

Syllabus - “Letting Nature Lead” Series

Purpose:

The purpose of this series is to provide a platform for learning, networking and experience-sharing focused on adaptive approaches to protected area management that promote social and ecological resilience.

Description:

In today’s complex and rapidly changing world, static and reductionist approaches to conservation are increasingly seen as problematic. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the uncertainty in our world and taught us that nature always prevails. How then do we promote conservation in a way that lets nature lead?

Effective conservation needs to embrace the inherent uncertainty and complexity of our world while pursuing holistic, community-centered solutions. Social-ecological systems approaches to conservation presuppose uncertainty, focus on the dynamic interrelatedness of coupled human/ecological systems and seek to understand interactions and feedbacks within the entire system rather than just focusing on one component at a time. This series will highlight how thinking like a system can promote conservation that lets nature lead. Participants will learn and share experiences with social-ecological systems approaches and ideas of resilience as a pathway to building an adaptive paradigm for conservation.

Session 1: Thinking Like a System

Session 2: Building an Adaptive Paradigm

Session 3: Adaptive Planning and Management

Session 4: Governance, Communities and Resilience

Objectives:

- Gain experience with social-ecological systems thinking and how it can be applied to enhance resilience both within protected areas and in surrounding communities.
- Understand our current context of complexity and discuss complexity in your own context
- Describe how current approaches to conservation often fall short of meeting their objectives due to static and reductionist approaches that do not embrace complexity
- Understand and share experiences with systems thinking. This includes ideas of complex adaptive systems and social-ecological systems.
- Discuss how protected areas are social-ecological systems and what that means for conservation
- Understand and apply concept/situation mapping as a tool to describe a social-ecological system
- Discuss resilience and resilience thinking and understand how it is put into practice.
- Understand and apply the adaptive management cycle

- Explore concepts of adaptive governance including social learning and experimentation with a focus on communities and resilience.

Session-1: Thinking like a system

This session provides participants an opportunity to explore social-ecological systems thinking in the context of protected areas.

Learning objectives:

- Understand some of the shortcomings of current approaches to PA management
- Contextualize our world in terms of complexity
- Explore the linkages between social and ecological systems
- Understand social-ecological systems and their characteristics:
 - Complexity
 - Emergence
 - Non-linearity
 - Self-organization
 - Limited predictability
- Understand the adaptive cycle with particular reference to the four phases and the role of disturbance.
- Gain exposure to some of the tools of a systems thinker
- Understand and relate to protected areas as a social-ecological system that is complex and adaptive

Session-2: Session-2 builds on session-1 and allows participants to further explore the possibilities of social-ecological systems thinking through situation mapping and the concept of resilience.

Learning objectives:

- Understand situation mapping and apply it to your own context
- Gain exposure to the concept of resilience and how it is different from sustainability
- Identify the attributes of a resilient SES
- Situate concept mapping within the framework for resilient social-ecological systems (as step-1)
- Explore and discuss the four steps in the framework for a resilient SES.
- Link the framework for a resilient SES to adaptive planning and management of PAs

Session-3: Session-3 introduces the adaptive management model for PAs and integrates SES thinking and concepts of resilience as foundational steps to adaptive planning and management.

Learning objectives:

- Gain exposure to the six steps of the adaptive management model for PAs
 - Assess the system
 - Design a plan
 - Implement
 - Monitor

- Evaluate
- Adjust
- Understand and apply the adaptive management model to your own context
- Emphasize the importance of values in the planning process
- Integrate concept mapping and resilience thinking into the first two steps of the adaptive management cycle.
- Explore what adaptive management means outside of the boundaries of a PA

Session-4: Session-4 focuses on the challenges of building an adaptive paradigm and enhancing resilience within and beyond PA boundaries. PAs are linked to local, regional and global SES's and this session explores the role of adaptive governance and community resilience in PA management.

Learning outcomes:

- Understand communities, how they function, how to assess their capacity for governance and their level of resilience/vulnerability.
 - Shocks and stressors
 - Individual attributes
 - Community attributes
 - Collective action
- Gain experience with the key components of adaptive governance:
 - Polycentric
 - Bioregional
 - Participation
 - Experimentation and social learning
- Discuss and problematize the application of adaptive governance
- Link adaptive governance back to the adaptive management model and SES thinking