

Cornell Roundtable on Environmental Studies Topics

Conservation benchmarking: Climate Change and the Future of Restoration Ecology

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G01 BioTech

Conservation benchmarking: Climate Change and the Future of Restoration Ecology

Since the 1980s scholars have recognized restoration ecology as a distinct sub-field, but the idea that ecosystems can be restored to some former or better state long predates that recognition. In the United States, many conservation areas are currently managed to resemble a vision of the landscape before European contact (e.g. removal of non-native species). However, a number of historians, philosophers, anthropologists, and conservationists have critiqued the use of historical reference communities, on the grounds that they (1) reinforce a nature-culture dichotomy, (2) deny histories of intensive Native American land-use, and (3) are based upon severely biased ecological and historical records. Climate change further challenges the use of historical baselines; climate change researchers suggest that past species assemblages will not survive or thrive in their historical ranges.