



# The Biodiversity “Crisis”

What Canadians Need to Know

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# THE BIODIVERSITY “CRISIS” – WHAT CANADIANS NEED TO KNOW

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bill C-73, the Nature Accountability Bill, an Act respecting transparency and accountability in relation to certain commitments Canada has made under the Convention on Biological Diversity, was introduced into Parliament on November 22, 2021, but has not proceeded to Second Reading or Committee stage. Consequently, there has been almost no attention paid to a law that could rival the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act in terms of its adverse effects on Canadians’ lives.

In this article, I will describe the background to the proposed legislation, including the efforts that are being made to present the loss of biological “diversity” as posing a catastrophic threat to Canada and the world and one that, like climate change, requires urgent and radical changes to economic systems. In a subsequent article, I will summarize the main provisions of the proposed legislation and comment on their potential implications for Canada.

The controversies over biodiversity often concern claims that biological diversity (i.e. in simplest terms, larger numbers of species) is healthy not just for nature but for human beings as well. The biodiversity issues are often portrayed as centred on the rate at which species are becoming extinct but actually involve a wide range of questions about habitat loss, species health and the alleged effects of human-induced climate change.

A study published in 2019 by the intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warned that: *“human actions threaten more species with global extinction now than ever before”* and that *“around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss.”*

The conclusions of the IPBES report were widely reported in the media and accepted by governments. Canada, along with 195 other countries, adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The conclusions in the IPBES report are at odds with the data compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources (IUCN), which catalogues every known species that has become extinct since the year 1500. There are 529 species included on the IUCN’s “Red List”. The number of extinctions by decade has been in significant decline since 1920. It is thought that this extinction peak coincides with the introduction of non-native species, primarily on islands. In contrast to the claims of the IPBES

that we can expect 25,000 to 30,000 extinctions globally per year, the average over the last 40 years is about 2 species annually.

In the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Parties agreed “to catalyze, enable and galvanize urgent and transformative action by Governments and subnational and local authorities, with the involvement of all of society, to halt and reverse biodiversity loss”. The Framework sets out four goals and establishes 23 targets. The targets entail the massive expansion of land use planning and regulation of economic activities in almost all areas.

The global biodiversity policies basically involve an unresolved debate about how many species are threatened, how severely they are threatened, about how much is due to overexploitation and agriculture (i.e. food production) and human-induced climate change and about the validity of current methods for assessing these things. There is a long leap between acknowledging that some species are threatened and accepting the claim that the nature of the threat is so severe that it requires an urgent and massive intrusion of state control over most land and marine areas. In short, no “crisis” has been demonstrated.

# THE BIODIVERSITY “CRISIS” – WHAT CANADIANS NEED TO KNOW

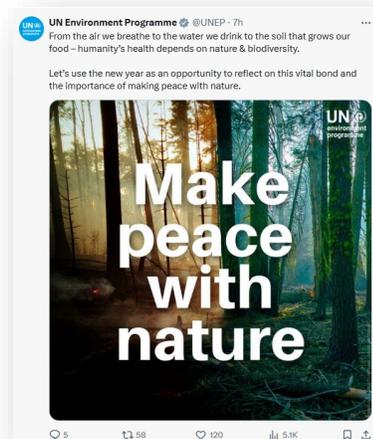
One of the unfinished agenda items on the calendar of the 44<sup>th</sup> Canadian Parliament is consideration of Bill C-73, the Nature Accountability Bill, an Act respecting transparency and accountability in relation to certain commitments Canada has made under the Convention on Biological Diversity. It was introduced into Parliament on November 22, 2021. First Reading was completed on June 13, 2024, but It has not proceeded to Second Reading or Committee stage. Consequently, there has been almost no attention paid to a law that could rival the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act in terms of its adverse effects on Canadians’ lives.

