Conservation Biology Discussion: Economics and Ethics

The Thoreau Ideal as a Unifying Thread in the Conservation Movement (Child, 2009)

* I have never read a paper written in this way, but I very much enjoyed it. It made me think of conservation from a different perspective, and a lot of it resonated with me. I may be in the minority, but I appreciated that Child boldly pointed out so many ideas held about conservation biology that are inharmonious with the field of study itself, and I think it is great that someone offered an entirely opposing view of the approach that has been taken so far.
* In the interest of exploring wilderness and nature locally (as opposed to “retreating to faraway, tropical paradises”), I am curious how Child would approach promoting these ethics in highly urbanized areas, where the general public is considerably less aware of nature (in my experience).
* Although economic valuation may be helpful in appealing to political approaches to conservation and short-term goals, but in the long-term (decades, centuries…), it seems like a risky strategy that may end up in identifying certain ecosystem services, communities, species, etc. as unnecessary or not worth conserving. Is this worth the short-term benefits for biodiversity conservation?

An ecosystem services framework to support both practical conservation and economic development (Tallis et al. 2008)

* One of the main things that stuck out to me about this article was that it used a couple failed conservation/development projects as examples of what likely represents an ineffective approach. I feel that too few studies and programs discuss similar failed ideas, or at least that they are not published. These failures are incredibly important to learn from, and approaches that deal with addressing ineffective methods while facilitating effective strategies seems absolutely necessary.
* Although initially a strange concept and figure to look at, I like their use of Fig. 4, as it nicely visualizes different potential outcomes of ecotourism projects. This idea is something I’ve not thought a lot about, but management of these types of conservation/development-promoting projects is *incredibly* important if we intend to maintain their benefits. So there seems to be a limit of how ‘successful’ a country’s ecotourism project should be, though, since increased popularity likely increases its traffic and therefore increases required roads/hotels/etc. Maybe those projects could simply charge more, as opposed to allowing more tourism, though, similar to trophy hunting conservation management.
* The last few paragraphs were particularly significant to me, too, as they suggest that we must actively evaluate our attempts at promoting conservation and development. Treating all of the ongoing projects as experiments very much appeals to me, despite the impracticality and challenges that may pose. Do we think it is a worthwhile investment to not only support these projects, but fully monitor them? Such an approach, in my opinion, may be more useful than simply confirming or refuting that an approach works, but could help assess the effectiveness of programs *as they are progressing*. The inherent benefit here is that the evaluation may indicate that changes need to be made, and we would then not simply carry on blindly hoping that the program succeeds, when it is in fact detrimental or ineffective.