



**CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL
DIVERSITY**

Press Release

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Declines in Biodiversity threaten development goals –*Findings of Biodiversity Synthesis presented to coincide with International Day for Biological Diversity*

Earth's species – their variety and numbers – are declining faster than ever, threatening the well-being of humans today and in the future. According to a new study presented at McGill University on May 19, to mark the International Day for Biological Diversity, which takes place on 22 May 2005, the culprit: human activities across the world.

Less biodiversity leads to a decline in the crucial ecosystem goods and services needed for life, such as food, clean water, and the materials for clothing and shelter. Although all people rely on biodiversity, it is the poor who will disproportionately bear the costs of this loss.

The study, “*Ecosystems and Human Well-being: the Biodiversity Synthesis Report*”, (available at http://newsroom.wri.org/media_previews.cfm), was prepared by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) with the cooperation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The four-year study, developed with the participation of 1,300 experts from 95 countries indicates that declines in biodiversity can be addressed only if societies make a concerted and coordinated effort to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity, and set long-term policy goals and targets.

Key findings indicate that:

- Changes in biodiversity due to human activities were more rapid in the past 50 years than at any time in human history.
- Over the last 100 years, human-caused species extinction has multiplied as much as 1,000 times.
- Some 12 percent of birds; 23 percent of mammals; 25 percent of conifers and 32 percent of amphibians are threatened with extinction.
- The world's fish stocks have been reduced by an astonishing 90 percent since the start of industrial fishing.

The report discusses the following:

- The causes of biodiversity change – habitat conversion, climate change, pollution, over-exploitation of resources and a rise in alien invasive species – are constant, and in some cases, increasing in intensity.
- The use of biological diversity has allowed for improvements in human well-being, but at the cost of the degradation of ecosystem services, leading to the exacerbation of poverty for many people.
- It is possible to conserve biological diversity and reduce poverty, but only if governments design their policies with the sustainable use of biological diversity as the primary goal.
- To achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goals and the CBD's 2010 biodiversity target of reducing the rate of biodiversity loss will require tradeoffs. However, if actors coordinate their implementation strategies, these can be minimized.

- To attain the 2010 biodiversity target of a substantial reduction in the rate of loss of biological diversity, will require an unprecedented effort. Modest goals are still possible if actors take the necessary steps now.

The biodiversity synthesis report was released at a ceremony at McGill University in Montreal, Canada to coincide with the International Day for Biological Diversity, which takes place on 22 May of every year.

“This is quite literally a pivotal moment in the history of our planet,” said Jacques Hurtubise, McGill University interim vice-principal (Research). “Our Institution is well-placed and proud to be playing a role in the report and ensuing discussions, through its expert teaching and research in many disciplines, and in particular through the McGill School of the Environment.”

“In order to maintain and enhance the services we receive from nature, we are faced with major challenges.” indicated Anantha Kumar Duraiappah, Director of Economic Policy at the International Institute for Sustainable Development in Winnipeg Canada and one of the co-chairs of the biodiversity synthesis. “We will need to make sure that we don’t disrupt the biological web to the point where collapse of the whole system becomes irreversible, and we must find more equitable ways of sharing ecosystem services.”

“The loss of biodiversity is a major barrier to development already and poses increasing risks for future generations.” Said Walter Reid, the director of the Millennium Assessment, “However, the report shows that the management tools, policies, and technologies do exist to dramatically slow this loss, and some regions could even achieve the 2010 target, but the time to act is now.”

“The report is of great value to all those concerned with the Convention on Biological Diversity and with its objectives – the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the equitable sharing of its benefits.” said Hamdallah Zedan, Executive Secretary to the Convention on Biological Diversity. “The MA’s findings remind us that biodiversity is a requirement for all life on the planet – it is life insurance for our changing world. The report reminds us of the need for action now”

He added: “I encourage all parties to the Convention to consider the report at the upcoming eleventh meeting of our scientific advisory body – SBSTTA - and prepare recommendations concerning its implications for the future work of the Convention, including the 2010 biodiversity target.”

The Convention on Biological Diversity is the most broadly-subscribed international environmental treaty in the world. Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio DeJaneiro Brazil in 1992, it currently has 187 state parties and the European Community who have committed themselves to its three main goals: the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. The Secretariat is located in Montreal, Canada.

The Millennium Ecosystem Biodiversity synthesis is the second in a series of seven syntheses and summary reports and four technical volumes that assess the state of global ecosystems and the impact on human well-being. The four-year assessment is recognized by governments as a mechanism to meet part of the assessment needs of a number of international environmental treaties, including the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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