a) retention of remnants;
- b) replanting using indigenous vegetation;
- c) ensuring all three layers are replaced; and
- d) fencing off from grazing.

The NWF Work Plan 2007 objectives and strategies are focused on looking beyond the allocation of physical resources to promoting a cultural shift in values so that people work and live in the long term within an ecosystem in a manner that achieves the triple bottom line. NWF is not talking about removing people from the landscape, but about developing ecosystem partnerships so that what they do becomes sustainable, and (at the very least) maintains or (at best) enhances the natural living environment.

The following five indicators fit within our past grantmaking preoccupations of fostering a bottom up approach in planning; grounding decision-making in sound scientific R & D; promoting community education, leadership and capacity building; calling for monitoring and evaluation; and requiring widespread dissemination of research and project outcomes.

(1) vision building from the bottom up

Adopting a bottom up approach in the initial planning phase that is inclusive of all stakeholders within an ecosystem. If they are to 'own' the vision developed, and be part of its implementation, they have to play a meaningful role in its development.

Paid staff are important to give arms and legs to a project, avoiding volunteer burn-out. A bottom up approach would require a democratic structure in which any staff were accountable to the group as a whole.

A top down approach can alienate people and leave them ignorant. Without widespread community engagement that, in particular, includes landholders and land managers, there can be no cultural shift that will help ensure sustainability in the long term.

This does not mean that good leadership ought to be replaced with the tyranny of structurelessness. Governance systems need to be democratic, accountable and transparent. The Foundation is supporting the training and development of

leadership in the landscape restoration field through the funding of landscape restoration fellowships.

(2) appropriate research and investigation

Ensuring that decision-making is based on sound science. Is the project putting resources into undertaking appropriate R & D?

NWF would argue that, for a start, there needs to be a baseline inventory of flora and fauna. This provides a benchmark for measurement of progress.

In other projects, such as Connecting Country in the Mt Alexander Shire, information from landholders and land managers about the existing condition of the landscape has been gathered, including recorded sightings of where native plant and wildlife species were found. This information was then brought together through a user friendly interactive mapping project, which has been designed on a pro bono basis by software developer Spatial Vision.

Based on Google Earth, the Connecting Country website offers simple and accessible mapping tools for people to enter information about flora and fauna sightings across the Mount Alexander region. The maps provide an eagle's eye view of the whole landscape. They have allowed the Connecting Country partners to identify 21 possible opportunities for major on-ground habitat restoration works across the region.

At the end of 18 months, Connecting Country produced a Biodiversity Blueprint of the region, containing valuable information about environmental assets and a unique and comprehensive set of maps. These potential projects will form the springboard for the development of fully costed action plans in the project's second stage, which is currently underway with the support of a project officer funded by NWF.

(3) community capacity building

Where a community remains disengaged and ignorant from the landscape restoration process, the Foundation believes the project is being set up to wither away in the long term.

Capacity building would involve a community education process that disseminates the results of any R & D and explains the science and NRM rationale for the approach being undertaken in a project.

The community could collaborate in R & D (e.g. bird counts), as well as restoration implementation and long term management. For such collaboration to be effective, training would be required.

One of the landscape restoration projects being funded by the NWF is being auspiced by the Otways Agroforestry Network (OAN) and involves peer group mentoring. Peer group mentoring (PGM) takes advantage of the maxim that landholders learn best from peering over the fence and seeing what their neighbors are doing.

OAN's mentoring grew out of long term treegrowers undertaking site visits and assisting new members in selecting and locating productive as well as landcare plantings. Peer group mentors oversee projects, provide on-the-job training and facilitate visits to other landholders with similar aspirations – a service that has proven very popular. The difference between mentors and consultants is that the latter do not advise, simply assist and support.

(4) building productive landscapes

Given NWF's focus of retaining people in the landscape, rather than removing them, what can be done to ensure they make a productive living while working in harmony with the environment?

Integrating farm forestry provides shelter and offers income diversification. What other approaches can be taken that might boost the local economy? e.g.

- a) R & D might show that recreating a wetland will attract ibis and lower crop pest attacks;
- b) strategic planting could well improve water quality;
- c) indigenous flora and fauna could become part of the productive process;
- d) creating walking trails through biolinks aimed at attracting tourists.

An NWF-funded project on Fiery Creek, which runs into Lake Bolac, largely involves a group of long term traditional farmers who were concerned about rising salinity. Funding research to find ways of countering salinity aids both their productivity as well as enabling revegetation of riparian zones for habitat.

(5) monitoring and learning

Strategic planning involves not only setting objectives and devising strategies to implement those objectives, but also undertaking evaluation and survey techniques to ensure those strategies are, in fact, achieving what they are supposed to do.

Without monitoring of landscape restoration and community building processes, decision-making is based on intuition, prejudice and hunches. Sound science and social research both require continual monitoring, which ensures that adaptation is hard-wired into any change process.

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