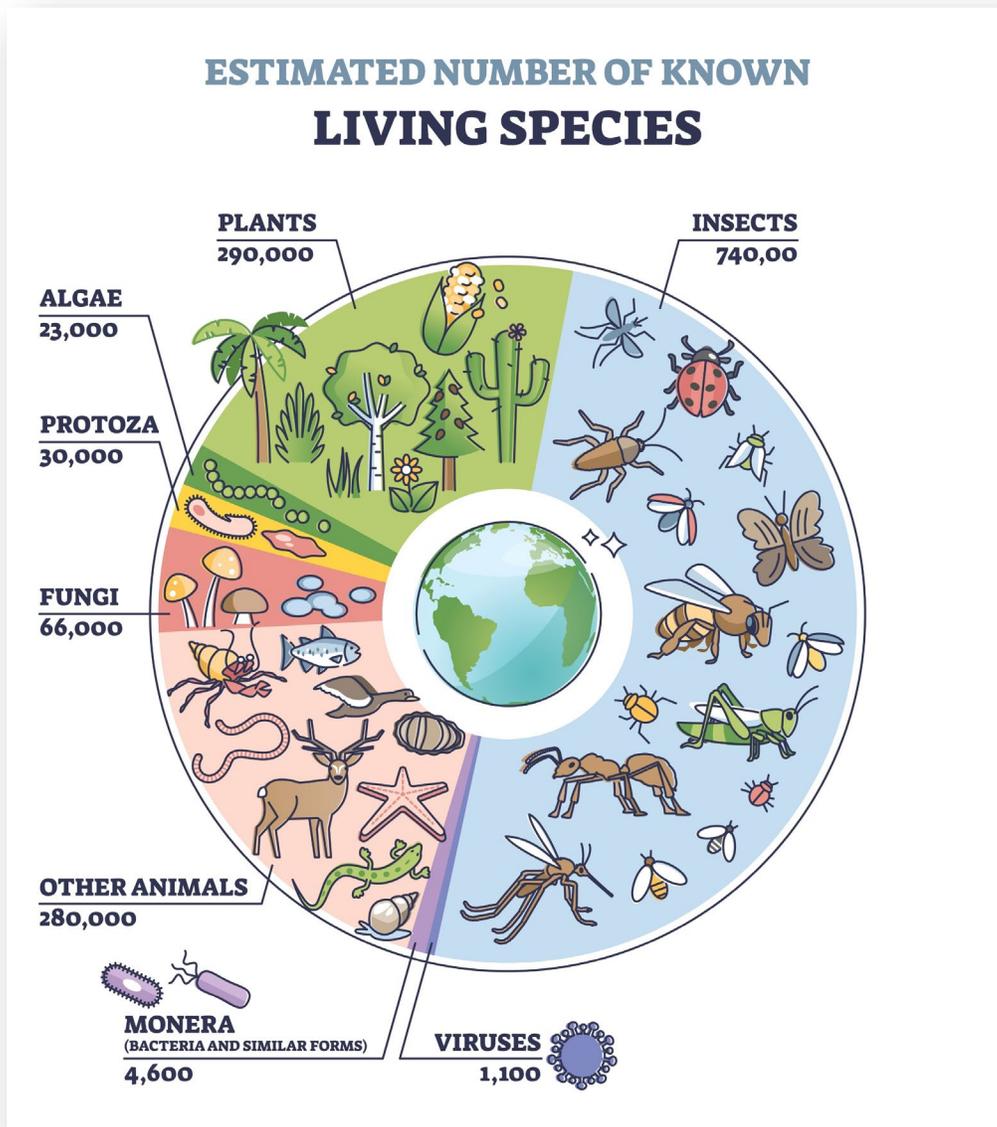
**In this article, I will describe the background to the proposed legislation, including the efforts that are being made to present the loss of biological “diversity” as posing a catastrophic threat to Canada and the world and one that, like climate change, requires urgent and radical changes to economic systems.** In a subsequent article, I will summarize the main provisions of the proposed legislation and comment on their potential implications for Canada.

## What is Biodiversity?

It is not clear that there is a universally-agreed definition of biodiversity. According to one of the definitions in Wikipedia, biodiversity is the variability of life on earth. It can be measured on various levels. There is for example genetic variability, species diversity, ecosystem diversity and phylogenetic diversity. Diversity is not distributed evenly on Earth. It is greater in the tropics as a result of the warm climate and high primary productivity in the region near the equator. Tropical forest ecosystems cover less than one-fifth of Earth's terrestrial area and contain about 50% of the world's species.

