Best Management Practices for Adaptive Management of Large-Scale Restoration Programs

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This analysis identifies best practices of adaptive management (AM) from existing large-scale restoration programs. Successfully applying AM increases in difficulty and complexity with the size of the physical and political area being proposed for restoration. Uncertainty, natural variation, and confounding factors are just some of the variables that become harder to resolve from project to program level. The case study approach to identify best practices is applied to the Bay-Delta Authority (CALFED), the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP), the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA), and the Lower Columbia River Estuary Program (LCREP). There are three AM best practices identified that reduce program-scale challenges. First, the scope of institutional buy-in in large-scale restoration can be substantial. It takes collective institutional buy-in for AM to realize its potential, which is often hard to identify and achieve. The second challenge is the need for infrastructure. It proved to be important to limit the disconnect in the AM process between setting measurable objectives in a centralized program and evaluating progress towards objectives with decentralized projects. Infrastructure linking program and project evaluation prove critical for success in adaptive management of restoration programs. Third, monitoring is critical for adaptive management, however it receives low priority and attention in restoration. Effectiveness monitoring is necessary for evaluating restoration efforts, and programs committed to monitoring are closer than the others to realizing the potential of AM. These best practices should provide restoration program planners insight into increasing effectiveness of restoration.

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