

You don't know what you've got till it's gone: Including cultural and spiritual values in Pacific NW ecosystem management

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Pacific NW coast ecosystems shaped some of the world's richest indigenous cultures and sustained large populations for 1,000s of years. Salmon and other species were respected as spiritual beings apt to severely punish human greed, waste and disrespect. Salmon were also vital to rank, status, food, economic and territorial security, i.e., had both intrinsic and instrumental value. Fisheries were a major plank in the early British Columbia economy, but now make up <0.5% of GDP. While fish populations are sadly depleted—ecosystem modeling shows that sustainable management could produce 9x current value—an even greater part is due to the growth of 'new' economic sectors (IT, farmed salmon, oil and gas, stock market, etc.). A third factor is a very narrow view of ecosystem value. The total economic value approach (Sumaila this session) broadens the scope of values, but is unlikely to fully represent 'cultural and spiritual values'. As the name implies, the way in which such values are expressed varies dramatically with social, religious and ecological context, making them easy to reject as inappropriate in a pluralistic society or threatening to individual freedoms. Negative results include over-reliance on methods to convert to monetary equivalents and under-representation in policy and decision-making. Undervaluing coastal ecosystems is an even greater threat to sustainability than the gaps in our knowledge of ecosystem function. I outline an approach to identify what I believe to be a set of common or overlapping values underlying the richness of expression.