

Why Protect Plants?



Vernal pool. Photo courtesy John Game.
Cover : desert wildflowers. Photo courtesy Ray Bransfield.

Native plants are the most visible elements of ecosystems. Up and down our coasts, plains, and mountains, thousands of wildflowers, trees, flowering shrubs and other native plants perfume the air and delight the eye throughout the year.

Native plants are habitats for wildlife. Wild plants and animals have evolved together for millennia. Hummingbirds, salmon, deer, eagles and all native animals depend on native plants for food, shelter, and survival.



Penstemon dissectus, Georgia
© Hugh and Carol Nourse

Native ecosystems are also economic powerhouses. Studies show that quality of life is of enormous economic value. Clean air, clean water, and beautiful, healthy wildlands attract both business-

Extinction of a single plant species may result in the disappearance of up to 30 other species of plants and wildlife – US Forest Service

es and tourists. Millions take time – and spend money - each year to marvel at the glorious landscapes and astounding variety of native plants and animals in national parks, national forests and other wild areas around the nation.

Valuable commodities, including foods and medicines flow from native species. The life-saving cancer drug taxol was developed from the Pacific yew, a native of the moist stream

canyons of western ancient forests. Insects and birds that live in native wildlands pollinate billions of dollars of crops each year.

Native Plants are Disappearing

Unfortunately, these irreplaceable native species and ecosystems are increasingly at risk. Accelerating sprawl is consuming our native plant communities. Between 1960 and 1990, sprawl consumed an area about the size of West Virginia as urbanized area in the US doubled to 51,000 square miles.

Approximately 80% of the nations coastal ecosystems have been damaged or destroyed by development. Invasive non-native species, excessive and poorly planned logging, mining, and other activities also besiege native plants. Less than 5% of our ancient forests remain intact. More than 50% of the nation's native wetlands have been destroyed. In the process we have lost 117 million acres of irreplaceable flood control and water purification capacity as well as habitat for thousands of species.



Clearcut Logging
Photo courtesy Klamath Forest Alliance

The Endangered Species Act provides almost NO protection to most Federally listed endangered and threatened plants – among the most imperiled American species.

This habitat destruction is taking its toll. Plants are full participants in the extinction crisis that has sparked outcry from the world's scientists. The World Conservation Union reports that 29% of plant species in the U.S. are at risk of extinction and that 1 plant species in 8 (12.5%) is at risk worldwide.

Plants are 2nd Class Citizens in Conservation Law and Policy

Few people realize that in almost every area of law, policy, and planning, plants receive inferior protection, attention and funding.

The Federal Endangered Species Act is the single most powerful legal tool available to protect imperiled ecosystems and landscapes. But, although the Act protects imperiled animals wherever they live, it allows nearly unlimited

destruction of most imperiled plants and their habitats outside of Federal lands. Without real protection for plants under the Federal Act, its promise of conservation is only half-fulfilled.

In budgeting, the situation is just as dire. Funding for rare species conservation is pathetically low and what little funding exists is heavily weighted towards charismatic animals such as deer, salmon and eagles.



Coryphantha scheeri var. *robustispina*
federally endangered © Lorena Babcock Moore

Staffing is critical. Conservation depends on experts who understand species needs and can incorporate conservation science into land management. Resource protection agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and USDA Forest Service employ pitifully few plant specialists. The Bureau of Land Management administers 245 million acres but employs only 68 botanists nationwide (1 botanist per 3.6 million acres!). A single Forest Service botanist is often responsible for an entire National Forest, covering more than 1 million acres and containing dozens of rare and listed plants. It is clearly impossible for any single person to adequately perform such duties.

