

The “Impact” of our Investment in Conservation and Restoration

David W. Yoskowitz
Harte Research Institute
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

RAE Summit 2016
New Orleans, Louisiana





“What we’ve got here is failure to communicate”



“What we’ve got here is failure to calculate and communicate the value of our natural resources in order to effectively manage them”

As we know language is important. It matters!



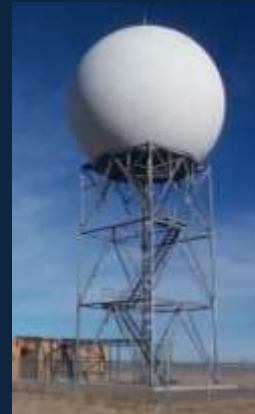
What language will we use for communicating what the restoration and conservation of our natural environment has achieved?

1. Internal operations

In many cases we have adopted the language of business and personal finance to describe the “success” of a project.

Return on Investment (ROI) was the term of favor during my short time at NOAA

Additional products, data streams, and acres restored were a measure success.



The problem is that “return” is inward looking.

We could change the conversation and message by thinking about the **Impact of Investment (IoI)**, which is outward looking.

Lynn Scarlett at ACES Conference:
Knowledge to Action **to Impact**



2. Macondo blowout



NRDA

RESTORE Act



What are you going to say when you go in front of this committee?

Is it enough to talk about the number of acres restored?

People employed?

Critters protected or enhanced?





