

Concluding Remarks

Adaptive management can be applicable to local resource projects as well as large-scale conservation programs, though the legal constraints on an adaptive approach may differ across scales. But the basic framework presented in this technical guide, involving an iterative process of management, monitoring, and evaluation, applies in either case. The key issues in deciding to use adaptive management are whether there is substantial uncertainty about the impacts on management, and whether the reduction of that uncertainty can be expected to improve management.

For many important problems, adaptive management holds great promise in reducing the uncertainties that limit the effective management of natural resource systems. In many cases, utilizing management itself in an experimental context may be the only feasible way to gain the system understanding needed to improve management. In concept, adaptive management is neither conceptually complex nor operationally intricate. However, it requires refinements of the business models of DOI agencies, to more fully reflect system sustainability and resilience, more explicitly account for uncertainty, and more fully incorporate conservation planning, decision-based monitoring, and evaluation.

A realistic assessment of its challenges suggests that adaptive management is likely to be neither short-term nor inexpensive, and a considerable amount of up-front planning may be required. Stakeholders and implementing organizations must commit to providing the necessary resources for monitoring and assessment over the time required to make progress in achieving project objectives. In particular, an initial investment of time and effort will increase the likelihood of better decision making and resource stewardship in the future. The need for patience and flexibility in adaptive management highlights the importance of carefully considering the potential use of an adaptive approach, and careful planning and evaluation when adaptive management is used.