

## Our Living World

By Ray Mathers, HOPE volunteer Qld

### Why should we protect the environment?

This might seem like a silly question but some people still struggle with the why. A few years ago, while I was in Sydney and on a train, I overheard two old business men talking about this question. They concluded that there were too many national parks and some should be turned into housing to help the economy. This is a very ignorant conclusion to make considering all that the environment does for us, and because we have a moral obligation to protect it (Future. 2019).

### So, what does the environment do for us?

The environment is extremely important for the survival of not only the variety of animals and plants found in various places, but is important for our survival too. Large tracts of land such as national parks provide a place for recreation and relaxation for those who live in the cities and towns. Without these oases in our landscape there would be limited opportunity for people to experience nature.

What else does the environment do for us? Well, it can be something we can all hand down to future generations and a way to give back to the planet. We should not be just thinking selfishly about the here and now we should be thinking of what we should hand down to the following generations. Environmental degradation is a huge problem and we don't want to pass a planet beyond repair to our children and their children.

The environment and the national park forest provide us with air purification and wind suppression. Without trees in national parks and the forests they contain, the climate crisis would be much worse. Without trees blocking the wind, the winds would be less turbulent and more damaging to human structures. Trees also put moisture back into the atmosphere which leads to rainfall. The more land we clear the less likely it is to rain in a particular area. Trees also stabilise the soil and prevent salt from rising to the surface in ground water. This is of particular importance to farmers. Soil salinity is a growing problem across the country. As the trees are cleared there are less roots taking the water out of the ground so it rises to the surface taking the salt with it. Without the tree roots holding the soil together there would be more erosion and loss of topsoil. Not only is this bad for the farmers and the plants that rely on the soil, it clogs up the rivers and covers fish feeding grounds. Without soil we humans would be in huge trouble as all of our food relies on the topsoil to grow.

Without nature and forests in general we would not have some of the most important medical discoveries of the last century. We are in danger of losing these potential medicines before they are discovered (Novy 1997). We must preserve large tracts of land that support animals and plants for the future discoveries to be made.

Now for the elephant in the room, climate change. There are some out there who believe that climate change is some kind of hoax, but with 97% of climate scientists saying that climate change is real, we have to take notice. Forest management needs to take into account climate change when planning sustainable forestry (Peng 2000). The forest directly affects the climate of our regions as well as globally. As said before, forests put moisture into the air, act as wind breaks and provide shade for soil as well as animals. Clearing and burning of the forest puts more CO<sub>2</sub> into our atmosphere thus warming the planet with catastrophic consequences. Climate change is real and happening now and we need forests to help limit the damage.

Forests hold a significant amount of the biodiversity of life on the planet. Without the forests around the world the amount of species would be very much lower. The ecology of the forest directly impacts on every one of us.

### What is ecology?



Ecology is "the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings" (Dictionary.com 2012) (ECO GLOBE. 2019). So, ecology is how various animals and plants interact and how they interact with their surrounding such as soil, air and water. Whether we like it or not we are part of the ecosystem and our ecology is important too. We are the first animals on the planet to modify the landscape on a global scale.

The national parks and other large tracts of land provide us with other ecosystem services too.

Figure 1: Importance of Ecology (ECO GLOBE. 2019)

## What are ecosystem services?

Ecosystem services are the services provided to us by the environment (Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) 2014) . We are part of the ecosystem and we rely on the services that the environment provides. Without these services we could not survive for very long.

Some of the ecosystem services are outlined in the diagram below.

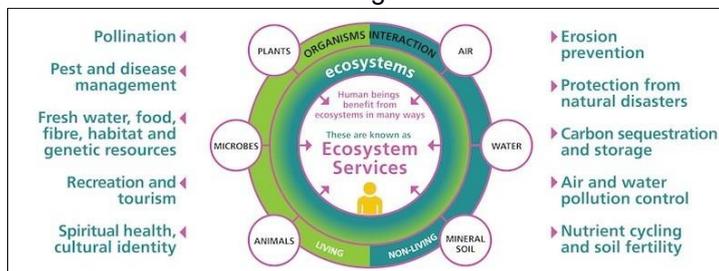


Figure 2: Ecosystem services diagram. (Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) 2014)

The economic benefit of the environment is substantial, from insects that help manage pests (Lewis 1973) and insects that pollinate our crops to medicines that have been found in animals and plants. As I have said before forests provide wind protection for crops, help it to rain and prevent soil salinity. So, to farmers the economic importance of the environment is substantial. Also, the price of environmental degradation is considerable (Turner, Pearce & Bateman 1994) . All of our purchases come from primary industries at their beginning and primary industries are dependent on the environment providing ecosystem services to help produce the products we buy. So, to think that the forests in our national parks do nothing for the economy is an error and those men I spoke of in the beginning of this article need to educate themselves to protect the environment for future generations.

## What can we do and who's responsibility is it?

Environmental protection is everyone's responsibility we can help by:

- Reducing our carbon foot-print.
- Planting trees.
- Stop destruction of the ecosystems and cutting down the world's forests.
- Educate those who are ignorant of the benefit of the environment.
- Lobby politicians on behalf of the environment.

## Conclusion:

So, the environment is extremely important to us as humans, both now and for future generations. There are many ways we can help protect the environment and it's up to each one of us to take action for the future of our species and all the other species that call this planet home.

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