Getting there

In 1997 two books were published that focused on the significance of biological diversity for the welfare of humankind. One was Yvonne Baskin's delightful book on *The Work of Nature: How the Diversity of Life Sustains Us* (Baskin 1997) and the second, the highly influential volume edited by Gretchen Daily on *Nature's Services: Societal Dependence on Natural Ecosystems* (Daily 1997). These volumes provided a compelling rationale for conserving biological diversity as not only a social responsibility of society but also as a necessity for human prosperity and survival. The crucial interface between biological diversity and ecosystem services to human well-being had finally been made explicit in these seminal publications. These books marked a turning point in ecological science and conservation.

The idea that ecosystem services provide an imperative for conservation became the launching pad for the monumental Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA). Using the ecosystem service paradigm, the MA took a global view of the status and trends of ecosystems and the services they provide, plausible scenarios of the capacity of ecosystems to deliver services in the future, and the response options available to society that would lead to the continuance of the delivery of the vital services that underpin human endeavors.

The MA was developed under the auspices of the UN, and guided by wide representation including those from intergovernmental conventions, NGO's, and industry. Over 1300 scientists were involved in the production of a number of products that received wide distribution. The social process that led to its development, as well as the resultant publications, sparked the interest of a wide audience including the policy-making community, one of the targeted audiences. Throughout the world ecosystem service concepts are now being incorporated into development and strategic planning. The concept that ecosystem services benefit society has resonated with an extraordinary breadth of constituencies, including the development community that has traditionally viewed environmental priorities as an impediment to development.

So, the case has been made, but the means to practical utilization of the concepts and findings of the MA are not sufficiently developed for easy implementation. It was noted in the MA summary that, “the scientific and assessment tools and models available to undertake a cross-scale integrated assessments and to project future changes in ecosystem changes in ecosystem services are only now being developed” (MA 2005). The tools needed to carry out assessments at local levels, in the framework of the MA, have been aided greatly by the recent publication of *A Manual for Assessment Practitioners* (Ash et al. 2010).

Now, this volume represents a major leap forward in providing tools to utilize ecosystem service concepts in decision-making. It has been produced by a team with an unusual history. In 2006, three veterans of the MA formed a unique partnership to take the next step toward bringing ecosystem services science into practice. Gretchen Daily (Stanford University), Peter Kareiva (The Nature Conservancy), and Taylor Ricketts (World Wildlife Fund) founded the Natural Capital Project, dedicated to producing quantitative tools for spatially explicit valuation of ecosystem services, and applying them in major resource decisions worldwide. The project has blended the muscle of a research university with the practical perspectives and global networks of the
two largest conservation organizations. From the outset, Stephen Polasky (University of Minnesota) and Heather Tallis (Stanford University) have co-led the modeling efforts, and Minnesota has recently joined as a fourth formal partner.

This team has produced a series of models for an array of key ecosystem services that can be used in concert to provide scenarios of the land-use decisions on the subsequent delivery of a bundle of services. These models were designed for use by a wide range of practitioners and have the capacity to utilize input data of differing levels of resolution. The Natural Capital Project has not only developed these models, but has been applying them in many regions in the world.

There is no doubt that the application of the material in this volume will provide a major step forward in the search for practical approaches that will become mainstream and will further the goal of society of conserving the biological diversity that produces the ecosystem services vital for our future well-being.

Hal Mooney


