

Enabling Payments for Watershed Services

Award Year:

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Principal Investigator:

Drew Bennett, Colorado State University

Jenn Hoyle, Yale University

For the first time in human history more than half of the world's people live in urban areas. Increased urban populations intensify pressures on natural systems surrounding cities, particularly watersheds that provide drinking water. This project seeks to explore linkages between social and environmental characteristics of urban water supplies and governance strategies to minimize supply risk. Specifically, we are interested in understanding factors related to the emergence and functioning of payments for watershed services (PWS) initiatives that aim to protect drinking water supplies.

Our goals are to:

1. identify general characteristics associated with PWS and
2. compare the characteristics of existing PWS programs with those of areas at high risk for future water insecurity.

Our investigation will build on existing urban drinking water data, including the City Water Map, World Resources Institute's Aqueduct Water Risk framework, Forest Trends' State of Watershed Payments 2014 survey, World Bank's governance indicators, and select case studies of PWS for source water protection. Our team will:

1. aggregate data on PWS programs and link related social and environmental conditions to the City Water Map;
2. synthesize lessons from existing case studies to highlight factors that allowed these programs to emerge and function;
3. analyze correlations among social and environmental conditions and the presence of PWS programs; and
4. share pursuit findings with key audiences.

The project will produce an expanded City Water Database, a peer reviewed article, and a policy brief that outlines our findings in plain terms for water resource managers and policy makers.

Participants:

Genevieve Bennett, Forest Trends

Nathaniel Carroll, Forest Trends

Stella Cousins, University of California, Berkeley

Todd Gartner, World Resources Institute

Heidi Huber-Stearns, University of Oregon

Rob McDonald, The Nature Conservancy

Stephen Posner, University of Vermont

Ryan Richards, George Mason University

Chelsie Romulo, George Mason University

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