

River restoration poorly coordinated, evaluated

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The process of river restoration in the U.S. is uncoordinated at almost every level. Project scales are rarely linked to goals, and evaluation is rarely reported or used to assess whether these goals are achieved. A new study published in *Restoration Ecology* is the first attempt to systematically determine the motivations behind river restoration throughout the U.S., and to assess the ways in which projects are being evaluated.

Despite considerable optimism from restoration project managers, two-thirds of whom felt that their restorations had been “completely successful,” the study finds that the process of river restoration is poorly coordinated. Project goals, design, implementation and evaluation are disconnected. Evaluations are uncommon and are rarely reported or used to assess whether goals have been met. The study also finds little coordination between separate projects, something that is essential for successfully addressing watershed degradation.

River restoration is a popular approach to watershed management in the U.S., where over one-third of all rivers are degraded due to alterations in the shape of river channels, chemistry of the waters and the timing and amount of water they receive. Each year more than \$1 billion is spent on these projects.

“Our research findings suggest that the practice of river restoration in the United States is motivated by good intentions, but suffers from disconnected approaches and very little evaluation and feedback. We

hope that putting some real numbers behind this problem will encourage more open discussion and a greater commitment by management agencies to examine and improve the ecological outcomes of river restoration,” says Emily S. Bernhardt, lead author of the study.

Advisory committees and significant community involvement were identified as elements of successful restoration projects. The authors suggest the creation of a national program to monitor and coordinate future projects.

Source: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

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