

June 6, 2023

Dr. Arati Prabhaker
Assistant to the President and
Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
1650 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20504

Dear Dr. Prabhaker,

We welcome the Administration's development of the first ever National Nature Assessment and thank you for your efforts to this point. As Members of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition Nature and Oceans Task Force, we lead our Congressional colleagues in responding to species loss and ecosystem degradation. We write to express our views on how the National Nature Assessment can realize its significant potential to inform policy efforts to stem the biodiversity crisis.

The loss of species and the resultant biodiversity loss are serious problems on the global level and in the United States. Many species are actively declining as they await protection. In fact, 23 have been proposed for delisting from the Endangered Species Act because they are likely extinct. Biodiversity loss presents a direct threat to the security, health, and well-being of the people of the U.S. by degrading valuable ecosystem services such as water filtration, coastal protection, and pollination. The loss of nature and biodiversity also disproportionately impacts communities of color, low-income communities, tribal communities, and others that have historically faced environmental injustice.

The National Nature Assessment presents an important opportunity to better understand the status, trends, and challenges of U.S. biodiversity loss. We offer the following specific views and recommendations on the development of the National Nature Assessment:

Direction 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. The Assessment should scope the current status and historic and projected trends in U.S. biodiversity and the impact of biodiversity on America's national welfare. The Assessment should report trends in current land and water management approaches so we can assess current management effectiveness and better understand how to enact conservation efforts. We also fully support a rigorous tribal consultation process and efforts to include tribal and indigenous knowledge throughout the Assessment.

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. The Assessment should analyze what the leading drivers of biodiversity loss are at the national and individual state level. This analysis should include determination of the main elements of each of the leading drivers and the relative contribution of each driver to biodiversity loss at the national and individual state levels. Finally, the Assessment should consider how biodiversity loss differs within various categories of protected areas and Tribal lands, as compared to nationally.

Identify Opportunities

The Assessment should further include an analysis of future changes and opportunities to protect biodiversity. This should include a review of gaps in biodiversity loss data, technologies, and science and what is needed to close these gaps. It is critical to understand the main strategies to stem biodiversity loss as well as what resources are needed to adequately implement these measures. We urge the Assessment to include the best practices for predicting future biodiversity trends as well as how these best practices can be incorporated into planning and response actions governments, corporations and non-profits.

Assess Social Implications

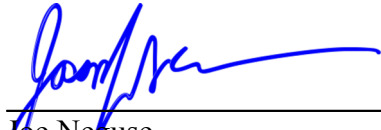
There is no greater common interest than healthy, natural systems. Biodiversity impacts us all. The Assessment should communicate the social implications of biodiversity trends, inclusive of all sectors of American society and the wide range of stakeholders. In addition to providing a national scale assessment of overall biodiversity loss, 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 inclusion of the major economic and public health impacts of U.S. biodiversity loss in the Assessment. We also suggest the Assessment should analyze how biodiversity loss impacts diverse social groups and what opportunities exist to prioritize these impacts through remediation.

The U.S. must make substantial progress in ensuring the conservation of the nation's biodiversity for our immediate well-being, and for future generations. The Assessment should provide information sufficient for Congress, and policymakers at all levels of government, to understand the dimensions of biodiversity loss and take policy action to mitigate the systemic causes of its decline. We look forward to a well-crafted National Nature Assessment that will serve as an important catalyst for urgently needed and long overdue policy action to address America's biodiversity crisis. Thank you for considering our recommendations for the scope of this Assessment.

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



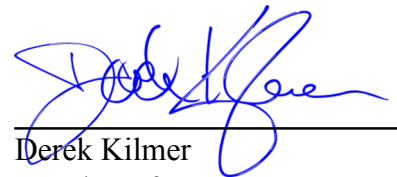
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



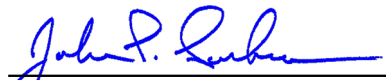
Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



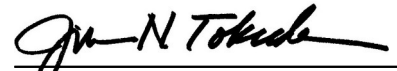
Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
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John P. Sarbanes
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Jim Tokuda
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Darren Soto
Member of Congress

cc: Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Deputy Director for Climate and the Environment, OSTP
Dr. Heather Tallis, Assistant Director for Biodiversity and Conservation Sciences, OSTP