

## **Our Mission and Goals**

The benefits of ecosystems and landscapes for society are as manifold as the demands they face. Clean air and water, carbon storage and biodiversity are as much part of a functioning ecosystem as the provision of natural recreational spaces.

The concept of ecosystem services has found its way into societal, scientific and political debates over the course of the last couple of years. Due to a unique perspective, it is able to shed light on issues of protection, sustainable use and development of nature and the environment. The ecosystem services approach places a focus on nature's contribution to human well-being. The concept aims to create an enhanced basis for the protection and/or sustainable use of nature and the environment by collecting, evaluating and integrating ecosystem services into policy practice. By focusing on the social and economic benefits of ecosystem services for humans, the concept fortifies exchanges across disciplines and society as a whole, encouraging cooperative alliances that build on this principle. To us, this interdisciplinary collaboration is the key prerequisite for the necessary transformations that must be made to enable the protection and sustainable use of our natural resources.

Large-scale studies like the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment or TEEB (i.e. Natural Capital Germany – TEEB-DE) have taken up this concept and, quite successfully, introduced it to the political arena. The IPBES (Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) has recently established an office in Germany and a number of political strategy papers are already referring to ecosystem services explicitly. Nevertheless, there remains some ground to be covered in its practical application in the agrarian and forest industries, where the ecosystem service approach finds itself in its early stages. It is therefore especially important to examine if and under which circumstances the concept is indeed suitable for the facilitation of a more sustainable use of natural resources and greater protection of biodiversity. This means that the network will also include a critical view in its analysis of the concept of ecosystem services in order to grasp its limitations. These may include, for example, problems during the implementation process in the political-administrative realm (i.e. legal delimitations).

Following the International Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) and its affiliated national networks in other countries, we have come together as a national ESP-DE network in order to fully apply the potential of the ecosystem services concept to the development of innovative solutions for the protection and sustainable use of our natural resources and biodiversity, embedding our work within new strategic partnerships between scientific research and practice. The network aims to pool existing knowledge on ecosystem services while at the same time generating new knowledge. ESP-DE would like to connect for the first time different stakeholders from civil society, politics, economy and science that have hitherto worked too diffusely in their attempts to come up with solutions for the protection and sustainable use of ecosystems.

Our goals include:

- creating a stronger visibility of ecosystem services' pertinence for society
- expanding the expertise on ecosystem services and disseminating this knowledge to the appropriate target groups in order to facilitate the concept's application in research, teaching and practice.
- encouraging the intensive exchange of experience and knowledge within the network of partners
- providing a platform for the joint development of innovative approaches for ecosystem service management, particularly with regards to the political/administrative realm (Community of Practice)
- promoting private commitment and entrepreneurial responsibility concerning ecosystem services