When it comes to global action, the climate crisis has the Paris Agreement. But what does the extinction crisis have?

Without a worldwide effort to stem biodiversity loss, we’re on track to lose 1 million species in the coming decades. We risk losing the species we depend on for food, water, and climate and disease control. These losses could mean the world may not be able to support life as we know it.

It’s an emergency on a scale we’ve never faced before. That’s why, over the past few years, the Center and many others have been attending global meetings to press for a comprehensive plan to save life on Earth.

But we’re fast approaching a make-or-break moment.

The crucial document here is artlessly named the “Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.” It’s an agreement that will guide how every country in the world — except the United States and the Vatican, which aren’t parties to the underlying treaty — will conserve global biodiversity.

Despite four rounds of meetings, including two this year, the world is nowhere near reaching an agreement, let alone one that will match the magnitude of the extinction crisis. Still, the Framework is on track to be adopted this winter at the Convention on Biological Diversity’s CoP15.

One troubling aspect of the Framework is that it may not include an agreement to immediately stop human-caused wildlife extinctions — it may simply call for slowing the rate or risk of extinctions. Here at the Center, we can’t accept that. How can global leaders sign any agreement that knowingly allows a bear, turtle or bird to be driven extinct?

What we need is a global commitment to stop human-caused extinctions and stop them now. It’s not good enough to curb extinctions a decade from now or sometime midcentury; every day we delay action, our planet grows lonelier.

So between now and the end of negotiations, the entire Framework needs to shift. Globally we have to do everything we can to avoid losing another species — and then, over the next decade, build a world that supports the biodiversity we have left.

But there’s only one way to get there: by making #StopExtinction a public rallying cry. Keep an eye out for ways you can take action on this issue. Without pressure, governments won’t be ambitious enough to battle extinction. And we need that ambition. Life on Earth is depending on it.
The consequences of the climate emergency are all around us. This year we’ve seen extreme weather, shrinking Arctic sea ice, collapsing ecosystems, and species pushed closer to extinction. Meanwhile we know that ever-worsening heat waves, wildfires, drought and storms are causing incalculable suffering for both wildlife and humans, especially for Black people, Indigenous people, and Asian and other communities of color.

The Center welcomed President Biden to office last year with our Climate President Action Plan and leads a coalition of more than 1,200 climate justice, frontline, faith, progressive and environmental organizations called People vs. Fossil Fuels. We’re working to ensure Biden uses his full executive authorities, both emergency and non-emergency, to speed the transition off fossil fuels and launch a just energy transition. We’re calling on him to:

- Reject federal permits for new fossil fuel projects and exports.
- End fossil fuel production on public lands and waters.
- Declare a climate emergency to shift off fossil fuels and boost renewables.

We celebrated his invocation of the Defense Production Act in June to spur solar energy and increase heat pump and insulation manufacturing — a plan that closely tracked an important piece of energy policy that relies only on spurring demand for renewables while failing to ensure reduced supply of fossil fuels. The renewable energy incentives also rely on a trickle-down economy that has never worked in favor of low-income communities.

The result is that the “climate” bill actually expands fossil fuel leasing on public lands and waters in exchange for even a single renewable energy project on federal lands. Over the next 10 years, this provision translates to more than 600 million acres of offshore leasing — four times the size of the entire Gulf of Mexico’s outer continental shelf — locking in carbon pollution for decades and sacrificing marine creatures and frontline communities.

History has shown the limitations of one-sided energy policy that relies only on spurring demand for renewables while failing to ensure reduced supply of fossil fuels. The renewable energy incentives also rely on a trickle-down economy that has never worked in favor of low-income communities.

We did have a crucial victory at the end of September when, after intense pressure from activists and allies, Manchin withdrew a provision from the government spending bill that would have greenlit more fossil fuel projects and been a disaster for frontline communities and the environment.

We’ll keep fighting these disastrous policies and will remain relentless in our work to stop each harmful project in its tracks. Stay tuned for how you can help.

Jean Su • Director, Senior Attorney  
Energy Justice Program

Everywhere I go, in summertime, I’m on the lookout for monarch butterflies. During the workday, in between calls, I walk around my yard in Kentucky checking the milkweeds and flowers for monarchs and other insects. This summer I saw lots of milkweeds — the monarch caterpillars’ only host plant — across the eastern United States, but only a few dozen monarchs.