Before



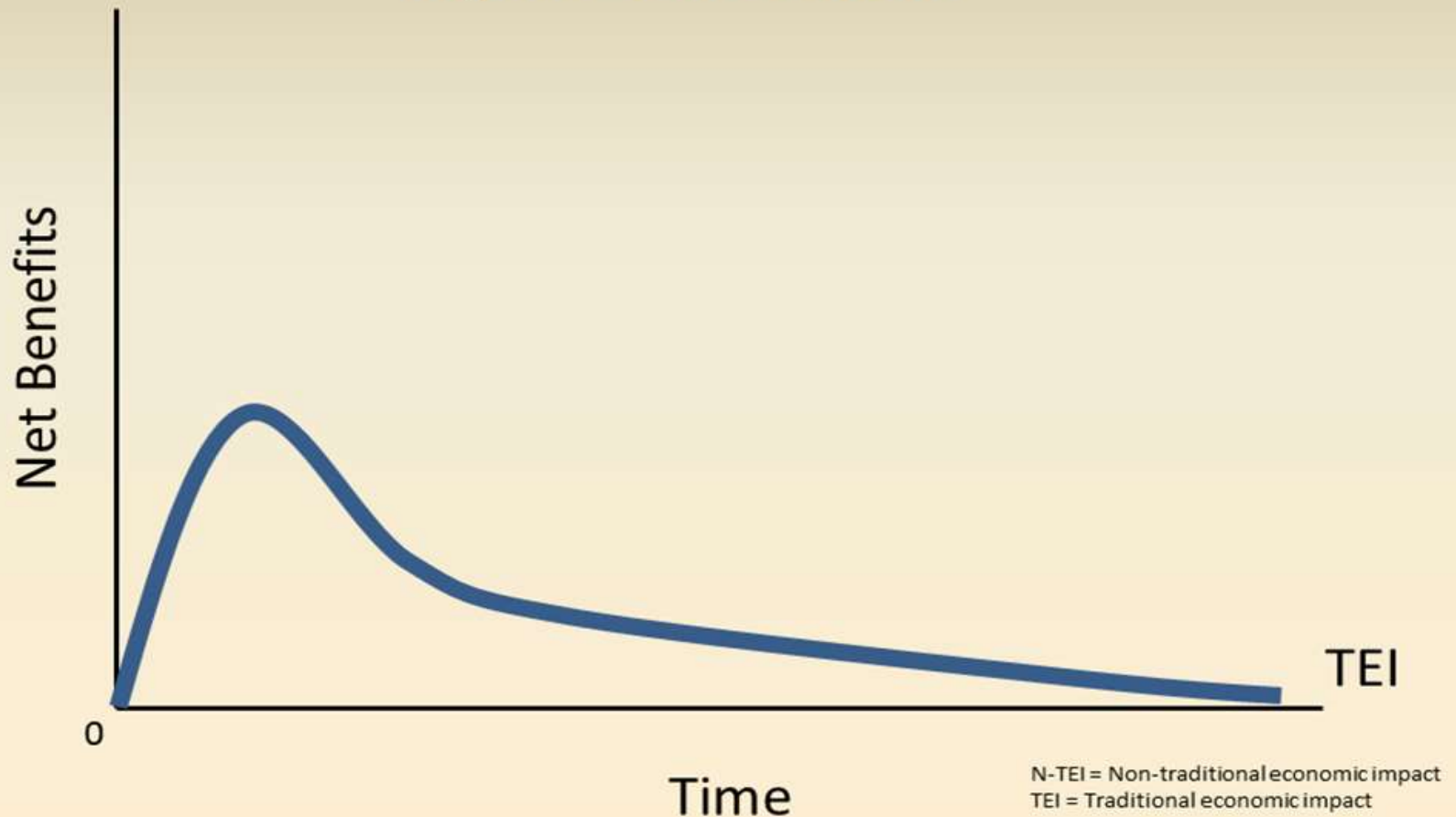
After

Barataria Barrier Island complex, Louisiana

Restoration = habitat (acres) & jobs
≠ Impact unless we account for it

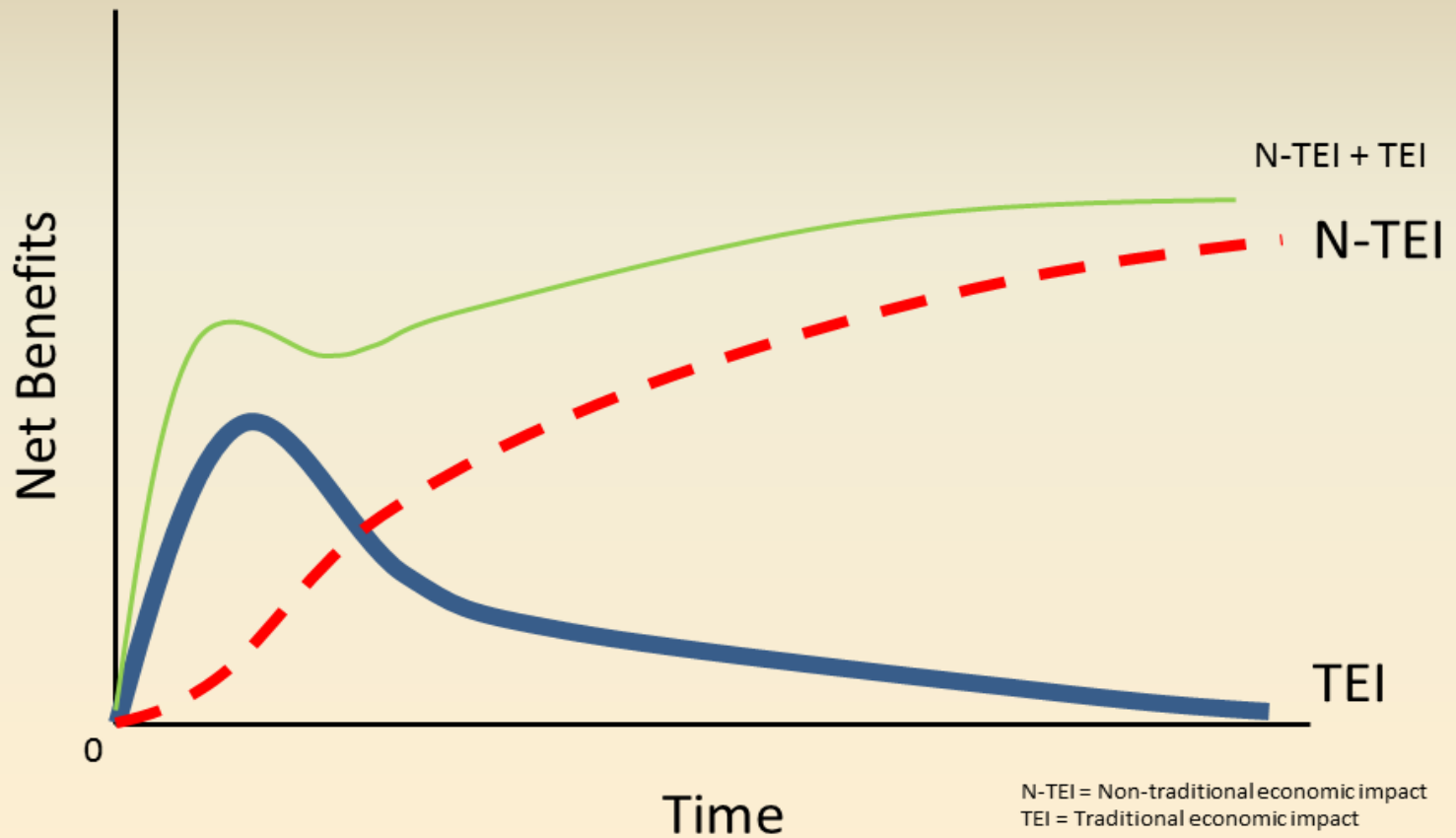
What do we get with traditional economic impact analysis: jobs, output, income.

