

UN: World's natural assets vital to policymaking

October 20 2010, By MALCOLM FOSTER , Associated Press Writer



Some delegates to the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, or COP10, huddle during lunch break on its opening day in Nagoya, Japan, Monday, Oct. 18, 2010. Delegates from more than 190 nations kicked off the U.N. conference Monday aimed at ensuring the survival of diverse species and ecosystems threatened by pollution, exploitation and habitat encroachment. (AP Photo/Kyodo News, Kazushige Fujikake)

(AP) -- Governments and businesses around the world need to recognize the immense economic value of preserving species and ecosystems and incorporate that into their decision-making, a U.N. report said Wednesday.

The study released at a conference of the U.N. Convention on Biodiversity held in Nagoya, Japan, attempts to show the economic implications of failing to stop the alarming loss of species and

ecosystems due to pollution, overexploitation or [habitat destruction](#).

The emphasis on traditional economic measures such as manufacturing, mining and [energy generation](#) needs to change, the U.N. Environment Program argues in the report, the product of two years of research by thousands of experts.

The failure of policymakers and corporations to take into account the natural capital of "[ecosystem services](#)" - such as the role forests play in purifying water or insects in pollinating crops - is contributing to their degradation and putting future generations at risk, it said. The poor, who depend heavily on nature for food and shelter, are particularly vulnerable.

"The time for ignoring biodiversity and persisting with conventional thinking regarding wealth creation and development is over," Pavan Sukhdev, the study leader, said in a statement.

As an example, overexploitation of global fisheries leads to an annual loss of \$50 billion every year compared to a more sustainable fishing scenario, the report said. Insect pollinators provided an economic value of 153 billion euros (\$211 billion) in 2005, it found.

The report, called The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, didn't provide an overall estimate of annual global costs from biodiversity loss because not enough data is available from the many different kinds of ecosystems, said Joshua Bishop, chief economist at the International Union for Conservation of Nature who was involved in the study.

Bishop said the process of quantifying biodiversity losses is far more complicated than the British government's Stern Review of climate economics, which estimated the cost of reducing greenhouse gases.

The two-week U.N. conference aims to come up with 20 targets for 2020 to stop or slow this biodiversity loss. Scientists say human activities are driving species extinct at a rate 100 to 1,000 times the historical average and threatening ecosystems.

Environmental groups hope the report will convince government ministers gathering next week to take steps to counter these trends.

"This is building the pressure on the ministers," said Tove Ryding, policy adviser on [biodiversity](#) for Greenpeace. "We're hoping they see this as a strong call for action."

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