AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO VALUING ECOSYSTEM SERVICE BENEFITS FROM COASTAL RESTORATION

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Coastal systems provide numerous services—often referred to as ecosystem services—to people, including buffering homes and roads from flooding, reducing wave energy from storms, providing nursery and feeding resources for fish, supporting nature-based tourism activities, and improving water quality.

These ecosystem services provide tangible economic value to communities, by reducing damage costs to homeowners, increasing revenues for fishers, and generating more money spent by tourists interested in birding, boating and hiking. Many data gaps exist relating to the economic benefits provided by these ecosystem services. To help fill these data gaps, The Nature Conservancy has written a guidebook titled; A Guide for Incorporating Ecosystem Service Valuation into Coastal Restoration Projects. The guidebook covers a range of topics related to ecosystem service valuation, including a framework for natural scientists and economists to work together to collect the appropriate data to conduct more ecosystem service valuation studies. In order to be successful, ecosystem service valuation must be more than just data collection – it should be a process that includes defining the project scope, stakeholder engagement, goal setting, selection of relevant metrics, and determining appropriate methods. By conducting more valuations studies, managers and practitioners can improve the management and design of projects for both people and nature, and increase community support and funding for restoration projects. This guidebook is the first of its type to provide a truly integrated framework for bringing together interdisciplinary teams to quantify the ecological processes and economic benefits related to coastal restoration.