

COP16: From forests to oceans, nature in a dire state

By Jake Spring

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Item 1 of 2 Najin (front) and her daughter Patu, the last two northern white rhino females, graze in their enclosure at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia National Park, Kenya March 20, 2018. REUTERS/Baz Ratner/File Photo

[1/2]Najin (front) and her daughter Patu, the last two northern white rhino females, graze in their enclosure at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia National Park, Kenya March 20, 2018. REUTERS/Baz Ratner/File Photo

Oct 18 (Reuters) - Global destruction of nature has reached unprecedented extremes.

As the United Nations two-week COP16 biodiversity summit kicks off on Monday in Cali, Colombia, here is what you need to know about nature's rapid decline - and its importance to the global economy.

ANIMALS AND PLANTS

Plants and animals play significant parts in keeping nature humming, from cycling nutrients throughout an ecosystem to aerating soils and engineering rivers. Without plants and animals, the world would not be habitable for humans.

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However, more than a quarter of the world's known species, or a total of about 45,300 species, are now threatened with extinction, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Animals on the verge of extinction include Mexico's vaquita porpoise, northern white rhinoceros in Africa, and the red wolf in the United States.

Monitored populations of wild animals had shrunk by 73% globally by 2020 compared with 1970 figures, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).



[2/2] A mother and calf vaquita, a critically endangered small tropical porpoise native to Mexico's Gulf of California, surface in the waters off San Felipe, Mexico in this handout picture taken in 2008. Paula Olson/NOAA Fisheries/Handout via REUTERS

FORESTS

Because forests are home to the most plant and animal species in any ecosystem, including, scientists consider deforestation levels to be a good proxy for nature destruction.

In 2021, more than 100 countries pledged to halt deforestation and woodland degradation by 2030. As of 2023, the amount of land deforested was 45% higher than where it should be in order to meet the 2030 goal, according to the [Forest Declaration Assessment](#), an annual analysis released by a coalition of research and civil society organisations.

While the rate of deforestation has declined in Brazil's Amazon, it has gone up in Bolivia, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the analysis shows.

Scientists also worry about woodland degradation, with fires, logging and other destructive forces damaging forests but not completely destroying them. The assessment showed that the goal of ending degradation is 20% off track.

FISHING & OCEANS

Fishing is the leading cause of marine wildlife destruction, according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the top global science authority on nature.

More than 40 countries, with a combined population of 3.2 billion people, rely on seafood for at least 20% of their nutritional protein, opens new tab, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Roughly 38% of fish stocks are being overfished, compared with about 10% in the mid-1970s, according to the FAO. WWF says overfishing is also destabilizing coral reef ecosystems, which provide shelter, food and nursing grounds to a quarter of the world's marine life.

This year has seen the world's fourth mass bleaching of corals, with more than half of the reef areas globally bleaching from high sea temperatures.

FARMING

Agriculture drives some 90% of tropical deforestation, according to WWF, as jungles make way to soy farms, cattle ranches, palm oil plantations and other mass production of commodities.

Governments pay at least \$635 billion annually in subsidies for agriculture, that are harmful to the environment, and likely several trillion dollars more in indirect subsidies, according to the World Bank.

Countries agreed at COP15 in 2022 to identify harmful subsidies by 2025 and to slash them by at least \$500 million a year starting in 2030.

Environmentalists have also urged banks to stop offering credit to commodities sectors linked to deforestation. Between January 2023 and June 2024, banks offered a total of about \$77 billion in credit to these firms, according to the Forest & Finance Coalition of research and advocacy groups.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Whether it is insects pollinating crops, plants filtering fresh water supplies, or forests providing timber for construction, nature and its critters deliver a wealth of materials and services to the global economy for free.

About \$44 trillion of the world's annual economic output - or roughly half the total - relies on these natural resources and services, according to the World Economic Forum. That includes \$2.1 trillion in the United States, \$2.4 trillion in the European Union and \$2.7 trillion in China.

The World Bank estimates that the collapse of certain ecosystem services, such as fisheries or native forests, could cost the world economy \$2.7 trillion annually by 2030, about 2.3% of global output. The U.N. Environmental Programme estimates spending on nature needs to increase to \$542 billion annually by 2030, up from \$200 billion as of 2022, to halt nature loss and meet climate goals.