

Editorial

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Dear Readers,

According to Chapter 24 of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA), forests and woodlands account for over 40 % of land cover in mountain areas. The authors of the MA have noted a recent shift in how forest services are valued—“from simple timber production toward biodiversity, aesthetic, spiritual, and recreational aspects” (Koerner and Ohsawa 2006, pp 693–694). The multiplicity of these services contributes to human wellbeing not only in mountain areas but also in the adjacent lowlands. There is a need to acknowledge this potential and ensure that it is maintained through multifunctional forest management, in order to guarantee that human populations today and generations to come have continuous and equitable access to products and services of forest landscapes. Although there has been a significant increase in protection of forest landscapes in recent decades, the sustainability of mountain forests outside protected areas in many parts of the world is increasingly threatened. Often degradation, fragmentation, and homogenization of forest landscapes jeopardize the ability of these ecosystems to provide services for nature and humans. In order to sustain the multiplicity of forest ecosystem services, we must develop a comprehensive understanding of human–ecosystem interactions; moreover, development interventions need to build on insights from this systemic understanding.

In the Development section of this issue of MRD, Nguyen Ngoc Thang and coauthors show how community forestry in Viet Nam can help preserve multifunctional forests, provided that rural poverty in the highlands is addressed. Jason Funk and Suzi Kerr present a project in New Zealand/Aotearoa in which a global institutional tool—carbon farming—is being used to achieve sustainable re-establishment of native forest on Māori (ie indigenously-owned) land. Claude Garcia and coauthors discuss how a different kind of economic development tool—“geographical indications” or labeling—failed to achieve the goal of protecting biodiversity in the Western Ghats because the project did not take a comprehensive systemic approach from the beginning. Nakul Chettri et al (Asia) and Alex Muhweezi et al (Africa) describe efforts to build up transboundary collaboration in protected areas to achieve the double goal of conservation and development; as underlined in both cases, such approaches require a long-term and multi-stakeholder perspective, as well as a systemic understanding of issues. Finally, Davide Geneletti presents a promising Italian expert-panel-based methodology to assess the value of forests when planning land(scape) use.

Papers in the Research section address various aspects of forest ecosystems continuously modified by and for human use: they re-assess the history and role of an “invasive” species in Madagascar (Kull et al); present a regional-scale assessment of the dynamics of (valuable!) secondary forests in Southeast Asia (Heinimann et al); analyze plant diversity in, and soil and water conservation properties of, man-made forests in Yunnan (Tang et al); present a change detection analysis of mountain forests in Romania in a socioeconomically dynamic period (Mihai et al); and discuss the distribution, community structure, and regeneration of treeline birch subjected to human use in Nepal (Shrestha et al). The final paper in this section also discusses the impact of human intervention on mountain vegetation (Bhutan’s grasslands), keeping in mind the difficulties of striking a balance between (human) development and (nature) conservation needs.

MRD hopes that this close-up on the complex issues related to using and preserving the multifunctionality of forest landscapes around the world will contribute in a small and hopefully significant way to sustainable mountain development.

Susanne Wymann von Dach and Anne Zimmermann, Assistant Editors

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