“Every native species, however humble in appearance ... has its place in the nation's heritage. It is a masterpiece of evolution, an ancient, multifaceted entity that shares the land with us.”
– E. O. Wilson, 1999

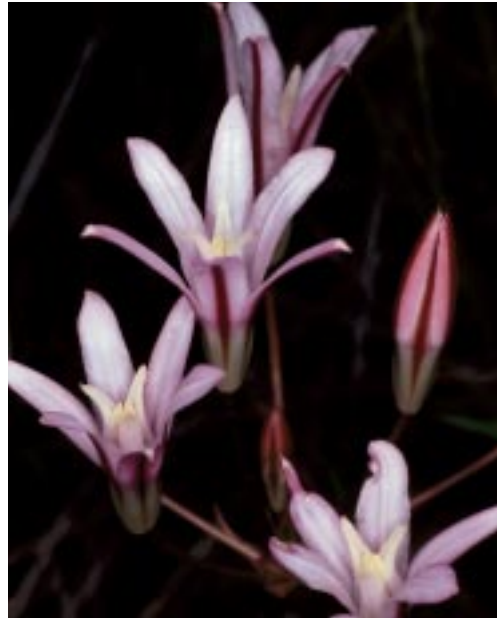
Did you know?

- ❖ According to a 1996 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report, outdoor recreation (wildlife watching, hunting and fishing) generated more than \$101 billion in economic activity in the U.S. Wildlife watching alone generated \$29.2 billion and supported over 1 million jobs nationwide.
- ❖ The world's most widely planted commercial pine is the Monterey pine, native to a few tiny threatened groves in California's central coast and Baja California. In New Zealand alone, U.S. \$4 billion of Monterey pine products were produced in 1995-96.
- ❖ Over 70% of our imperiled plants are found outside Federal lands where they receive only limited protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act.
- ❖ Despite the staggering economic value of native ecosystems, U.S. taxpayers spend on average less than 32 cents per year on endangered species conservation, less than the price of a postage stamp.
- ❖ Studies show that native species and ecosystems worldwide provide economic goods and services that value up to \$33 trillion annually!
- ❖ Studies show that most ecosystem restoration efforts fail. Once we lose our native wildlands, they are gone forever.
- ❖ According to the World Conservation Union, a larger percentage of the flora of the U.S. is imperiled than in any other “developed” country.

What Can Be Done?

The Center for Biological Diversity and the California Native Plant Society have launched the Native Plant Conservation Campaign to fight for more effective conservation of native plants nationwide. We are pursuing this goal on several fronts:

The Native Plant Conservation Network: The NPC network is a national network of native plant societies, botanical gardens, botanical societies and other groups who work to conserve native plants. The network exchanges botanical



Brodiaea coronaria ssp. rosea
California listed endangered Photo: Dana York

challenges posed by invasive non-native organisms and other topics of interest to native plant advocates.

Legislative Advocacy. We advocate for better legal protection for rare and imperiled plants and their habitats and greater scientific input in land and species management.

International Collaboration. We work with native plant conservation organizations around the world to exchange scientific and conservation information and create a stronger voice for plants in international conservation efforts such as the Global Convention on Biological Diversity.

Model Projects. We identify and support State & Federal policies and projects that are effective in conserving or restoring native plant species and habitats.



Pollination of native columbine
Photo courtesy John Game



Urban sprawl into native oak woodland
Photo: John Woodbury

and conservation information and works to create a strong voice for native plants in Federal policymaking.

The Equal Protection for Plants Campaign is working to amend the Federal Endangered Species Act to provide plants with the same protections that are provided to animals.

Botany Staffing Project. We work with State and Federal agencies to increase staffing in botany

Tools for Advocates. We produce plant-specific guides to conservation biology, public outreach methods, and environmental laws to help advocates better and more easily to use the latest information in their work.

Technical Reports. We produce technical reports and fact sheets on the

The Native Plant Conservation Campaign



A project of

**The Center for
Biological Diversity**

and

**The California
Native Plant Society**



MISSION

to promote appreciation and conservation of native plant species and communities through education, law, policy, land use and management.

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**Wild plants
and the wild
places they live
— will they be
here for our
children?**

