

SESSION DESCRIPTION

ID: X3

Ecosystem services assessments in LIFE projects: outcomes, approaches, and lessons learned

Hosts:

	Name	Organisation	E-mail
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Abstract:

Ecosystem services (ES) assessments are increasingly recognized as crucial tools for linking biodiversity conservation with socio-economic benefits and policy implementation. The European Union's LIFE Programme, as a major funding instrument for environment and climate action, has supported a wide range of projects that integrate ES concepts into planning, implementation, and monitoring. LIFE projects have long funded the conservation and restoration of nature, and ecosystem services assessments are essential to demonstrate how these actions generate benefits for both biodiversity and society. To support this process, the European Commission developed guidance on how to assess the impacts of LIFE projects on ecosystem services. However, the degree of integration of ES concepts across projects varies widely, as do the methods and indicators applied to evaluate impacts.

This session invites contributions from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers involved in LIFE projects who have applied or advanced ES assessments. We aim to explore methodological innovations, practical applications, and challenges encountered in diverse ecological and socio-political contexts.

By bringing together case studies and project analyses, this session will highlight successes, barriers, and opportunities for embedding ES assessments in LIFE projects. Ultimately, it seeks to strengthen the evidence base for integrating ecosystem services into EU environmental policy and practice, enhancing synergies between conservation outcomes and societal well-being.

Goals and objectives of the session:

This session aims to showcase how ecosystem services (ES) assessments have been applied and advanced within LIFE projects, highlighting their role in linking conservation and restoration outcomes with societal benefits and policy relevance. It will provide a platform for exchanging methodological innovations, practical applications, and lessons learned from diverse ecological and socio-political contexts. Specifically, the session will review the outcomes of ES assessments and the extent of their integration across thematic areas; examine approaches and tools used to evaluate ES impacts in line with or adapted from EU guidance; discuss experiences with stakeholder engagement and the contribution of ES assessments to decision-making and policy uptake; identify successes, challenges, and opportunities for scaling up ES approaches within the LIFE programme and beyond; and synthesize lessons for mainstreaming ES approaches across EU Member States.

Planned output / Deliverables:

The session will generate a synthesis of practical experiences and lessons learned from applying ecosystem services (ES) assessments in LIFE projects. Key outputs will include:

- A summary of methodological approaches, tools, and innovations presented, with reference to their alignment with EU guidance.
- Identification of common challenges and practical solutions for integrating ES assessments into LIFE-funded conservation and restoration actions.

- A set of key messages and policy-relevant insights on how ES assessments can strengthen decision-making and societal benefits within and beyond LIFE projects.
- Recommendations for improving consistency, comparability, and mainstreaming of ES approaches across EU Member States.

The session outcomes will be shared with the ESP community and, where possible, consolidated into a short written synthesis (e.g., a session report or policy brief) to inform future LIFE projects and EU-level environmental policy.

Session format:

The session is planned as a 90-minute interactive format, combining short presentations with structured discussion. It will open with a brief introduction (5 minutes) to frame the goals, followed by 4–5 selected presentations (10 minutes each) showcasing case studies, methodological approaches, and lessons from LIFE projects. After the presentations, a moderated panel discussion (30 minutes) will allow presenters to reflect on common themes and challenges, while engaging with questions from the audience.

Voluntary contributions accepted:

N/A

Related to ESP Working Group:

Other