

The economic costs of ecosystem degradation

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Abstract

Harnessing reliable and relevant information on ecosystems requires focusing and prioritising information acquisition on dimensions of interest. As a boundary object between ecosystem monitoring, research and public decision-making, ecosystem accounting can serve this purpose. Based on Kervinio, Surun et al (2023), I present an argument in favour of a set of accounts, consistent with the statistical standard part of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA-EA), that explicitly links monetary accounts to ecosystem extent and condition accounts. The ecosystem condition account is structured in three categories reflecting the main values motivating integrated ecosystem management targets and notions of «good ecological status». These categories are: (i) the maintenance of their heritage dimensions, (ii) their capacity to sustainably provide ecosystem services and (iii) the maintenance of their overall functionality. We discuss how such ecosystem accounts and associated monitoring can form the basis both for assessing an ecological debt by using a cost-based approach and for designing an action-orientated information system suitable to support the transition towards sustainable societies.

Keywords

Ecosystem degradation; cost-based accounting; ecological debt.

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