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Sustainability Science for Watershed Landscapes

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Sustainability Science for Watershed Landscapes

James A. Roumasset
Kimberly M. Burnett
Arsenio M. Balisacan

Editors



S E A M E O
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and

Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA)
College, Los Baños, Laguna, Philippines 4031
E-mail: post@agri.searca.org

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CONTENTS

<i>Tables</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Figures</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Message</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xiv</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xvi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xix</i>

Theme 1: Sustainability Science for Resource Management and Policy

1	Economic Policy for Sustainable Development vs. Greedy Growth and Preservationism <i>Majah-Leah V. Ravago, James A. Roumasset, and Arsenio M. Balisacan</i>	3
2	Integrated Watershed Management: Trees, Aquifers, Reefs, and Mud <i>Sittidaj Pongkijvorasin and James A. Roumasset</i>	47
3	Transdisciplinary Research in Watershed Conservation: Experiences, Lessons, and Future Directions <i>Chieko Umetsu, Makoto Taniguchi, Tsugibiro Watanabe, and Shigeo Yachi</i>	77
4	Payments for Ecological Services: Experiences in Carbon and Water Payments in the Philippines <i>Rodel D. Lasco and Grace B. Villamor</i>	103

Theme 2: Monitoring and Modelling

5	Cyberinfrastructure for Sustainability in Coupled Human – Environment Systems <i>Michael H. Kido, Kenneth Y. Kaneshiro, and Kevin N. Montgomery</i>	127
6	Watershed Management for Sustainability in Tropical Watersheds: An Integrated Hydrologic Modelling Approach <i>Ali Fares</i>	141

-
- 7 Watershed Assessment, Restoration, and Protection in Hawai'i 167
Aly I. El-Kadi and Monica Mira

Theme 3: Participatory Approaches

- 8 Landscape-Scale Conservation: Fostering Partnerships through 195
Ecosystem Service Approaches
Rebecca L. Goldman and Gretchen C. Daily
- 9 A Participatory Approach to Community Resource Management: 219
Building Upon Local Knowledge and Concerns
James B. Friday and Harold J. McArthur Jr.

Theme 4: Case Studies

- 10 Changing Land Use in the Golden Triangle: 235
Where the Rubber Meets the Road
*Maite Guardiola-Caramonte, Jefferson M. Fox, Thomas W. Giambelluca,
and Peter A. Troch*
- 11 Effects of Feral Pigs (*Sus scrofa*) on Watershed Health in Hawai'i: 251
A Literature Review and Preliminary Results on Runoff
and Erosion
Gregory L. Bruland, Chad A. Browning, and Carl I. Evensen
- 12 Sustainable Water Quality Management for Pacific Island 279
Watersheds: Illustrations from American Samoa, Hawai'i,
and Micronesia
Carl I. Evensen
- 13 The Transboundary Management of Groundwater Resources 311
in Kumamoto, Japan
Jun Shimada

Synthesis

- 14 Sustainability Science: 329
Overview and Directions for Further Research
Kimberly M. Burnett and James A. Roumasset

TABLES

2.1	Equations Used in the Model	57
2.2	Summary of the Main Results (study state) from All Scenarios	62
3.1	Characteristics of Research Organisations	96
3.2	Tools for Integration	97
6.1	Predominant Soils of the Upper Hanalei Watershed and Their Basic Characteristics	149
6.2	Soil Erosion and Sediment Yield for October-December 2003 Estimates with Original and Modified Versions of N-SPECT, Using Two Different LS Factor Grids, and Compared to Actual Sediment Yield	159
8.1	Summary of Lessons Learned From Case Studies	204
11.1	Characteristics of the Eight Sites in the Mānoa Watershed	264
12.1	Water Issues Ranked as High Priority (extremely important + very important) by Pacific Island Respondents	290
12.2	Water Issues Ranked as Most Important (1) to Least Important (10) by Residents in Each Pacific Island	291
12.3	Responses of Pacific Island Respondents to Sources of Drinking Water	292
12.4	Responses of Pacific Island Respondents on Safety of and Satisfaction with Drinking Water in the Home	293
12.5	Primary and Secondary Sources of Known or Suspected Water Quality Contaminants per Island	294

