

**Statement of Support for a National Biodiversity Strategy and the House of Representatives (H.R.195) and Senate (S.494) Resolutions Calling for its Establishment in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress**

The federal government should establish a National Biodiversity Strategy to protect biodiversity for current and future generations. This approach would articulate the nation's commitment to a whole-of-government response to tackling species extinction and addressing the primary threats to biodiversity, ecosystem services and ultimately, humanity.

Our planet is facing an alarming and catastrophic biodiversity crisis, largely driven by human activities. Habitat destruction, overexploitation of wildlife, climate change, introduction of invasive species, and pollution are all threatening our planet's ecosystems. Recent scientific studies have documented this devastating loss worldwide, including the ground-breaking 2019 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services assessment warning that about one million species are at risk of extinction. In North America alone, nearly 3 billion birds have disappeared since 1970.<sup>2</sup> This decline is further exacerbated by the fact that humans have severely altered 75% of the world's lands and 66% of its marine environments.

The loss of biodiversity presents a direct threat to the security, health, and well-being of people in the United States by reducing valuable ecosystem services like zoonotic disease buffering, water filtration, and pollination. This loss disproportionately impacts communities of color, low income and tribal communities, and others that have been systematically and deliberately targeted for environmentally degrading activities and excluded from conservation efforts. As our nation faces the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism, the widespread loss of species only compounds existing inequalities.

While multiple federal agencies are already tasked with protecting and conserving biodiversity in the U.S., there is no coordinating policy to maximize these efforts or facilitate collaboration among them. In fact, the national effort to address the biodiversity crisis has fallen further behind due to woeful underfunding and inconsistent administration of key laws and programs at times over the past decade. We need to reverse the damage and make substantial forward progress.

As detailed in both H. Res.195 and S. Res. 494, a National Biodiversity Strategy would address the five drivers of biodiversity loss, secure and restore critical ecosystem services, and reestablish the nation as a global leader in biodiversity conservation. This approach would mobilize a stronger, more coordinated, national response and create a blueprint for effectively tackling the challenge.

The Strategy would direct federal agencies to pursue actions within existing laws and policies and promote innovation for developing new tools to protect biodiversity. Among other actions to comprehensively reduce and reverse biodiversity loss, the Strategy would advance, reaffirm, and clarify the wildlife value of key goals including responding to the climate crisis, preventing future pandemics, and addressing racial equity and justice. It would also call on the federal government to elevate the nation's role in advancing biodiversity conservation globally through enhanced U.S. leadership, diplomatic engagement, and investment. Lastly, the Strategy would promote accountability and progress in addressing the biodiversity crisis through a new quadrennial assessment and build on the forthcoming National Nature Assessment.

The biodiversity crisis is not a far-away problem: it is unfolding here and now in the U.S. Our nation should play a leading role in tackling the challenge. As expressed in H. Res.195 and S. Res. 494, a National Biodiversity Strategy to protect our natural legacy, for today and for generations to come, is a visionary and urgently needed response to the biodiversity crisis.