

Policy Brief

Recognizing and Valuing Ecosystem Services in Protected & Conserved Areas

Executive Summary

Ecosystem services, the myriad ways natural environments contribute to human well-being, have increasingly become a focal point in



Trade-offs Between Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

The trade-off between protecting biodiversity and managing ecosystem services is complex. While biodiversity-focused strategies may not always align with optimal ecosystem service provision, integrating both can lead to more balanced and effective conservation outcomes. Authorities should tailor their strategies to protect and manage ecosystem services while considering potential trade-offs and the needs of local communities.

The concept of ecosystem services includes various types such as provisioning (e.g., food, water), regulating (e.g., climate control), cultural (e.g., recreation), and supporting services (e.g., nutrient cycling). Recent developments have expanded this idea to "nature's contributions to people," emphasizing diverse worldviews and local contexts. This shift underscores the need for protected area authorities to identify and cater to different beneficiaries, ranging from local communities relying on subsistence resources to global stakeholders benefiting from climate regulation.

Understanding the difference between natural capital stocks (e.g., a herd of wildebeest) and ecosystem service flows (e.g., annual population growth) is crucial for sustainable management. Protecting natural capital while managing ecosystem service flows ensures that resources are not depleted faster than they can regenerate.

Strategic investment can enhance the benefits derived from ecosystem services. Investment in ecological infrastructure, such as wetlands and coastal dunes, can replace or complement built infrastructure, often at a lower cost. Additionally, improving access to ecosystem services through investments in sectors like ecotourism can unlock significant economic value. These investments should align with the protected area's management objectives and the needs of its beneficiaries.

Quantifying the value of ecosystem services is essential for informed decision



valuable within these areas. This suggests that protected areas can enhance certain types of ecosystem services but may need to balance access and protection to maximize benefits.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, protected area authorities should:

1. **Prioritize Valuation Studies:** Invest in collecting data on ecosystem services to fill regional gaps and inform policy decisions.