The Economics of Stewardship: Assessing the economic contributions of environmental restoration events

What Is the Issue?
Understanding the economic benefits that accrue as a result of volunteer participation in stewardship activities can contribute to the broader understanding of the impacts of these activities. We are developing an accounting system for the value of contributions made by sponsoring organizations, the costs associated with traveling to and from events, and the value of contributed consumable and durable goods, as well as the value of volunteer labor. In doing so, we examine the benefits that accrue at the stewardship event level, rather than at the individual volunteer level.

Why Is This Research Important?
Volunteer environmental stewardship exists in the Pacific Northwest region as a large-scale cultural phenomenon. This effort represents not only a critical component of ecological restoration efforts, but there are also substantial economic contributions that have gone unconsidered. Tools, time and transportation are all donated to these events.

Study Results
- Documented and valued contributions provided by volunteers and hosting organizations to stewardship events.
- Results suggest that contributions by volunteers and hosts are significant; the combined costs associated with the 17 sampled events were approximately $35,700.
- These efforts represent a small subset of the more than 1,000 volunteer environmental stewardship activities that take place annually in King County.

Study Approach
Volunteer restoration events in King County parks during Spring 2011 were selected at random. Items considered included:
- Transportation mode and travel time to the event
- Event planning and cleanup time
- Contribution of consumable materials such as food, drink, or give-aways
- Contribution of durable goods such as tools, equipment, or supplies.

More Information

Research Sponsors
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