

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES – AN EMERGING DIRECTION FOR THE U.S. EPA.
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Forty years ago the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S.EPA) was formed to “protect human health and the environment”. In those days the environment was being severely, and obviously, degraded by any number of pollution inputs, and it was clear that a healthy environment was essential to our survival. Today many of the stressors on the environment are not so obvious, and there is a call for more explicit accounting of the benefits and costs of environmental protection. In recognition of this new reality many governmental and non-governmental agencies have shifted emphasis from environmental protection for its own sake, to environmental protection to maintain the services which the environment provides. These are referred to as ecosystem services. One of the programs in the U.S.EPA that has adopted the ecosystem services paradigm is the Ecosystem Services Research Program (ESRP). The vision of the ESRP is to transform the way we understand and respond to environmental issues by making clear the ways in which our choices affect the type, quality, and magnitude of the services we receive from ecosystems – such as clean air, clean water, productive soils and generation of food and fiber. The ESRP is reaching for this vision with a three-pronged approach, emphasizing specific pollutants, certain ecosystem types, and place-based scenarios as case studies.

ESRP; Ecosystem Services Research Program; Ecosystem Services