In the mid-1990s nearly 1 billion migratory monarchs graced the skies. But last winter scientists reported that the overwintering population in the mountains of Mexico was less than half the size needed for this beloved orange-and-black pollinator to be out of the danger zone for migratory collapse.

It’s hard to believe that a widespread insect like the monarch, known from backyards and classrooms across the country, is now below its “quasi-extinction threshold,” the minimum population size needed for its future to be secure.

In summer 2014 the Center and our allies petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect monarchs as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. In 2020 the agency put them on the candidate waiting list for protection; following a lawsuit, it agreed to issue a final decision on their protection in 2024, a decade after our petition. Meanwhile the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the world’s most comprehensive scientific body on extinction risk, classified the monarch as endangered earlier this year. This designation does not provide the species with any protection, but it magnifies the scientific consensus that monarchs desperately need our help.

Monarchs face multiple threats, including pesticides, climate change, and lack of connected healthy habitats to help them migrate successfully. They’re the face of the insect extinction crisis, representing the plight of bees and other butterflies struggling across the globe. Everyone can help monarchs by planting native milkweeds and a variety of flowers so that they have nectar sources available from spring through fall. Not using pesticides and choosing organic foods also helps, as does getting involved in local fights against sprawl and in national battles to address the climate emergency.

Jean Su • Director, Senior Attorney  
Energy Justice Program

Every single time I see a monarch, my heart flutters. I wish it well on its long journey. Then I go back to my desk to keep fighting for the protection of monarchs and all the other plants and animals I love.

Tierra Curry • Senior Scientist  
Director, Saving Life on Earth Campaign

Photo above: Monarch butterfly by Esperanza Doronila, monarch caterpillar by Will Brown
A Landmark Win in Louisiana’s ‘Cancer Alley’

Years of collaboration, tenacious community organizing, and legal work have paid off in Louisiana’s St. James Parish, where a global polluter — and serial human-rights offender — has hopefully been sent packing.

In mid-September, Louisiana’s 19th Judicial District Court reversed a state agency decision to issue air permits needed by Formosa Plastics to build a sprawling petrochemical complex in a neighborhood that has already suffered years of environmental injustice.

If allowed to stand, the permits would have let Formosa Plastics emit more than 800 tons of toxic pollution into the air every year, perpetuating chronic environmental racism and hurting St. James’ predominantly Black residents — who already get sick at high rates in a region known as “Cancer Alley.”

The court decision, the result of a lawsuit filed by Formosa Plastics emit more than 800 tons of toxic pollution into the air every year, perpetuating chronic environmental racism and hurting St. James’ predominantly Black residents — who already get sick at high rates in a region known as “Cancer Alley.”

The court decision, the result of a lawsuit filed by Earthjustice on our behalf, throws out the air permits needed by Formosa Plastics to issue air permits needed by Formosa Plastics to build a sprawling petrochemical complex in a neighborhood that has already suffered years of environmental injustice.

The center for this fight for years. It’s been an honor working alongside these community members and leaders, and with local and national environmental organizations, every step of the way. Here’s hoping this toxic project is finally gone for good.

The judge’s decision sends a message to polluters like Formosa that communities of color have a right to clean air, and we must not be sacrifice zones.”

“This decision is the nail in the coffin for Formosa Plastics. They won’t build in St. James Parish, and we will make sure that they won’t build this monster anywhere,” said Anne Rolfs, director of the Louisiana Bucket Brigade. “Thank God for the people of St. James who stood up and provided real leadership, for the judge who made this decision, and for the incredible team of lawyers.”

Formosa Plastics’ massive proposed petrochemical complex would include 10 chemical manufacturing plants and numerous support facilities spanning 2,400 acres, located just one mile from an elementary school in St. James Parish. It would have vastly increased the levels of cancer-causing pollutants harming residents from existing industrial plants.

Petrochemical production is the fastest-growing use of fossil fuels — mostly to make plastic, much of it single-use. Plastic pollution is already choking oceans and wildlife, and could outweigh fish by 2050.

The Center has been involved in this fight for years. It’s been an honor working alongside these community members and leaders, and with local and national environmental organizations, every step of the way. Here’s hoping this toxic project is finally gone for good.

“Stopping Formosa Plastics has been a fight for our lives, and today David has toppled Goliath,” said Sharon Lavigne, founder and president of RISE St. James, the day the court ruling came out. “The

On Nov. 15, 2022, the world population will reach 8 billion people. A billion people have been added to the planet over the past 11 years. During that same timeframe, we’ve seen unprecedented climate-change-related storms, staggering extinctions, historic droughts depleting once-thriving water sources, the loss of irreplaceable ecosystems, and animals and plants pushed to the brink.