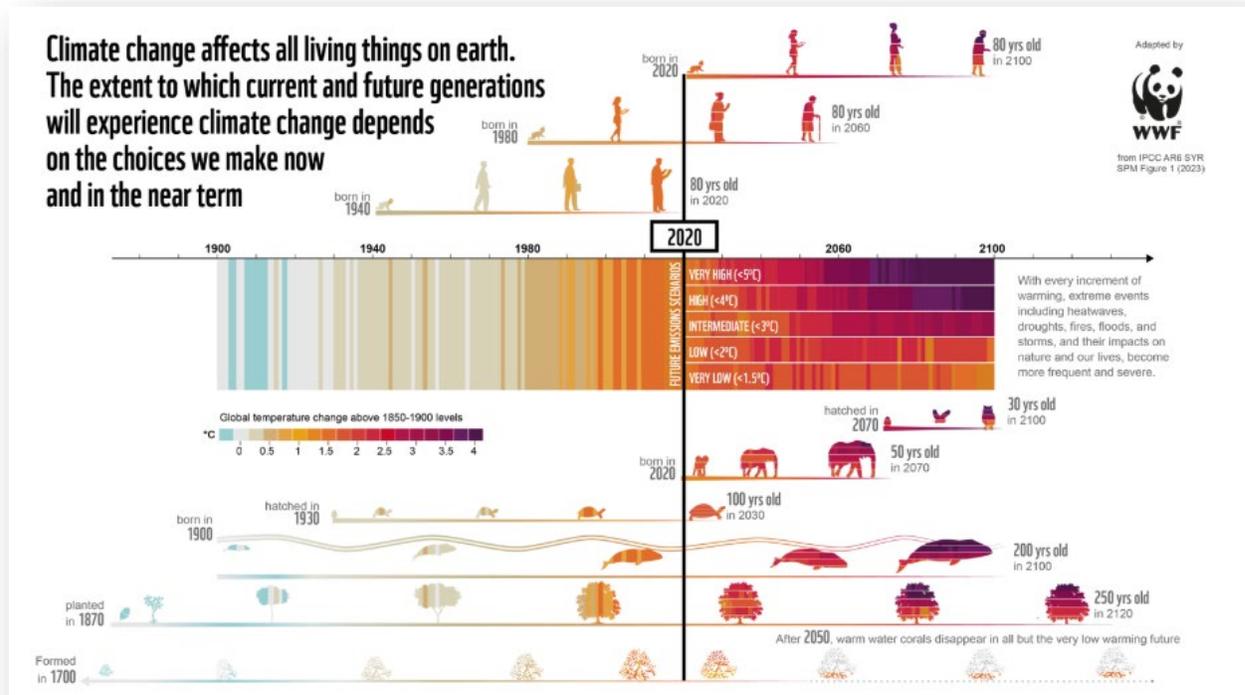
The controversies over biodiversity often concern claims that biological diversity (i.e. in simplest terms, larger numbers of species) is healthy not just for nature by for human beings as well. This view is sometimes accompanied by a near-religious belief that there is a natural “balance” among humans and nature physically, economically, culturally, and spiritually, and that there is a proper interconnection and balance between humans and the land, water and all they sustain that must be restored.





*Image licensed from Shutterstock.*

Thus, the biodiversity issues, while often portrayed as centred on the rate at which species are becoming extinct, are far more comprehensive and complex. **The scientific questions are probably best addressed through empirical studies focused on specific species and their habitats. The number and complexity of these are breathtaking. To make matters worse, the UN and its various agencies have endeavoured to draw a causal linkage between human-induced climate change, habitat loss, and species health, and then to present the solution to the “biodiversity crisis” as one that entails the complete transformation of the world’s political and economic systems.**



WWF creates a crisis with this colorful graph tying climate change projected warming to species loss: [https://wwf.panda.org/wwf\\_news/?8958966/climate-change-ipcc-life-earth](https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?8958966/climate-change-ipcc-life-earth)

## The Case for Alarm

For many years, the central concern in terms of global biodiversity has been related to the claim by the World Wildlife Federation and more recently by representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that the number of species becoming extinct is very high and is increasing every year. To quote Ahmed Djoghaief, then Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity under UNEP in 2007:

*“Every hour, three species disappear. Every day, up to 150 species are lost. Every year, between 18,000 and 55,000 species become extinct. The cause: human activities. Climate change is one of the major driving forces behind the unprecedented loss of biodiversity.”*

