VALUING ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN NORTH CAROLINA

SITUATION

The State of North Carolina is developing an ecosystem services mitigation credit trading framework that has the potential to help all affected parties operating in the eastern part of the state manage their environmental responsibilities. This will be a locally driven process with guidance and facilitation by Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources. The initial focus will be determined by a group of local stakeholders comprised of federal and state agencies, academia, and NGOs.

WHAT IS ECOSYSTEM SERVICE CREDITING?

An ecosystem service crediting system is an innovative conservation solution that can: 1) provide a means for quantifying conservation actions on private and public land; 2) establishes a framework for sponsors to invest in the project in a cost efficient manner; 3) creates market-based incentives for landowners to become involved in the process; 4) provides a mechanism for sponsors to accumulate credits that may be later used to offset adverse impacts; and 5) establishes assurances that sponsored conservation actions are effectively implemented through a standardized verification and monitoring system.
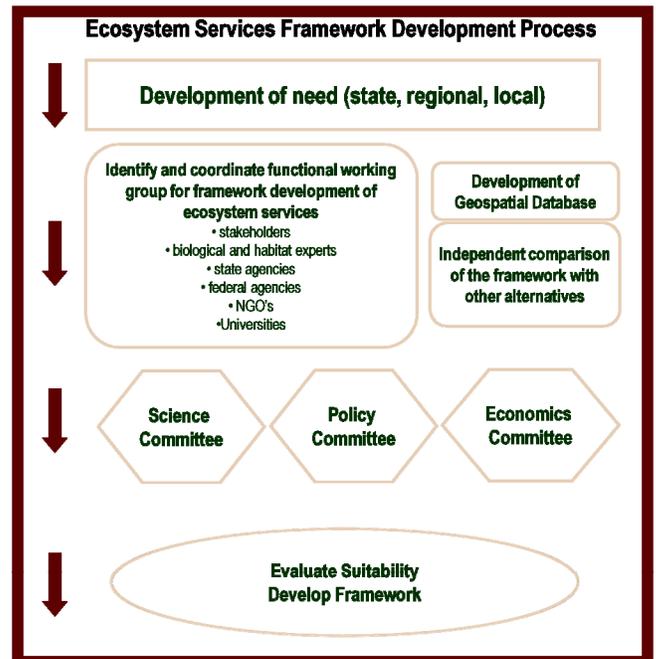
WHO CAN USE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES CREDITING?

This system can be used by federal, state, local and private entities wanting to enter into market based conservation solutions.

INITIAL TASKS

1. Identify and coordinate a functional working group for development of an Ecosystem Services Credit framework.

- Identify, contact and engage stakeholders willing to participate in the development and implementation of an ecosystem services framework.
- Engage recognized experts to participate in the development of the project.
- Work with the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, other state agencies, OSD, USMC and other services and/or interested parties, to designate and develop appropriate working groups. Provide coordination and liaison among members of the RCS development group.

- Conduct meetings among stakeholders, scientists, and agency personnel to advance the development of an ecosystem services market in North Carolina.

2. Compile existing datasets and develop a spatially explicit database to aid in the development, implementation and monitoring of Ecosystem Service Projects.

3. Inform the decision-making process by contributing the elements necessary for an independent comparison of the project with other alternatives.

OUTCOMES

Development of a framework for valuing ecosystem services that will mesh with the purpose of the Working Lands Group Partnership Agreement. Specifically: 1) promote conservation of military, agricultural, and forestry lands, 2) examine policy and possible legislation to support maintaining working lands, 3) promote land use that is both compatible with and complimentary to military requirements as well as mutually benefit each Agency's mission requirements, 4) share decision support information, including applicable GIS data, and 5) create a framework that could be used as a model for other states in the southeast.

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