

PRESS RELEASE

Ambitious new monitoring network will advance international efforts to rescue the world's vanishing biological diversity

Potsdam, Germany, 3 April 2008 – Some 90 leading scientific and intergovernmental organizations are joining forces here from 8-10 April (Tuesday to Thursday) to start building a global Biodiversity Observation Network that will monitor and assess the status of the world's species and ecosystems in order to prevent their further loss.

The Earth's biosphere is such a complex system that a comprehensive monitoring network for simultaneously tracking individual species and populations and monitoring trends in forests and other ecosystems has never been built.

To present a full picture of what is happening to biodiversity, this monitoring network would also need to integrate masses of biological information with data and forecasts on climate change, pollution and other threats to biodiversity.

The lack of comprehensive information about the world's biological resources continues to undermine the efforts of policymakers and managers to set priorities, elaborate strategies and assess the effectiveness of their actions.

Fortunately, new technologies are dramatically improving the collection and analysis of biodiversity information. These increasingly sophisticated monitoring systems, which consist of satellite, air, land and ocean-based instruments, are being interlinked through the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) to form a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS).

The biodiversity arm of this expanding "system of systems", to be called the Biodiversity Observation Network, or GEO BON, will represent the first step towards achieving a more complete understanding of the status and trends in the world's living resources.

"Governments are already relying on GEOSS for the information they need to understand and address climate change. They need the same quality of environmental information for dealing with other global challenges, such as food security, water resources and the highly complex issue of biodiversity," said Director José Achache of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO).

The Potsdam meeting will formalize the mandate for the participating national, regional and global organizations to harmonize their data and information systems, identify and address gaps and overlaps in existing coverage, and ensure the continuity and sustainability of biodiversity information.

The launch of GEO BON comes just a month before the Government of Germany will host the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Bonn from 19 to 30 May.

The CBD conference is expected to attract several thousand participants and to address forest biodiversity, alien invasive species, progress towards the international goal of reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by the year 2010, and other priority issues. GEO BON promises to strengthen the ability of the 190 member governments of the CBD to achieve the Convention's goals.

"It is imperative that the aggregate impact of the numerous actions launched worldwide to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are carefully tracked," said Ahmed Djoghlafl, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity. "Establishing the Biodiversity Observation Network will

help put together the data about genetic resources, species and ecosystems that we need to evaluate the effectiveness of our actions.”

About GEO BON

The partnership for building GEO BON is being coordinated by DIVERSITAS and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the US with the support of the GEO Secretariat. Amongst the dozens of participating organizations are the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the BIOTA AFRICA Network, the United Nations Environment Programme’s World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP/WCMC) and the US Geological Survey.

The next several years will be critical to GEO BON’s development. A key priority will be to establish an enhanced ability to identify ecosystems that are unique or highly diverse; that support migratory, endemic or globally threatened species; that are of socio-economic importance; and that can support the 2010 target agreed under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

While the GEO BON will continue to emerge and expand over the coming decade and beyond, a dramatic improvement in biodiversity information can already be expected over the next three years as a result of the work being launched at this week’s meeting.

By bringing together the diverse, stand-alone observation instruments and systems now tracking trends in the world’s genetic resources, species and ecosystems, GEO BON will create a global platform for integrating biodiversity data with data on climate and other key variables. It will fill gaps in taxonomic and biological information and speed up the pace at which information is collected and disseminated.

GEO BON will also ascertain the data requirements of user groups, review and prioritize research, facilitate interoperability among observation systems and databases, generate regularly updated assessments of global biodiversity trends, design decision-support systems that integrate monitoring with ecological modelling and forecasting, and make data and reports available to users via GEOSS.

About GEO

The Group on Earth Observations was established in 2005 after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the Group of Eight leading industrialized countries (G8) and three ministerial Earth Observation Summits all called for improving existing observation systems. Its membership now includes 72 countries and the European Commission; 52 “participating organizations” also contribute to its work.

GEO is coordinating the construction of a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) that will link together diverse monitoring networks, instruments, data bases and models and other decision-support tools. GEOSS addresses nine priorities of critical importance to the future of the human race. In this way, it aims to help countries to protect themselves against natural and human-induced disasters, understand the environmental sources of health hazards, manage energy resources, respond to climate change and its impacts, safeguard freshwater resources, improve weather forecasts, manage ecosystems, promote sustainable agriculture, and conserve biodiversity.

GEO also serves as an advocate for investments in biodiversity and other Earth observation systems. Greater investment is essential to ensure the adoption of new and emerging technologies for monitoring species populations, modelling changes in biodiversity and filling in the many gaps in biodiversity observations.

Note to journalists: For more information, please see www.earthobservations.org/cop_bi_geobon.shtml or contact Michael Williams of the GEO Secretariat at +41-79-572-9628 (cell phone during the meeting) or +41-22-730-8293 (in Geneva before and after the meeting).