Although our environmental crises can’t be blamed on population growth alone, every person on the planet needs food, water, fuel and a place to call home. With each additional billion, the stress on the environment increases, amplifying the harms caused by habitat loss, pollution, water use and the climate emergency.

In 2009 the Center recognized that our work to save wildlife and wild places couldn’t succeed if growth continued unabated. Since then we’ve given away more than a million Endangered Species Condoms, spoken at dozens of conferences across the country, and had our population work featured in major media outlets around the world. Our message has always been the same: Population growth can’t be ignored. By advancing reproductive rights, education and equity, we can create a better future for people and wildlife alike.

Thirteen years later, on the cusp of 8 billion, population advocacy is still considered taboo in many circles, and reproductive rights are being rolled back at a deadly rate. Yet we’ve also found new opportunities: Nearly 3 out of 4 Americans believe that human population is growing too fast and driving other species to extinction. An increasing number of people agree that population growth is making climate change worse, and that climate concerns are becoming a key factor in family planning.

With a renewed public understanding of the connections between population and extinction, and between reproductive justice and environmental justice, we’ve been able to push the boundaries of the environmental movement. Our recent analysis of climate plans across the country — which found nearly all of them fail to address gender issues — is sparking conversations in U.S. cities about how to account for gender and health as a key part of climate action. Our report on how toxic pollution, inequality, capitalism and health are intertwined is being used to train nurses to better understand environmental and reproductive health.

When the United Nations announced the date that we’d reach 8 billion, it said we shouldn’t worry about population, that a world packed with people represented “infinite possibilities” — even though we only have one finite planet. But by continuing to push for population solutions grounded in human rights, health, equity and justice to be part of environmental action, we can create a future where people and wildlife thrive.

Julie Teel Simmonds • Senior Attorney
Oceans Program

Stephanie Feldstein • Director
Population and Sustainability

Photo above: Sharon Lavigne on Formosa site by Center for Biological Diversity

Photo above by Feri Tasos

Crowded Planet:
On the Cusp of 8 Billion People

On the Cusp of 8 Billion People

On the Cusp of 8 Billion People

On the Cusp of 8 Billion People
And we know how to do that.

Getting fishing line out of right whale habitat — whether through seasonal closures or requiring the use of ropeless or “pop-up” fishing gear — will help save whales from getting tangled up and killed. And setting speed limits in the ocean will help prevent them from getting run over and killed by ships. While some of these protections are already in place, they’re not nearly as extensive as they need to be because of industry opposition.

That’s why some recently issued court decisions and proposals are such good news for these amazing creatures.

First, a federal court ruled in our favor in a long-running lawsuit we brought with allies challenging NOAA Fisheries’ failure to protect North Atlantic right whales from deadly entanglements in lobster gear. The decision means the agency must issue new regulations to better protect right whales from this existential threat.

Second, in response to a petition and lawsuit we filed with allies, NOAA Fisheries proposed a rule to create more seasonal speed zones in right whale habitat and take other steps to protect them from fast-moving vessels. The agency hopes to finalize the rule by the end of the year.

Third, in response to another petition we filed, the agency is currently considering whether to implement a rule to protect more waters off the Alaska coast as North Pacific right whale critical habitat.

We’ll keep fighting to help make sure that these new protections go into place and that right whales in both the Atlantic and the Pacific receive the protections they desperately need. And with any luck, one day I’ll get to see a right whale in the Pacific Ocean, too.

I’ll never forget the first time I saw a right whale. It was several years ago on a whale-watching trip off the coast of Massachusetts. I happened to walk to the back of the boat just in time to see a right whale raise its callosity-laden head out of the water before disappearing again below the surface.

These callosities — raised patches of roughened skin — are found only on right whales and, like human fingerprints, are so distinctive scientists can use them to identify individual whales.

Sadly the number of individual North Atlantic right whales is declining dramatically. These whales, along with their counterparts in the Pacific, are among the most endangered mammals on Earth. So getting to see one felt like a gift.

The story goes that these whales got their name from whalers, who dubbed the species the “right” whale to hunt because they were often found close to shore, swam relatively slowly, and were so blubber-rich that a healthy whale would usually float after it was killed.

