



Living in harmony with nature

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 objectives are the 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 for the management of different ecosystem components and processes in a holistic manner.

As the ecosystem functions and processes are often unpredictable and change over time, the management planning and actions 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 biodiversity loss, we should try to avoid it even without full scientific certainty. Such measures require careful planning and risk analysis if they are to be viable over the long-term.

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



Convention on
Biological Diversity

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United Nations Decade on Biodiversity

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 well-being of the environment and the well-being 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 people 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

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

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)—Ecosystem Approach
▶ www.fao.org/biodiversity/cross-sectoral-issues/ecosystem-approach/en

IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management
▶ www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/cem

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