

Heinz Center Issues Landmark Report On State of the Nation's Ecosystems

A new environmental study identifies major gaps in what is known about the nation's lands, waters, and living resources and proposes periodic reporting of key indicators that will inform and influence policy discussions for generations to come.

The highly anticipated report by The H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment is a succinct and comprehensive - yet unbiased and scientifically sound - examination of the current state of the nation's lands, waters, and living resources. An unprecedented collaboration among nearly 150 experts from government, business, environmental organizations, and academia, the study identifies indicators and reports the best available data on conditions and trends.

The State of the Nation's Ecosystems: Measuring the Lands, Waters, and Living Resources of the United States presents a compelling argument for reporting environmental indicators, much as key data are reported to help gauge the state of the national economy.

The report provides indicators for the nation as a whole and for its coasts and oceans, forests, farmlands, fresh waters, grasslands and shrublands, and urban and suburban areas. For each of these systems, the study reports on ten key characteristics of ecosystems that should be tracked over time, and, where the data are available, it describes current conditions and trends. The ten categories, characterized by about 100 indicators in all, are:

- * Ecosystem extent
- * Fragmentation and landscape pattern
- * Building blocks of life
- * Contaminants
- * Physical conditions
- * Plants and animals
- * Biological communities
- * Plant growth and productivity
- * Production of food and fiber and use of water
- * Recreation and other services

Participants in the study included representatives of industry and environmental organizations, elected and appointed leaders from local, state and federal government, and scholars. Nine federal agencies and thirteen corporations and foundations funded the project, which was commissioned by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. It calls for annual updates and a revised edition every five years.

The State of the Nation's Ecosystems is published by Cambridge University Press and is also available in full at www.heinzctr.org/ecosystems.