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Conservation Alert

Our Wildlife is Going, Going...

Not all gone, at least not yet. But the trend toward a reduction in biodiversity is deeply troubling.

Why does it matter if poachers, habitat loss, and legal and illegal hunting drive elephants to extinction? How will the loss of whales, tigers, polar bears and Whooping Cranes affect our daily lives? A world without these and innumerable other threatened and endangered inhabitants of our planet is a world not only diminished for people, but also in many cases life-threatening to us. From the World Wildlife Fund: “Biodiversity underpins the health of the planet and has a direct impact on all our lives. Put simply, reduced biodiversity means millions of people face a future where food supplies are more vulnerable to pests and disease, and where fresh water is in irregular or short supply.”

During earth’s history, five mass extinctions have occurred. We are now in the midst of the sixth—the *Anthropocene*—literally meaning the age of the humans. We have begun an epoch where humans bear direct responsibility for the current unprecedented rate of extinctions. From the Center for Biological Diversity, “Scientists estimate we’re now losing species at 1,000 to 10,000 times the background rate, with literally dozens going extinct every day.”

Human actions such as exploitation of natural resources, environmental contamination, deforestation, overpopulation, climate change and habitat loss have increased the extinction rate to unprecedented levels, and the impact on earth’s ecosystems has been (and will continue to be) devastating. For example, land use planner Randy Carpenter describes in an article in the [Mountain Journal](#) how the continued population growth rate in the Bozeman/Gallatin/Greater Yellowstone area will turn “America’s most iconic wild ecosystem...to a tidal wave of people.”

What can be done and what can you do? There are powerful forces driving our latest unprecedented rate of extinctions. But they can be resisted. The despoiling of natural habitats must be reversed, and those wild places that remain must be preserved. There must also be an increased recognition of wildlife’s value for its own sake, as well as for how it benefits people. One [study](#) calculated the value of the ecological services that nature provides us to be approximately \$33 trillion, equal to almost the entire world’s gross product! A few suggestions for how you can help:

- Donate to conservation organizations like land trusts, and help them to directly protect habitat.
- If you cannot afford a cash gift, then donate your time. Many organizations have volunteer programs so you can help clean beaches, cut brush, gather seeds or pull unwanted plants.
- Say it! Speak up and share your passion for wildlife conservation with friends and family.

Much of wildlife protection is achieved or lost via the political realm. If you do not have a relationship with your elected officials, cultivate one. Ask for a face-to-face meeting and express your concern about [wildlife tracking](#), endangered species protections and diminishing wildlife populations.

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