

Conserving biodiversity could benefit the world's poor

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Land areas that are a priority for wildlife conservation provide relatively high levels of ecosystem services such as pollination, water purification, food production, and climate regulation, so safeguarding them is expected to benefit people. Assessing these benefits to populations in ways that are useful to decisionmakers who guide conservation efforts has, however, proved difficult.

A global analysis published in the January 2012 issue of *BioScience* by Will R. Turner of Conservation International and his colleagues breaks new ground by analyzing the flow of benefits from ecosystem services under a variety of socioeconomic assumptions and in greater spatial detail than previous studies. The analysis, which divides the globe into more than 58,000 hexagons, finds that over half the global value of ecosystem services benefitting the world's poorest people originates in areas that are a high priority for conservation. Moreover, the value of ecosystem services generated by the top quarter of biodiversity sites is more than triple the effective cost of conserving them.

If there were effective and equitable mechanisms to ensure that the beneficiaries of ecosystem services paid those responsible for stewarding them, Turner and his colleagues conclude, global benefits to poor communities would robustly increase by 50 percent, and the payments would amount to more than a dollar per person per day for about a third of the 1.1 billion people in the world living in dire poverty. The authors say their findings reinforce the idea that there is an important concordance between biodiversity, provision of [ecosystem services](#), and

poverty that policymakers could use in designing equitable payment schemes to address both poverty and loss of biodiversity.

Provided by American Institute of Biological Sciences

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