

“To Stave Off Extinction, Protect Half-Earth” Excerpt Transcript

Excerpt from [March 4, 2016](#) episode of Science Friday.

<p>IRA FLATOW</p>	<p>This is Science Friday. I'm Ira Flatow. Last month, President Obama designated three new national monuments out in the California desert. You have the Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountains. All in all, they protect nearly two million acres of sand dunes, lava flows, snow capped peaks, and Native American trading routes. But add it all up and the tally of protected land in the US is only about 14%. Worldwide it's about the same.</p> <p>And that, according to my next guest, isn't nearly enough to stave off another mass extinction of the world's biodiversity. His prescription for the planet? To set aside half the earth, half of it, including land and sea, for nature to do its things with no human intervention. Sort of off limits to people. And he lays out his vision for how we'll get there in his new book Half Earth-- Our Planet's Fight for Life. Doctor E.O. Wilson is a professor emeritus at Harvard University and the author of Half Earth.</p> <p>Welcome back to Science Friday, Doctor Wilson.</p>
<p>E.O. WILSON</p>	<p>Well it's always a pleasure to be with you, Ira.</p>
<p>FLATOW</p>	<p>It's always a pleasure to have you. This half earth idea, it's not about taking a knife and splitting the earth in half, is it?</p>
<p>WILSON</p>	<p>No, not at all. It's a matter of putting together all the remaining real wilderness areas the land that can be utilized in the category of a reserve around the world, on down to relatively small plots. It can be done easily in the sea, where we have 3% covered now. And we can take it up over 50% by simply setting aside the open seas and preventing fishing there. For the land we go from 15% to 50. That's not as difficult either, as it might seem. Creating corridors, picking the largest areas that are available and designating them. And just moving it on up until we come to about half. At one half we are now very roughly in a position of moving the extinction rate down, to 10 to 20% over what's going to happen if we leave it alone.</p>

FLATOW	What's it going to take for you to convince the world's countries to do something like this? It's going to need a coordinated effort, right?
WILSON	Well yes, but we already have various devices within the United Nations and the help and support of a number of these developed nations to include the world's biodiversity in our foreign policy agenda.
FLATOW	<p>According to the World Bank, countries like Germany and Slovenia have already protected about half their land. So it seems like at least in the right political climate, this sort of thing is possible.</p> <p>Aren't most biologically rich places on the planet already protected in some way or another?</p>
WILSON	<p>Oh, unfortunately not. Or if they are on paper protected, that's being violated.</p> <p>The worst place, in magnitude, Indonesia. Which has laws against the cutting of more rain forests in many very rich areas like Borneo, but the laws are just overlooked. And we're still getting massive cutting and burning throughout Indonesia to plant oil palm. It comes on just public leaders, political leaders, looking the other way. So if we can mount at the same time as realistic procedures to aim for that half earth mark, and the 80 Earth percent or so species saved, then increasingly that can be a moral issue that could, might, I hope, eventually, be universally accepted.</p>
FLATOW	Well good luck to you, Dr. Wilson. And it's a great book. It's called Half Earth. E.O. Wilson is a professor emeritus at Harvard University.