

# Cognitive factors affect evaluation of ecosystem services and sustainability

December 10 2013

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A new report, drawing on behavioural economics literature from 2001 to 2012, has examined how cognitive factors influencing people's choices and preferences can affect the values that they place upon ecosystem services and upon ecosystem sustainability. Ecosystem services valuation is currently central to forestry and natural resources strategies and policy-making.

Ecosystem services refer to the benefits or outputs that people derive from ecosystems. Following the publication of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment there has been a growing interest in assessing the flows of such services and valuing the contribution they make to human well-being.

Evidence shows that the values placed on particular ecosystem services will vary depending upon how survey questions are framed, the setting in which questions are posed and a range of other factors influencing people's choices and preferences.

Better understanding of these implications will enable a more nuanced interpretation of valuation evidence and better understanding of potential pitfalls in undertaking valuation studies.

The report shows that there can be a wide variation in the values placed on particular ecosystem services due to a range of factors. For example, the ability of individuals to process information can result in eight times higher variance in respondent values when more complex formats are

used. The Report covers methods used to mitigate these effects and highlights where addressing research gaps on how people value [ecosystem services](#) could contribute to ecosystem sustainability.

**More information:** Read the complete report:  
[www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCRP02...df/\\$FILE/FCRP022.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCRP02...df/$FILE/FCRP022.pdf)

Provided by Forest Research

Citation: Cognitive factors affect evaluation of ecosystem services and sustainability (2013, December 10) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-12-cognitive-factors-affect-ecosystem-sustainability.html>

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