

World's Biodiversity Declining at an Alarming Rate

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May 20, 2005 - By Phil Couvrette, Associated Press

MONTREAL - The world's biodiversity is declining at an alarming rate, threatening human well-being and future development and requiring important efforts and new thinking on conservation, a sweeping international report released on Thursday says.

The report is the second of seven reports billed as the world's largest study of changes to Earth's ecosystems and their impact on humans. It is the result of five years of collaboration between 1,360 experts from 95 countries around the world.

Human activity is responsible for a reduction of biodiversity, which degrades ecosystems and penalizes other groups of people, especially the poorest who depend most on them, according to the report presented at McGill University in Montreal to mark the International Day for Biological Diversity.

Entitled "Ecosystems and Human Well-being: the Biodiversity Synthesis Report," it was prepared by the U.N. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment with the cooperation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

"The loss of biodiversity is a major barrier to development already and poses increasing risks for future generations," said Walter Reid, the director of the Millennium Assessment, "However, the report shows that the management tools, policies, and technologies do exist to dramatically slow this loss."

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According to the report changes in biodiversity due to human activities were more rapid in the past 50 years than at any time in human history, and over the last 100 years species extinction caused by humans has multiplied as much as 1,000 times.

Some 12 percent of birds; 23 percent of mammals; 25 percent of conifers and 32 percent of amphibians are threatened with extinction, and the world's fish stocks have been reduced by an astonishing 90 percent since the start of industrial fishing.

"We will need to make sure that we don't disrupt the biological web to the point where collapse of the whole system becomes irreversible," warns Anantha Kumar Duraiappah, of Canada's International Institute for Sustainable Development, one of the co-chairs of the report.

The report notes that while efforts have helped reduce the loss of biodiversity more action is needed as little progress is foreseen in the short term.

"The magnitude of the challenge of slowing the rate of biodiversity loss is demonstrated by the fact that most of the direct drivers of biodiversity loss are projected to either remain constant or increase in the near future," the report says.

The report blames biodiversity change on a number of factors including habitat conversion, climate change, pollution and over-exploitation of resources.