

The Importance of Nature

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The importance of Nature, ecosystem health and human-animal interaction are commonly undervalued, mostly likely due to lack of insight. However, given their interdependence, the preservation of Nature in its many forms needs to be prioritized in order to safeguard human and animal health and wellness.

The health benefits of Nature for humans are gaining recognition in medical fields, with doctors prescribing “ecotherapy” (exposure to the outdoors in Nature) and pet therapy (time spent with companion animals) to combat a wide variety of ailments. Time outdoors has been shown to reduce blood pressure, heart rate, anxiety, depression, and other stress-related symptoms. Regarding pet ownership, the significant health benefits of the human-animal bond (for both pets and their owners) have been well documented. Human-animal interaction may alleviate stress, lessen pain and worry, provide company and give people a sense of purpose. Also, in some studies significant monetary savings have been linked to pet ownership being related to decreased doctor visits.



Ecosystem Health (Eco-Health) also has a direct impact on human health. An ecosystem is a community in which producers (plants), consumers and decomposers work together in their environment (air, water and soil) for survival. It is necessary to distinguish between naturally-occurring ecosystems, and man-made ecosystems created through landscaping activities. While some landscaping may be appropriate for the development of residential and business locations, dramatic changes in land structure and use involving non-native plants, soils and grasses may prove detrimental to environmental and human health in the long-term.



Wildlife and intact, naturally-occurring ecosystems perform beneficial functions – *Ecosystem Services* - that are essential for human survival. These are:

1) *Supporting Services* - fundamental natural processes that allow the Earth to sustain life, namely soil creation, photosynthesis, nutrient cycling and water cycling. These processes make all other types of ecosystem services possible.

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2) *Provisioning Services* - benefits extracted from nature, such as food, water, natural fuels and fibres, and medicinal plants.

3) *Regulating Services* - regulate natural processes and include decomposition, water purification, pollination, erosion and flood control, and climate regulation.

4) *Cultural Services* - non-material benefits that enhance the cultural development of humans, such as recreation, creative inspiration from interaction with nature (eg. art, music, architecture) and the influence of ecosystems on local and global cultures.



These ecosystem services enable life as we know it and we depend on them daily, whether or not we are aware.

Given all the ways that animals and ecosystems support human health, we should prioritize taking care of Nature, so that Nature can continue to take care of us.

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References:

National Wildlife Federation (<https://www.nwf.org/Wildlife/Wildlife-Conservation/Ecosystem-Services.aspx>)

Pet Partners (<https://petpartners.org/learn/benefits-human-animal-bond/>)