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Abstract

Untangling the Environmentalist's Paradox: Why Is Human Well-being Increasing as Ecosystem Services Degrade?

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Abstract:

Environmentalists have argued that ecological degradation will lead to declines in the well-being dependent on ecosystem services. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment paradoxically found that human well-being has increased despite large global declines in most ecosystem services. We assess four explanations of these divergent trends: (1) We have measured well-being incorrectly; (2) well-being is dependent on food services, which are increasing, and not on other services that are declining; (3) technology has decoupled well-being from nature; (4) time lags may lead to future declines in well-being. Our findings discount the first hypothesis, but elements of the remaining three appear plausible. Although ecologists have convincingly documented ecological decline, science does not adequately understand the implications of this decline for human well-being. Untangling how human well-being has increased as ecosystem conditions decline is critical to guiding future management of ecosystem services; we propose four research areas to help achieve this goal.

Notes

Untangling the Environmentalist's Paradox: Why Is Human Well-being Increasing as Ecosystem Services Degrade?

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Tartalom:

Alternative explanations of the environmentalist's paradox

Hypothesis 1: Critical dimensions of human well-being are not captured adequately

Hypothesis 2: Food production is more crucial than other ecosystem services for human well-being

Hypothesis 3: Technology and social innovation have decoupled human well-being from ecosystem degradation

Hypothesis 4: There is a time lag between ecosystem service degradation and impacts to human well-being

Integrating human well-being and ecosystem services

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References cited

ecosystem services, human well-being, time lags, sustainability, adaptation

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