

Biodiversity is the Living Foundation for Sustainable Development

Contributed by Terry Mock
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Terry Mock, a former land developer, presents his viewpoint as a member of the sustainable community and board member of Land Development Today.

It is the combination of life forms, and their interactions with each other and with the rest of the environment, that have made Earth a uniquely habitable place for humans. Biodiversity -- the variability within and among living organisms and the systems they inhabit -- is the foundation upon which human civilization has been built. In addition to its intrinsic value, biodiversity provides goods and services that underpin sustainable development in many important ways. First, it supports the ecosystem functions essential for life on Earth, such as the provision of fresh water, soil conservation and climate stability. Second, it provides products such as food, medicines and materials for industry. Third, biodiversity is at the heart of many cultural values.

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders agreed on a comprehensive strategy for "sustainable development" -- meeting our needs while ensuring that we leave a healthy and viable world for future generations. One of the key agreements adopted at Rio was the Convention on Biological Diversity.

This pact among the vast majority of the world's governments set out commitments for maintaining the world's ecological underpinnings as we go about the business of economic development. The convention established three main goals: the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources. In 2002, 10 years after the Convention on Biological Diversity was opened for signature, the parties involved developed a strategic plan to guide further implementation at the national, regional and global levels. The purpose is to effectively halt the loss of biodiversity so as to secure the continuity of its beneficial uses through the conservation and sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

Of all life forms, plants are the primary source of energy in the biosphere and are, therefore, the basis of all life on land and in water. Forest biodiversity may be the richest of all terrestrial systems. Together, tropical, temperate and boreal forests offer diverse sets of habitats for plants, animals and microorganisms, holding the vast majority of the world's terrestrial species. To destroy such an essential resource appears to be madness, yet in meeting important human needs, forest trees have been plundered on a global scale. The retention and management of plant diversity is urgently needed in order to build "designer ecosystems" that will replicate the natural systems that have evolved over 4 billion years on this planet and that create the very conditions for life to exist. Given that biodiversity also includes genetic differences within each species, it is critically important that genetics from endangered and superior specimen old growth trees be preserved now, while these unique organisms are still alive.

At Champion Tree Project International, protection, propagation, and planting of clonal materials from the largest and oldest trees in the world are our goals.

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