



10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Healthy wetlands, healthy people”

Changwon, Republic of Korea,
28 October-4 November 2008

Ramsar COP10 DOC. 22

The global use of terminologies concerning ecosystem services

Background

1. High priority task 15 in the Scientific and Technical Review Panel’s work plan for 2006-2008 concerned reviewing issues of harmonization of definitions and terms, particularly in relation to the usage of “ecosystem services” as defined by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) – the MA defined the term as “the benefits that people receive from ecosystems”.
2. Specifically, STRP’s task 15 was to “further review the harmonization of definitions and terms related to ecosystem benefits/services (with reference to Resolution VIII.7 paragraph 15 and COP9 DOC. 16, and taking into account the usage of such terms in other international fora), and report to COP10.”
3. Work responding to this task has been pursued by STRP’s 2006-2008 Working Group 2 on “Wise use and ecological character”, led by Randy Milton. The review work was undertaken for the STRP by Ezequiel Lugo of the Stetson University (USA) College of Law, through the good offices of Prof Royal Gardner, STRP member for North America. The STRP and Secretariat are very grateful for their support to the work of the Panel.
4. This review work has now been published (in June 2008) as a paper in the *Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law*, and with the kind permission of the author and journal editors the paper is reproduced in full here (PDF) as an annex to this note.
5. In addition this note contains some further observations on the use and understanding of the term “ecosystem services” compiled by the STRP.

Key findings of the review paper

6. The paper concluded that there is currently a lack of full harmonization and usage of terms, and it draws attention to the following key points, notably that:
 - i) there is an increasing, but not as yet full, uniformity in the usage of the term “ecosystem services” in different fora and processes, particularly in intergovernmental activities;

For reasons of economy, this document is printed in a limited number, and will not be distributed at the meeting. Delegates are requested to bring their copies to the meeting and not to request additional copies.

- ii) there is widespread confusion between the application of ecosystem services terminology and similar terms used for other purposes, notably in relation to issues of payments for environmental services;
- iii) there is a need to clarify the conceptual difference between the term “ecosystem services” (the benefits provided by ecosystems to people) and “environmental services” (the benefits provided by people) in relation to payments for environmental services; and
- iv) there should be wider recognition of this difference, which would then help to clarify that any payments for “environmental services” would be used as incentives to maintain ecosystems and the ecosystem services they provide, rather than as payment for the services provided to people by these ecosystems.

Other relevant recent issues concerning ecosystem services

- 7. “Ecosystem services” remains an unfamiliar term outside the environment and conservation community and is (as yet) not well understood by the general public. The term also engenders confusion in discussions of “valuation” and “trade-offs” in the context of Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, and spatial/landscape-level planning, where the traditional interpretation of “services” as a marketable or tradable item remains dominant.
- 8. There is increasing global recognition extending across sectors of society that ecosystems deliver benefits to people in many ways, and this can be deliberately or serendipitously expressed in the terminology used. However, there is less recognition or understanding of the benefits ecosystems provide through the interaction and delivery of their provisioning, regulating, supporting and culture services under the overall term “ecosystem services”, and of what types of benefits people derive from these different categories of services (as categorized by the MA).

Annex

Lugo, E. 2008. Ecosystem services, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and the conceptual difference between benefits provided by ecosystems and benefits provided by people. *Journal of Land Use and Environmental Law* 23(2): 243-261 (http://www.law.fsu.edu/journals/landuse/vol23_2/Lugo.pdf)

Available here in PDF format