

Biologists and Engineers: The Communication Conundrum

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Successful stream restoration projects depend upon multidisciplinary teams that communicate in ways that efficiently and effectively transfer a huge amount of scientific, social, and economic data. Couple this with natural systems that have their own variability, and it isn't so surprising that many of the hurdles we face in stream restoration are not just technical.

People are self-selected into a variety of disciplines due in large part to their personal interests, skills, and aptitude. This is the very reason that we have stereotypes of engineers as being meticulous and biologists as being non-linear – not that it is always, or even mostly true, but humans tend to organize information by creating representative groups and then sorting additional data into these categories. The preponderance of personality tests on the internet nicely illustrates my point. By the way, I'm an ISTJ, Red, Compromiser.

Given that we are a very diverse group of people, how do we bridge these gaps, creating a more productive and effective restoration team? To illustrate communication barriers, and potential solutions, a case study of large wood placement in stream channels will be used as an example of how engineers and biologists can apparently be on the “same track” while in actuality they were apparently in different worlds.

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