

Testimony to the House Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee on the IPBES Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to speak with you today about this report, which comes at a critical time for wildlife and humanity. What the report's authors have shown with great rigor is stunning. Like me and many other people, you are probably coming to grips with the numbers:

- 1 in 8 species on Earth – up to 1 million species – are facing extinction.
- That loss is driven by the fact that we have altered over 75% of terrestrial environments and 66% of marine environments.
- Populations of native species have declined by over 20% on average, some much higher. The area of coral reefs has declined by 50%.
- Half a trillion dollars of crops are at risk from pollinator loss.
- Half of the Sustainable Development Goal metrics are declining.

We are losing species faster than ever before in human history, at tens to hundreds of times faster than the normal background extinction rate. We are officially in the middle of the planet's sixth mass extinction event. The last time this happened it was an asteroid taking out the dinosaurs; this time, we are the cause.

The top threats driving biodiversity loss are all a result of humans living unsustainably. The report identifies the number one greatest threat to our planet as land and sea degradation. We have transformed three-quarters of the surface of our planet, which is a change that natural systems cannot sustain.

The second greatest threat is the direct exploitation of species. We have hunted and fished and in other ways over-harvested species at levels that they cannot sustain.

And the third greatest threat—one that we are all aware of—is climate change. As we're already observing, climate change is radically changing our weather and moving species' habitats. Climate change alone is a terrifying transformation of our planet. In combination with the other threats, the damage we have done and are doing is almost unimaginable.

Critically, the consequences are as dire for humanity as they are for wildlife. Ecosystem services from pollinators to fisheries to water filtration and beyond are all at grave risk because of the damage and losses of natural systems.

The numbers bring the biodiversity crisis into sharp focus: Nature is unraveling and the fabric of our planet has changed. And we are the cause, and we will pay the price.

Despite the darkness of the results, there is reason for hope: we also have solutions.

In the US, we are fortunate and pragmatic enough to have visionary laws, most significantly the Endangered Species Act (ESA), which is our most powerful tool for preventing extinction. Over 95 percent of species protected by the ESA still survive and hundreds are on the path to recovery. The ESA was enacted in 1973 with overwhelming bipartisan support and is still widely supported by the American people. But the bipartisan consensus supporting protection of biodiversity has eroded over time, unfortunately, and the Act has become a target for unrelenting attack from development interests. In the last Congress alone there were over 115 legislative attempts to weaken the ESA or exempt certain species or projects. And as we speak here today, the Trump administration is preparing to finalize rules that would undermine the implementation of the Act.

And the Act has been weakened over time by a lack of resources – less than one quarter of the funding that scientists say is needed to conserve species has been provided. Not only that, but how the limited funding is spent is highly skewed: half of all spending went to just six species from 2008 through 2014, leaving as little as \$60 annually for some of the other 1,600 listed species. With proper funding and political support, the ESA can achieve its full potential in protecting our most imperiled plants and animals and address the threats we are now focused on.

Your constituents, even those who choose to not accept the science, depend on nature and the ecosystem services it provides. While the science has spoken, it is silent on the tradeoffs that society will need to make moving ahead. We need decision-makers and leaders to make the tough calls. I appreciate being here with you today because you can help make that difference, not just for wildlife, but for humanity.

Thank you.