

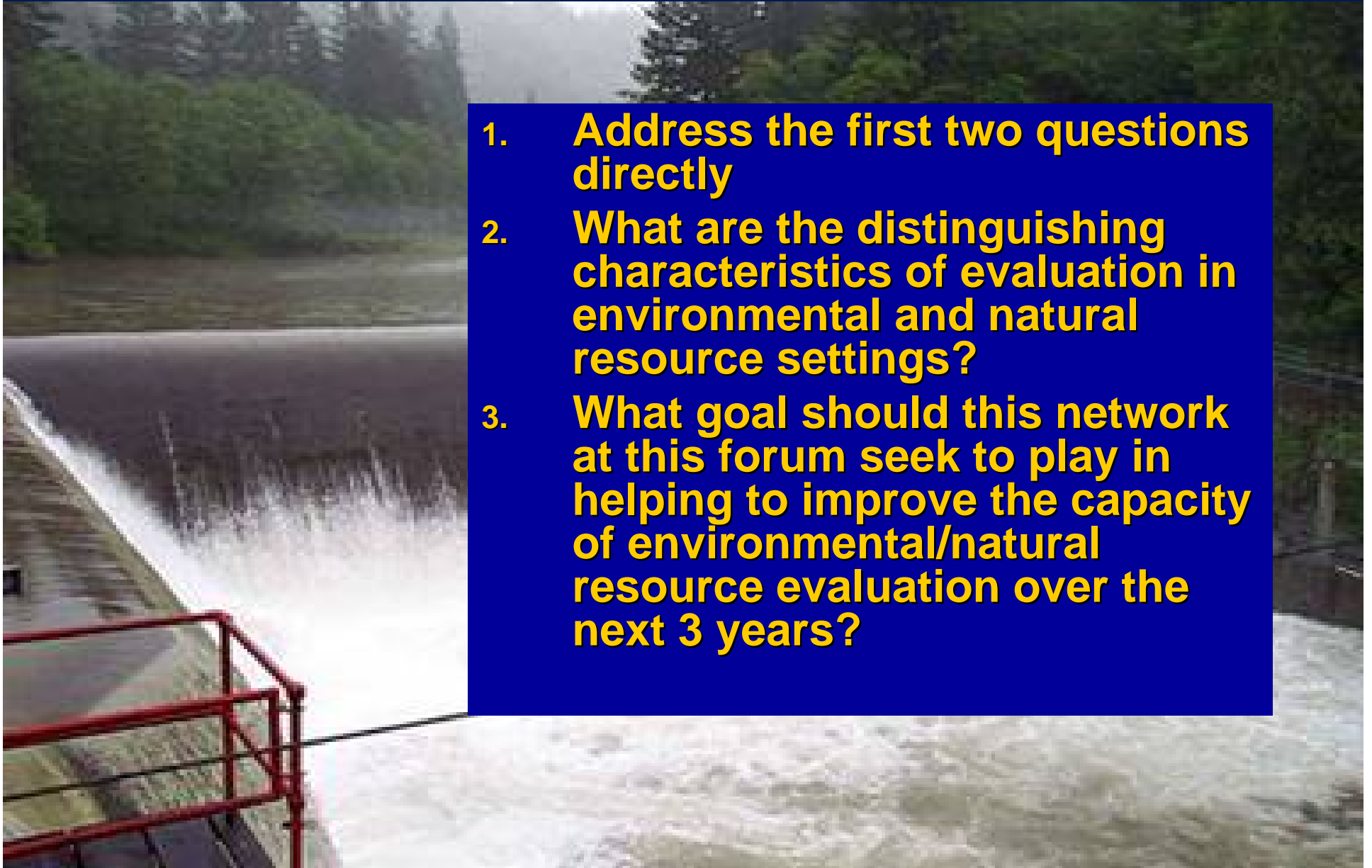


*Environmental Evaluator's Networking Forum*

# **Current State of Environmental Evaluation**

# Presentation Themes

1. **Address the first two questions directly**
2. **What are the distinguishing characteristics of evaluation in environmental and natural resource settings?**
3. **What goal should this network at this forum seek to play in helping to improve the capacity of environmental/natural resource evaluation over the next 3 years?**





