

The value of proximity biodiversity

LOOKING AT THE VACHER CREEK CASE

In 2007 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada mandated Groupe AGÉCO to assess the economic value of rehabilitating the ecosystems along Vacher Creek, using the ecosystems goods and services method. The project is aligned with the international trend towards putting monetary value on the multiple services that Nature brings to mankind. To better recognize the value of what is priceless.

This innovative study took place on the banks of Vacher Creek, a 30 kilometer long stream that roams across farming, residential and industrial land in the Lanaudière region. In 2005, 50 farmers nearby the creek joined regional actors to improve the quality of the creek's banks. They worked on restructuring the banks and added plants. More insectivorous birds are seen since the effort were made and water quality has improved.

PUTTING A PRICE ON WHAT IS PRICELESS

Groupe AGÉCO's role was to evaluate the "economic value" of the improvements from the point of view of the "users" of the creek. There is no doubt that the people affected by the ecosystem rehabilitation prefer the improved version. The creek is cleaner. Trees edge the stream and it is now pleasant to fish and cool off.

The difficulty of the project was to give a monetary value to the benefits... Groupe AGÉCO's challenge was to develop a survey methodology to evaluate the improvements from the standpoint of the people affected.



A MAJORITY READY TO PAY

With a wide range on-line survey, Groupe AGÉCO asked farmers and citizens of St-Jacques-de-Montcalm, a village at the edge of the creek. Residents further off and occasional bikers were also surveyed.

Slightly more than half (52 %) of those surveyed indicated a willingness to pay for a program to encourage farmers to adopt eco-friendly practices. This pro payment group were younger, more educated and were preoccupied by environmental issues. They indicated they would be ready to pay 100 \$ a year for a 5 year period for a program similar to what was done at the Vacher Creek by the farmers. The group also answered they would pay over 200 \$ a year for a program that would create even more environmental benefits.

EVALUATING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT TOWARDS BETTER DEVELOPMENT

The Vacher Creek project is a model of interest for governments who develop programs to support agricultural practices, as well as city elected representatives that manage life space, at the citizen level. The results of ecosystem evaluation using the ecosystems goods and services method shed a new light that could influence development choices.

Knowing that the population estimates highly priceless natural benefits gives valuable insight to political leaders.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada states that ecosystems goods and services (EGS) are the environmental benefits that Canadians receive from healthy ecosystems, namely clean water and air and an enhanced biodiversity. The EGS concept includes the goods available to the product markets that come from ecosystems (such as food, fiber, fuel, fresh water, generic resources, biochemical products, etc), as well as the advantages that result from ecosystemic processing (nutritive element cycles, climate regulation, water purification, waste treatment, pollinisation, etc.) and finally, the non-material advantages (beauty of landscape, leisure, etc.). Improving certain agricultural practices can contribute to reinforce the production of ecosystems goods and services. (Source : http://www.agr.gc.ca/pol/egs-bse/index_f.php)

For nearly 15 years, Groupe AGÉCO is active in the agriculture and agri-food sectors, sustainable development and social responsibility. The recommendations of the consulting firm facilitate the implementation of concrete improvements in your organization.



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