Inspiring Action Across Diverse Audiences

More A Set of Musings than an Action

Last week I attended a workshop focused on developing an action plan for our region to better address environmental protection of critical habitats, signature species, water resources, climate change challenges and more effectively educate for local stewardship, all of which aligns educating for sustainable societies. Looking around the room I saw that the attendees represented a very broad cross section, from national groups like the Army Corps of Engineers, to regional environmental organizations, to state agency representatives, to local non profits, to scientists working in both the state and private colleges and research institutions, to educators, a funding agency, and a business owner. The structure of the group seemed promising with lots of conversation and potential collaborations being discussed. But who wasn’t at the table? What voices and concerns weren’t being represented?

Critical goals and targets were being established with metrics for measuring progress on each goal posted around the room. One of the listed goals was for diversity and inclusion, certainly critical as there was little visible diversity in the room. But it struck me that the whole sequence was a little backwards…we establish the goals and metrics without the diversity of voices from the community and then widen our reach and hope that together we can achieve the stated goals.

One young woman addressed the room and said very simply and clearly that the first goal for diversity should be to make others feel welcome, to recognize them, invite their voices, and be willing to change direction to ensure that their goals are really represented in the overall mission. One simple sentence that spoke volumes.

The problems we need to tackle to build Sustainable Societies require all of our voices, and all of our good ideas. It will involve some of us stepping back and listening, encouraging others to step in and supporting them as they lead, and allowing them to do it in their own way. It doesn’t mean stepping away, but it might mean being willing to slow down, step back, allow a lull and let new voices fill in and rise. Everyone brings a different experience and different set of skills and understandings. We need them all.