

Rep. Jared Huffman Opening Statement

Good morning. Thank you for joining us today to examine the Extinction Crisis. We are honored to have such a distinguished panel of witnesses with us here on the 22nd International Day for Biological Diversity.

Earlier this month, a team of scientists from around the world released a comprehensive UN report detailing just how many species are at risk of extinction because of human activities. The numbers are staggering- as many as 1 million species are threatened with extinction. That's 1 in every 8 species around the world.

But this isn't the first we're hearing about the extinction crisis. Scientists have been ringing the alarm bells for years. We are currently in the 6th mass extinction, and species are disappearing 100 times faster than historic rates.

The loss of all these species threatens the lives and livelihoods of people around the world. The report highlights that the loss of biodiversity is experienced differently by different social groups, countries, and regions. It is likely that the people who will be hit hardest by this biodiversity loss will be some of the world's most vulnerable populations, despite the fact that the benefits and burdens of resource use that drives biodiversity loss are unequally distributed. So as we discuss the extinction crisis today, let's keep in mind that this is also about the very real impacts these losses will have on people around the world.

Coastal protection, thriving fisheries, clean water, clean air, and other ecosystem services and economic benefits are at risk. So are the values, traditions, and land management strategies of indigenous communities.

The report identifies the top 5 causes of this rapid species loss: land and sea use changes, exploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution, and invasive species. All of these are things we can do something about, but we are not yet on track to slow the extinction crisis. We need to do more.

As I said in our State of Wildlife hearing in March, this committee is working on many innovative ideas and bills to address threats and recover species both domestically and around the world.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that we have an extinction crisis on our hands, the Trump administration is going in the opposite direction to appease special interests and big donors.

The Endangered Species Act continues to be a top target of the Trump administration. It is our strongest tool in the conservation toolbox for recovering threatened and endangered species, and we need a strong, durable ESA now more than ever. But the administration is currently finalizing rules that would create loopholes in the ESA, putting more species at risk of extinction and giving more leeway to industry. Weakening the ESA is the wrong way to go.

The Administration is also slow-walking species listings under the ESA. Only 17 species have been listed since 2017, far below the rate of listing under former administrations, including the Reagan administration. And now, the Trump administration is trying to change the ESA so that they can ignore climate change impacts to endangered and threatened species.

In its drive for “energy dominance”, the Trump administration is putting more plant and animal species at risk in order to expand oil and gas activities, including in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge is home to over 700 species, including polar bears, wolves, and the Porcupine caribou herd, which the Gwich’in

have relied on since time immemorial. But the Trump Administration, along with their allies in Congress, are working to open it up to oil and gas development. And the administration has also proposed to open new offshore areas for oil and gas activities, threatening ocean ecosystems and the existence of imperiled species such as the North Atlantic Right Whale.

Finally, the administration's short-sighted plan to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement will set back global action on climate change, further exacerbating this crisis. The House of Representatives recently passed a bill to keep the U.S. in the agreement. It's time for the Senate to act.

We need to think about what we can do to slow the loss of biodiversity, because the status quo is not enough. We need to be willing to take a hard look at our role in the large-scale drivers of this crisis, especially climate change, and take action. We need to roll up our sleeves and do the difficult but necessary work to protect and conserve our ecosystems and wildlife, because as the UN report points out, the loss of species has a profound and irreversible impact on people.

With that, I invite the Ranking Member to say a few remarks, and then we will welcome and introduce our witnesses.