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## Stakeholder Attitudes toward Ecosystem Management in Southern Michigan

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# Stakeholder attitudes toward ecosystem management in southern Michigan

*Robert H. Holsman and R. Ben Peyton*

**Abstract** The advent of ecosystem management presents many challenges for management agencies, including understanding and integrating public values for management of wildlife resources. Ecosystem-based approaches to management suggest a shift in emphasis that would prioritize the maintenance of species diversity and ecosystem function. At issue is the extent to which the public understands and values these ecological benefits relative to more tangible, traditional management goals (e.g., those for game species). We describe a three-dimensional conceptual model of ecosystem benefits to guide resource managers in integrating human dimensions into ecosystem management planning. We compared benefit preferences and ecosystem management attitudes of 5 different wildlife stakeholder groups from data gathered in a mail survey. All groups placed high importance on ecological dependence, nature appreciation, and existence values. All groups were slightly positive regarding hypothetical ecosystem-based approaches that included trade-offs to traditional benefits. However, these attitudes reflected much uncertainty, including a high percentage of undecided responses. Management implications include the need for agencies to develop a concrete vision in defining ecosystem management goals and to clarify for stakeholders the consequences of alternative approaches.

**Key words** attitudes, benefits, ecosystem management, human dimensions, values

Ecosystem management has been heralded as an opportunity to better manage our natural resources for the benefit of people and wildlife alike. Since Grumbine's (1994) definitive paper on the subject, many technical approaches have been developed for managing on the "biological side" of this concept (cf., Boyce and Haney 1997, Baydeck et al. 1998), with a particular emphasis on conserving biodiversity. This body of work on ecosystem management has proceeded on the assumption that the public values and supports such notions. For example, Jones et al. (1995) observed that the emergence of ecosystem management as United States Forest Service policy in the early 1990s reflected an attempt to realign the agency's mission to parallel

support for endangered-species protection and measures to safeguard environmental quality (National Environmental Education Training Foundation [NEETF] 2000). However, as many state wildlife resource agencies will affirm, traditional demands that land management produce recreational and other utilitarian benefits are alive and well. The question of how extensively ecosystem management is understood and supported by the full range of stakeholders remains unanswered.

Grumbine's (1994:31) working definition of ecosystem management stated that it "integrates scientific knowledge of ecological relationships within a complex sociopolitical and values framework toward the general goal of protecting native

the public's growing nonutilitarian values. The assumption that growing environmental awareness has shifted public values might also have roots in public opinion polls that continue to show broad ecosystem integrity over the long haul. Within this goal, he listed 5 specific goals, 4 of which focused on functional and structural values of ecosystems and a fifth goal to "accommodate human use and

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The advent of ecosystem management presents many challenges for management agencies, including understanding and integrating public values for management of wildlife resources. Ecosystem-based approaches to management suggest a shift in emphasis that would prioritize the maintenance of species diversity and ecosystem function. At issue is the extent to which the public understands and values these ecological benefits relative to more tangible, traditional management goals (e.g., those for game species). We describe a three-dimensional conceptual model of ecosystem benefits to guide resource managers in integrating human dimensions into ecosystem management planning. We compared benefit preferences and ecosystem management attitudes of 5 different wildlife stakeholder groups from data gathered in a mail survey. All groups placed high importance on ecological dependence, nature appreciation, and existence values. All groups were slightly positive regarding hypothetical ecosystem-based approaches that included trade-offs to traditional benefits. However, these attitudes reflected much uncertainty, including a high percentage of undecided responses. Management implications include the need for agencies to develop a concrete vision in defining ecosystem management goals and to clarify for stakeholders the consequences of alternative approaches.




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