



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS



System of
Environmental
Economic
Accounting

System of Environmental-Economic Accounting 2012 – Experimental Ecosystem Accounting Revision

First Global Consultation on:

Chapter 3: Spatial units for Ecosystem Accounting

Chapter 4: Accounting for Ecosystem Extent

Chapter 5: Accounting for Ecosystem Condition

Comments Form

Deadline for responses: 30 April 2020

Send responses to: seea@un.org

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Organization & country:	Conservation International

The comment form has been designed to facilitate the analysis of comments. There are nine guiding questions in the form, please respond to the questions in the indicated boxes below. To submit responses please save this document and send it as an attachment to the following e-mail address: seea@un.org.

All documents can be also found on the SEEA EEA Revision website at:
<https://seea.un.org/content/seea-experimental-ecosystem-accounting-revision>

In case you have any questions or have issues with accessing the documents, please contact us at seea@un.org

Question 1: Do you have any comments on the definition and description of ecosystem assets and ecosystem accounting areas and the associated measurement boundaries and treatments?

The team agreed that these concepts are very clear in the chapter and haven't not changed significantly since the previous version. The treatment of 'narrow' linear features makes sense, although more guidance could be provided as to when a linear feature should be included in a broader ET or when it is an EA.

Question 2. Do you have any comments on the use of the IUCN Global Ecosystem Typology as the SEEA Ecosystem Type Reference Classification?

The IUCN ecosystem typology makes a lot of sense for higher order ETs. However, it should be noted that the third level, ecosystem function groups, is probably not refined enough for developing accounts. Countries will need to develop levels 4 and 5 to better account for differences and to better conform with the CBD definition of ecosystems.

Question 3. Do you have any comments on the recording of changes in ecosystem extent and ecosystem condition, including the recording of ecosystem conversions, as described in chapters 4 and 5?

No this is straightforward. It is good that the authors note that changes in ET will lead to a new set of ECI and that there is a need to track those transitions from natural to non-natural, as this would not be captured in the ECI. For example, a forest gets converted to a pasture; the forest was of moderate condition; the new pasture is in good condition; that should not represent an improvement in the condition of that asset. It is still not totally clear how this will be captured when condition indicators are aggregated across the EEA. A couple of specific points:

1. We note that Section 3.4.3 highlighting the importance of socio-economic data in delineating spatial units is an important contribution to the discussion. There is already a wealth of socio-economic data and information collected by gov agencies (e.g., household surveys, forest inventory), but they are often not spatially explicit. Some additional technical guidance on key considerations to deal with these non-spatial data in spatial modeling would be necessary.
2. Paragraph 3.67 "In some cases, e.g., biomass provisioning services, the location of the supply and the use of the services is the same and occurs in a single EA" is not true in all/most cases. Timber, for example, can be harvested in one EA, it can have a really long supply chain. This kind of spatial disconnect in provisioning services has gotten significantly less attention in previous discussions compared to regulating services.

Question 4. Do you have any comments on the three-stage approach to accounting for ecosystem condition, including the aggregation of condition variables and indicators?

The approach makes sense, that it is well written and comprehensive, and all the recent thinking is there. It is clear and easy to follow in understanding the concepts and implementation. However, Section 4.9 needs to be rewritten to reflect the Table 4.1 accurately. The ETs in Table 4.1 are Level 3 and not Level 2 as incorrectly indicated in the text of Section 4.9.

Question 5. Do you have any comments on the description and application of the concept of reference condition and the use of both natural and anthropogenic reference conditions in accounting for ecosystem condition?

Reference condition is really tricky, and in many ways it is the most important “variable” in creating the condition account. The idea of setting a particular point in time is interesting but seems unfeasible, since the necessary environmental information likely did not exist at that time for comparison. Similarly, a single time period could also be influenced by interannual variability, which would have an oversized impact on the condition indicators. One option that was not explored in the chapter is using some sort of temporal averaging approach, for example, comparing the current state to the average state over the past 50 years. However this may lead to more technical challenges.

Question 6. Do you have any comments on Ecosystem Condition Typology for organising characteristics, data and indicators about ecosystem condition?

This structure is good and could be easily applied to many ETs. It is also a useful framework for deciding which condition measurements will be collected. The flexibility to use different condition measurements for different ETs is also logical.

Question 7. Do you have any other comments on Chapter 3?

No. This is straightforward and well laid out.

Question 8. Do you have any other comments on Chapter 4?

No. The delineation of ecosystem extent is clear.

Question 9. Do you have any other comments on Chapter 5?

We appreciate the inclusion of a logical process for determining ecosystem condition, however, it is so heavily reliant on the reference state, especially for stage 2 and 3, that it seems this requires more thought. Particularly, operationalizing the reference condition measurement is not well described. Overall, the chapter is well written and addresses a number of the complexities in accounting for condition.