

EVALUATION OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES OF A FRESH WATER TIDAL RESTORATION PROJECT

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All over the world estuaries are considered to be economically very important ecosystems that provide ecosystem services (Costanza *et al.*, 1997) which for their part contribute to human welfare (Fischer *et al.*, 2009). To compensate for losses of estuarine habitat and accompanying services, costly investments are often needed. However, not all ecosystem services are replaceable causing a decrease in human welfare. World-wide restoration projects and nature development of estuarine ecosystems take place to restore the delivery of ecosystem services. Disfunctioning of ecosystems corresponds with the reduction or standstill of the delivery of several ecosystem services. To determine and evaluate these deliveries an evaluation of the ecosystem is a prerequisite. The functions or ecosystem services of intertidal restoration areas were already described in literature (De Groot *et al.*, 2002; Cox *et al.*, 2006) and even used as conservation goals of the Schelde (Adriaensen *et al.*, 2005). However, the quantification of these services was not performed before. In this study three ecosystem services of intertidal habitats, i.e. aeration, nitrogen retention and silica delivery, were quantified to evaluate these services. Our study site is a former agricultural area that was turned into a flood controlled area with a controlled reduced tide (Cox *et al.*, 2006). Since four years, fresh water intertidal mudflats and marshes are developing. Due to the controlled in- and outflow through a system of sluices, this site is perfect for mass balance studies. During tidal campaigns dissolved oxygen, nitrogen and dissolved silica concentrations were measured several times a year after which mass balance studies were performed. The results of these mass balance studies show that the study area provides in two functions: aeration and nitrogen retention. Also silica delivery was observed when estuarine silica concentrations were limiting.

References

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