



## Biodiversity: Our common wealth, our common responsibility



The coastal rainforests of the Pacific Northwest are part of America's spectacular natural heritage

**W**hat natural features make your corner of the world unique? What land forms, weather patterns, plants and wildlife influence your area? Whether you live in mountains, prairies, coastal marshes, deserts or river valleys, these natural features distinguish your area from others across North America and the world. They make it uniquely beautiful and different from neighboring communities just over the horizon.

Across North America there are more than 115 distinct ecological regions (ecoregions). These communities of plants and animals have been influenced by topography, soils, climate, and time. This biological diversity or *biodiversity* of North America (and the world) is truly spectacular. From the Sonoran desert of the Southwest, to the tall grass prairie of the plains, and the temperate forests of the East, each region has plants and wildlife that have evolved over thousands of years. They are as unique to worldwide biodiversity as the tropical rainforests of Central and South America.

### Biodiversity is more than just numbers

More than a simple checklist of **ecological regions, habitats, and species**, biodiversity is also the **variety of genetic codes** that determine the physical characteristics of each species, and the complex interactions or processes that these species have with each other and their physical environment. **Ecological processes** are critical to maintaining every ecological community and the species that reside there. For instance, the gopher tortoise, currently an endangered species, cannot live without the long leaf pine-scrub oak and other dry, sandy habitats of the southeast. One key process maintaining these communities is fire. Prescribed, or controlled, fire is now being used in the southeast to maintain the ecological integrity of this fire-dependent community, helping to save the gopher tortoise from extinction.

### Benefits and Threats

Whether for the beauty and recreational value or for the economic and medicinal benefits of many plants and animals, our biological diversity is more than a natural treasure, we depend on it for our very existence. Unfortunately, this treasure is increasingly feeling the pressure of our own demands on the land. The immediate and long-term consequences of the threats now facing biodiversity -- habitat loss and fragmentation, the introduction of non-native species, pollution and ozone depletion to name a few-- affect all species, including our own. As a result some ecological

communities and the species residing there have been greatly reduced in range and number. There are more than 700 plant and animal species in the U.S., throughout nearly every ecological community, that are in danger of being lost forever.

Take a moment to consider your corner of the world and note the flowers, trees, birds, wildlife, and land features that you enjoy. By enhancing wildlife habitat on your property, conserving natural resources, and reducing waste, you will help to preserve the natural heritage of your own region and protect our common and extraordinary biological wealth.

Mid-western prairies are being restored on numerous Audubon member properties, including Smock Golf Course, IN.



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