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"Towards an Indigenous Ecosystem Services Valuation Framework: A North Australian Example"

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Despite calls by various international agencies, considerable work is still required to understand and incorporate the importance of earth's ecosystems for informing public policies. Savannas comprise nearly one third of global terrestrial ecosystems and support many local and Indigenous communities, but the value of their ecosystem services (ES) is insufficiently understood. This study proposes an integrated ES valuation framework and applies it to assess ES for an Indigenous savanna estate in northern Australia, describing how capabilities along with biophysical and socio-cultural ES benefits play a vital role for peoples' wellbeing. We estimated the monetary value of ES by applying a conventional Basic Value Transfer (BVT) method for biophysical benefits (USD 84 M y⁻¹), and a wellbeing approach for valuing socio-cultural benefits and capabilities (USD 4 M y⁻¹). The latter offers a relatively nominal estimate but underscores the importance of including peoples' capabilities in order to demonstrate wellbeing benefits for Indigenous people who regularly visit and utilize their lands. We explore two scenarios, Business as Usual (pastoral land use) and ES-based economies (implying customary land use, particularly through fire management) to project plausible broader benefits for the community over a longer term. This research describes how inclusion of Indigenous peoples' capabilities and socio-cultural values are critical for ES assessments, and indicates that an integrated approach is essential for appropriately informing local, regional and global development policies. (Text from authors' abstract)

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