***What has been the evolution of evaluation in environmental natural resource management over the past few decades?***

***Translation: How has my evaluation work in environmental settings evolved since 1985?***

- 1. Before I knew there was something called evaluation I did applied research and called it evaluation**
- 2. After discovering evaluation I pushed technique to get to judgments about the dependent variables**
- 3. Now that I am mature I can call what I do evaluation**

# Evaluation

**Evaluation is the provision of insights, information and advice with the aim of improving performance and social and natural conditions.**

## ■ Evaluation

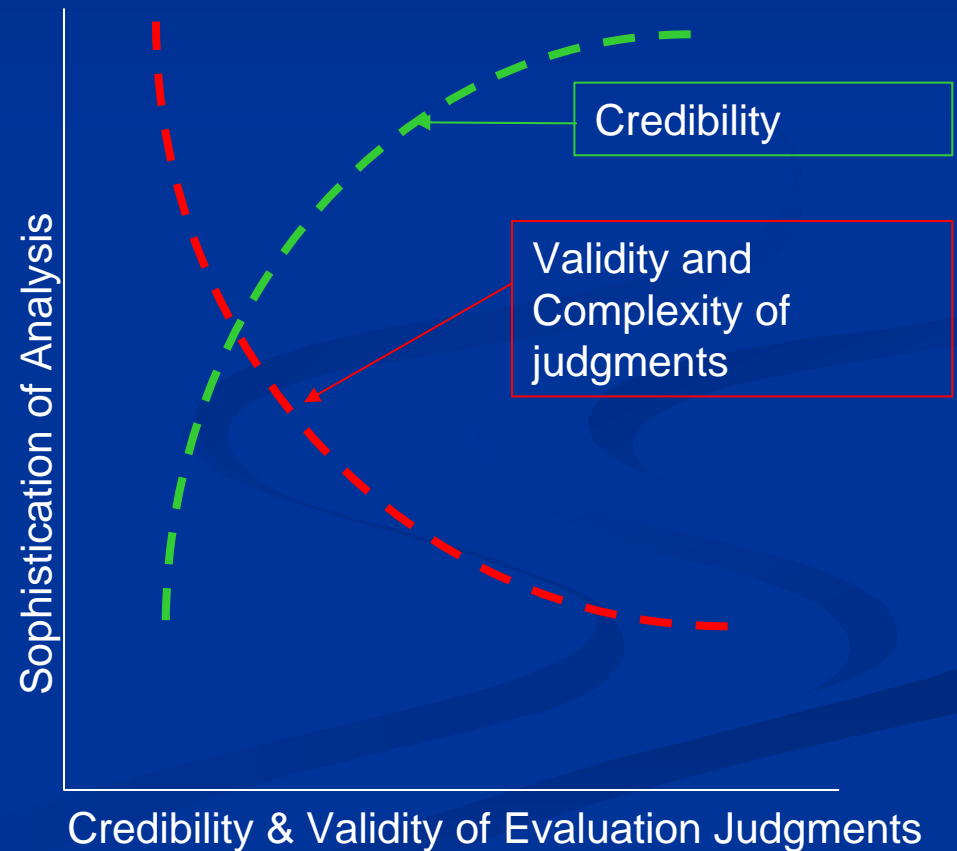
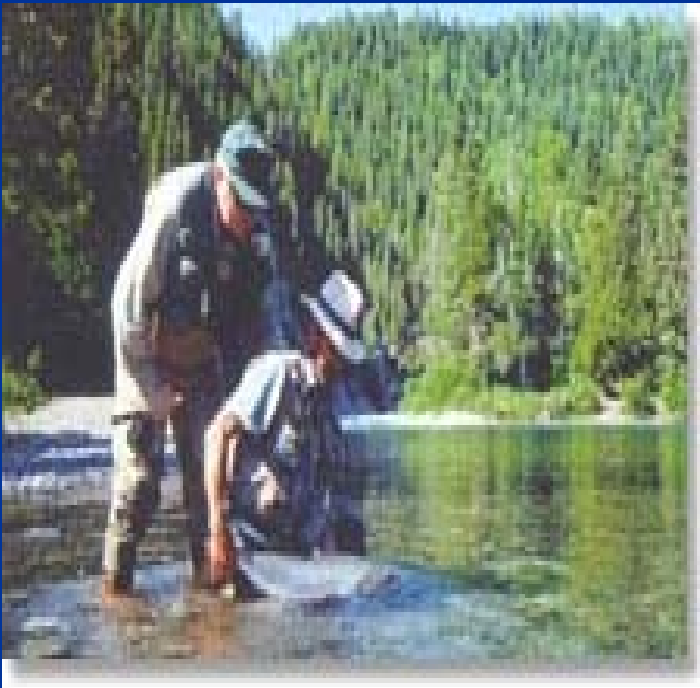
- **Attributes changes to the intervention (the decision in environmental and resource settings) and considers the effect of context**
- **Compares results to what would have been achieved with a reasonable alternative**
- **Judges the value of results (valuation)**
- **Valid, reliable, credible, ethical and feasible**

