What Everyone Should Know about Going Public: The Broader Impacts of Citizen Science

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Citizen science should be part of the toolbox of natural resource professionals because it can deliver two keys that humanity needs to create a sustainable world: reliable knowledge and social capital.

Even though curiosity is a universal human trait, the enterprise of scientific discovery is kept outside of mainstream culture, rather than integrated into our rituals and customs. It is carried out by an elite few, making it an easy target for attacks on its credibility and requiring specialized communicators to bridge the enormous gap between those creating knowledge and those for whom the knowledge is created. This is a serious problem because there are two interlocking keys needed to solve problems: (i) reliable knowledge of what can be done and (ii) social capital to make it happen. (The social networks, cohesion, and individual investment in community that makes democracy work better are social capital). Right now these two keys are separated from each other. The scientific enterprise is not broken (it is still making knowledge), but it can’t efficiently do its part in solving problems while located apart from society. The remedy is to relocate science from its isolation and foster its growth in the mainstream of society as an ongoing collaboration between the public and professionals. How can we do this? Citizen Science has already begun to do it, every day, and we need to expand the process. From the last decade of studying the phenomena of citizen science, we now know that citizen science co-creates highly reliable scientific knowledge and weaves social capital. Citizen science is still in its infancy and if we grow it, we have an opportunity to develop systems of engagement and participation aimed at collective problem-solving. In this context, Dr. Cooper will discuss the current trends and frontiers in the emerging discipline of citizen science.

Students, staff, and faculty are encouraged to attend. The public is welcome. Refreshments will be served.


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