

Researcher says now is the time to prioritize endangered species

March 14 2016

Human impact on Earth is becoming indelible and as a result humans, like no other species, have an obligation to take care of the planet and all of those who inhabit it. One case in point is the human effort to save endangered species.

Currently, resources allocated to recover endangered [species](#) are insufficient to save all listed species, and with a scarcity of [funds](#) what is needed to be effective is a more analytical approach that can bring clarity and openness to resource allocation, argues Leah Gerber, an Arizona State University [conservation biologist](#).

In the current issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Gerber outlines how a return on investment model could be applied to the allocation of funds toward [endangered species](#) helping to save a greater number of species. By doing this, those in charge of saving species will allocate resources in a less arbitrary way.

Gerber reports that 1,125 species are currently protected under the Endangered Species Act. Required funding of \$1.21 billion per year should be allocated to recover all of the listed species, but less than 25 percent is actually allocated to recovery.

"The magnitude of issues influencing [global biodiversity](#) dwarfs the resources available to mitigate impacts and sustain biodiversity," she states in her article, "Conservation triage or injurious neglect in endangered species recovery."

"Thus we are faced with making hard choices and striving for efficient conservation resource allocation. What we need is a more objective and deliberate process to recover endangered species," Gerber said.

To address the issue, Gerber looked at how the allocated funds could be better utilized. Her analysis revealed that redistribution of recovery funds from the top 50 overfunded species to those that are severely underfunded would eliminate funding deficits for more than 180 plant and [animal species](#), potentially improving recovery success.

Gerber notes that the U.S. Endangered Species Act is 40 years old and while it has been successful in preventing extinction, recovering species to the point of them being de-listed has proven far more difficult.

Gerber said currently funds are allocated from Federal to regional levels and regions decide on how to prioritize. But the system is ad hoc and "there is no general strategy. Agency personal responsible for recovery plans are overworked and underfunded."

"A lot of thought goes into how funds are allocated for endangered species, but when resources are scarce what is needed is more clarity on the process," Gerber said. "A return on investment approach is one way to allocate limited funds to protecting biodiversity."

The time to act is now, said Gerber, a professor in ASU's School of Life Sciences and the director of the Center for Biodiversity Outcomes.

"Rates of extinction are higher than ever before," she said. "The cause is human activity. My analysis shows that current funding is insufficient to curb unprecedented rates of extinction. Humans rely on nature in many known and unknown ways. When we lose species, we lose these benefits - and the beauty of biodiversity itself."

More information: Conservation triage or injurious neglect in endangered species recovery, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1525085113

Provided by Arizona State University

Citation: Researcher says now is the time to prioritize endangered species (2016, March 14)
retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-03-prioritize-endangered-species.html>

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