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Groundwater Ecosystems and the Service of Water Purification

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I.	INTRODUCTION.....	479
II.	PROVISION OF GROUNDWATER ECOSYSTEM SERVICES	482
III.	THE PROVISION OF WATER PURIFICATION	485
IV.	INDICATORS OF GROUNDWATER PURIFICATION SERVICES	488
V.	THE EFFECTS OF REMEDIATION ON PURIFICATION SERVICES	491
VI.	ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF RESTORING PURIFICATION SERVICES	492
VII.	CONCLUSION.....	495

I. INTRODUCTION

The ability of groundwater microorganisms to decompose matter provides a number of significant ecosystem services. These include rendering harmless potential human pathogens, breaking down organic wastes and, the net result, purifying groundwater. The importance of uncontaminated groundwater to functioning ecosystems is undisputed. Over 90% of the world's unfrozen freshwater is stored underground, compared to only 3.6% found in lakes and reservoirs.¹ It has long been thought that most subterra-

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1. See Ralph C. Heath, *Basic Ground-Water Hydrology*, 2220 U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY WATER-SUPPLY PAPER 1 (1982).

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