

What value on nature? Countries now have 1st guidelines

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The Furnas hydroelectric dam sits along the Rio Grande River in Sao Jose da Barra, Brazil, Sept. 1, 2021. Countries have approved the first comprehensive guidelines for judging the value of nature following four years of intense debate, officials said Monday, July 11. Credit: AP Photo/Andre Penner, File

Countries have approved the first comprehensive guidelines for judging the value of nature following four years of intense debate, officials said Monday.

The report was endorsed by 139 countries, including the U.S., Russia, China, France, the U.K. and Germany, that are members of the United Nations-backed Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, or IPBES.

Its authors hope the guide they've drawn up with the help of experts from a wide range of disciplines will make it easier for governments to consider more than just the economic benefits of a project when deciding whether and how to go ahead with it.

This includes figuring out how [local communities](#) will gain or lose from a project such as a [hydroelectric dam](#)—a situation that has regularly led to friction between businesses, citizens and authorities in the past.

Rather than prescribe a set way for governments to estimate these non-economic benefits, the report provides them with tools for working through the often complex assessment process, said its co-author Patricia Balvanera of the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

"We provide a roadmap to [decision-makers](#) for how to deal with this very complex situation they face every single day," she said.



A red car drives on a road leading up to the Feldberg mountain near Frankfurt, Germany, June 20, 2022. Countries have approved the first comprehensive guidelines for judging the value of nature following four years of intense debate, officials said Monday, July 11. Credit: AP Photo/Michael Probst, File

Fellow author Unai Pascual of the Basque Center for Climate Change in Bilbao, Spain, said the report's approval represents a "milestone" for the way governments view nature, by challenging some of the underlying assumptions that have contributed to [environmental destruction](#).

The report was drafted with the help of dozens of experts from both social and [natural sciences](#) in an attempt to bridge the often considerable differences between disciplines and find a common approach they could all support, he said.

"We don't know what will come next," said Pascual, but suggested the guidelines are likely to be reflected in the negotiations at December's U.N. conference on biodiversity in Montreal.

Representatives of Indigenous groups welcomed the new guidelines and an IPBES [report](#) published last week which highlighted the need for sustainable use of nature.

"There is a growing body of evidence showing that when the rights of Indigenous peoples are guaranteed, we outperform all other forest managers in reducing deforestation and preventing wildfires," said José Gregório Díaz Mirabal of COICA, a coordinating body for the indigenous organizations of the countries of the Amazon Basin.

"If the goal is to succeed in saving the Amazon, any plan must be carried out in collaboration with Indigenous peoples," he said.

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