

## **Challenging Perverse Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems**

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I am pursuing two research aims during my time with the Rachel Carson Center. The first is to further explore a conceptual framework that colleagues and I developed to better understand the role of politics in social-ecological systems, i.e., systems such as planet Earth as a whole, comprising human social and ecological elements. At its center, the framework establishes a link between two concepts originating in very different fields: resilience and hegemony. It does so in order to bring into focus instances of perverse resilience—resilience specific to one internal element of an overall system that is at odds with the sustainability of the system. To illustrate: an example could be the perverse resilience of established and comparatively powerful fossil fuel interests that comes at the expense of overall sustainability for the Earth, people, and all other living things. I have since sought to apply this framework at other scales and, in my time at the RCC, I seek to further broaden the framework's practical application.

My second aim is to better understand complexity as the theoretical foundation on which much resilience scholarship rests, with a view to suggesting ways to best engage justly and effectively with wicked problems—such as climate change—(i) that are urgent, (ii) that are high stakes, (iii) for which there is little or no agreement about the problem's definition, and (iv) that resist resolution through evolving as they are addressed. My key questions are around the theoretical constraints and possibilities for effecting change in the context of complexity. The backdrop for this aspect of my inquiry is long-standing public debates, much rehearsed through the twentieth century and since, about the desirability and effectiveness of different approaches to decision making in society. To illustrate through an exaggerated spectrum: at one end, all decision making would be left to markets, while at the other end, all decision making would be made centrally. In short, I am interested in decision making in contexts characterized by incomplete knowledge, and which allow for robust projection but not precise prediction.