Numerous laws, including the Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act — which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year — have protected right whales from hunting for decades. But people are still killing them — just not deliberately.

Entanglements in commercial fishing gear and collisions with vessels are now the primary threats to these critically endangered whales. Entanglements and ship strikes can kill these animals outright, cause injuries and infections, or prevent them from reproducing. Losing any more of them to such a horrible fate could have a devastating impact. Scientists estimate that there are fewer than 340 North Atlantic right whales left and fewer than 500 North Pacific right whales, with only about 30 whales in the eastern population found off Alaska.

Although the current situation is grim, there’s reason for hope. Right whales are resilient. They bounced back from the brink of extinction before, and they can do so again. We just need to give them a chance.
The Center is relentless in our pursuit to save wildlife and wild places. A few recent highlights:

In August we launched a lawsuit to force the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create a national wolf recovery plan — a roadmap for restoring wolves wherever there’s suitable habitat in the contiguous United States. We first petitioned for this plan in 2010, but the Service denied it, so we’re challenging that decision in court.

Meanwhile we sued the same agency to force it to protect critical habitat for 49 endangered Hawaiian Islands species. The Service listed the species as endangered in September 2016. But nearly six years later, it has failed to designate critical habitat, as required by the Endangered Species Act. That unlawful delay puts these endangered plants and animals at greater risk of going extinct.

Forty-eight of these listed species, like the Nalo Meli Maoli — also called the Hawaiian yellow-faced bee — are found nowhere else in the world outside of Hawai‘i. The forty-eight of these listed species, like the Nalo Meli Maoli — also called the Hawaiian yellow-faced bee — are found nowhere else in the world outside of Hawai‘i.

In coastal North Carolina, we celebrated an important step forward for a highly imperiled snail called the magnificent ramshorn. It has needed protection since at least 1984. Finally, after a petition and lawsuit from the Center, the government has finally proposed it for protection.

There are only a few hundred yellow-spotted woodland salamanders left — and most are caught in the crosshairs of the coal industry. The Center and our partners in Appalachia have petitioned to get them protected under the Endangered Species Act.

And make sure you check out our latest creative project, the United States of Extinction. It’s an interactive map highlighting extinct species from all 50 states. Find it at www.extinctionmap.org.

HIGHLIGHTS: THE FIGHT TO SAVE WHAT’S WILD

THERE are plenty of ways to measure the success of an organization like the Center, but one of the most important is simply asking this question: Do endangered animals and plants have a better shot at long-term survival because of us?

We recently crunched the numbers on more than three decades of tireless work and found that we’ve secured protection for 742 species and a half a billion acres of habitat. That includes polar bears, jaguars, corals, freshwater fishes, sea turtles, birds, mussels, crayfish, butterflies — the list goes on.

It’s an extraordinary record but by no means complete. The world’s wildlife extinction crisis, which threatens to rob us of a million species in the coming decades, is unrelenting. And so are we.

Already this year we’ve taken action to secure new or expanded protections for hammerhead sharks; bleached sandhill skipper butterflies in Nevada; and three generations of plywood corals, freshwater fishes, sea turtles, birds, mussels, crayfish, butterflies — the list goes on.

We’re proud of our role in protecting half a billion acres of endangered species habitat. That’s more than all the land in the hands of the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service put together.

Every acre that’s saved — and every whale, bird, wolf and grizzly that’s helped — puts us a step closer to saving life on Earth. That’s why we’re here, and none of it happens without you.

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Results Matter

From the Director

Kieran Suckling

Endangered Earth is published three times yearly in January, July and October. To become a member or give a gift membership, contact us at (866) 357-3349 or by visiting the Center’s web site at www.BiologicalDiversity.org. Contributions are tax deductible. Our tax ID is 37-2948866.

To sign up to receive our e-newsletter, please visit our web site at www.BiologicalDiversity.org.
The Center for Biological Diversity’s decades-long history is unmatched: We’ve secured protections for more than 740 species and more than half a billion acres of wildlife habitat. Help us continue this extraordinary legacy by joining the Owls Club.

By leaving a legacy gift through a bequest, or making the Center a beneficiary of your retirement plan or other estate plan, you’ll be supporting the fight to save endangered wildlife for generations to come. To learn more about your legacy giving options, please call (646) 770-7206 or email owlsclub@biologicaldiversity.org.

BiologicalDiversity.org/OwlsClub