FIGURES

1.1	Barbier's Venn Diagram (adapted from Barbier 1987)	6
1.2	Positive Sustainability	12
1.3	Rent-seeking and the Iron Triangle	18
1.4	Unsustainable and Sustainable Development	27
2.1	Optimal Paths of Head Level with Different Marine Algae Stock Constraints	61
2.2	Optimal Paths of Ground Water Extraction with Different Marine Algae Stock Constraints	61
2.3	Open Access vs. Socially Efficient Effort	65
2.4	Transition to New Steady-State Levels Due to Adding and Subtracting One Square Kilometer of Mangroves	66
2.5	Total Revenues from Adding and Subtracting One Square Kilometer of Mangroves	67
2.6	Revenue, Cost, and Profit of Fishery Production Under Sole Ownership	68
2.7	Net Revenue of Depleting/Growing Area of Mangrove Under A Regulated Fishery	69
3.1	Stages of Integrated Project-type Research	80
3.2	Six Research Groups of ICCAP	84
3.3	Impact Assessment Flow and Scenarios in ICCAP	85
3.4	Framework of Analysis for Integrating SG Outputs in ICCAP	86
3.5	Lake Biwa-Yodo River Project – Four Research Groups	87
3.6	Four Research Groups in Lake Biwa-Yodo River Project	89
3.7	Human Activities on Urban Subsurface Environments	92
3.8	Six Research Groups of Urban Subsurface Environments Project	93
4.1	Net Carbon Sequestration Under Various Scenarios of the LLDA Project in Tanay, Rizal	111
4.2	Estimated Net Cumulative CO ₂ e Removals by the Proposed Kalaban Reforestation Project, Philippines (Villamor and Lasco 2006)	114

5.1	<i>InteleView</i> – Virtual Earth Image of: (A) Kauaʻi in the Hawaiian Islands; (B) Project area on North Kauaʻi, Circles Indicate Locations of Sensor Deployments Transmitting Data Wirelessly to the <i>InteleSense</i> Server; (C) Location of Waipa Valley/ <i>Ahupuaʻa</i>	131
5.2	System Architecture, <i>InteleCell</i> Hardware, and Sensor Types Currently Supported	132
5.3	Example of Near-Real Time Data Observed in <i>InteleView</i> , Used to Evaluate Flood Response in Waipa Stream and Taro Irrigation Ditch, to Torrential Rainfall Occurring in Lower Waipa Valley over a five-day Period in Nov-Dec 2006	136
6.1	Hanalei Watershed Located in the North of the Island of Kauaʻi, Hawaiʻi	145
6.2	Measured Precipitations for the 2003-2004 Simulation Period at USGS Rain Gauges at the Watershed Outlet and on Mt. Waiʻaleʻale	147
6.3	Spatial Distribution of Average Annual Precipitation in Hanalei Watershed as Determined (a) Using the PRISM Model and (b) Hawaiʻi Atlas	148
6.4	Daily Average Stream Flow in Hanalei river at the USGS Gauging Station Based on 49 Years of Record (1963-2004)	148
6.5	Land Cover Map of the Study Area	150
6.6	AnnAGNPS	151
6.7	Daily Precipitation and Runoff From 1999 and 2001 at the Watershed Outlet and Mt. Waiʻaleʻale	152
6.8	(a) Spatial Distribution of CN Values for C-CAP Land Cover and (b) Estimated Runoff Volume (per grid cell)	154
6.9	Spatial Distribution of Average Annual Sediment Load from Hanalei Watershed Using AnnAGNPS model	155
6.10	Total Sedimentation Contribution Versus Percent Area of Watershed Contributing to the Sediment Loads	156
6.11	LS Factor Grids Applied in the Simulation of Soil Erosion	158
6.12	Sediment Delivery Ratios and Sediment Yield in Hanalei Bay Watershed Predicted with the Modified Version of the N-SPECT	158
6.13	Feral Pig Disturbance in Hanalei Watershed	160
7.1	The Nāwiliwili Watershed, Kauaʻi, with its Main Perennial Streams and their Respective Basins (Hawaiʻi State 2009)	171

