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Abstract

Salamanders vs. the Simpsons: Community-based ecosystem monitoring

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Public concern for the environment and endangered species is growing. Canadian society has a more involved relationship with nature and natural resources than we did 50, or even 25 years ago. Ironically, this explosion of ecological awareness comes precisely at a time when governments at all levels are scaling back on their involvement in monitoring the environment. Monitoring programs funded through incremental or non-base budgets, combined with the steady pace of government ministry reorganizations, often result in short-term, fragmented, and ineffective government ecological monitoring. In a new phenomenon known as community-based ecosystem monitoring (CBEM), citizen groups, non-government organizations (NGOs), and individual citizens monitor a local species, ecosystem, or ecosystem process. CBEM can be viewed as government downloading of costs or as an historic taking-back of social responsibility. Benefits of CBEM include data acquisition, increased public awareness of nature and ecosystems, and opportunities for environmentalists to see decision-making first-hand. British Columbia is fertile ground for CBEM in that it has a well-developed NGO community, a stunning variety of ecological and natural resource issues, and a government that is currently downsizing its "dirt ministries." CBEM has a long-established precedent in the First Nations tradition of close and daily observation of nature.

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