# The 3 Phases

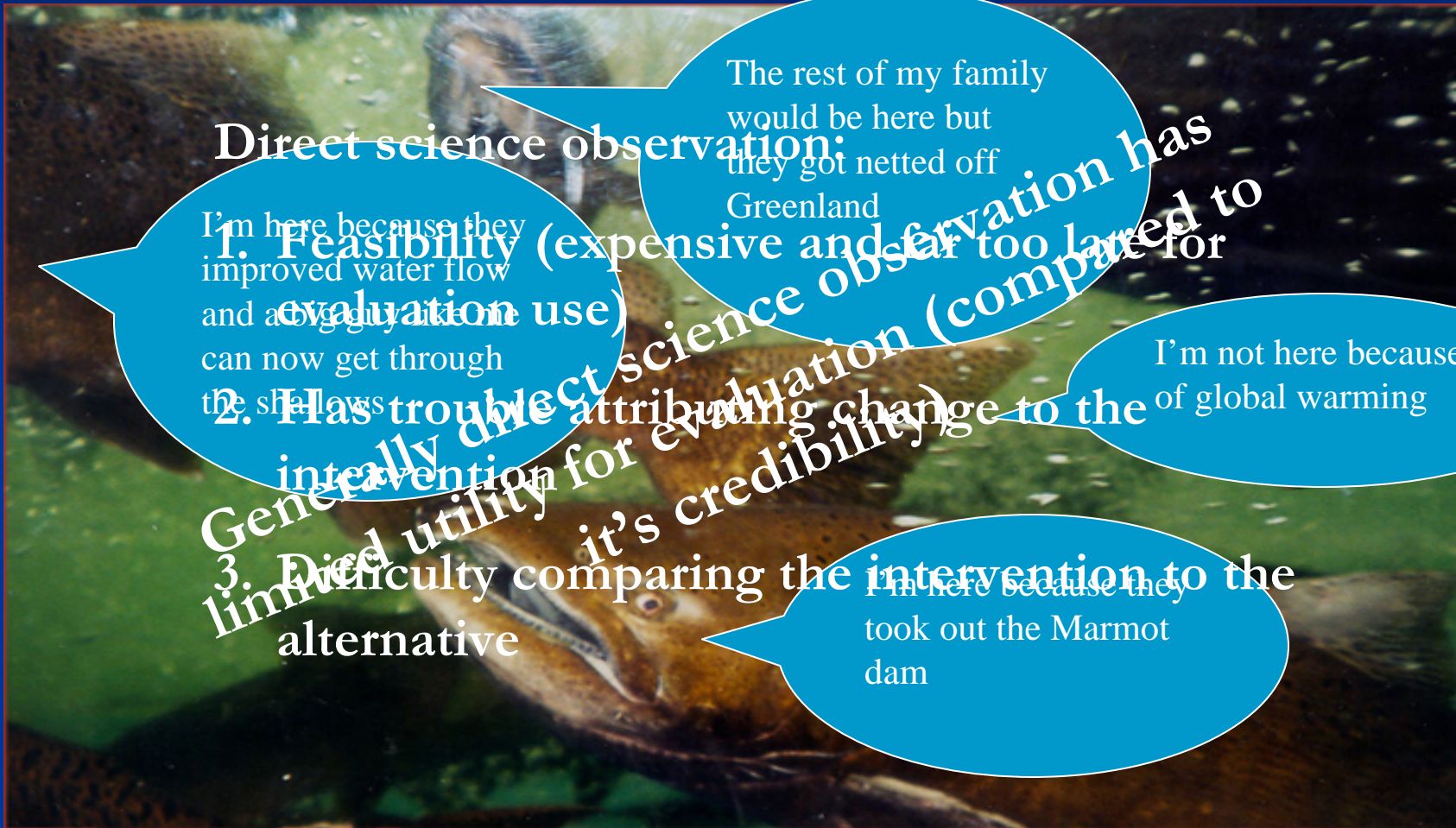
1. **Applied Research (before I knew about evaluation)**
  - **Good quality applied research that did not:**
    - Compare to an alternative
    - Facilitate utilization
2. **Technique Focused (thought evaluation was a method)**
  - Extravagant efforts to evaluate the environmental effects of decisions and interventions
  - Validity suffered
  - Successfully facilitated utilization
3. **Evaluation**
  - Now that I am mature I have developed a technique that successfully addresses many of the distinguishing characteristics of policy and site specific evaluation in environmental settings
  - Utilization implies working with organizations to identify and develop change and improvement strategies