8.1	Three Possible Incentives or Partnerships that Could Encourage the Provision of Ecosystem Services from Working Landscapes, Depending on the Size Parcels in the Landscape and the Familiarity of the Landowners with Each Other	201
8.2	Ecosystem Service Projects (ES project) Engage Significantly More Private, Corporate Stakeholders in Conservation Efforts than Traditional Approaches (BD project)	202
9.1	Map of Timor Leste	223
10.1	MMSEA Study Region	236
10.2	(a) Location of the Experimental Catchment Nam Ken, in South Xishuangbanna, (b) Land Cover and Location of the Micrometeorological (triangles) and Soil Moisture Stations (squares) in Nam Ken	240
10.3	Studied Land Covers: (a) Rubber, (b) Tea, (c) Secondary Forest, (d) Grassland	243
10.4	Data on Daily Albedo Values and Evaporation Fraction (λ) in the Rubber Plantations, 2005	245
11.1	Map of the Variations in Slope Across the Watershed with the Locations of All Eight Sampling Sites	265
11.2	The Basic Layout of Each Site in Study. Each Site was Oriented to Achieve Similar Slope and Vegetative Characteristics for Both Plots	266
11.3	Runoff Collection Apparatus with Lid Removed	267
11.4	Mean Bulk Density Across the Eight Study Sites (error bars represent ± 1 standard error)	269
11.5	Mean Volumetric Soil Moisture across the Eight Study Sites (error bars represent ± 1 standard error)	270
11.6	Mean Monthly Total Suspended Solids Concentrations for All Eight Study Sites from November 2007 to February 2008 (error bars represent ± 1 standard error)	271
11.7	Mean Total Suspended Solid Concentrations for the Fenced and Unfenced Plots in Each Site (error bars represent ± 1 standard error)	271
11.8	Differences in Total Suspended Solid Concentrations Between Fenced and Unfenced Plots Over Time. The Negative Trend Represents Higher TSS Amounts in the Unfenced Plots.	273
12.1	Location of the American-affiliated Pacific Islands (adapted from Carruth, 2003)	281
12.2.	Pacific Island Streams are Typically Short with Steep Gradients and Small Drainage Areas and Have Highly Variable Flow (Waipa stream, Kaua'i, Hawai'i; Photo by Carl Evensen)	282

12.3	The Effects of Groundwater Withdrawal on a Freshwater Lens (adapted from Carruth 2003)	283
12.4	Rapidly Developing Rural Landscapes Abound in the Pacific Islands (Amanave Village, American Samoa; Photo by Carl Evensen)	302
12.5	Island Life is Physically, Economically, and Culturally Linked to the Surrounding Oceans (Tumon Bay, Guam; Photo by Glen Fukumoto)	304
13.1	Location of the Study Area	312
13.2	Surface Geologic Map of the Study Area	313
13.3	Groundwater Potential Distribution of the No.2 Aquifer in the Kumamoto Area (October, 1993)	314
13.4	Stable Oxygen Isotope Content ($\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ‰) in the No.2 Aquifer Groundwater and Shira River Water (Kosaka, H. et al. 2002)	315
13.5	Annual Changes in Groundwater Levels at the Suizenji Observation Well	316
13.6	Annual Changes in Groundwater Levels at Ozu in the Midstream Area of the Shira River	317
13.7	Annual Changes in Spring Discharge at Lake Ezu	317
13.8	“Balance” of Groundwater in the Kumamoto Region	318
13.9	Annual Changes in Groundwater Withdrawal Uses in the Kumamoto City	319
13.10	Changes in Urban Land Use from 1965 to 1997 in the Kumamoto Area	319
13.11	Changes in Non-agricultural Land Use in the Shira River Mid-stream Area from 1930 to Present (Ichikawa, 2004)	320
13.12	Effect of Paddy Rice Irrigation on Annual Discharge Rate of the Shira River	321
13.13	Schematic View of the Creation of Groundwater Resources through Rice Paddies	323
13.14	Effects of Artificial Recharge through Abandoned Paddy Fields	324

MESSAGE

Cynicism surrounds the concept of “sustainable development” and its approaches, for at least two reasons. Firstly, the concept, as practiced, is nebulous – meaning different things to different people, even among serious researchers and policy analysts. Indeed, many vociferous advocates of sustainable development have one thing in common – they tend to speak a language other than what we know as science. Secondly, evident success or sustained impact of approaches to sustainable development in many parts of the world is quite sparse and wanting.

