

The Marriage of Ecology and Economics at RFF



RFF scholars, led by Senior Fellow James Boyd, are embarking on new efforts to integrate ecology and economics through the establishment of the Center for the Management of Ecological Wealth

(CMEW). The center will focus on “managerial ecology”—coordinated biophysical and social analysis to illuminate the value of natural systems for decisionmakers.

The center will foster and communicate research that helps improve the ability of governments, regulatory agencies, communities, and private firms to manage, protect, and enhance socially valuable ecological goods and services. It will emphasize the translation of ecological knowledge into policy- and management-relevant practices and outcomes, as well as work closely with practitioners to turn these ideas into practical policy tools.

Resources recently talked to Jim about how the center will grow in the years ahead and how CMEW findings will extend the value of RFF’s work on natural resource, energy, and climate issues.

Q: We’ve learned much from the *Deepwater Horizon* spill about the technical and managerial challenges involved in offshore oil drilling and the likelihood of environmental damages. What ecological management lessons do you draw from the spill?

A: One lesson is how limited we are in our

ability to predict and track the ecological consequences of events like this. This is due to the inherent complexity of those systems and the biological linkages that must be traced in order to know what is lost. Persistent underinvestment in measurement of ocean resources on which predictive science could build is another factor.

Q: Scholars at RFF have always responded to emerging environmental, energy, and natural resource problems by initiating new lines of research. Why is this the right time to coordinate ecological and economic research? What are the synergies?

A: The economics of natural systems are dependent on the science of how those systems produce valuable goods and services like clean water, abundant species, and fertile soils. Working with natural scientists who understand those systems are mandatory. There is a broad movement in ecology and conservation to make society’s dependence on natural goods and services more apparent to decisionmakers. Economic analysis helps makes concrete connections between nature and our social well-being.

Q: Where do you see the center in five years? What do you hope to accomplish?

A: We want to encourage biophysical analysis that allows us to creatively and positively improve natural systems. We need to identify practical solutions that speak to the concerns of households and communities around the world. There is also a need to measure the health of the natural economy, much like we measure GDP, and hold our leaders accountable for that. ●

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