

Moving Beyond Ecology: Valuing Restoration Success with Socioeconomics

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Coral reefs are crucial ecosystems currently facing alarming decline, impacting nearly 1 billion people who rely on them for survival and subsistence. Traditionally, restoration success has been evaluated based on ecological impact, assuming that the survival of corals equates to maintaining ecosystem services. However, the challenges facing restoration, including acute and chronic stress events, limit ecological success. Without evolving how we value restoration, its success and impact will always be limited. Considering the socioeconomic effects on local communities offers an alternative way to value restoration work, revealing societal benefits beyond traditional ecological and ecosystem services. The Coral Restoration Foundation's work in the Florida Keys serves as a case study for understanding coral restoration programs' socioeconomic impact. The socioeconomic framework of coral restoration programs encompasses various direct, indirect, induced, and total effects on local economies. This comprehensive understanding is crucial for informing policy decisions, securing funding support, and ensuring that coral restoration programs are designed and implemented in a manner that maximizes their positive impacts on both ecosystems and economies.