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The importance of environmental justice in stream rehabilitation

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Abstract:

New forms of river management have emerged following widespread recognition of the environmental damage caused by attempts to harness and control rivers for navigation, consumptive water use and power generation. A dominant top-down engineering-based paradigm is being challenged by catchment-framed, ecosystem-based approaches which claim to place greater emphasis on participation and equity. However, there has been limited attention given to examining these claims, and principles of justice are frequently left unarticulated or embedded in what is still presented as an essentially technical, outcome-driven management process. This paper examines the contribution of an environmental justice framework in articulating and explicating the ethical and political nature of decision making in stream rehabilitation practice. Particular attention is given to distributive, procedural and relational elements of justice, and to the limitations of an anthropocentric approach. A broader-based ecological justice framework is proposed. Several key issues in applying this framework are discussed, including the need for 'situated justice', for multiple voices to be heard, for dealing with unity and diversity at the catchment scales, and in integrating knowledge through genuine transdisciplinary research and practice