



Ecosystem Types Across the U.S.

New sensor technology and IT may transform our understanding of ecosystems. Big Science is coming to ecology, which was once the domain of individual naturalists. [The Economist](#) reports on NEON, the National Ecological Observatory Network:

Ground has already been broken at three sites—in Colorado, Florida and Massachusetts. Eventually, 60 places across the country will be covered simultaneously. Once this network is completed, in 2016 if all goes well, 15,000 sensors will be collecting more than 500 types of data, including temperature, precipitation, air pressure, wind speed and direction, humidity, sunshine, levels of air pollutants such as ozone, the amount of various nutrients in soils and streams, and the state of an area's vegetation and microbes.

This network of sensors will produce a flood of data, requiring massive number crunching to process. This seems like a terrific research project that should add greatly to our knowledge of ecosystem dynamics.

In the middle of a divisive political season, we should all be able to agree on the desirability of better understanding the world around us. At least I *hope* we can all agree about that. These days, you never know.