

TARGETING CONSERVATION EFFORTS ON PLACES MOST BENEFICIAL TO PEOPLE CAN ADVANCE BIODIVERSITY, CLIMATE, AND DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- Research led by Unai Pascual, Ikerbasque researcher at BC3, and published in the prestigious journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution* identifies the critical terrestrial and coastal areas where we should focus our efforts for nature conservation

Bilbao, 30 November 2022 - In just a few weeks the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity ([CDB](#)) will convene in Montreal to adopt new targets for biodiversity conservation, restoration, and management. Along with the global commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change, these three frameworks will influence sustainable development for the rest of the decade.

Historically, targets for protecting ecosystems and biodiversity have been criticized for inadequately accounting for the needs of people, particularly the needs of local and Indigenous communities. Including nature's contributions to people is essential for making equitable and just conservation decisions.

New research from a global team, including from the Basque Centre for Climate Change ([BC3](#)), [Ikerbasque](#), and the [Natural Capital Project](#) scientists at the [University of Minnesota](#), demonstrates how nature conservation contributes to human wellbeing at local and global scales and maps the ecosystems that are not only essential to the nearby local communities but contribute to the well-being of every person on the planet.

Published in [Nature Ecology & Evolution](#), this work shows that conserving 30 percent of the Earth's land and 24 percent of coastal waters would sustain 90 percent of nature's current contribution to people in every country. This vital support delivered by nature has enormous cultural and economic value by providing food, drinking water, protection from hazards, mental and physical well-being, and many other priceless benefits.

Prioritizing conservation, protection, and restoration efforts to the areas identified as *critical natural assets* could maintain a high proportion of current natural benefits to people. "All people on the planet benefit from nature," says study lead author, Becky Chaplin-Kramer, lead author of the study at the University of Minnesota. "What is striking is just how many benefit from a relatively modest proportion of our total global land area. If we can maintain these areas in their current state through a variety of conservation mechanisms that allow the types of use that make them so valuable, we can ensure that these benefits continue for years to come."

These valuable ecosystems can be found in every corner of the planet. Some are well-known environmental powerhouses, like the Congo Basin forests. Others may fly under the radar, but each one is vital to the respective communities it serves. Importantly, every country has some critical areas that benefit local communities. There are also areas that remain globally important for climate mitigation and biodiversity, like the Amazon, but cannot provide all the critical local benefits, and thus may require giving additional conservation attention to nearby areas, like the Paraná River connecting the many population centers across central South America.

Likewise, the headwaters of the Yangtze and Mekong rivers emerge as areas of key importance for many people in Asia.

Measuring and mapping the areas that provide significant benefits to people provides the information that decision-makers need to better account for impacts on local communities when choosing conservation policies and investments. **Unai Pascual, Ikerbasque Professor at BC3**, co-Chair of the recently released [Values Assessment of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#) and who has co-authored this study says that “this study helps to answer a crucial question: where should we make sure we focus our efforts for conservation around the world? The study identifies the critical areas that could be prioritized for conservation while securing that benefits from nature, such as the provision of clean water, food security or protection from storms, do continue to flow to local communities, as well as humanity as a whole.”

The effort is not only the most comprehensive set of nature’s contributions to people yet to be mapped but the approach developed can be used at various decision-making scales and complemented with local expert and stakeholder input. “Global maps can provide a big picture view, and reveal large-scale patterns, but they require local context to make decisions for implementation. It’s like how a mapping app on your phone might first give you an overview of your route, but if you want to see what it will look like once you’re at your destination, you would switch to a street-level view—you need both to really know where you are going,” says Chaplin-Kramer. Pascual adds that “the study can help conservation efforts sustain multiple values from nature, including the intrinsic values of species while recognizing the multiple ways people rely on nature. We hope that these kinds of studies will help bridge among different values dearly held by practitioners and policymakers interested in optimizing conservation and development efforts around the world.”

Collaborators and partners in this study include: BC3, Ikerbasque, [Carleton University](#), [Colorado State University](#), Instituto Multidisciplinario de Biología Vegetal del Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas ([IMBIV-CONICET](#)), [Conservation International](#), [Cornell University](#), [King's College London](#), [Nature Conservancy of Canada](#), [Pennsylvania State University](#), SPRING, [Stanford University Natural Capital Project](#), [SYSTEMIQ](#), [Nature Conservancy](#), [UNEP-WCMC](#), the [National University of Cordoba](#), the [University of Bern](#), the University of Minnesota School of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, the [University of Siena](#), the [University of Tasmania](#), [Western Washington University](#), the [World Resources Institute](#) and the [World Wildlife Fund](#).