A useful point of departure is thus to define sustainability science at the outset. As William Clark succinctly puts it, sustainability science is a field defined by the problems it addresses rather than by the disciplines it employs, much like health science and agricultural science. In particular, it is a field that seeks to, and I quote, “facilitate a transition toward sustainability – that is, improving society’s capacity to use the earth in ways that simultaneously meet the needs of a much larger but stabilizing human population, ... sustain the life support systems of the planet, and ... substantially reduce hunger and poverty” (*Our Common Journey: A Transition Toward Sustainability*, National Research Council Policy Division Board on Sustainable Development, 1999). Clark sees sustainability science “transcend(ing) the concerns of its foundational disciplines and focus(ing) instead on understanding the complex dynamics that arise from interactions between human and environmental systems.”

Bringing together the various sciences along with other dimensions of human thought to address sustainability’s concerns, including the social goals of sustainable development and humanity’s well-being, is, to say the least, exciting. This is indeed synergy of a 21st century kind!

On the other hand, the challenges facing this new field are huge. For the most part, sustainability science requires detailed information synthesized into new knowledge, enriching and even revolutionizing present paradigms and methods of research and policy design. Interestingly, the transdisciplinary nature and requirements of this new science, which is a key to its promise of generating new knowledge, is in itself a challenge. Particularly for us scientists and researchers, it may mean having to change our paradigms and ways of looking at our world, modifying our way of viewing and doing science, stepping out of the neat little boxes we have fashioned for our respective disciplines, and developing new ways of talking and working with each other as well as nonscientists and other stakeholders who similarly aspire for society’s well-being. Perhaps the ultimate promise, and at the same time challenge, of this new field is its systems perspective of problem-

solving – indeed, to be able to address human-and-environment concerns in ways that do not beget bigger problems nor bypass more significant issues. Just thinking of its possibility is overwhelming and exciting.

Key to making this transdisciplinary initiative work is placing the policy question or issue at the forefront of the research agenda. How do the different chapters in this volume contribute to an improved understanding of what works – and what does not – in the area of watershed management? The other element of this initiative is the recognition that one-size-fits-all approach to policy design aimed at addressing sustainability concerns across landscapes seldom works in practice. What may work well in a Hawai'i landscape will not necessarily work well in a Philippine landscape and vice versa. Indeed, because the bio-physical, socio-economic, and institutional conditions are quite diverse across landscapes, even within a country, the choice of appropriate policy and technology levers for addressing resource management issues is extremely challenging.

It is widely believed that the present development path of the world is not a sustainable one. As a development organization, SEARCA sees in sustainability science a way of carrying out its mandate of agricultural and rural development for Southeast Asia yet managing the natural base on which most of these agricultural and rural activities depend.

Arsenio M. Balisacan
Former SEARCA Director

FOREWORD

The goal of *Sustainability Science for Watershed Landscapes* was to synthesise the third wave of sustainability science and make science directly relevant to specific pressing policy questions. Current efforts are grounded in almost four decades of international concern commencing with the Stockholm Conference on the Environment (1972), and including, to mention only a few of the key initiatives, the Brundtland Commission (1983-1987) and the resulting report, *Our Common Future* (1987) and the four year Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005). The Assessment addressed environmental, social sustainability, and economic sustainability to meet fundamental human needs while preserving the earth's life support systems. The challenges facing us early in the 21st century are so complex that they demand trans-disciplinary approaches, coupled models, multi-scale assessment, and the involvement of stakeholders in defining our basic questions. These challenges are heightened by a changing climate. This volume presents important case studies highlighting these approaches.

It was logical for the East-West Center (EWC) to partner with the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) and the University of Hawai'i in convening the 2007 "International Conference on Sustainability Science for Watershed Landscapes" that resulted in this volume. The EWC has had a sustained partnership with SEARCA and its parent organisation, the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO). Furthermore, since at least the mid-1970's the EWC has been committed to the policy aspects of equitable access to resources in the Asia Pacific region. A milestone was the creation of what was then the Resource Systems Institute (1977) under the leadership of Harrison Brown. In the same year the Environment and Policy Institute (EAPI) was established under the leadership of William Mathews to study human interaction in tropical ecosystems. Both RSI and EAPI concentrated on international comparative studies with an Asian focus and hosted many Asian visiting researchers often leading to long-term research partnerships. Although there has been institutional change, the focus on the policy aspects of equitable access to resources is continued today by the Center's Environment, Vulnerability and Governance concentration, led by Jefferson Fox, a co-organiser of the meeting and a contributor to this volume.

