

Overcoming Obstacles to Population Risk Assessment. Wayne R. Munns, Jr., USEPA, ORD, NHEERL

Driven by management goals, statutory requirements and stakeholder interests, populations of wildlife and aquatic organisms often are the assessment endpoint entities (assessment populations) identified in site-specific ecological risk assessments. Yet, risks to populations are seldom actually assessed, due in large part to uncertainty about how risk estimates should be used in risk management decisions, and to the scientific and technical difficulties population risk assessments entail. Some of the obstacles associated with population risk assessment are identified in a companion talk by W. Nelson Beyer. They include confusion about how to define populations, questions about the level of environmental protection afforded by population endpoints relative to other endpoints, technical challenges posed by population risk assessments, and whether such assessments are responsive to legal mandates. This presentation offers possible approaches for overcoming these obstacles, and describes how the risk assessment planning process can be used to guide selection of endpoints (population or otherwise) responsive to regulatory and stakeholder needs.