

A vibrant underwater photograph featuring two large sea turtles, likely Hawksbills, swimming over a diverse coral reef. The larger turtle is in the upper half of the frame, its head tilted upwards and its front flippers extended. The smaller turtle is positioned below it, swimming towards the right. The reef is composed of various coral species, and the water is a clear, bright blue. Several small, dark-colored fish are visible swimming around the turtles.

ENDANGERED EARTH

CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY • FALL 2022

IT'S TIME FOR A GLOBAL WAKEUP CALL ON THE EXTINCTION CRISIS

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.



**Tanya Sanerib • Senior Attorney
Legal Director, International Program**

Photo on right: White rhinoceros by Geran De Klerk





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 Earthjustice on our behalf, throws out the air permits and sends this disastrous project’s state approvals back to the drawing board. It’s a relief to us all — especially the amazing local people I’ve met during this campaign who have fought tirelessly, unapologetically and gracefully for years.

“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

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 Rolfes, 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.



**Julie Teel Simmonds • Senior Attorney
Oceans Program**

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



CROWDED PLANET: ON THE CUSP OF 8 BILLION PEOPLE

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.



**Stephanie Feldstein • Director
Population and Sustainability**

Photo above by Feri Tasos

THE RIGHT MOVES FOR RIGHT WHALES

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.

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.

Photo: North Pacific right whale by Brenda Roan, NOAA

**Kristen Monsell • Senior Attorney
Litigation Director, Oceans program.**





HIGHLIGHTS: THE FIGHT TO SAVE WHAT'S WILD

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 the Endangered Species Act requires. 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 'Akē'akē, also known as the band-rumped storm-petrel, is a distinct population segment found solely within the Hawaiian Islands. This isolated and genetically unique population is one of Hawai'i's rarest, most elusive seabird species.

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.

Photo above: Hawaiian yellow-faced bee by Sheldon Plentovitch, USFWS
Illustration on left: Laysan 'apapane from the United States of Extinction project



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Results Matter

From the Director
Kierán Suckling

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; West Coast fishers; bull kelp in Pacific waters; dunes sagebrush lizards in Texas and New Mexico; Florida bonneted bats; yellow-spotted woodland

salamanders, who in coal country are likely down to a few hundred individuals; and 49 types of plants, trees, birds and bees in Hawai'i.

It isn't enough to get these plants and animals on the endangered species list. We have to protect the places where they live. Our analysis has found that species with designated critical habitat are twice as likely to be recovering as those without. That's why we put such a focus on securing protection for forests, mountains, deserts, beaches, rivers and oceans.

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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Sea otters photo by Kedar Gadge

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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.

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