Rethinking Conservation: Why Old Conservation Targets Don't Size Up to Today's Environmental Challenges

Around a half-century ago both scientists and the public became increasingly aware of our collective footprint on the earth. To help preserve increasingly threatened species and ecosystems, global conservation targets – originally around the 10-12% range – were established to help motivate governments to conserve more wild areas. However, these targets failed to incorporate the interconnectivity of ecosystems and snowball effects that occur when ecosystems decline. Today, scientists argue that a much higher figure – closer to 50% or more – of ecosystems must be off limits to development in order to remain healthy and vibrant for decades to come.

10%

OLD SCIENCE:
10% Protection is Sufficient

Small, isolated protected areas

Fewer threatened species protected

Species cornered and populations shrink

Large industrial land uses

Increased emissions

Contaminated freshwater

Increased threat of extinctions in native species

Indigenous peoples lose traditional ways

Future generations left with few jobs, cleanup bill

OR

50+%

NEW SCIENCE:
At Least 50% Protection is Recommended

Large, interconnected protected areas

Increase of threatened species protected

Freedom to migrate and explore suitable habitat

Balanced, sustainable development

Limited emissions

Freshwater preserved

Native species remain vibrant and healthy

Indigenous peoples continue tradtional ways

Sustainable jobs for future generations