

## PRESS RELEASE: Experts call for restoration of natural capital

An international group of scientists and practitioners on ecology and land use called for massive and urgent investment in "the restoration of natural capital" at a conference in Greifswald (Germany) last week.

Natural capital is made up of the environmental stocks which provide the goods and services provided by ecosystems. The grim alternative to investment in restoration is continuing degradation of our environment, leading to critical shortages in ecological essentials such as clean air, clean water, and fertile soil.

Investments in ecological restoration will lead us away from the deepening crisis of ecosystem collapse. The conference heard that ecological restoration is an essential but neglected element in achieving the interrelated goals of nature conservation, sustainable economic development, and enhancing the well-being of peoples throughout the world.

A striking example of the scale of our global environmental crisis can be seen in the gigantic carbon emissions from degraded peatlands in South East Asia, which was highlighted at the conference. These emissions are comparable to emissions from the industries of developed countries. But they have received very little international attention and are not included in the Kyoto Protocol.

Massive investment in the restoration of peatlands in this region should be an essential part of any strategy to control climate change, but has only recently been initiated on a very small scale, while burning continues to accelerate.

The conference delegates recognised that human communities suffering from acute poverty are the first victims of this kind of degradation, and yet often intensify it because of lack of resources to invest in sustainable production. In a declaration issued at the end of the conference, the group urged "a pro-poor approach in developing countries to break through the vicious cycle of social-environmental degradation".

The delegates also discussed the radical changes in land use taking place in the enlarged European Union. They urge EU member states to take positive advantage of the land freed up by the decline in land needed for intensive farming. This can be done through the restoration and rehabilitation of river systems, wetlands, peatlands, forests, and eco-systems created by traditional farming methods. Such an approach would enhance environmental health, protect biodiversity and cultural landscapes, help produce higher quality organic food and other regional products, and also maintain jobs, livelihoods and, hopefully, social cohesion in rural communities.

There was agreement that ecologists need to learn from economists, and economists from ecologists, as we strive for nature conservation, sustainable economic development and ecological restoration. The conference stressed the need to consult effectively with all stakeholders impacted by programmes pursuing all these objectives.

Finally the conference delegates called upon political and social leaders to pursue a radical cultural shift and to help usher in a new era built upon twin principles: "Economics as if nature mattered and ecology as if people mattered".

The 5th European Conference on Ecological Restoration took place in Greifswald, Germany, last week. It was convened by the Society for Ecological Restoration - Europe to explore the challenge of changes in land use, and was attended by over 400 restoration scientists and practitioners from 47 countries and 5 continents. The full text of the final conference declaration is appended to this press release.

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## APPENDIX

### The Greifswald Statement on Ecological Restoration

The 5<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Ecological Restoration<sup>1</sup> (Greifswald, 21– 25 August 2006) convened to explore the challenges of land use changes by exchanging knowledge and experience on the ecological, economical, and ethical dimensions of Ecological Restoration. The Conference was attended by over 400 experts from 47 countries and 5 continents.

We, the Conference delegates, concur with the conclusions of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005, which states:

*Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history. These changes have contributed to substantial net gains in human well-being and economic development, but these gains have been achieved at growing costs in the form of the degradation of many ecosystem services, increased risks of nonlinear changes, and the exacerbation of poverty for some groups of people. These problems, unless addressed, will substantially diminish the benefits that future generations obtain from ecosystems and increase conflict potential.*

**More and more the factor restraining economic development is remaining natural capital, not manufactured capital as it used to be. Economic logic says to invest in the limiting factor.**

We are convinced that the only way to realize sustainable economic development and to enhance the well-being of people is to reverse the process of degradation and ensuing loss in ecosystem goods and services through the investment in the restoration of natural capital. This includes

- the restoration/rehabilitation of degraded natural and anthropogenic ecosystems and their capacity to provide useful goods and services,
- the implementation of ecologically sustainable utilization of natural resources, and
- appropriate investments to capture long-term economic returns.

