

Beyond seeing the forests for the trees: understanding the conditions for forest biodiversity governance

Eeva Primmer, Finnish Environment Institute

Abstract:

The research community working on conservation and planning tends to assume and strive for a frictionless flow of information from science to planning, and further, to decision-making. Indeed, we can often read and hear frustration among conservation scientists, when decisions are not made in the way that their best knowledge would have suggested, knowledge is not used as it was envisioned, or plans are not implemented. Despite extensive new data, wonderful new methods, truth-telling indicators, extensive assessments, flashy portals and communicating heroes, the science-based knowledge meets decision-making in an arbitrary fashion. At worst, the understanding of landscapes and ecosystems might not improve the sustainability of governance - or even reach decision-making at all. Where does the friction come from? Is it poor understanding of values, or lack of operational solutions? My talk is about how to understand this science-policy friction.

With examples from forest biodiversity conservation, I demonstrate that understanding governance can indeed help reduce the friction in communicating science to decision-making. The talk will position the commonly identified conservation knowledge gaps, i.e. endangered species, valuable habitats and ecosystem services, as well as their spatial constellations, against governance ideas. Building on the core characteristics of governance mechanisms, I analyze the institutional conditions for different management and conservation solutions. The analysis pays attention to the different functions and benefits of forests that are manifested at the landscape level as well as to formally and informally stated rights and responsibilities of actors as regards these functions and benefits. The goal of the talk is to show that the recognition of these institutions is a prerequisite for any governance solution that should change forest biodiversity conservation policy and practice.