Impact of Investment



American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)
managed by NOAA generated over 1,400 jobs (Edwards, et al.
2013)

Impact of Investment



Now we include the **non-traditional** measures of impacts including ecosystem services.

Obvious right?

What conservation / restoration program explicitly accounts for a suite of non-traditional economic impacts for its projects?

Measured like bio-physical outcomes.

Over time.

What's needed?

1. Socio-economic data to match up with the bio-physical data.
2. Measurements of benefits that can be simplified and easily operationalized.
3. The “opportunity and “willingness” to do it.



1. Socio-Economic Observing System

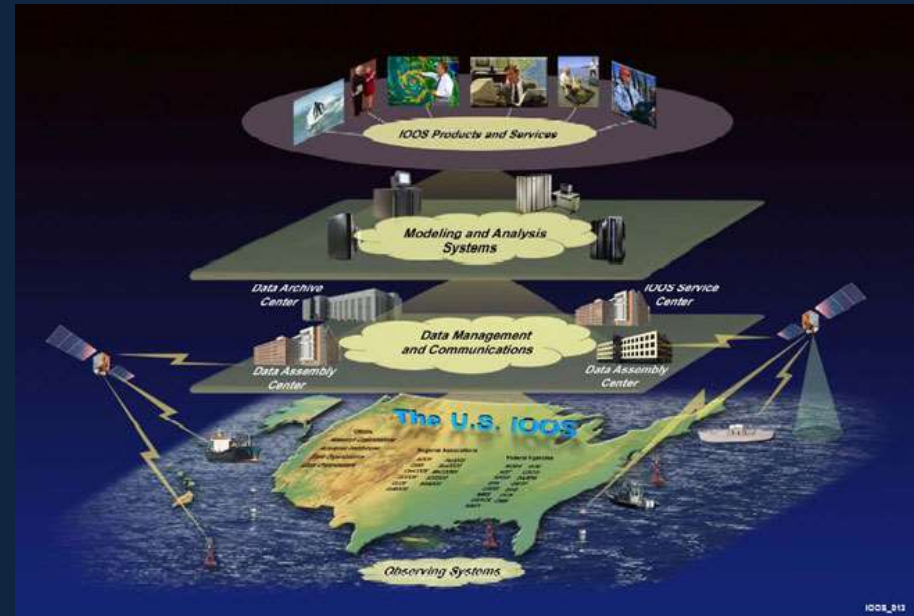
We are trying to elucidate the benefits emanating from the natural system.

Strong bio-physical science and monitoring

Need for more socio-economic monitoring

Ann Bartuska has mentioned that we need to start “systematically counting” benefits

How can we expect to measure the impact and benefits of restoration when we don't have an equivalent system to bio-physical monitoring.



Getting practical - now

Matching the great bio-physical data that is collected by the NERRs with a structured monitoring system for socio-economic data and studies.

Avoiding the “one-off”

A mix of traditional, non-traditional, repeated studies

Gulf of Mexico National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs)





Takeaways

1. Language matters
2. The ROI is important but a better measure of “success” is the Impact of Investment (IOI).
3. The Gulf of Mexico offers, now more than at any other time, the opportunity to measure the “impact” of restoration.
4. We need to simplify ES benefit measurement to be able to operationalize.
5. “We value what we measure” and “We should be willing to measure what we value”. Robust socio-economic measurement needs to take place.

Thank You!

