

Land degradation pushing planet towards sixth mass extinction

March 30 2018, by Brett Israel



Land degradation, caused by human activities like natural resource extraction, is a global threat to humans and animals. Credit: IPBES

More than 100 experts from 45 countries have published a three-year study of the Earth's land degradation, calling the problem "critical" and

saying that worsening land conditions undermine the well-being of 3.2 billion people.

The report was published by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) on March 26. Providing the best-available evidence for the dangers of land degradation for policymakers, the report draws on more than 3,000 scientific, government, indigenous and local knowledge sources.

Rapid expansion and unsustainable management of croplands and grazing lands is the most extensive cause of land degradation, creating significant loss of biodiversity and [ecosystem services](#), which include food security, water purification, energy sources and other contributions essential to people, the report says. The problem is so critical that a co-chair of the report said, "The degradation of the Earth's [land surface](#) through human activities is pushing the planet towards a sixth mass species extinction."

Land degradation is also an underappreciated factor contributing to global conflict and migration, among other problems, according to study co-author Matthew Potts, UC Berkeley associate professor in forest economics in the College of Natural Resources.

"Land degradation presents unique and persistence challenges to humanity," Potts said. "This assessment shows that we are at a crossroads and must take urgent action to combat [land degradation](#) and restore [degraded land](#) if we want to create a happy and healthy planet for all humanity."

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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