

WHY SPECIES BECOME THREATENED OR ENDANGERED



The recovery of greater sandhill cranes is one of Colorado's success stories.

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THERE ARE VARIOUS REASONS why species can become threatened, endangered or extinct. Although some species may decline or disappear due to natural causes, most species are put at risk due to the activities of people. The following are some of the primary causes:

Destruction or alteration of natural habitats.

- Loss of habitat to land development, reducing the area available for wildlife.
- Draining of wetlands and stream channelization, which eliminates wildlife habitat.
- Conversion of natural habitats to agricultural use, decreasing biodiversity.
- Damage to natural habitats due to other human uses, such as off-road vehicles.

Pollutants or pesticides in the environment.

- Herbicides and pesticides accumulating in water, causing toxic effects in animals.
- Pesticide accumulation in animals'

bodies, affecting their biological processes.

- Emissions from fossil fuel combustion, leading to global and local climate change.

Direct impact on animals by people.

- Overharvest, usually for commercial purposes.
- Increasing highways and traffic, leading to more road-kills.
- Increased human contact and harassment, leading to wildlife stress, immune system suppression, disruption of natural behavior, etc.
- Predation by pets – primarily dogs and cats.

Effects of introduced exotic species.

- Introduction of new, exotic predators.
- Introduction of non-native species that outcompete natives for food, shelter etc.
- Introduction of non-native plants that alter natural ecosystems.
- Introduction of new pathogens and parasites to which native species lack immunity.
- Interbreeding of exotics and natives, leading to genetic "pollution."