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Abstract

Trade-off analysis for decision making in natural resources: Where we are and where we are headed

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Forest management involves making trade-offs to balance social, ecological, and economic objectives of the forest. In the past this decision making was primarily done by trained professionals. Forest certification requires a greater involvement by the public, and has created a need for formal methods to make trade-offs in a transparent and balanced manner. This paper explores the nature of trade-offs in the historical context of forest management in British Columbia. It describes the development of forest management in the context of ecosystem and intergenerational trade-offs that have been made which are often in conflict with the public value system. The difficulties in using public preferences to make decisions are discussed, and the available methods used for conducting trade-off analysis in forest management are critically reviewed. The author recommends a set of guidelines for public participation that are learning-based and designed to build public confidence in the decision-making process. A continuous improvement approach for implementing management decisions is also recommended. Research needs to provide supporting tools for sustainable forest management planning are described.

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