

SOCIAL VALUES REGARDING ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND LAND USE IN THE WESTERN CORN BELT

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ABSTRACT

The landscape provides benefits to humans, and land-use decisions are made based on constantly evolving human needs. These landscape benefits are known as ecosystem services: resources provided by the land for human benefit. The decisions that drive land-use changes and preferences in ecosystem services come from a variety of sources and must consider environmental, economic, and social factors. Behind all of these factors is a set of social values, obtained either through societal or familial influence, which guide our thoughts and opinions regarding land use. In the summer of 2017, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders in Mitchell, SD, a small city in the western Corn Belt surrounded by areas that have experienced a significant change from grassland to row crops over the last twenty years. Interviews focused on values, attitudes, and beliefs of the stakeholders interviewed regarding land use and land-use change. From these interviews, eleven major value themes emerged as major contributors to land-use opinions and ecosystem services valuation. Preliminary research results revealed the following themes: small farms and agrarian community, technology, development, small-town community, education, nostalgia, tourism, new jobs, land as economic value, tourism, and hunting. These themes, also known as values typologies, will be used as part of a larger project which will assess social values as they relate to ecosystem services and land-use throughout the Upper Missouri River Basin.