Increasing socio-economic demands for energy, water, food, raw material, and recreation, may lead to new and increasing ecosystem degradation. Our experience shows that the restoration of degraded ecosystems is often difficult, slow, costly and sometimes impossible. Therefore, **all efforts should be made to prevent further ecosystem degradation.**

Moreover, **the restoration of existing degraded ecosystems will augment natural capital and enable safeguarding of future societal needs.** Restoration<sup>2</sup> should

- consider all forms of scientific, indigenous and local knowledge and experience
- treat the causes rather than the symptoms
- recognize the linkages within the larger landscape
- emphasize process repair over structural replacement
- allow sufficient time for self-generating processes to resume
- take existing values (incl. archeological and cultural values) into account
- include short-term evaluation and long-term monitoring to allow adaptive management and to acquire new knowledge.

Our experience also shows that the **success of ecosystem restoration often depends more on social, economic, and cultural constraints** than on eco-technical know-how. This implies to

- inform all stakeholders on the full range of alternatives, opportunities, costs and benefits offered by restoration. Scientists have a duty to inform and educate
- empower all stakeholders in planning, decision making, implementation, evaluation and monitoring
- take a pro-poor approach in developing countries to break through the vicious cycle of social-environmental degradation
- provide short-term benefits leading to the acceptance of longer-term objectives
- involve imagination to capture the public heart
- bring about a cultural shift by embedding restoration into daily cultural practices.

Key problems that require the integration of social, economic and environmental aspects into restoration practice include peatland degradation of Southeast-Asia, desertification in Central Asia, transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, and rural developments in Western Europe. It is essential to invest more in interdisciplinary approaches

The **collaboration between economists and ecologists is a prerequisite** to incorporate knowledge and awareness of the value of natural capital into daily activities. We urge ecologists to learn from economists, and economists from ecologists.

Finance mechanisms (such as the Clean Development Mechanism [CDM] and Bio-rights) based on the opportunity costs of maintaining ecosystem goods and services should be made available for ecological restoration.

In view of the gigantic carbon emissions from degraded peatland and the lack of resources to address this urgent issue, we demand an immediate eligibility under the Clean Development Mechanism for support to peatland restoration measures.

To address one of the biggest and most burning environmental disasters of our age in terms of Carbon emission, land degradation, biodiversity loss and poverty, particularly in relation to peatland degradation in Southeast Asia, we call for the establishment of a Global Peatlands Fund.

We furthermore call upon society's leaders to achieve a radical paradigm shift and to help usher in a new era built upon twin conceptual pillars: **Economics in which nature matters and ecology in which people matter.**

Essential to bring about the necessary change is public awareness, government and policy support at all levels and in all contexts, in both developed and developing countries. We urge governments, multi-national institutions and the private sector to actively seek innovative markets, legislation and institutional mechanisms to this end, and to enter into the long-term commitments required.

We recommend improved collaboration between the conservation conventions and other policy platforms (e.g. the United Nations Conventions on Climate Change [UNFCCC], on Combating Desertification [UNCCD], and on Biological Diversity [CBD], the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and the World Water Forum) to build on their synergies, strengthen the global mandate for ecological restoration and optimize the use of human and financial resources.

Only by stopping degradation and restoring existing degraded ecosystems we will be able to achieve the necessary integration of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals 1 and 7 on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability, and to carry as much as possible of the world's ecological riches through the pressures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century into what we must all hope will be a stable and sustainable world beyond.

Greifswald

25 August 2006

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<sup>1</sup> Organized by the Society of Ecological Restoration Europe and the University of Greifswald (Germany), in collaboration with the International Mire Conservation Group, the International Peat Society, and the Gesellschaft für Ökologie.

<sup>2</sup> See also "Ecological Restoration – a Means of Conserving Biodiversity and Sustaining Livelihoods" (2004) published by the Society for Ecological Restoration International and the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management.