Place-based understanding makes an important contribution to sustainability science. Hawai'i is a logical place in which to have hosted this dialogue. Indigenous Hawaiian land management practices are rooted in the *abupua'a* – the watershed comprised of the mountaintop to the reef's edge. This volume includes valuable

examples from O'ahu, Kaua'i and the Island of Hawai'i as well as Micronesia, American Samoa, Thailand, the Philippines, and Timor Leste, Xishuangbanna, Yunnan, Japan and Guatemala and Brazil in Latin America. The East-West Center is committed to continued partnerships with colleagues and institutions in the Asia Pacific, the US and beyond in furthering the frontiers of sustainability science.

Nancy D. Lewis
Director, Research Programme
East-West Center

PREFACE

Globally, we must confront our inability to meet the demands of unchecked population growth, rapid depletion of natural resources, increasing energy needs, and the world-wide deterioration of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. In short, the current behaviour of humans on this planet is not sustainable.

In August of 2006, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA). The goal of the UHM-SEARCA initiative was to synthesise a third wave in sustainability science that goes beyond the nature of interactions in order to facilitate policy analysis. The resulting "International Conference on Sustainability Science for Watershed Landscapes," held on November 13-14, 2007, was a product of that collaboration and with the East-West Center. One of the major accomplishments of that conference is this reference volume on methods and applications in both Hawai'i and Asia.

In 2008, a Mānoa Ad Hoc Committee of Faculty and Administrators proposed the organisation of an Institute of Sustainability Science, Technology and Policy. The mission they articulated was to apply the knowledge and talents of the University to the practical problems that our society faces in supplying ourselves with the resources of energy, water, food that a growing population requires from a diminishing resource base. Specifically, they suggested that the Institute would build on the vision of sustainability science, a transdisciplinary method of organising research to deliver meaningful contributions to critical issues of resource management and rigorous policy analysis.

With this effort the University of Hawai'i joins many other universities in North America and Asia in leading the efforts to take us beyond sustainability. After all, it will not be enough to just sustain the current situation. Sustainability science offers a way of organising research to deliver practical solutions based on integrated and scientifically sound research.

In closing, I both congratulate and thank the authors of the ensuing chapters for their efforts to stimulate the sustainability science movement and facilitate further collaboration between East and West.

Gary K. Ostrander
Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

United by a common goal to lay the foundations of policy analysis in the sustainability science arena, the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA), University of Hawai'i Mānoa (UHM), and East-West Center (EWC) agreed to support an international conference on "Sustainability Science for Watershed Landscapes" on November 13-14, 2007 in Honolulu, Hawai'i. SEARCA and UHM began planning the conference in August 2006; when the two institutions entered into a Memorandum of Understanding on sustainable resource management, risk management, and agricultural development. EWC partnered in the conference organisation and provided logistical support as well as the conference venue.

This volume emerged from the conference discussions and subsequent papers. The chapters herein help to synthesise a "third wave" of sustainability science by integrating traditional interdisciplinary environmental studies with policy science. The challenge lies in the integration of the analysis of natural and human systems with policy science. Abstraction is an essential part of science, and specific simplifications should be motivated by specific policy questions. By focusing on actual resource management and policy questions and interacting with stakeholders, research is organised to inform real-world decision-making. Sustainability science must go beyond the application of scientific knowledge to specific problems and develop new methods for dealing with dynamic, spatial, behavioral, and interactive complications of resource systems under pressure.

Watershed management is a natural challenge for sustainability science. Water is the unifying resource of a watershed. Watershed conservation generates on-site values such as timber and biodiversity and offsite values such as groundwater recharge and the reduction of downstream sedimentation. This volume suggests asking the policy questions up front before designing the research methodology and data protocols. Given the paucity of prototypes, the chapters provide case studies from Asia and the Pacific, including Hawai'i. Some of them serve as a starting point for asking particular policy questions. Others provide the full gambit of resource-systems analysis to specific policy recommendations.

We especially thank the chapter authors, including prominent economists, biologists, hydrologists, foresters, and ecologists who strove to advance sustainability science beyond the description of resource systems towards the posing and solution of particular policy questions. Without their support and enthusiasm, this venture would have failed. Our appreciation also goes to the other conference speakers and session chairs, Barry Usagawa, Bruce Wilcox, Daniel Murdiyarmo, Jim Jacobi,

Kensuke Fukushi, Nguyen Hai Nam, Arnulfo Garcia and Nicomedes Briones, whose focus and stimulating discussion promoted the conference objectives.