Other experts, Eric Chivan and Aaron Bernstein, writing in 2008<sup>1</sup>, claimed that:

<sup>1</sup> Eric Chivan and Aaron Bernstein, *Sustaining Life – How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity*, Oxford University Press, 2008

*“The consensus of scientists is that the current global rate of species extinctions is on average somewhere between 100 and 1,000 times greater than pre-human levels (the natural background extinction rate).”*

Mark Urban, writing in *Science* in May 2015<sup>2</sup>, wrote that:

*“If we follow our current, business-as-usual trajectory (representative concentration pathway RCP 8.5 (4.3 degrees C. rise), climate change threatens one in six species (16%)”.*

Most influentially, an 1,800-page study<sup>3</sup> published in 2019 by the intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warned that: *“human actions threaten more species with global extinction now than ever before”* and that *“around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss.”*

The conclusions of the IPBES report were widely reported in the media and accepted by governments. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in the United States called it the “current mass extinctions” and the *New Yorker’s* headline read “Climate Change and the New Era of Extinction”. In 2022, Canada along with 195 other countries, adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its Sixth Assessment [Report](#) analyzed the impact of projected climate change under various scenarios on ecosystems and biodiversity. This is a summary of its main findings:

*“Climate change has altered marine, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems all around the world (very high confidence). Effects were experienced earlier and are more widespread with more far-reaching consequences than anticipated (medium confidence). Biological responses, including changes in physiology, growth, abundance, geographic placement and shifting seasonal timing, are often not sufficient to cope with recent climate change (very high confidence). Climate change has caused local species losses, increases in disease (high confidence) and mass mortality events of plants and animals (very high confidence), resulting in the first climate-driven extinctions (medium confidence), ecosystem restructuring, increases in areas burned by wildfire (high confidence) and declines in key ecosystem services (high confidence). Climate driven impacts on ecosystems have caused measurable economic and livelihood losses and altered cultural practices and recreational activities around the world (high confidence) ...*

*At the warm (equatorward and lower) edges of distributions, adaptation limits to human-induced warming have led to widespread local population losses (extirpations) that result in range contractions (very high confidence). Among land plants and animals, local population loss*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.aaa4984>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment>

*was detected in around 50% of studied species and is often attributable to extreme events (high confidence). Such extirpations are most common in tropical habitats (55%) and freshwater systems (74%), but also high in marine (51%) and terrestrial (46%) habitats. Many mountain-top species have suffered population losses along lower elevations, leaving them increasingly restricted to a smaller area and at higher risk of extinction (medium confidence). Global extinctions due to climate change are already being observed, with two extinctions currently attributed to anthropogenic climate change (medium confidence). Climate-induced extinctions, including mass extinctions, are common in the paleo record, underlining the potential of climate change to have catastrophic impacts on species and ecosystems (high confidence)."*

The report also introduces the notion of "hard limits".

*"Beginning at 1.5°C warming, natural adaptation faces hard limits, driving high risks of biodiversity decline, mortality, species extinction and loss of related livelihoods (high confidence). At 1.6°C (median estimate), >10% of species are projected to become endangered, increasing to >20% at 2.1°C, representing severe biodiversity risk (medium confidence). These risks escalate with warming, most rapidly and severely in areas at both extremes of temperature and precipitation (high confidence). With warming of 3°C, >80% of marine species across large parts of the tropical Indian and Pacific Ocean will experience potentially dangerous climate conditions (medium confidence)."*

Such alarming, and remarkably precise, assessments and projections contrast with the generally moderated findings in the scientific portions of the AR6 report.



Dr. Patrick Moore: 12 Fake Invisible Catastrophes and Threats of Doom <https://youtu.be/VuOpzZWD25Y>

## The Counter-View on Species Extinction

Opposition to the "alarmist" case comes from many sources. Some focus on claims of increasing rates of species extinction and others on the alleged linkage between climate changes and ecosystem health.

