

March 31, 2023

Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
1650 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20504

To the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy,

Our planet and nation are facing an alarming biodiversity crisis, largely driven by human activity and closely tied to nature's collapse. **As 124 state legislators from 38 states and territories**, we are thankful that the Biden administration has begun to build a foundation for addressing this crisis and recognizes one of the key obstacles: **we do not currently have a clear and consistent picture of where America's biodiversity, especially at the state and local level, stands today.**

We see the National Nature Assessment as an important opportunity to set us on track to protect and restore our states' biodiversity by first deepening our knowledge of its status, trends, and challenges. Since states are stewards of our nation's biodiversity and will be among the primary users of the first National Nature Assessment, we write to express commonly held perspectives and wants on its intended use.

While global trends in biodiversity loss are clear, we are still uncertain about biodiversity's status in our own states. While we can institute our own studies to assess the status of biodiversity within our borders, we often lack the resources to do so. Further, individual study methods can vary by state and give us results on biodiversity loss that may be inconsistent. Therefore, we need consistent and thorough results on a state by state basis as we work together to reverse biodiversity loss nationwide.

The Assessment presents an opportunity to better understand U.S. biodiversity loss and prepare society for addressing and remedying the crisis facing nature and its benefits to humankind. The Assessment should provide a stronger foundation for additional and urgently needed policy action by the federal, state and tribal governments to mitigate the leading drivers of species loss. These actions include the development of a National Biodiversity Strategy which would strengthen the nation's commitment to arresting the biodiversity crisis, promote a more coordinated response, and provide governments, corporations, and non-profits with a roadmap for actions needed to address the crisis' major drivers. A National Biodiversity Strategy can also inspire us to craft our own biodiversity strategies, creating collaborative solutions to reverse biodiversity loss in our states.

'Nature' and Purpose

- An essential purpose of the Assessment is to provide the best available scientific evidence for informing decisions and actions to protect and restore the integrity of U.S. ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity.
- Therefore, while "Nature" has many meanings, we desire that this assessment considers "Nature" as biodiversity and the systems that are necessary to help to sustain it.

Analyze the Threats

To inform effective conservation decisions for biodiversity, we need to focus on the root of the crisis. The Assessment should use the latest data and science to analyze direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, and pathways for their mitigation. It should include analysis of the following questions:

1. The 2019 IPBES's Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Global Assessment identified five leading drivers of worldwide biodiversity loss. What are the leading drivers of U.S. biodiversity loss at the national and individual state levels?
2. What are the main elements of each of the leading drivers of U.S. biodiversity loss at the national and individual state levels?
3. What is the current status and trend of each leading driver at the national and individual state levels?
4. Where does biodiversity loss occur within different categories of protected areas and Tribal lands?
5. What is the relative contribution of each of the leading drivers to U.S. biodiversity loss at the national and individual state levels?

Assess Social Implications

There is no greater common interest than healthy, natural systems. Biodiversity impacts us all. The Assessment should communicate:

- The social implications of biodiversity trends, inclusive of all sectors of American society and the wide range of stakeholders.
- The Assessment should include detailed information about the status of trends of biodiversity loss, and the factors driving its decline, at a geographic scale useful to inform state and regional conservation action by states and tribes.

We support the Assessment including analysis of the following questions:

1. What are the major economic, public health and wildlife impacts of U.S. biodiversity loss? How does this vary by state?
2. How does biodiversity loss disproportionately impact certain social groups, and where are their opportunities to prioritize these impacts in remediation?
3. What is the current rate of U.S. biodiversity loss across states? What are the long-term consequences to our economy, public health, and wildlife if U.S. biodiversity loss continues?
4. The 2018 National Climate Assessment includes important analysis of climate change impacts for key sectors including agriculture and rural communities, human health, Tribes and Indigenous People, and for various regions of the U.S. The National Nature Assessment should similarly address how biodiversity loss is impacting these sectors and geographic areas?

The U.S. must make substantial progress in ensuring the conservation of the nation's biodiversity for its own sake, for our immediate well-being, and for future generations. The Assessment should provide information sufficient for policymakers **at all levels of government, both nationally and locally**, to understand the dimensions of U.S. biodiversity loss and take policy action to mitigate its systemic causes.

As state legislators, the Constitution gives us the most responsibility over our states' biodiversity. A National Nature Assessment that includes state-specific information would be an important catalyst for urgently needed and long overdue policy action to address America's biodiversity crisis.

Sincerely,

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Alaska Senator Loki Tobin
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