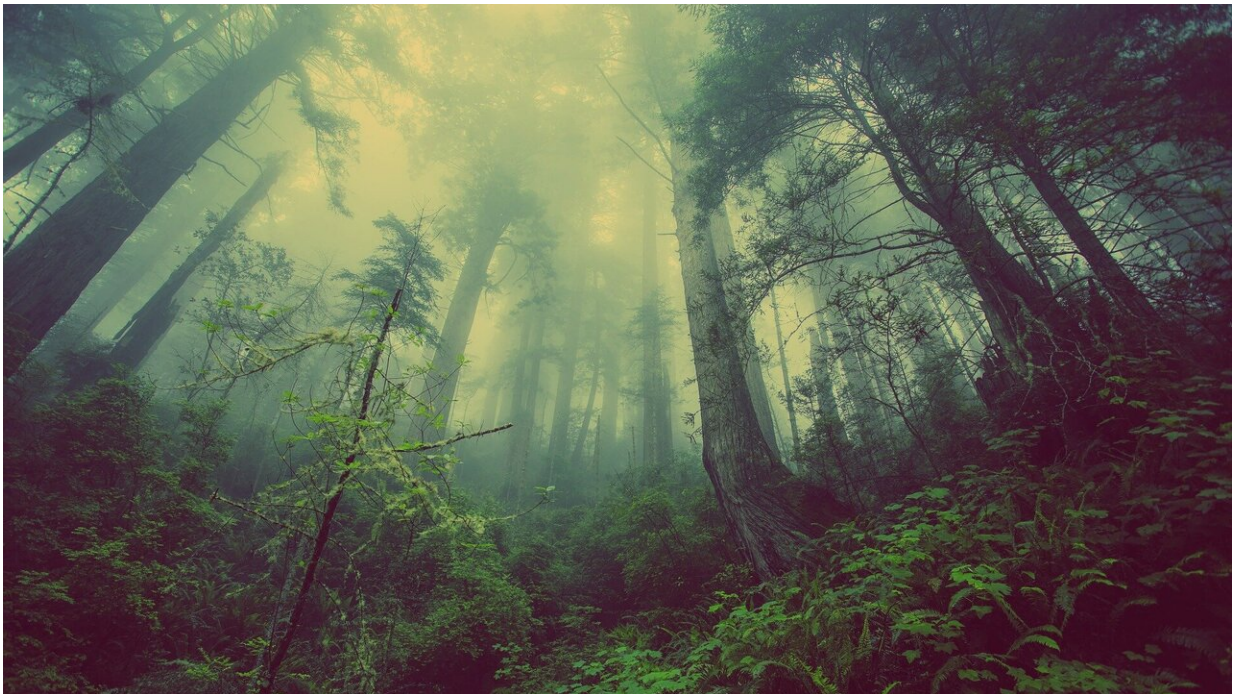


# Differing values of nature can still lead to joined up goals for sustainability

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Recognizing and respecting the different ways nature is valued can enable better environmental decision-making, according to new research led by the University of East Anglia (UEA).

International agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals represent wide support for a sustainable future, living within planetary

boundaries and ensuring a safer future for current and next generations.

However, there remain huge disagreements about how to advance such goals, often resulting in marginalization, conflict and inaction.

The [paper](#), published in the journal *One Earth*, examines the basis for this disagreement, reviewing four competing but well-established potential approaches towards resolving current environmental crises: Nature Protection; Green Economy; Earth Stewardship and Biocultural Diversity; and Degrowth and Post-growth. The paper is titled "Plural values of nature help to understand contested pathways to sustainability."

One of the key findings is that there are clear differences in the way they value nature. In particular, Nature Protection tends to prioritize the intrinsic value of nature or "nature for itself," while Green Economy tends to prioritize instrumental values of nature or "nature for society."

Earth Stewardship and Biocultural Diversity recognize these values but also stress relational values of nature or "nature as society" and Degrowth straddles these types of values, prioritizing sufficiency and redistribution.

The international team of researchers finds that these different approaches to valuing nature are critical distinguishing features of such strategies, but also help to explain why compromise between them is often difficult.

Lead author Adrian Martin, Professor of Environment and Development at UEA's School of Global Development, said, "There is a tendency not to be receptive to ideas that come from other pathways, making it hard to build the massive movement that is needed for transformation to solve the climate and biodiversity crises.

"However, the act of revealing this basis for disagreement also helps us to move forwards. It helps point the way towards a more inclusive and potentially more transformative environmentalism, recognizing and respecting plural values of nature."

The paper suggests three ways in which this can happen. Firstly, through ways of working that make plural values of nature visible and usable for decision-making; secondly by reforming relevant institutions, such as systems of laws, land tenure and [economic incentives](#), to ensure that these plural values can be embedded in practice; and thirdly to address the power imbalances that underpin the current domination of the [green economy](#) pathway, involving, for example, the mobilization of civil rights movements.

"In this study we reveal the role that values play in underpinning different perspectives about how best to achieve sustainability and justice," added Prof Martin. "We already knew that the environmental movement is fragmented but now we have a better understanding of why that is so entrenched.

"More importantly, we have the basis for better mutual understanding based on [greater transparency](#) about values and ways of working that respect the diversity of ways of valuing nature. Our hope is that this can support more inclusive and better environmental decision-making."

**More information:** Plural values of nature help to understand contested pathways to sustainability, *One Earth* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.oneear.2024.04.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2024.04.003)

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