

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Tom McClintock
House Natural Resources Committee
Sub-Committee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife
May 22, 2019

In 1970, S. Dillon Ripley of the Smithsonian Institution, predicted that by 1995, between 75 and 80 percent of all species of living animals on our planet would be extinct. In 1979, Oxford University biologist Norman Myers predicted that one million species would go extinct by the year 2000. In 1994, biologist Peter Raven predicted in Nature Conservancy that by 2024, 90 percent of tropical rain forests will disappear and half of the species within them. In 1989, Noel Brown, a senior U.N. Environmental Official, warned that by the year 2000, entire nations would be wiped off the face of the earth as oceans would rise by up to three feet.

Now along comes the latest contribution to apocalyptic predictions, the United Nation's Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. It has issued a report that predicts "nearly one million species are now threatened with extinction." The sub-committee meets today to consider this report.

Except they haven't issued the report. They've issued a summary of the report written by climate activists for climate activists – but the 1,500 pages of science remains classified so there is no way at present to evaluate it. That's the antithesis of science, which is based on transparency and independent verification.

But we do know this: according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, science has actually catalogued fewer than 1.8 million species to date. 800 species are known to have gone extinct since 1500. And 27,159 are threatened to some degree. Of the extinctions we have actually documented, roughly 75 percent occurred on islands and 86 percent were the result of introduced non-native species.

What are we to do? Any true scientist would tell us to first review the science. Wait for the report to be released and then expose it to rigorous scientific review before making policy. Instead, the report – or I should say, the summary of the report for policy makers -- prescribes “transformative change.” If you’re wondering what that means, they’re very clear: “By transformative change, we mean a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values.” In practical terms, that means reducing human population growth, forbidding “overconsumption” and “addressing inequalities especially regarding income and gender which undermine capacity for sustainability.” It also calls for “the evolution of global financial and economic systems to build a global sustainable economy, steering away from the current limited paradigm of economic growth.”

Sceptics might be inclined to think that this sub-committee has bitten off more than it can chew today.

But do not despair. As Ronald Bailey, science correspondent for Reason Magazine writes: “Many of the transformative changes advocated by the IPBES are already happening as a result of the economic growth the UN agency wants us to steer away from. Due to increasing wealth, education and urbanization, world population will peak later this century around 8 to 9 billion.” He goes on to point out that growing prosperity and technology is resulting in increasingly more efficient resource use and growing income and gender equality.

There have been periods within both recorded history and throughout paleo history when scientists tell us temperatures were much higher – and also much colder -- than they are today. Science tells us that carbon dioxide levels have varied widely throughout the planet's history, including periods when they were many times higher than today. Science tells us that at the end of the last ice age, ocean levels were 400 feet LOWER than they are today. Hurricane activity is much lower than recorded in the 18th Century.

And despite what we are told, there is a vigorous debate within the scientific community over how human activity compares with vastly more powerful natural influencers that have driven climate change for 4 ½ billion years. As Chicken Little belatedly discovered, there is a big difference between an acorn and the sky.

History, and especially recent history, is filled with apocalyptic predictions about the end of the world. We're still waiting. The irony is that we look back and laugh at each generation that succumbs to these fits of hysteria. We chuckle at the reflection of our own human nature in the tale of Chicken Little or the Emperor's New Clothes. Just imagine how future generations will view us.