

Environment & Energy

State Lawmakers Ask Biden to Form National Biodiversity Strategy

By Zach Bright

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- US nearly alone in lacking national approach
 - Longer environmental reviews could result, attorney says
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A group of 365 state legislators from 48 US states and territories are calling on President Joe Biden to create a National Biodiversity Strategy.

The lawmakers said a strategy was needed to protect habitats, prevent wildlife exploitation and reduce threats from climate change, pollution, and invasive species.

“The global scientific consensus is that as many as one million species are at risk of extinction. Studies have shown that we are losing species and their habitats faster than ever before,” the lawmakers said in their letter, released Friday.

The World Economic Forum’s 2020 Global Risks Report ranks biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse among the top five risks to humanity in the next decade. The US is one of the only countries in the world that lacks a national approach to protecting biodiversity, the letter said.

A national plan could mean environmental reviews could have to account for biodiversity and lead to longer reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act, said Peter Whitfield, an environmental attorney and partner at Sidley Austin LLP.

“There’s also the component of increased litigation risk too,” Whitfield said. “So if there’s a mandate to consider biodiversity and some of those reviews don’t, maybe there are some communities that would bring a lawsuit and challenge it.”

Legislators in their letter said they hoped a strategy would build on existing conservation efforts such as the Biden administration’s America the Beautiful initiative, which aims to conserve 30% of US lands and waters by 2030.

To contact the reporter on this story: Zach Bright at zbright@bloombergindustry.com

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Renee Schoof at
rschoof@bloombergindustry.com

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