

Department of Environmental Science and Policy

Seminar Series

Nature's non-material benefits, relational thinking, and decision-making

Rachelle Gould

University of Vermont

DATE: Friday, 3/07/2025 **TIME:** 10:30 am **ROOM:** Ungar 230-E

Zoom: <https://miami.zoom.us/j/94362255951>



Abstract: Understanding the non-material ways that nature benefits people (e.g., via mental health, spirituality, and identity) matters for both ethical and practical reasons. A primary ethical reason is that without this understanding, we risk further marginalization of non-dominant perspectives; a primary pragmatic reason is that omission of this information can lead to ineffective environmental management. This talk will discuss research on cultural ecosystem services, nature's nonmaterial contributions to people, and relational values – a suite of concepts that seek to bring into decision-making meaningful conversation about intangible aspects of human-nature relationships. It will address how this work interacts with the purported “relational turn” in sustainability science, with research on human behavior/action, and with decision-making tools such as Benefit-Cost Analysis. The talk will combine insight from multiple disciplines to consider how research might help make environmental decision-making more fair and effective.

Bio: Rachelle Gould is an interdisciplinary scholar whose work involves social science, the humanities, and ecology. She is an Associate Professor at the University of Vermont. Her research explores the relationship between people and ecosystems and focuses on: (1) environmental values, including cultural ecosystem services and relational values; (2) lifelong and life-wide environmental learning, and relationships between learning, identity, values, and pro-environmental behavior; and (3) how equity, inclusion, and justice permeate environmental issues. Working with Indigenous partners, and understanding and incorporating Indigenous perspectives, is an important element of her work; one of her goals is to work toward anticolonial environmental valuation research and practice. Also central to her work are efforts to better connect research to policy and practice; she works with a number of US agencies on environmental valuation efforts and has had lead author roles in IPBES and the US National Nature Assessment.

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