



**A Letter from Scientists to the  
United States Congress  
Urging Action to Address the  
Threats of Global Warming  
to Wildlife and Ecosystems**

**FEBRUARY 2008**

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*“We write to you to convey our sense of urgency. Global warming is already causing serious damage and disruptions to wildlife and ecosystems, and reliable projections call for significant additional damage and disruptions. To fulfill the nation’s longstanding commitment to conserving abundant wildlife and healthy ecosystems for future generations, Congress must craft legislation that greatly reduces greenhouse gas pollution and generates substantial dedicated funding to protect and restore wildlife and ecosystems harmed by global warming.”*

– 612 Scientific Experts Concerned About Global Warming and Its Effect on Wildlife and Natural Resources, including

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# A Letter from More Than 600 Scientists to the United States Congress Requesting Adequate Funding to Address the Threats to Wildlife Posed by Global Warming

Dear Members of Congress,

The undersigned signatories are leading researchers and practitioners from the various disciplines of biological science. We understand that Congress is currently considering a number of proposals to reduce U.S. emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) and thereby confront global warming. We applaud this effort. Global warming represents, by far, the greatest threat ever posed to the planet's living resources, which provide the foundation for our economy and our quality of life. We write to you to convey our sense of urgency. Global warming is already causing serious damage and disruptions to wildlife and ecosystems, and reliable projections call for significant additional damage and disruptions. To fulfill the nation's longstanding commitment to conserving abundant wildlife and healthy ecosystems for future generations, Congress must craft legislation that greatly reduces GHG pollution and generates substantial dedicated funding to protect and restore wildlife and ecosystems harmed by global warming.

The following examples of damage and disruptions to wildlife and ecosystems caused by GHG pollution and global warming are among the most noteworthy:

- Melting polar ice caps
- Thawing permafrost
- Acidification of the oceans
- Sea level rise
- Intensified storms
- Warming of rivers, streams, lakes and estuaries
- Declining snowpack on mountains and earlier runoff
- Drought
- Catastrophic fires
- Pest infestations
- Spreading pathogens and invasive species
- Changes in phenology (seasonal events) and distributions of wildlife populations, separating predators from prey and otherwise disrupting ecological communities.

Each of these disturbances to ecosystems, by itself, poses a serious threat of extinction to numerous plant and animal species. Yet none happens in isolation from the other forces that also imperil species, such as habitat destruction and fragmentation, the spread of invasive species and unsustainable harvest of resources for human consumption. Global warming combines with each of these non-climatic factors to place enormous stress on the planet's biological wealth.

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If provided with sufficient funding, managers of wildlife, land and water have a number of tools at their disposal to ameliorate threats to ecosystems and to avert mass extinctions. Feasible actions include:

- *Maintaining healthy, connected, genetically diverse populations.* Small isolated populations are more prone to local extirpations than larger, more widespread populations. Although managers already encourage healthy populations, global warming increases the importance of this goal and will likely require adjustments in population targets and in the design of habitat corridors.
- *Reducing non-climate stressors on ecosystems.* Reducing other human-induced stressors such as toxic pollution and habitat loss will minimize negative synergistic impacts with global warming and increase the resiliency of habitats and species to the effects of climate change and variability.
- *Preventing and controlling invasive species.* Rapidly changing climates and habitats may increase opportunities for invasive species to spread. Extensive monitoring and control will be necessary to limit the negative impacts of invasive species.
- *Reducing the risk of catastrophic fires.* Global warming could lead to more frequent fires and/or a greater probability of catastrophic fires. Managers can use prescribed fires and other techniques to reduce fuel load and the potential for catastrophic fires.
- *Protecting coastal wetlands and accommodating sea level rise.* Managers can defend against the negative impacts associated with sea level rise through conservation easements and the acquisition of inland buffer zones to provide an opportunity for wildlife to migrate inland.
- *Adjusting yield and harvest models.* As fish and wildlife populations respond both directly and indirectly to climate through changes in habitats, their productivity and sustainability may increase or decrease. Managers may need to adapt yield and harvest regulations both in anticipation and response to these changes.
- *Considering global warming models as well as historical data when making projections.* Managers must be aware that historical climate, habitat and wildlife conditions are not indicative of future conditions. Projections and planning should take into account expected changes in climate.
- *Employing monitoring and adaptive management.* Due to uncertainty concerning global warming, wildlife managers must anticipate the impacts to wildlife and use monitoring data to quickly adjust management techniques and strategies. Traditional, long-practiced methods and strategies will not be as effective as conditions change.
- *Identifying new opportunities.* Managers must be ready to anticipate and take advantage of new opportunities. For example, if climatic conditions leave existing agricultural areas unusable for agriculture, they could become important wildlife conservation areas with the appropriate agency and landowner collaboration.

Each of these essential steps comes with a price tag. Inevitably, managers of the nation's wildlife, land and water resources will need billions of dollars annually to develop and implement science-based strategies for conserving wildlife and ecosystems threatened by global warming. To make this conservation work feasible, Congress should ensure that substantial revenues generated by any climate change legislation be dedicated to conserving the wildlife and ecosystems that would otherwise be lost or badly degraded by global warming.

We thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter.

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