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**Reports Highlight Environmental Trends
Call for Action on Better Data**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) *The State of the Nation's Ecosystems 2008* report released today by the Heinz Center provides authoritative documentation of key environmental trends. A companion report calls for bold federal and state action to strengthen and integrate the nation's environmental monitoring. *The State of the Nation's Ecosystems 2008* shows that the acreage burned every year by wildfires is increasing, non-native fish have invaded nearly every watershed in the lower 48 states, and chemical contaminants are found in virtually all streams and most groundwater wells, often at levels above those set to protect human health or wildlife. In contrast, ecosystems are increasing their storage of carbon, there are improvements in soil quality and crop yields have grown significantly, according to Robin O'Malley, Director of the Heinz Center's Environmental Reporting program.

These and other trends are highlighted in this second edition of the report, first released in 2002. With more data and improved indicators for tracking key characteristics of the nation's lands, waters, and living resources, "We get the 'pulse' of our nation's ecosystems through this report. These indicators for our nation's ecosystems are comparable to the vital signs doctors' check in an annual physical. The trends described in this report have the potential to affect agriculture, forestry, recreation, and everyday life for millions of Americans," said Thomas E. Lovejoy, President of the Heinz Center.

Produced with input from hundreds of experts from business, government, academia, and environmental organizations, and funding from government, foundations and the private sector, the report is scientifically grounded, unbiased, and drawn largely from federal agency data programs.

William Clark, Professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and chair of the project said, "The report is quite simply the most comprehensive assessment of the state of the nation's ecosystems ever produced. Its premise is simple: decision makers deserve relevant, scientifically credible, and unbiased information on how the environment is changing to help shape responses and to evaluate whether those responses are making a difference."

A companion policy report, *Environmental Information: Roadmap to the Future*, notes critical gaps in environmental information and highlights the management challenges. “Not having all the information we need is like going in for your annual check up and not having all the usual tests conducted -- the gaps in information might put your health at risk,” Lovejoy said. “Likewise environmental data gaps mean we don’t have the entire environmental picture. For example, we don’t track the area of sea grasses – important for every estuary; we don’t adequately measure the storage of carbon in ecosystems – important for climate change, and we don’t track ground water levels – important for people and ecosystems,” he said.

“We are an information society, but the United States lacks the capacity to meet the current information needs of decision makers for whom the environment matters. Climate change will create rapid and unpredictable transformation of our nation’s ecosystems, and coping with these changes will demand sound and timely information,” said O’Malley.

The *Roadmap* report provides comprehensive recommendations to Congress, the executive branch, and states on how to improve the current environmental reporting system. The report suggests more effective ways to link national and local information to support national and local decision making.

Key recommendations in the *Roadmap* report urge Congress to establish a national environmental indicator initiative, guided by the federal government, states, the private sector, environmental organizations, universities, and others. This effort would link national indicators with information used by local, state, corporate, and other decision makers, and drive an agenda for improving data collection and reporting.

The *Roadmap* suggests that the executive branch build on the work of the Heinz Center and others to maintain momentum while Congress moves forward, establish internal processes to improve federal data coordination, and expand dialogue among the many users and providers of needed environmental information. The companion report also suggests that Congress and the executive branch provide additional support for monitoring and related activities and that states demonstrate a heightened commitment to providing the information needed by state, local, and other decision makers to improve the state of the nation’s ecosystems.

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The State of the Nation's Ecosystems 2008 is available in limited quantities from the Heinz Center in advance of publication by Island Press later this summer. The *Road Map* report is available online from the Heinz Center. See www.heinzcenter.org/ecosystems and www.islandpress.org

Founded in 1995 in honor of Senator H. John Heinz III, the Center believes only by working together can we solve today’s environmental challenges and leave the world a better place for future generations. At the crossroads of science and environmental policy, The Heinz Center brings leaders together from business, government, academia, and environmental groups to find solutions that are both scientifically and economically sound.