



Biodiversity is life



Biodiversity is our life

Ecosystem Approach

The ecosystem approach is a way to manage entire ecosystems, keeping in mind that all their components (including ourselves) are interconnected. Its main objective is conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in an equitable way.

When managing an ecosystem, we must consider the effects of our actions on each of its components, and also on surrounding ecosystems. We must take into account both the well-being of the environment and the well-being of humans.

Although our understanding of ecosystems is still incomplete, the ecosystem approach is based on scientific methodologies. One way to overcome the lack of information is to learn from indigenous and local knowledge and practices. A network of competent and committed partners (governments, institutions and concerned communities) should collaborate to plan and do the work in a holistic manner.

Because habitat restoration may take many years before we see results, and because ecosystem processes are often unpredictable and change over time, management should remain flexible and adaptable. Sometimes, we may need to take measures even if some cause-and-effect relationships are not fully understood. Where there's a threat of significant reduction of biodiversity, we should try to avoid it even without full scientific certainty. Of course, financial stability is also crucial to long-term viability, and such measures should not be taken at any cost as they, among other things, require careful planning and risk analysis.

Finally, the ecosystem approach does not preclude other management and conservation approaches, such as protected areas and single-species conservation programmes, but ideally all these approaches should be integrated, especially when dealing with complex situations.



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Fast Facts

- ▶ Ecosystem processes and functions are complex and variable: ecosystem management must involve a learning process and remain flexible in order to adapt to changes.
- ▶ The ecosystem approach is a way to manage entire ecosystems in a holistic manner.
- ▶ Your actions affect both your immediate environment and distant ecosystems: take into account the wellbeing of the environment and the wellbeing of humans.
- ▶ Around the world, ecosystems are being eroded, fragmented and degraded.
- ▶ The most important threats to ecosystems and biodiversity are: climate change, overexploitation of natural resources, large-scale conversion of land to agriculture and urban expansion, introduction of invasive alien species, and pollution.
- ▶ Biodiversity loss directly affects the quality and quantity of ecosystem services provided, such as carbon sequestration, soil fertility, nutrient cycling, pest control, control of erosion and pollination of crops and trees.
- ▶ Protected areas, when carefully managed, can contribute to sustainable development through the provision of important goods and services to local people, and employment opportunities created by tourism.
- ▶ Many families in the developing world depend on biological resources collected from their surrounding environment for their day-to-day needs.
- ▶ Human health is highly dependent on a healthy, well-functioning environment.

Learn More

Ecosystem Approach ▶ www.cbd.int/ecosystem

CBD decision on the ecosystem approach ▶ www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=7148

Ecosystem Sourcebook ▶ www.cbd.int/ecosystem/sourcebook

Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment ▶ www.icsu-scope.org

Katoomba Group—United Nations University ▶ www.katoombagroup.org

BirdLife International ▶ www.birdlife.org

FAO—Ecosystems ▶ www.fao.org/biodiversity/ecosystems/it

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity

413, Saint Jacques Street, suite 800
Montreal, Quebec, H2Y 1N9
Canada

Tel.: +1 514 288 2220
Fax: +1 514 288 6588
iyb2010@cbd.int

www.cbd.int/ecosystem