

The [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) was adopted in 1992 and entered into force in 1993 amid much fanfare. It's been a rousing success in attracting adherents; it currently has 193 parties, with the only major outlier being the United States, which has some of the strongest conservation laws in the world. But a new report in [Science](#) (subscription required) makes it clear that the Convention is not meeting its conservation goals.

In 2002, the parties to the Convention committed themselves

to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on Earth.

Well, here we are in 2010. And it seems that performance has fallen well short of that goal. Here's the abstract of the *Science* paper:

We compiled 31 indicators to report on progress toward this target. Most indicators of the state of biodiversity (covering species' population trends, extinction risk, habitat extent/condition, and community composition) showed declines, with no significant recent reductions in rate, whereas indicators of pressures on biodiversity (including resource consumption, invasive alien species, nitrogen pollution, over-exploitation, and climate change impacts) showed increases. Despite some local successes and increasing responses (including extent and biodiversity coverage of protected areas, sustainable forest management, policy responses to invasive alien species, and biodiversity-related aid), the rate of biodiversity loss does not appear to be slowing.

Interestingly, the authors did find that the extent of management efforts (very crudely measured) had increased since enactment of the Convention, although in recent years the rate of increase in management measures had slowed. So the problem is not simply that parties are ignoring their Convention responsibilities. Rather, it seems that the measures they are taking are either ineffective or insufficient. Perhaps a concerted effort to accumulate information and provide technical assistance would help. For example, it's not clear at this point whether the problems are technical (identifying the wrong areas for preserves, or misunderstanding which species need protection); political (lack of support for measures with real strength); institutional (failure to implement or enforce adopted

protective measures); or all of the above. In addition, the parties to the Convention ought to face up to the fact that if they want to meet their conservation goals into the future they need to come back to the climate change table, figure out what sort of target CO₂ levels and temperatures are consistent with meaningful conservation, and go about finding a way to achieve those levels.