

Creativity abhors prescription

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Published online: 5 November 2011
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Eric Gustafson (2011) has initiated a discussion aimed at advancing the field of landscape ecology by revising scientific publication formats including better use of information technology. I empathize with Eric—it is difficult to determine quickly if a paper is worth reading, and some papers were not worth reading after all. As Eric noted, there are examples of journals using sidebars or structured abstracts to help solve the first problem, and this journal should adopt a similar format. I also agree it would be helpful to publish a statement of the relevance of research to this journal’s audience, perhaps using as a guide the key issues and research priorities identified in Wu and Hobbs (2002).

It would surprise me if the problem of irrelevant or inadequate papers can be solved independently of the peer review process which is the defining feature of a scientific journal. Editors and reviewers are expected to read poor papers so that journal readers do not have to. Like other interdisciplinary fields, our journal requires an enlightened peer review process to “...encourage and publish papers that are novel, synthetic, and interdisciplinary; that combine theory and practice; and that contain grounded speculation, while also being able to identify and eliminate junk...” (Holling 1997). Better use of information technology is essential, but creativity abhors prescription and well-documented junk is still junk.

References

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