



June 4, 2019

The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chair
Committee on Science, Space & Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2321 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space & Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
394 Ford House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Johnson and Ranking Member Lucas,

Please accept the follow statement for the record regarding the Committee’s June 4 hearing titled “*Nature in Crisis: Biodiversity Loss and its Causes*” that will, among other things, examine the recent scientific report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). We applaud the Committee for holding this timely hearing and for recognizing the urgent need to act to save the world’s biodiversity from extinction.

This landmark global assessment, backed by the United Nations and more than 130 countries around the world, reviewed around 15,000 scientific and government sources and also drew from indigenous and local knowledge. It is the most comprehensive document ever prepared on biodiversity.

The assessment alarmingly concludes that “around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers to biodiversity loss.”¹ This massive extinction crisis is being driven by climate change, habitat destruction from logging, mining, and farming, direct exploitation of species by poaching, hunting, and overfishing, invasive species, and pollution. Without swift action to reverse these trends, our natural heritage as we know it could disappear forever.

The statistics are sobering. Seventy-five percent of the terrestrial environment and 66 percent of the marine environment have been “severely altered” by human activity. Plastic pollution has increased tenfold since 1980. Fifty percent of agriculture expansion occurred at the expense of forests. Over 40 percent of amphibian species and more than 33 percent of marine mammals are threatened with extinction. The global rate of species extinction “is unprecedented in human history.”

¹ S. Diaz, J. Settele, E. Brondizio. 2019. Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services *available at*: <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>



Thankfully, the United States arguably has the strongest conservation law in place to help combat the extinction crisis. The Endangered Species Act has not only prevented the extinction of 99 percent of the endangered and threatened animals and plants under its care, but it has put most of these species on the path to recovery. Had the Endangered Species Act not existed, scientists estimate that at least 291 species would have gone extinct since its passage in 1973.² These successes are nothing short of a miraculous accomplishment, given that the Act has been severely underfunded for decades, and is a true testament to its effectiveness.

It is undeniable that humans have had a detrimental impact on species all over the world. The downward trend in biodiversity and the ecosystem services that it provides to humanity paints a bleak picture of the future. Without “transformative change”—as the report suggests—the world will continue to lose species at an unprecedented rate. We must take meaningful action before it’s too late.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Kurose
Endangered Species Policy Specialist
Center for Biological Diversity

² N. Greenwald, K.F. Suckling, B. Hartl, L. Mehrhoff. 2019. Extinction and the U.S. Endangered Species Act. *PeerJ*:e6803 available at: <https://peerj.com/articles/6803/>