Dr. Patrick Moore (Ph.D. in ecology) has noted that fewer than 900 extinctions have been documented in the more than 500 years since 1500 AD. About 95 percent of them were on

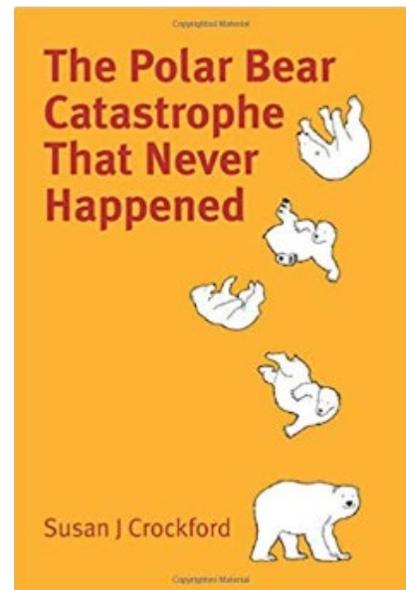
islands.<sup>4</sup> He also stated that there are three primary causes of species extinction by humans: overhunting; clearing of native ecosystems for food and fiber production; and the introduction of exotic predators, especially on islands.

Dr. Moore is especially critical of the IBPES methodology.

*“The IBPES claims there are 8 million species. Yet only 1.8 million species have been identified and named. Thus the IBPES believes there are 6.2 million unidentified and unnamed species. Therefore one million of the unknown species could go extinct overnight and we would not notice it because we would not know they has existed... This is highly unprofessional. Scientists should not, in fact cannot, predict estimates of endangered species or species extinction based on millions of undocumented species.”*

**The conclusions in the IBPES report are at odds with the data compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources (IUCN), which catalogues every known species that has become extinct since the year 1500. There are 529 species included on the IUCN’s “Red List”. A graph summarizing the data shows that almost all the extinctions occurred in the period 1870 to 1970, and the number of extinctions by decade has been in significant decline since 1920. It is thought that this extinction peak coincides with the introduction of non-native species, primarily on islands. In contrast to the claims of the IPBES that we can expect 25,000 to 30,000 extinctions globally per year, the average over the last 40 years is about 2 species annually.**

The alarmists criticize the IUCN’s Red List as “incomplete and biased”<sup>5</sup>. Others instead have accused the IUCN of over-estimating the number of threatened species. For example, the IUCN’s criteria for designating threatened species (the total of Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable species) can be questioned in terms of its subjectivity. The criteria used can give rise to overstating a species condition which would inflate the threat. For example, to classify a species as “threatened”, all one needs is “an observed, estimated, inferred or suspected population size reduction”. The magnitude of the reduction determines whether a species is listed as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered. That criteria is accurate for well-studied species for which quantitative studies have been carried out. However, many ICUN evaluations have no quantitative data available on



Dr. Susan Crockford debunks the polar bear extinction myths in her books and in this popular presentation:  
<https://youtu.be/1k9k21xPH9Y?list=PLZcRTdbkGEnGIZ8tNUJvebM62Oz7uPkoZ>

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Moore, Testimony before US House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife May 22, 2019

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S000632071831557X#:~:text=The%20IUCN%20Red%20List%2C%20a,published%20on%20the%20Red%20List>

densities or abundance from which to determine the threatened status. The population is then just inferred or suspected.<sup>6</sup>

