Proposition 3

Ecological risk assessment should focus on ecological condition, and not on human well-being.

Pro Position
That this dichotomy is elusive is a poor reason to abandon the conceptual distinction between analyses to inform decisions and the decision process itself by incorporating consideration of Ecosystem Services.
The Ecosystem Services paradigm is a utilitarian valuation scheme.
Ecological Risk Assessment has been criticized for its reductionist approach.
The question isn’t whether Ecological Risk Assessment is a less-than-perfect tool (it is!), but rather if the Ecosystem Services paradigm is a better one (and it isn’t!).
Because, the **Ecosystem Services paradigm** is doubly reductionist!
First, the **Ecosystem Services paradigm** reduces the inherent complexity of ecosystems by focusing only on those components that have utility to humans.
Second, the Ecosystem Services paradigm monetizes the utility of services – ultimately, and despite OMB guidance to the contrary, functions that can’t be quantified in monetary terms are rendered irrelevant to the decision.
By replacing **Assessment of Ecological Risk** with statements of value, the **Ecosystem Services paradigm** confuses the two-step process of decision-making: causation and valuation with a doubly-reductionist, utilitarian mishmash.
The Ecosystem Services paradigm is nothing more than a welfare program for environmental economists!

(with apologies to M. Sagoff)
Ecological Risk Assessment/Risk Management Paradigm

- Ecological Risk
- Statutory & Legal Considerations
- Engineering Constraints
- Societal Values & Concerns
- Fiscal Considerations
- Policy Context

Environmental Decision Making