

Leveraging Nature-based Solutions to Reconnect People and Nature

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Nature-based Solutions (NbS)—solutions to societal challenges that involve people working with nature—are becoming increasingly popular, particularly in response to the climate crisis, and have been proposed as mechanisms for transformative change towards more resilient and sustainable landscapes. In our perspective, we argue that NbS holds the potential to support such transformative change, but only if its framing in research, policy, and practice moves away from a separation between people and nature.

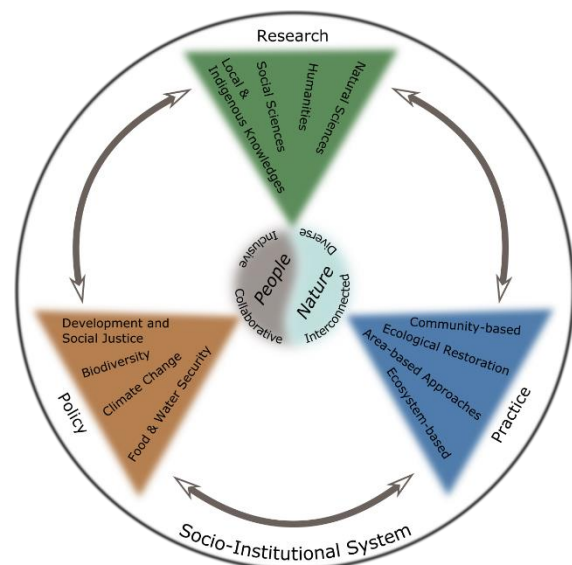
Currently, the framing of NbS is dominated by an instrumental ecosystem services lens, which highlights one, external “nature” working for the benefit of “society.” We argue this reinforces a false separation between people and nature, which obstructs the transformational potential of the concept in policy, research, and practice. To support wide-scale societal change, the NbS concept must be more inclusive of other ways of understanding and fostering human-nature relationships. For example, in the case of beaver-assisted wetland restoration, the intervention can be understood either as beavers working for people, or beavers working alongside people. The latter perspective fosters a collaborative relationship between humans and beavers, where the beavers are not fenced into a particular area but instead viewed as partners in the NbS, given the freedom to mold the intervention to the context.



Coming over the dam. Photo credit: Cheryl Reynolds, Worth A Dam.

To foster such relations, we propose “the core frame” of NbS, which positions NbS to support a change in Western thinking about people-nature relationships away from an

artificial separation, towards an understanding of people and nature as intimately connected. This core frame is inclusive, collaborative, interconnected, and diverse. It shifts communication around NbS, re-positions people as one part of a greater whole, and supports multiple ways of knowing within NbS research, policy, and practice.



A visualization of the core frame of NbS, centred around human-nature relations and bringing together various research, policy, and practice elements.

Crucially, the core frame is more inclusive of Local and Indigenous knowledges and place-based approaches, which are necessary for just and effective NbS on-the-ground.

If we continue to understand NbS in ways that encourage a separation between people and nature, NbS actions are likely to be less holistic and hence, miss opportunities for the integrated approaches crucial to address our shared socio-environmental challenges. Therefore, the framing of NbS holds strong implications for achieving transformational change. By supporting a shift in the mainstream, Western understanding of nature as working *for* people, to people working *with* nature, NbS—with its global reach and growing popularity—could play a critical role in addressing the intertwined challenges of social justice, biodiversity loss and the climate crisis.