Special thanks also go to the UHM Sustainability Council and its chair, Mary Tiles, for the funds granted to this project. Jefferson Fox, EWC Senior Fellow, was instrumental in arranging EWC support. Rodel Lasco, Philippines Coordinator for the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), facilitated the ICRAF and Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) funding of two of the conference speakers.

This volume could not have been possible but for the concerted effort of the people at UHM, EWC, and SEARCA. Majah-Leah Ravago, UHM Economics Ph.D. student, EWC Degree Fellow, and chapter co-author, was coordinator extraordinaire, assisting the editors and facilitating communications between all parties involved. UHM Water Resources Research Center Director James Moncur and his stellar staff, Susan Yokouchi and Barbara Guieb, provided hassle-free handling of the direct costs for the conference. June Kuramoto, assisted by Arlene Hamasaki, ably accomplished administration and other logistics handled by EWC. Kevin Nishimura, from the UHM Economics Department, facilitated the travel logistics for some of the invited speakers. Arnulfo Garcia, former SEARCA Research and Development Department Manager, and his competent staff, Nyhria Rogel and Ruby Johnson, handled project management. Lily Tallafer also helped in various stages of the project. The Knowledge Management Department, headed by Maria Celeste Cadiz, together with her staff Lorna Calumpang and Bernadette Joven, helped polish the manuscript. Jane Kirton and Chris Wada also helped with the final copyediting of several chapters.

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James A. Roumasset
Kimberly M. Burnett
Arsenio M. Balisacan

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Arsenio M. Balisacan

Professor of Economics
School of Economics
University of the Philippines Diliman

Chad Browning

Environmental Scientist
Office of the Environment,
Fish & Wildlife
Bonneville Power Administration

Gregory L. Bruland

Assistant Professor
Department of Natural Resources
& Environmental Management
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Kimberly M. Burnett

Assistant Specialist
University of Hawai'i Economic
Research Organisation

Gretchen C. Daily

Director, Center for Conservation
Biology Professor, Biology Department
Stanford University

Aly I. El-Kadi

Professor of Hydrology
Department of Geology and
Geophysics and Water Resources
Research Center
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Carl I. Evensen

Chair and Extension Specialist
Department of Natural Resources
& Environmental Management
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Ali Fares

Professor of Watershed Hydrology
Department of Natural Resources
& Environmental Management
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Jefferson M. Fox

Senior Fellow
Research Programme
East-West Center

James B. Friday

Extension Forester
College of Tropical Agriculture
and Human Resources
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Thomas W. Giambelluca

Professor, Department of Geography
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Rebecca L. Goldman

Senior Scientist for Board Relations
The Nature Conservancy
Worldwide Office

Maite Guardiola-Claramonte

Graduate Research Assistant
Department of Hydrology
and Water Resources
University of Arizona

Kenneth Y. Kaneshiro

Director, Center for Conservation
Research and Training
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Michael H. Kido

Director
Hawai'i Stream Research Center
Center for Conservation Research
and Training
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Rodel D. Lasco

Senior Scientist and Philippine
Programme Coordinator
World Agroforestry Centre

Nancy D. Lewis

Director, Research Programme
East-West Center

Harold J. McArthur, Jr.

Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research
Relations
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Monica Mira

Researcher
Water Resources Research Center
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Kevin N. Montgomery

Director
National Biocomputation Center
Stanford University

Gary K. Ostrander

Vice Chancellor for Research
and Graduate Education
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Sittidaj Pongkijvorasin

Faculty of Economics
Chulalongkorn University

Majah-Leah V. Ravago

PhD Student in Economics, University
of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Graduate Degree Fellow
East-West Center

James A. Roumasset

Professor of Economics
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Research Fellow, University of Hawai'i
Economic Research Organisation

Jun Shimada

Professor of Hydrology
Graduate School of Science
and Technology
Kumamoto University

Makoto Taniguchi

Professor
Research Institute for Humanity
and Nature

Peter A. Troch

Professor
Department of Hydrology
and Water Resources
University of Arizona

Chieko Umetsu

Associate Professor
Research Institute for Humanity
and Nature

Grace B. Villamor

Researcher
World Agroforestry Centre

Tsugihiko Watanabe

Professor
Center for Coordination, Promotion
and Communication
Research Institute for Humanity
and Nature

Shigeo Yachi

Associate Professor
Center for Ecological Research
Kyoto University