# Phase 2: Technique

## But It Was Usually Better to Send Vince to the River



# Lesson – Evaluation Needs to Stay Within the Reach of the Directly Attributable = Independent Variables



Direct science observation:

I'm here because they improved water flow and a big guy like me can now get through the shallows

The rest of my family would be here but they got netted off Greenland

I'm not here because of global warming

I'm here because they took out the Marmot dam

1. Feasibility (expensive and far too large for evaluation use)  
2. Has trouble attributing change to the intervention for evaluation (comparison)  
3. Difficulty comparing the intervention to the alternative

Generally dire for evaluation (comparison)  
Died it's credibility  
limited utility for evaluation

# **Now That I Am Mature SEER (Systematic Evaluation of Environmental and Economic Results)**

**Assesses the environmental and economic effects of environmental and resource decisions**

- 1. Policy and site specific decisions**
- 2. Attributes effects to the decision**
- 3. Compares them to a reasonable alternative**
- 4. Provides valid, reliable and credible results**
- 5. Is feasible**



## ***How has demand for demonstrating performance (e.g., GPRA, PART) influenced the demand and the practice of evaluation?***

- **Results based accountability (RBA) has opened up very important opportunities for evaluators**
  - **RBA is the generic term for GPRA and PART in the US and for its other forms elsewhere**
  - **RBA expanded the market for evaluation**
  - **RBA has added weight to the efforts of evaluators to address results**
  - **Accompanying the emergence of RBA, evaluators were pushing evaluation onto governance agendas**
    - **Transparent, results focused, flexible evidence based decision making, accountable**

# Challenges Emerging From A Decade of RBA

- **Performance measures focus on dependent variables often well beyond the reach of the interventions**
  - Increasingly seem to lack strong link to the programs
  - Increasingly seem to be determined from outside the programs and agencies
- **The growth of RBA in the US and other settings presents a fundamental challenge to evaluation**
  - The sole rationale for evaluation is provision of useful insights, information and advice to improve
  - Accountability trumps improvement

# Distinguishing Characteristics of Evaluation in Environmental & Resource Settings

- Time and space are important and need to be explicitly considered
- Evaluation of effects should stay within the plausible reach of the intervention = usually independent variables
- Multiple and potentially competing knowledge systems
- Affected domain is broader, not just “us” but always “us and it”, and possibly “us, it and them”
- Evaluation usually addresses remediation, does not start with the initial intervention
  - We usually look at (for example) Superfund remediation of effects of mining
  - Levers for change (improvement) might not align with this setting for most evaluations

## ***What goal should this network seek to play in helping to improve the capacity of environmental/natural resource evaluation over the next 3 years?***

- I expect much of what is called evaluation is still in the first two phases of my experience (pre evaluation applied research or technique driven evaluations)
- Serious challenge. How successful we can be in enhancing this potential capacity in settings where accountability is such an important driver for evaluations?
  - Do not give up on accountability or utility of evaluation for improvement
- Best bet:
  1. Issues are diffusion of good evaluation practice and development of necessary evaluative resources
    - Respect and address distinguishing characteristics of evaluation in environmental and resource settings
  2. Need to adhere to evaluation performance standards:
    - Valid, reliable, credible, ethical, feasible
    - Utilized