Thurston Conservation District
EST 1948

Assessing Ecosystem Services in Thurston County

PURPOSE & APPROACH

Thurston Conservation District and Thurston County are working together to better understand and measure the many benefits nature provides to our ecosystems, called ecosystem services. Many agencies and organizations manage different parts of the landscape, but we don't yet have a complete picture of how these benefits add up across Thurston County. This project aims to fill that gap.

The project will measure ecosystem services in "service-acres," which combine the amount of land providing a benefit and the condition of that land, using the best available information. The goal is not to put a dollar value on nature or to regulate private property. This approach will help us better understand where nature is providing benefits, how those benefits may change over time, and how different land management choices can affect them. This project will help our community improve communication among agencies, organizations, and community members, compare land management options, and track progress towards conservation goals.

THE FIVE ECOLOGICAL DOMAINS

The project aims to evaluate the same land through five overlapping lenses:



Forest Services: Large areas of native trees, from nature preserves to working timberland. They provide timber, store carbon, support hunting, and give wildlife places to live and travel. Healthy forests also protect nearby streams.



Riverscape Services: Streams, rivers, wetlands, and lakes, plus the shallow groundwater that connects them. They recharge groundwater, which sets our long-term water supply. They also shape water quality, flooding, and recreation.



Coastal Services: Saltwater beaches, bays, estuaries, and tidal wetlands, fed by eroding bluffs and river sediment. They support fish, wildlife, and a major shellfish industry. They are also a focus of tribal trust responsibilities.



Prairie Services: Oak prairies found nowhere else in the world, shaped over thousands of years by tribal burning. Only a small share of high-quality prairie remains. It is home to protected gophers, butterflies, and birds.



Agriculture Services: Grazing land, hay fields, crops, dairies, and shellfish farms. These services depend on healthy soil and on the people, skills, and infrastructure needed to farm. Farmland also provides open space and can reduce flooding.

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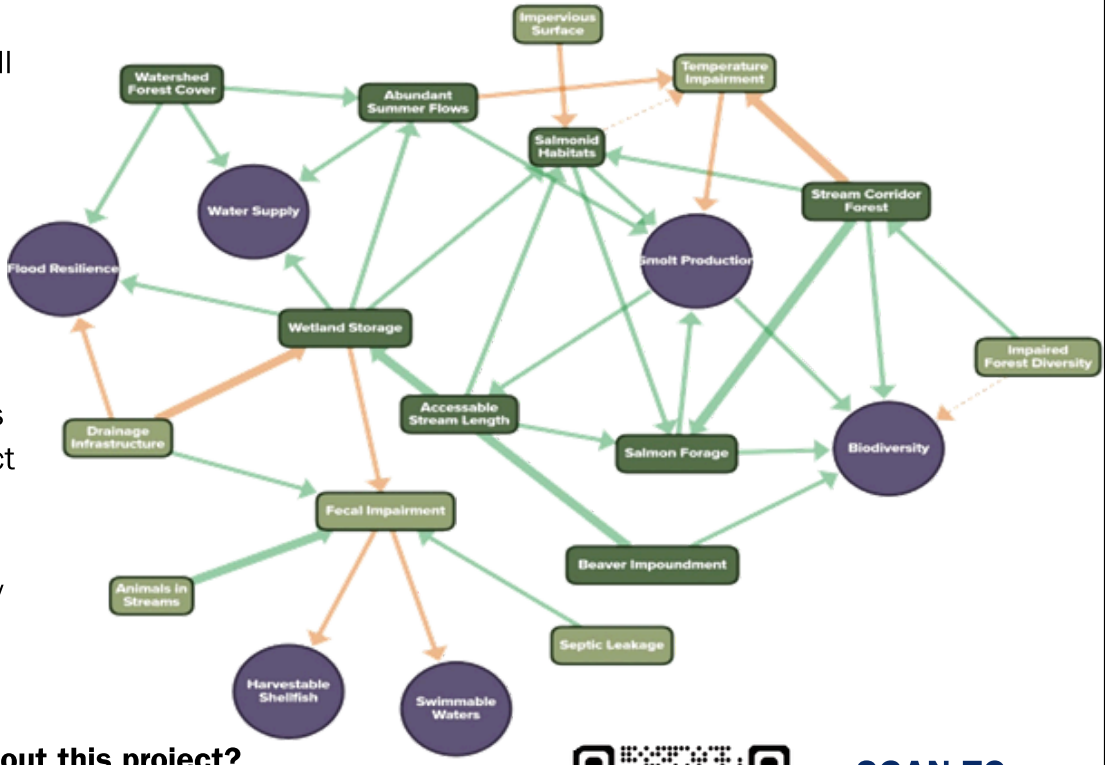
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ORGANIZING INFORMATION

Simple diagrams will illustrate how activities and landscape conditions increase or decrease ecosystem services. Diagrams will be posted online and linked to shared spreadsheets, allowing anyone to review the information and provide comments. Maps will show where in the landscape we expect ecosystem services to be provided.

SEQUENCE OF WORK

Over nine months, the team will develop ideas, build proofs of concept, and test potential approaches. Engagement will begin with an invitation for tribal consultation, followed by interviews with local practitioners and subject matter experts, and workshops with partner groups. The project result will include a proposal and roadmap outlining how Thurston County might quantify ecosystem services.



RESOURCES

Interested in learning more about this project?

Scan the QR code or visit the link below to explore a collection of project information, helpful resources, and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs).

SCAN TO LEARN MORE

If you have questions or would like to contribute to our work, please contact:

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