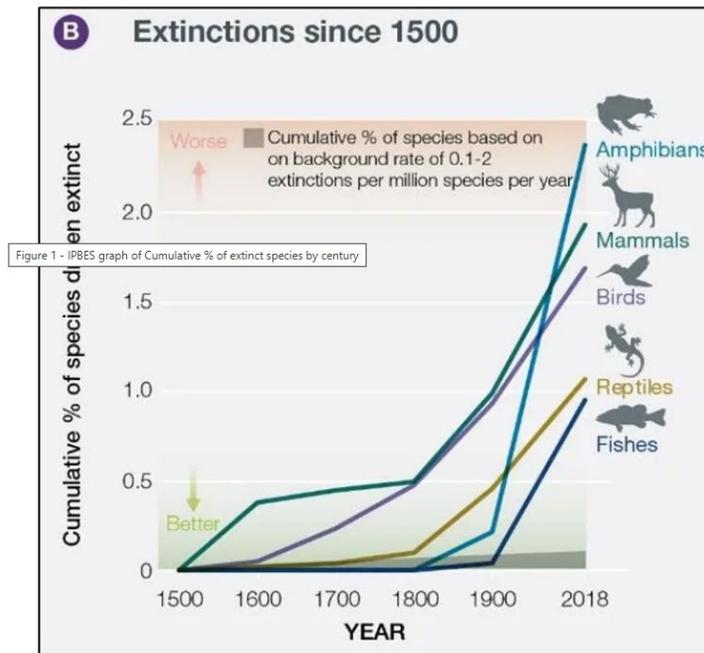


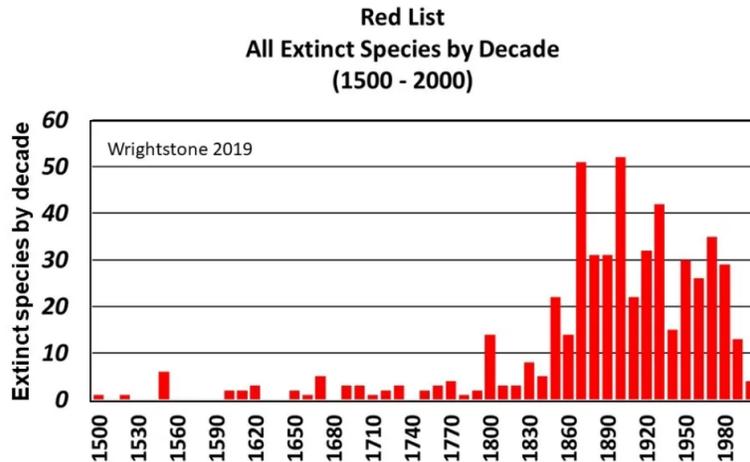
Figure 3 (B) - Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services  
<https://www.climatedepot.com/2019/05/13/geologist-uns-mass-extinction-lie-exposed-life-is-thriving/>

Neil Stork, writing in *Biology and Conservation*, 2010<sup>7</sup>, concluded:

*“So what can we conclude about extinction rates? First, less than 15 of all organisms are recorded to have become extinct in the last few centuries and there are almost no empirical data to support estimates of current extinctions of 100 or even one species a day... The evidence is so overwhelming that extinction threats vary for different groups of organisms and different fauna that it is surprising that there are still some who seek to draw conclusions on global extinction rates for all organisms based on the knowledge of just a few highly threatened groups”.*

<sup>6</sup> <https://judithcurry.com/2019/05/22/hearing-on-the-un-biodiversity-report/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225545103\\_Re-assessing\\_current\\_extinction\\_rates/](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/225545103_Re-assessing_current_extinction_rates/)



International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species  
<https://www.iucnredlist.org/>

Figure 2 – All known extinctions IUCN Red List (1500-2000)

<https://www.climatedepot.com/2019/05/13/geologist-uns-mass-extinction-lie-exposed-life-is-thriving/>

Dr. James Steele was for 25 years director of the San Francisco State University Sierra Nevada Field Campus. In testimony before a US Congressional Committee, he stated the following:

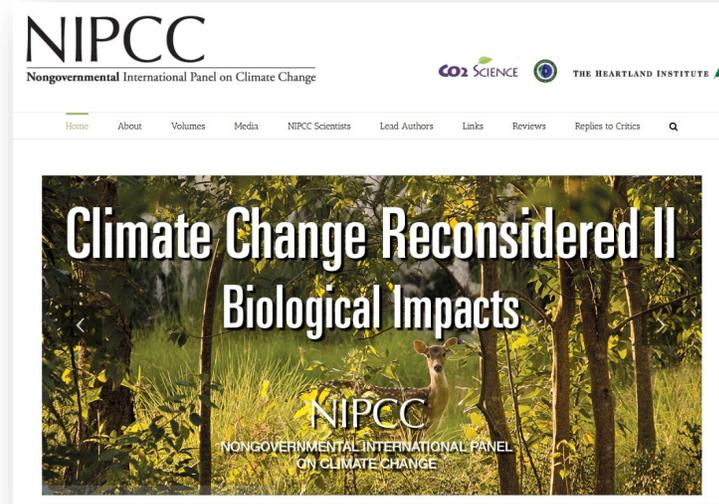
***“I am gravely concerned about the recent Summary for Policymakers by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services where it suggests that more than one million species are now threatened by extinction. Based on my experience, that number is greatly exaggerated. It appears this organization grossly overstated species threats in order to promote their stated agenda that “goals for 2030 and beyond may only be achieved through transformative changes across economic, social, political and technological factors...”***

