



Abstract

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Global attention to climate change has advanced an awareness of human impacts on the environment. Progressing more slowly is recognition of the critical link between forest ecosystems and human welfare. Forests provide a number of societal benefits or ecosystem services, such as water purification, climate and flood regulation, recreational opportunities, and spiritual fulfillment. This paper examines an emerging perspective that describes ecosystems as natural assets that support human health and well-being. The perspective serves as both a conservation approach and an extension of ecosystem management, involving the connection of ecosystem services to the people who benefit, in some cases with an assigned market value. We argue that the emergence of an ecosystem services perspective is timely as public interest in the state of the environment increases and natural resource managers face the reality of rapid forest ecosystem change. Forest conservation that considers the supply and delivery of ecosystem services will enhance the health and resiliency of ecosystems, engage and serve a broader public, and attract private investment and leadership in a common effort to safeguard natural systems.

Keywords: Ecosystem services, ecosystem management, natural capital, climate change, human well-being.