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Earth Stewardship – Following in the footsteps of Terry Chapin

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Background/Question/Methods

Ecologists at all ages and stages grapple with how to balance our work that leads to discoveries and understanding of basic ecology with our contributions to the informed stewardship of Earth's increasingly over-taxed ecosystems. Terry Chapin's Earth Stewardship framework has shown how these goals can work together. Here, we celebrate his leadership in renewing and strengthening the commitment the Ecological Society of America to both ecological science and appropriate action that contribute to sustaining the well-being and resilience of people and nature in rapidly changing world. Synergisms of science and societal engagement that can support Earth Stewardship require intense, bidirectional listening of partners committed to specific social-ecological systems, as well as to the planet. We draw lessons from Terry and others on how listening leaders can inspire transformational changes at local scales that might "upscale" to move the planet toward a more sustainable trajectory.

Results/Conclusions

Earth Stewardship as envisioned by Chapin et al. 2011 requires a strong sense of connection by people to valued places; consensus on sustainability goals and how to assess progress toward these goals; adaptive capacity to respond to changing conditions; and emergence of facilitators or leaders who can resolve conflicts and maintain focus. We consider cases in which ecologists, social scientist, and stakeholders with long-term, often intergenerational, traditional or local knowledge of the ecosystems from which they draw their livelihoods, have achieved some of these goals. In particular, we reflect on how ecologists have learned from, and contributed insights to partners during efforts to guide degraded or collapsed systems back towards more favorable trajectories. Earth Stewardship *sensu* Chapin will be catalyzed if, as individual successes become widely known, more diverse participants engage.