Technologies to Maintain Biological Diversity
Foreword

The reduction of the Earth’s biological diversity has emerged as a public policy issue in the last several years. Growing awareness of this planetary problem has prompted increased study of the subject and has led to calls to increase public and private initiatives to address the problem.

One major concern is that loss of plant, animal, and microbial resources may impair future options to develop new important products and processes in agriculture, medicine, and industry. Concerns also exist that loss of diversity undermines the potential of populations and species to respond or adapt to changing environmental conditions. Because humans ultimately depend on environmental support functions, special caution should be taken to ensure that diversity losses do not disrupt these functions. Finally, esthetic and ethical motivation to avoid the irreversible loss of unique life forms has played an increasingly major role in promoting public and private programs to conserve particular species or habitats.

Congressional requesters of this assessment include the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology; Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; and Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The House Committee on Foreign Affairs, House Committee on Agriculture, and House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries endorsed the requested study.

The task presented to OTA by these committees was to clarify for Congress the nature of the problems of reduction of the Earth’s biological diversity and to set forth a range of policy options available to Congress to respond to various concerns. The principal aim of this assessment is to identify and assess the technological and institutional opportunities and constraints to maintaining biological diversity in the United States and worldwide. Two background papers (Grassroots Conservation of Biological Diversity in the United States and Maintaining Biological Diversity in the United States: Data Considerations) and a staff paper (The Role of U.S. Development Assistance in Maintaining Biological Diversity in Developing Countries) were also prepared in conjunction with this study.

OTA is grateful for the valuable assistance of the study’s advisory panel, workgroups, workshop participants, authors of background papers, and the many other reviewers from the public and private sectors who provided advice and information throughout the course of this assessment. As with all OTA studies, the content of this report is the sole responsibility of OTA.

John H. Gibbons
Director
Advisory Panel
Technologies to Maintain Biological Diversity

Kenneth Dahlberg, Chair
Department of Political Science
Western Michigan University

Stephen Brush
International Agricultural Development
University of California, Davis

Peter Carlson
Director
Crop Genetics International

Rita Colwell
Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs
University of Maryland, Adelphi

Raymond Dasmann
Department of Environmental Studies
University of California, Santa Cruz

Clarence Dias
President
International Center for Law in Development

Donald Duvick
Senior Vice President of Research
Pioneer Hi-Bred International

David Ehrenfeld
Cook College
Rutgers University

Major Goodman
Department of Crop Science
North Carolina State University

Grenville Lucas
The Herbarium
Kew Royal Botanic Gardens

Richard Norgaard
Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics
University of California, Berkeley

Robert Prescott-Allen
Partner
PADATA, Inc.

Paul Risser
Vice President for Research
University of New Mexico

Oliver Ryder
Research Department
San Diego Zoo

Michael Soule
Adjunct Professor
School of Natural Resources
University of Michigan

John Sullivan
Vice President of Production
American Breeders Service

NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisory panel members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.
OTA Project Staff
Technologies to Maintain Biological Diversity

Roger C. Herdman, Assistant Director, OTA
Health and Life Sciences Division

Walter E. Parham, Food and Renewable Resources Program Manager

Analytical Staff

Susan Shen, Project Director and Analyst
Edward F. MacDonald, Analyst
Michael S. Strauss, Analyst
Catherine Carlson, Research Assistant
Robert Grossmann, Analyst
Allen Ruby, Research Assistant

Contractors

James L. Chamberlain
David Netter
Robert Prescott-Allen
Bruce Ross-Sheriff

Linda Starke and Lisa Olson, Editors

Administrative Staff

Patricia Duranas Beckie Erickson, and Sally Shafroth, Administrative Assistants
Nellie Hammond, Secretary
Carolyn Swann, Secretary

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After August 1986.
Through October 1986.