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Ecosystem services and conservation strategy: beware the silver bullet

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Ecosystem services; biodiversity conservation; natural capital; trade-offs; ecosystem processes; stock

Abstract

There is an important analytical distinction for conservationists between the flow of ecosystem services and the stock of natural capital that underpins or constitutes them. The relationship between these two is often complex and indeterminate. Ecosystem services result from the interplay of different biological and physical processes across a variety of scales. Flows of ecosystem services may be imperfectly related to stocks of natural capital. Conservation is concerned with the protection of certain stocks of natural capital, but also with maintaining the complex web of relationships that characterize biodiversity. Despite the obvious links between ecosystem services, natural capital, and biodiversity, these are not identical. Practitioners and policy makers should be cautious in their use of the proxy indicator of ecosystem services when developing mechanisms for biodiversity conservation. Conceptual clarity is essential in order to harness the potentially important role that ecosystem service based interventions can play in mainstreaming conservation issues.

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