



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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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?

Paragraph 3.12 - the example regarding unconfined aquifers is not totally clear. How should aquifers that span multiple overlaid ET be treated? One answer could be the one mentioned later regarding subterranean ET and thematic accounts. In this case it would be better to restructure this paragraph accordingly.

One important point about EA definition that is not discussed enough is the link between asset definition and Ecosystem Services supplied. Some services may depend on more than one EA or, put in another way, the delimitation of EA may (or should be) different depending on the considered services. For example, biological control of pests in crops may be provided by predators living in different EA, besides the cropland EA itself. At least some mention of the possibility of considering some sort of EA aggregation in the further components of SEEA EEA (Ecosystem service accounts) should be made.

Somewhat in this same line, wouldn't it be interesting to consider the condition of the ecosystem at some point when defining EA boundaries? For instance, there may be a patch of very bad condition forest adjacent to another patch in good condition (for example due to the existence of a Protected Area). Maybe in cases like this it would be better to consider these areas as two different assets, despite being contiguous.

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

Click here and start typing (The length of your response is not limited by this text box.)

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?

The chapters make clear the possible implications of failing to consider changes in extent together with changes in condition. I think a good solution is the presentation of "quality-corrected area" as shown in table A5.6.2. This solution should be highlighted and referred to when the issue is raised (for instance in section 5.4.5).

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?

Click here and start typing (The length of your response is not limited by this text box.)

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?

The application of reference conditions to anthropogenic ET is not very clear. How can the condition of, for example, a plantation forest or a monoculture be assessed in a way comparable to natural ecosystem types? The example promised in the note at the end of section 5.3.2 would be very useful.

Regarding the calculation of indicators from the combination of variables and reference conditions, I see many cases where the reference condition is an optimal value and values either too high or too low should be interpreted as unfavourable. Maybe this should be mentioned as an example as well (using a formula that considers an optimal range and thresholds for values considered too high or too low).

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

Click here and start typing (The length of your response is not limited by this text box.)

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

Click here and start typing (The length of your response is not limited by this text box.)

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

Minor comments:

In the paragraphs 4.8 and 4.9 the terms “row” and “column” appear to be swapped.
In the paragraph 4.13 there is an example about managed reregression that talks about “increases in urban areas” leaving the actual reduction implicit (i.e. a reduction on other class caused by this increase in urban area), which could cause confusion. A better wording would be “reduction in XX caused by expansion of urban areas”. It would be preferable to have an example of a managed reduction in an anthropogenic class, as to not mix the cause of the reduction and the nature of the ET.

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

The discussion about condition variables and indicators, particularly the sections about selection criteria, raises a topic I find very relevant. Considering that the SEEA EEA proposes many data-intensive innovations (which are all very pertinent and valuable), I think there should be more effort in highlighting its role as a catalyst/driving force to the development of better/more comprehensive data production at the national level. This could be done by acknowledging the need for better data in many situations, as well as reinforcing the benefits of the SEEA EEA considering this aspect.

Another point that may be of interest in the manual would be an, even if still provisional, attempt to establish a link between changes in ecosystem condition and the agents leading to that change, for instance highlighting how specific indicators may reflect overexploitation or inadequate management. That would be an important complement to the logical structure, following the section on the links between ecosystem condition and delivery of ES.

Minor comments:

Paragraph 5.5 It would be worth to add the notion that EA (the natural ones) are, to a certain degree and under proper management, self-sustainable and, consequently, the deterioration rates can be much lower than produced assets. This would be a good economic point about the cost/benefit of proper management of EA.

Annex 5.2 description of physical state characteristics. Soil organic carbon could arguably be considered a chemical characteristic, couldn't it?

Annex 5.2 description of compositional state. The term “Ecosystem service indicators” appears for the first time with no explanation or background. There should be a mention to the relevant sections of the following chapter on Ecosystem service accounts.

Paragraph 5.65 refers to table 5.4 when the correct one would be 5.5.

Paragraph 5.73 “has been outlined” should be “have been outlined”.
