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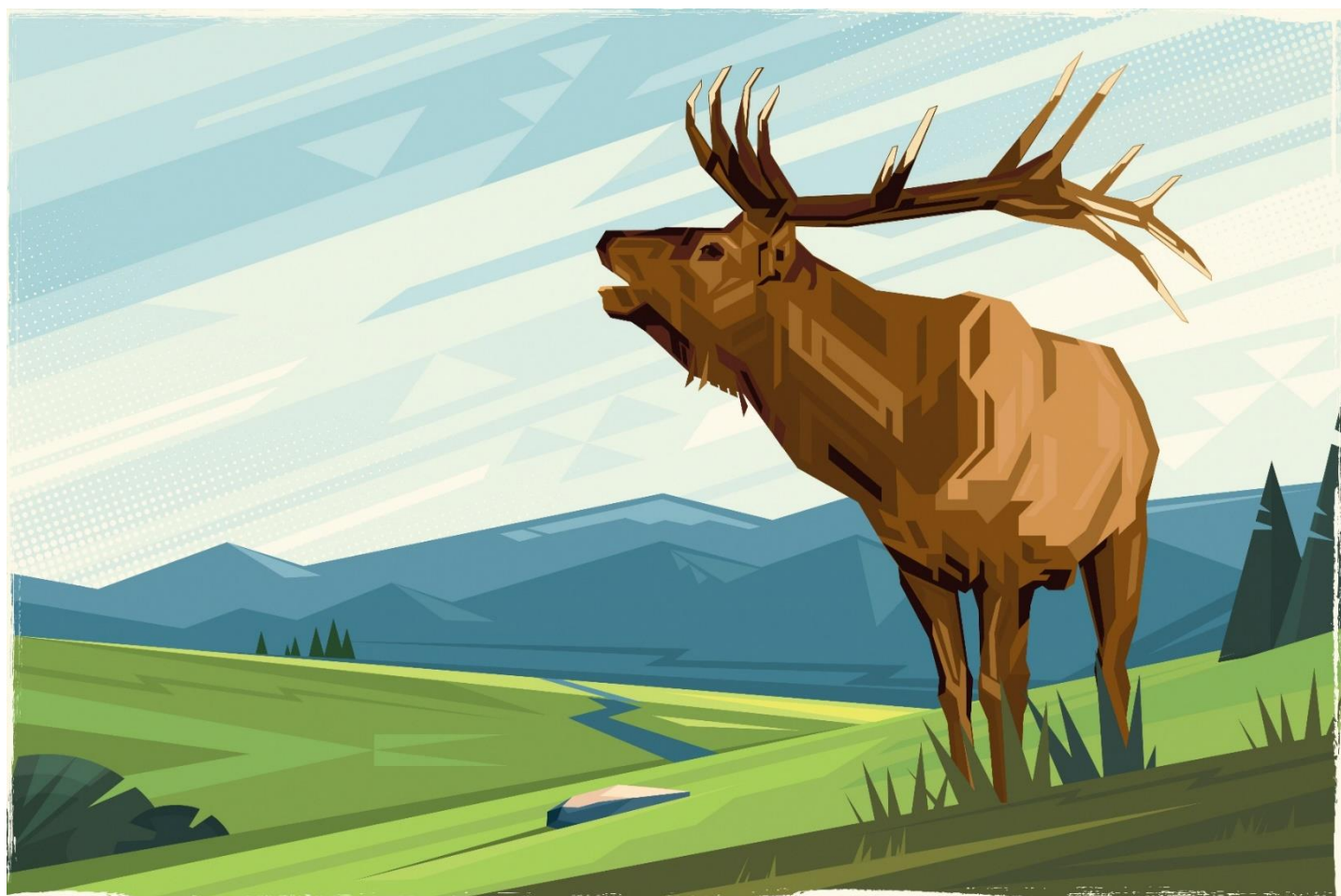
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Ecosystem Services and Riparian Restoration: A Socioecological Assessment of the LIFE Alnus Taejo Project

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Abstract

Ecosystem services are essential for ecological conservation and human well-being. In the framework of restoration activities over the riparian forest involves in the Spain-Portugal cross-border LIFE Alnus Taejo project's, this study assesses people perception regarding their hydrological, wild harvested products, and cultural/recreational ecosystem services, before the restoration works starts, and also, how the planned activities may affect those services, over three different regions: Montemayor del Río, Villasbuenas de Gata, and Fundão. Using the TESSA methodology approach, a mixed-methods approach combined surveys, free-listing, and geospatial mapping to assess community perceptions and expectations of future conservation actions. Findings reveal regional variations, highlighting the need for tailored conservation strategies. Water quality perceptions differed, with 75% of Villasbuenas de Gata respondents reporting seasonal turbidity concerns, while Fundão residents cited chemical contamination. In Montemayor del Río, minor issues such as occasional turbidity and foam were noted. Anticipated flood risk reduction was highest in Fundão (71.4%) and lowest in Villasbuenas de Gata (50%). For harvested wildlife products, 92.9% in Villasbuenas de Gata collected natural resources, compared to 63.6% in Montemayor del Río and 66.7% in Fundão, indicating strong economic dependence. In cultural and recreational services, 100% of Fundão's respondents saw tourism potential, while 85% in Villasbuenas de Gata supported ecotourism but raised accessibility concerns. Over 75% of participants across locations expressed interest in conservation initiatives. These results provide a baseline for evaluating future conservation efforts and ecosystem services, aligning with global restoration strategies, and emphasizing adaptive, community-driven conservation planning to optimize ecological and socioeconomic benefits.