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**United Nations Environment Programme  
World Conservation Monitoring Centre**

## **UNEP-WCMC natural capital related publications**

UNEP-WCMC have recently published, and are about to publish, two new reports on natural capital and ecosystem services that align well with the continued work of the Natural Capital Coalition. The Coalition provides a community of practice to actively share ideas and approaches. It has already collated publically available and proprietary methodologies to develop the Natural Capital Protocol, which can be found in the Coalition's *Taking Stock*, and has signalled its intent to continue engaging with new methodologies that could be important to the development of the Protocol. The two new publications are predominantly targeted at policy-makers but are also highly relevant to businesses interested in the Protocol and building their capacity for natural capital and ecosystem services assessments of their operations.

Two new reports published by UNEP-WCMC provide a timely guide to assessing natural capital and mapping ecosystem services. The first, *Natural Capital Assessments at the National and Sub-national Level: A Guide for Environmental Practitioners* presents a stepwise guidance document to conducting a natural capital assessment. The steps presented in the guide are designed around sets of key questions, together with practical checklists of actions. The assessment process set out is designed to provide an evidence base for understanding and mapping the distribution of natural capital, evaluating its status and trends, and exploring its relationship with priority economic sectors and livelihoods. In turn the information collated through the assessment process will help to inform the development of policy targets for sustainable management and improvement of natural capital and the transition to a green economy over time.

The second report, *Approaches to mapping ecosystem services*, complements the first by providing an overview of the state-of-the art in mapping ecosystem services, with the intention of building understanding and capacity of decision-makers to make informed decisions around the use of ecosystem service maps and models. First, the report provides a broad overview of the various conceptual models and frameworks for mapping ecosystem services (ES). It also contains a review of ecosystem mapping approaches, showing that there are many different approaches to mapping ecosystem services and a number of things that need to be considered when ecosystem services mapping is to be undertaken. The analysis it provides gives insights into the challenges of securing natural capital data for decision making.

Key messages from *Natural Capital Assessments at the National and Sub-national Level: A Guide for Environmental Practitioners*:

- Understanding the role of natural capital in formal and informal economic activities can inform a more equitable distribution of access to its benefits that can improve the well-being of key beneficiary groups.
- Such understanding will be crucial in achieving a green economy, where growth follows a sustainable trajectory that is socially inclusive and reduces environmental risks and ecological scarcity.
- The evidence base developed by carrying out a Natural Capital Assessment will enable the evaluation of different mixes of green economy policy options.
- Conducting a Natural Capital Assessment should not be viewed as a discrete study, but rather as an iterative science-policy process that updates the evidence base over time via a consultative process among researchers, decision-makers and stakeholders.

To find out more about this report, please visit <http://wcmc.io/5390>

Key messages from *Approaches to mapping ecosystem services*:

- As most studies use proxies as simplifications of ES (for example land cover classes or tonnes of carbon in a forest), the results are of limited use for real-world decision-making.
- Many ES mapping studies do not validate their results using real world data which makes it hard to assess the reliability of published studies.
- There is a lack of consistency between studies regarding ecosystem services (ES) metrics and indicators which means that results cannot be compared between different studies or used, for example, to inform progress towards global indicators such as Aichi Biodiversity Target 14.
- Mapping ES flow is poorly developed which means that most of the available literature does not show how ES flow across the landscape and over what time period. For example, a stand of timber is a natural asset and a certain amount might be harvested per annum and transported to various remote locations for use. Ideally both the natural capital and the ES provided from that capital needs to be captured in mapping and modelling work.
- There is generally little consideration of the sustainability of the supply of ES in mapping analyses, unless these are specifically included in the scenario that has been used in the analysis. If the use is beyond the capacity of the ecosystem to sustain, then the natural capital is being depleted and maps showing the flow of ES are mapping the destruction of the ecosystem and hence the future collapse of the service. This problem is common in many forestry and fisheries maps produced to date which essentially map threats/pressures on the natural capital stock.

You can find out more about this report on UNEP-WCMC's website, [www.unep-wcmc.org](http://www.unep-wcmc.org), after its publication in July.



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