*Loss of habitat is a key factor that can result in species becoming endangered – and sometimes it is political decisions that can lead to these species threats. For Example, government attempts to promote biofuels based on speculations about climate change have disrupted ecosystems and threatened more species. The European Union subsidized Palm Oil for years, resulting in the loss of tropical forest and threatening species like the Orangutans. Realizing their mistake, those subsidies will be withdrawn. Another example is that subsidies for sugarcane as a biofuel has prevented restoration of tropical forests in Brazil, and corn subsidies in the USA have encouraged corn plantation in the Great Plains, disrupting prairie ecosystems and reducing aquifers... Yet another situation is that subsidies for industrial wind turbines have resulted in increased bird and bat mortalities, in addition to the well documented eco-system disruption.”*

## The Counter View on Climate Risk to Biodiversity

The IPCC’s alarming findings concerning the linkage between climate change and biodiversity in its Fifth and Sixth Assessment reports have generally not been subjected to the same level of

review and critique as its other findings. The Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change (NIPCC) assessed the IPCC's findings on biodiversity in its Fifth Assessment Report<sup>8</sup>.



The following extracts summarize the NIPCC's main observations.

***“The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change’s view of future species extinctions relies on a narrow view of the literature that is highly selective and based almost entirely on model projections as opposed to real-world observations. Numerous shortcomings are inherent in the models used to predict the impact of climate on the health and distributions of animal species. Assumptions and limitations make those models unreliable in projecting the future in this regard...Species losses in the future are more likely to be attributable to the novel, relatively rapid twentieth and twenty-first century anthropogenic processes of habitat loss and transportation-mediated dispersal of pathogens and predators (including man) into previously isolated populations.”***

A group of professors from the University of Queensland in Australia conducted their own assessment of the comparative effects of climate vs. other factors on the rates of species extinction as assessed by the IUBN.<sup>9</sup> Based on their analysis of threat information gathered for 8,688 species, they found that the biggest drivers of biodiversity decline are overexploitation (the harvesting of species from the wild at rates that cannot be compensated for by reproduction or regrowth) and agricultures (the production of food, fodder, fiber and fuel crops; livestock farming; aquaculture, and the cultivation of trees). For sixty-two per cent of the species listed as threatened or near-threatened (5,407 species), the cause is the expansion and intensification of agriculture. Anthropogenic climate change – including increases in storms, flooding, extreme temperatures or drought that exceed background variability, as well as sea-

<sup>8</sup> <https://climatechangereconsidered.org/climate-change-reconsidered-ii-biological-impacts/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/536143a>

level rise – is now affecting 19% (1,688 species). of the species listed as threatened or near-threatened.

Few of the studies that have been published to date provide a breakdown of species at risk by region. Those that provide some statistical data indicate that most of the species at risk globally are located in Africa, Asia and South America.

## The Global Biodiversity Framework

The 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services prepared by IPBES identified five main drivers of global biodiversity loss: land-use and sea-use changes, overexploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species. It also observed that there are several indirect “drivers” or underlying causes of biodiversity loss.

The wording of the Global Assessment Report should make it clear that its authors roamed far beyond the scientific assessment of threats to and remedies for biodiversity loss and ecosystem health.

*“These are underpinned by social values and behaviours that include unsustainable production and consumption, subsidies that are harmful to biodiversity, and economic systems that do not reflect the true values of nature or respect a reciprocal and responsible relationship towards nature. The current structures and systems in place often reflect these indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, making fundamental, structural change – transformative change -essential.”*

**The description of the “drivers” makes it clear that the IPBES objectives are far more concerned with radically changing the current political and economic systems than with reducing species loss. Yet that is the basis for the Global Biodiversity Framework.**

## The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity, otherwise known as the Kunming-Montreal Global Diversity Framework, was agreed to at a conference in Montreal held between December 7 and 19, 2022.

