

Ecosystem Approach Quick Start Guide #2

Ecosystem Services

What are ecosystem services?

Ecosystem services are the benefits we get from nature. These include a wide range of benefits such as food, energy, clean air and water, regulation of risks (floods, droughts, erosion) and recreation or spiritual benefits.

People's wellbeing depends upon the quality and quantity of the natural environment. The structures and processes that make up healthy functioning ecosystems provide us with ecosystem services, all of which contribute to our health, wealth and wellbeing.

This is illustrated in the cascade diagram (below) showing how ecosystem services are derived from ecosystem functions and processes. It also shows how our management interventions and drivers for change can impact ecosystem service provision.

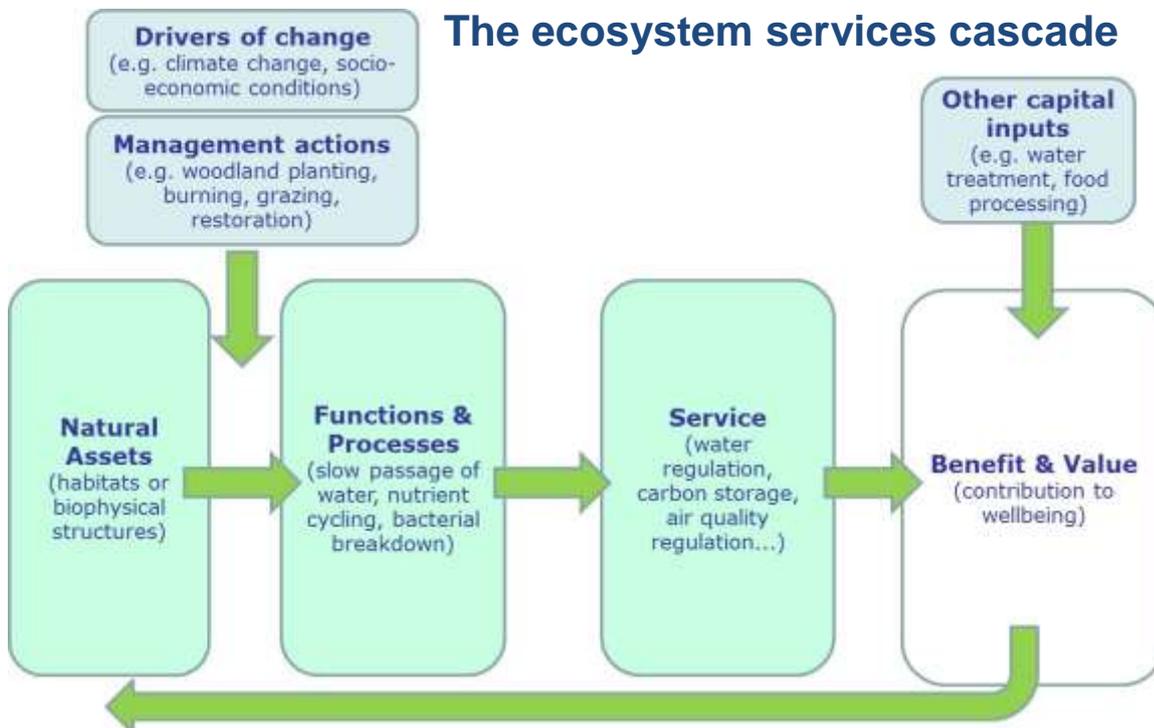
And how do they fit in with the ecosystem approach?

Ecosystem services are just **part of** the wider ecosystem approach.

The ecosystem approach is just that, a wider approach that is based upon healthy functioning ecosystems, involving people and valuing the environment in decision making (see Quick start guide #1). Ecosystem services are more specific. They are **the services provided by nature that benefit people** and provide a particular focus for valuing the environment (see quick start guide #4). They are **not the same thing** as the ecosystem approach and the terminology is **not** interchangeable.

So in summary:

- The ecosystem approach is **HOW** we work
- Ecosystem services are **WHAT** nature provides for human wellbeing.



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Ecosystem service framework

Ecosystem services are many and varied. There are many different names and categories of ecosystem services used and this is referred to as the ecosystem service framework. There is no standard listing but typically you will see them split into supporting services, regulating services, provisioning services and cultural services. The ecosystem service framework helps to organise information on the benefits, where they come from, who provides them and who benefits. This is the first step in recognising the value of these services and goods to people (see Quick start guide #4). The concept of ecosystem services also recognises that people’s management of land and water affects the level of ecosystem services that are provided. Farmers and land managers are therefore ‘**suppliers**’ of ecosystem services. Those who benefit, the ‘**beneficiaries**’, can live locally or much further away (eg water supplied from an upland area to a city or the storage of carbon in soil or vegetation contributing to climate regulation).

There are many different lists of ecosystem services, most however, are derived from the [UK National Ecosystem Assessment \(UK NEA\)](#) (shown in the table below) but are adapted for a particular purpose. Other lists of ecosystem services include one designed for working with Local Economic Partnerships (LEPS) using the [Local Environment and Economic Development \(LEED\) toolkit](#) whilst another, used for [National Character Area \(NCA\) Profiles](#), is a list designed to aid wider engagement.

The services you select and focus on will depend upon who you are working with and what is special about your place. The language that you use will also need to vary to suit your audience. You don’t need to use the formal language. “What nature provides for people” is an alternative way of talking about ecosystem services and the individual services can be described in plain English.

Ecosystem service framework used in the UK National Ecosystem Assessment

Supporting services	Provisioning services	Regulating services	Cultural services
Processes that are essential for healthy functioning ecosystems. As such, they are essential for the production of all other services.	Tangible things that can be obtained from ecosystems that meet human needs.	Include the benefits obtained from the processes that regulate the natural environment.	The non-material benefits people get from the natural environment.
Primary production	Crops, livestock, fish	Climate regulation	Wild species diversity
Water cycling	Trees, standing vegetation, peat	Disease & pest regulation	Environmental spaces
Soil formation	Water supply	Detoxification & purification in air, water & soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aesthetic/inspiration Recreation/tourism Spiritual/religious
Nutrient cycling		Pollination	
		Hazard regulation	
		Noise regulation	
For example:	For example:	For example:	For example:
Photosynthesis, weathering, decomposition, provision of habitat	Food, timber, biofuel, fresh water	Cleaner air, more fertile soil, cleaner water, flood control, carbon storage	Biodiversity, wildlife, walking, fishing, beautiful landscapes, sense of place

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