It has become essential in policy and decision-making circles to think about the economic benefits (in addition to moral and scientific motivations) humans derive from well-functioning ecosystems. The concept of ecosystem services has been developed to address this link between ecosystems and human welfare. Since policy decisions are often evaluated through cost–benefit assessments, an understanding the importance of marginal ecosystem changes, formalizing the idea of a safe minimum standard for ecosystem service provision, and discussing how to capture the public benefits of ecosystem services. We discuss how the integration of economic concepts and ecosystem services can provide policy and decision makers with a fuller spectrum of information for making conservation–conversion trade-offs. We include the results from a survey of the literature and a questionnaire of researchers regarding how ecosystem service research can be integrated into the policy process. We feel this discussion of economic concepts will be a practical aid for ecosystem service research to become more immediately policy relevant.

Keywords: benefits capture, conservation, ecological economics, ecosystem services, marginal analysis, payments for ecosystem services, safe minimum standard

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