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Articles

**ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND ECONOMIC THEORY: INTEGRATION FOR POLICY-RELEVANT RESEARCH**

Brendan Fisher<sup>1,13</sup>, Kerry Turner<sup>1</sup>, Matthew Zylstra<sup>2</sup>, Roy Brouwer<sup>3</sup>, Rudolf de Groot<sup>2</sup>, Stephen Farber<sup>4</sup>, Paul Ferraro<sup>5</sup>, Rhys Green<sup>6,7</sup>, David Hadley<sup>1</sup>, Julian Harlow<sup>8</sup>, Paul Jefferiss<sup>9</sup>, Chris Kirkby<sup>1</sup>, Paul Morling<sup>7</sup>, Shaun Mowatt<sup>10</sup>, Robin Naidoo<sup>11</sup>, Jouni Paavola<sup>12</sup>, Bernardo Strassburg<sup>1</sup>, Doug Yu<sup>1</sup>, and Andrew Balmford<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment, School of Environmental Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ United Kingdom

<sup>2</sup>Environmental Systems Analysis Group, P.O. Box 47, 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands

<sup>3</sup>Institute for Environmental Studies, Vrije Universiteit, De Boelelaan 1085, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>4</sup>Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260 USA

<sup>5</sup>Department of Economics, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, P.O. Box 3992, Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3992 USA

<sup>6</sup>Conservation Science Group, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EJ United Kingdom

<sup>7</sup>Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire MK42 0LF United Kingdom

<sup>8</sup>Natural England, 1 East Parade, Sheffield, S1 2ET United Kingdom

<sup>9</sup>Sita Trust, Brinkmarsh Lane, Falfield, South Gloucestershire GL12 8PT United Kingdom

<sup>10</sup>Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR United Kingdom

<sup>11</sup>Conservation Science Program, World Wildlife Fund, 250 24th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20037 USA

<sup>12</sup>Sustainability Research Institute, School of Earth and Environment, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT United Kingdom

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 economic analysis can help make ecosystem service research operational. In this paper we provide some simple economic analyses to discuss key concepts involved in formalizing ecosystem service research. These include the distinction between services and benefits, 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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<sup>13</sup> E-mail: [brendan.fisher@uea.ac.uk](mailto:brendan.fisher@uea.ac.uk)

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