In the Convention, the Parties agreed:

- **To catalyze, enable and galvanize urgent and transformative action by Governments and subnational and local authorities, with the involvement of all of society, to halt and reverse biodiversity loss,** to achieve the outcomes it sets out in its Vision, Mission, Goals and Targets, and thereby contribute to the three objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (environmental, social and economic) and to those of its protocols;

- To pursue the Convention’s vision of living in harmony with nature by 2050;
- In accordance with this vision, to take urgent action to reverse biodiversity loss to put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and planet by conserving and sustainably using biodiversity and **by ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources**, while providing the necessary means of implementation;
- To catalyze implementation of the Framework through mobilization of broad public support at all levels;
- To acknowledge the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; and
- To implement the Framework based on the ecosystem approach

The Framework sets out four goals and establishes 23 targets.

The goals can be summarized as:

- **To bring the areas of high biodiversity importance close to zero by 2030;**
- **To ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and marine and coastal ecosystems are under effective restoration;**
- **To ensure that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas and of marine and coastal areas are effectively conserved and managed; and**
- **To ensure urgent management actions to halt human induced extinction of known threatened species and for the recovery and conservation of species to significantly reduce extinction risk and restore genetic diversity.**

The targets basically involve the massive expansion of land use planning and regulation of economic activities in almost all areas.

**In short, the Convention reads like a set of aspirational goals written by the World Wildlife Federation, not a plausible statement of the goals that can be credibly pursued by either international organizations or governments.** There is no explanation as to why the goals should be pursued as a matter of urgency or why the target dates for 2030 and 2050 have been included, except perhaps to draw as close as possible a linkage to the target dates set by UN climate agreements. The purported “risk” of human-caused species extinction, as uncertain as it is, is used as the basis for an extraordinary extension of intrusive central planning approaches into almost all geographic regions and all sectors of the economy. Its greatest over-reach may be its assertion that there is a human “right” to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (whatever that means). No such right has ever been established by law or treaty.

## Final Comments

One certainly can make a case that there are regions of the world where species are threatened and where sensible actions should be taken to reduce the risk of species loss, especially where this also threatens humans. The nature of those risks, however, should be assessed based upon good science and the measures taken should be assessed with proper consideration for their effects on all of society as well as nature. The claim that climate change is seriously threatening biodiversity prompted alarm about the extinction of polar bears, a false thesis that should offer a caution with respect to other similar claims. Further, the measures being promoted allegedly to mitigate climate change, including use of large areas to grow biofuels and site industrial wind turbines, should take a prominent place among those being considered to enhance the habitats of all species, whether or not threatened by extinction.

**There is an unresolved debate about how many species are threatened, how severely they are threatened, about how much is due to overexploitation and agriculture (i.e. food production) and human-induced climate change and about the validity of current methods for assessing these things. There is a long leap between acknowledging that some species are threatened and accepting the claim that the nature of the threat is so severe that it requires an urgent and massive intrusion of state control over most land and marine areas. In short, no “crisis” has been demonstrated.**

Policies and measures to pursue the goals and targets set out in the UN Convention of Biological Diversity would *entail billions, if not trillions, of dollars in costs*, much of which would be incurred in developing countries that could ill afford them. It seems highly likely that future meetings of UN bodies to discuss collective actions to pursue these goals and targets will involve the same controversies that have arisen in the context of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, including demands that the costs of remediation everywhere be borne primarily by the OECD countries with more developed economies, including Canada. With respect to biodiversity, like climate, costs are the last things proponents want to talk about.



#### About the Author

Robert Lyman is an economist with 27 years' experience as an analyst, policy advisor and manager in the Canadian federal government, primarily in the areas of energy, transportation, and environmental policy. He was also a diplomat for 10 years. Subsequently he has worked as a private consultant conducting policy research and analysis on energy and transportation issues as a principal for Entrans Policy Research Group. He is a frequent contributor of articles and reports for Friends of Science, a Calgary-based independent organization concerned about climate change-related issues. He resides in Ottawa, Canada. [Full bio.](#)

#### About Friends of Science Society

Friends of Science Society is an independent group of earth, atmospheric and solar scientists, engineers, and citizens that is celebrating its 22nd year of offering climate science insights. After a thorough review of a broad spectrum of literature on climate change, Friends of Science Society has concluded that the sun is the main driver of climate change, not carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

#### Friends of Science Society

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