The Economics of Stewardship: Assessing the economic contributions of environmental restoration events

What is the issue?
Understanding the economic benefits that accrue as a result of volunteer participation in stewardship activities can contribute to the broader understanding of the impacts of these activities. We are developing an accounting system for the value of contributions made by sponsoring organizations, the costs associated with traveling to and from events, the value of contributed consumable and durable goods, as well as the value of volunteer labor. In doing so, we examine the benefits that accrue at the stewardship event level, rather than at the individual volunteer level.

Why is this research important?
Volunteer environmental stewardship exists in the Pacific Northwest region as a large-scale cultural phenomenon. This effort represents not only a critical component of ecological restoration efforts, but there are also substantial economic contributions that have gone unconsidered. Tools, time and transportation are all donated to these events.
- What is the value of these contributions?
- What value do people place on being able to contribute to the effort?
- How cost effective is the volunteer approach to small scale environmental restoration?

Study Goals
- Document and value contributions provided by volunteers to stewardship events
- Document and value contributions provided by sponsoring and hosting organizations to volunteer stewardship events
- Assess the impact of these contributions

Study Approach
Volunteer restoration events in King County parks during the Spring of 2011 were selected at random. Two tiers of consideration are being explored. The first are the contributions made by the volunteers themselves. The second are the contributions provided by event leads or hosts, as well as sponsors. Items considered include:
- Transportation mode and travel time to the event
- Event planning and cleanup time
- Contribution of consumable materials such as food, drink, or give-aways
- Contribution of durable goods such as tools, equipment, or supplies

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