



Nowhere to Go: Barriers to the Use of Assisted Colonization for Climate Sensitive Species

Topic

This research focuses on identifying the barriers to the use of Assisted Colonization, a controversial translocation management tool, when managing for endangered species affected by climate change.

Release

Managing for endangered species is a difficult undertaking in any right. Managing for endangered species in a changing climate is a whole new playing field with unforeseeable challenges. With habitats shifting and changing, many species will have to adapt or migrate in order to survive, but many species- such as single island endemics- will not be able to do so, and without novel management strategies these species face inevitable extinction.

Assisted colonization, the intentional movement and release of an organism outside its indigenous range, is one management alternative for species predicted to lack suitable habitat under likely climate change scenarios. Despite previous successful outcomes and existing policies that allow for assisted colonization in cases where it is warranted, this action is rarely considered. While there is ample data on the possible usage, as well as the controversial nature of assisted colonization, no study has examined the perceived and existing barriers to policy implementation.

Hawaii holds the title of endangered species capital of the world and given the high potential for further loss of biodiversity - the Pacific Islands are a prime location to implement novel conservation strategies. We evaluated both the perceived and existing obstacles concerning the use of assisted colonization, with a focus on cases where this action may provide a reasonable hedge against extinction using first person interviews with employees of federal, state and non-profit agencies and surveys within Hawaii.

The barriers identified were economic constraints, ecological risk and uncertainty and personal perceptions. Managing for climate change is still very new; over 95% of Recovery Plans through 2005 did *not* address climate change at all, which means we are having to quickly play catch up in our priorities, methods and mindsets.

Assisted colonization is best carried out when populations are large enough to tolerate the removal of individuals for translocation, meaning, we are in a race against time and this management action should be considered for climate sensitive species. Assisted Colonization is not right for every situation however we need to aggressively assess which species will require this action if our goal is saving them.

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