

Executive Summary of the Scoping Study for a National Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services for the Economy and the Society in Germany (NEA-DE)



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The objective of this scoping study is to explore and develop design and implementation options for a National Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services for the Economy and the Society in Germany (NEA-DE). The study identifies the interests and information needs of potential clients and users and describes options for implementation. An interdisciplinary team at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ), supported by external scientists, conducted the scoping study.

The value of ecosystems and their contributions to human well-being is increasingly acknowledged even beyond the traditional field of environmental conservation. This can be seen, for instance, in various initiatives for greening the economy, in discussions concerning transitions towards a more sustainable development of the society, in efforts for biodiversity protection as well as in diverse research activities. Although there is an increase of scientific research activity in this field, comprehensive and integrative knowledge of the state and trends of ecosystem services in Germany is still missing.

NEA-DE could assist filling this gap by providing a scientifically independent, spatially comprehensive assessment of ecosystem services in Germany. The key objectives of NEA-DE would be:

- To improve the understanding of ecosystem services and interactions with human well-being in Germany,
- To present this information in a convincing and easily comprehensible way, mainly on the basis of existing data,
- To provide results and policy options with high relevance for decision-making
- To generate knowledge through cooperation and to build a transdisciplinary community of practice.

The scoping study is structured as follows. Firstly, the social, political and economic context, within which NEA-DE could provide useful contributions, is illustrated. Secondly, the different information needs of potential users as well as expected effects and results of a NEA-DE are described. This is followed by an overview of the objectives and potential research questions of a NEA-DE. Finally, we present a modular implementation concept and explore the data situation.

As one conclusion of the study, it can be stated that the proposal to conduct a NEA-DE receives great interest among scientists. The interests of political actors, however, are rather ambivalent. Concrete expectations concerning the usefulness of a NEA-DE for different policy fields and applications are contrasted by concerns in regard to the practicability of a NEA-DE. Moreover, research questions range from more general themes, e.g. the state and change of biodiversity, ecosystems and their services, to very specific demands for certain policy fields such as better information on marine ecosystem services. Despite some skepticism, the scoping study shows that NEA-DE is scientifically doable. It has to be said, though, that the data situation presents significant challenges. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to consider politically relevant questions in the process of a NEA-DE.

The scoping study addresses the concerns of some political actors about the feasibility of NEA-DE by developing two possible implementation concepts. The question which of the two options is better suited, or whether a mix of both options should be aspired, depends upon both the available funding for a potential assessment as well as the willingness of different political sectors to contribute to and participate in such a process. For each implementation option, a modular implementation concept is recommended, which includes base modules, modules for creating the scientific fundament, and user-oriented modules. The last type of modules in particular aims at fulfilling the information needs of diverse user groups and could therefore include thematic or sectoral studies as well as assessments on regional or local level.