

Social Pathologies of Contemporary Civilisation

Title: "The Relationships Among Ecosystem Services and Human Well Being and the Construction of an Index of Well-Being"

Presenters: Kevin Summers and Lisa Smith

US Environmental Protection Agency, 1 Sabine Island Dr., Gulf Breeze, FL 32561

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment produced a compelling synthesis of the global value of ecosystem services to human well-being. While the MEA was a critical, initial step to demonstrate the potential for assessing global trends in ecosystem services, it is important to note that the MEA did not attempt to down-scale such assessments to regional or even national scales of analysis, nor did it attempt to create methods and tools to support decision-makers at any level of governance, industry, or citizen action. A new research perspective focusing on ecosystem services is needed in which we define ecosystem services as the products of ecological functions or processes that directly or indirectly contribute to human well-being, or have the potential to do so in the future. This approach can easily be applied to an Index of Human Well-Being. The vision of this approach would be to contribute to a holistic, comprehensive theory and practice for characterizing, quantifying, and valuing ecosystem services and to ensure that their relationship to human well-being is consistently incorporated into environmental decision making. Building upon indicators linking ecosystem services to human and community health, both ecosystem and placed based information could be used to develop a U.S. measure of human well-being. This measure would expand the interpretation of ecosystem service indicators into an overall quality of life measurement for environmental decision support.