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ABSTRACT

The Nature and Value of Ecosystem Services: An Overview Highlighting Hydrologic Services

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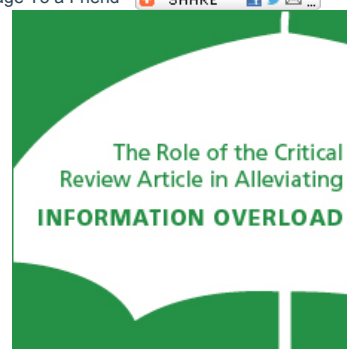
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ABSTRACT

Ecosystem services, the benefits that people obtain from ecosystems, are a powerful lens through which to understand human relationships with the environment and to design environmental policy. The explicit inclusion of beneficiaries makes values intrinsic to ecosystem services; whether or not those values are monetized, the ecosystem services framework provides a way to assess trade-offs among alternative scenarios of resource use and land- and seascape change. We provide an overview of the ecosystem functions responsible for producing terrestrial hydrologic services and use this context to lay out a blueprint for a more general ecosystem service assessment. Other ecosystem services are addressed in our discussion of scale and trade-offs. We review valuation and policy tools useful for ecosystem service protection and provide several examples of land management using these tools. Throughout, we highlight avenues for research to advance the ecosystem services framework as an operational basis for policy decisions.

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