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Commentary on Gordon Baskerville's [Perspective](#)

[Brian Walker](#)¹

Division of Wildlife and Ecology, CSIRO

Gordon Baskerville paints a black picture of the usefulness of contemporary ecological science, and a bleak future for improved resource use and management. I have to agree with much of what he says, and acknowledge that a lack of "reflection before action" (which is another way of describing the use of an ecological model in an adaptive management framework) is the norm in present-day resource management and planning. Gordon uses forest management to highlight the discrepancy between what planners and managers need in the way of information, in terms of scales and levels of integration, and the inadequate "building blocks" that ecological scientists publish. For science and real-world management to come together in a truly beneficial way, there are three requirements that need to follow each other in an iterative manner: (1) we need Baskerville's "reflection", an explicit, dynamic ecological model that predicts the outcome of any management action (in conjunction with climate and other driving variables); (2) the outcomes of management must be monitored; and (3) the ecologists and the managers need to learn from the mismatches between the model forecast and the actual outcome: where "learn" means changing (improving) the model.

However, while agreeing with the general thrust of the editorial, I wonder whether things are quite as bad as it makes out. I question whether most ecological research is still descriptive. It has come a long way over the past couple of decades. Admittedly, it still falls short in coping with dynamics at large spatial scales, and very few ecological studies take economic issues explicitly into account, but the tendency is in that direction. Unlike Gordon Baskerville, I do expect scientists in the organization in which I work to think and work in the temporal and spatial domains required by the manager. More and more, the research projects we are funded to undertake require joint planning, and often joint execution, with the managers or management agencies. The danger may lie, in the global trend toward commercializing science, in the pendulum swinging too far. If all scientists do is work on today's problems with managers, we run the risk of not developing new ideas and understanding about ecosystem ecology. I suspect that the right balance, as Gordon claims, is still to be struck, and that right now we need more ecologists working closely with real-world managers. But we don't want to discourage the exploration of new concepts in ecosystem ecology.

RESPONSES TO THIS ARTICLE

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Address of correspondent:

Brian Walker
Chief
Division of Wildlife and Ecology
CSIRO, Australia
PO Box 84
Lyneham Act. 2602
Australia
brian.walker@dwe.csiro.au

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