

***THE STATE OF THE NATION'S ECOSYSTEMS:
INDICATORS THAT SHED LIGHT ON THE
SUSTAINABLE USE OF FRESH WATER.***

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Regardless of one's definition of "sustainability," it is virtually certain that, at some level, it will include a statement about the condition of one or more resources. When one thinks about development that might be classified as "sustainable," concomitant use *and* stewardship of resources as critical as fresh water cannot be overlooked. Given a variety of stakeholders, all of whom have different values, it may be some years off before society can develop a universally-accepted definition of "sustainable water use," not to mention "sustainable development." As definitions of sustainable resource use are developed and applied across the country and the world, it will be critical that they be tied into universally-accepted data about both the ecological condition and the use of the resource by people.

The State of the Nation's Ecosystems project has developed a suite of indicators designed to help high-level decision makers and policy makers understand the condition and use of the ecosystems of the United States. These indicators describe the overall extent of ecosystems, their chemical and physical condition, the condition of their biological components, and a variety of human uses, including commodities, recreation, and natural ecosystem services. A description of the indicators themselves and a short discussion of the impartial and scientifically-sound process by which they were developed will convince the reader that this project, undertaken by the Heinz Center, does in fact yield just the type of indicators needed as a component of larger suites of measures of sustainable resource use/development.

The immediate challenges posed by gaps in available data will be discussed after a presentation of these indicators. Some of the most evident data gaps were for indicators of extent, altered systems, non-native species, animal deaths and deformities, status of fish and bottom-dwelling animals, groundwater levels, and recreational activities. The presentation will close with a discussion of the current efforts underway to address these data gaps.