LEAVES, A Newsletter of the INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM

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From the Editor, Request for information for upcoming newsletters

This newsletter is an opportunity for IEF members to share their experiences, activities, and initiatives that are taking place at the community level on environment, climate change, and sustainability. All members are welcome to contribute information about related activities, upcoming conferences, news from like-minded organizations, recommended websites, book reviews, etc. Please send information to newsletter@ief.org
Please share the Leaves newsletter and IEF membership information with family, friends, and associates and encourage interested persons to consider becoming a member of the IEF.

Promoting an Economy for People and Planet

This newsletter focuses on the urgent need to reframe the concept of the economy and shares important information and initiatives for working toward a new economic system that serves the well-being of people and planet.

On p. 4, read about the landmark ***Business and Biodiversity Report*** just released by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

The **innovative initiative *Market humanism: towards a new paradigm for the economy and economics*** is featured on p. 5. It is striking how closely it reflects the Baha'i teachings.

You can read the article ***5 ways forests drive inclusive and resilient economies*** on p. 5.

We begin with ***Economic Prosperity for the Common Good*****,** in which IEF President Arthur Dahl shares his substantial thoughts with IF20, the G20 Interfaith Forum Association (p.2)

In addition, this newsletter contains

- A relevant article from the newsletter of MEGA (Mobilising an Earth Governance Alliance) on p. 7
- Vanuatu calls for UN Action on Climate Change on p. 8
- UNEP Global Environment Outlook 7 Scenarios for Transformation to a Sustainable Environment on p. 9
- The announcement of the new expert assessment of the health of nature in the United States on p. 11

Economic Prosperity for the Common Good

Arthur Dahl

Some thoughts for IF20

If the ultimate purpose of an economy is to ensure the common good by bringing prosperity to all of humanity, then it is important to define what is the common good. Is prosperity only material wellbeing, or are there other dimensions of prosperity at the individual, social and even spiritual levels beyond what the economy considers? On what basis do we determine the common good? Clearly, science has a role in this, providing objective measures of human health and the health of the planet we live on. Religion also has a complementary role in opening us to a higher human purpose defined by spiritual values and moral laws, and guiding us to use the knowledge of science for our wellbeing. The world's faith traditions thus have a significant role to play in defining the common good.

One dimension of what is good for all is to meet basic human needs, as reflected, for example in the Sustainable Development Goals. Eliminating poverty and hunger, ensuring health and well-being, providing education for all, upholding gender equality, providing basic needs for water, energy and decent work including in industry, reducing inequalities, creating sustainable cities and communities with responsible consumption and production, acting on climate change, and protecting oceans, freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity, through peace, justice, strong institutions and partnerships. The SDGs include indicators to measure progress towards meeting these needs. Every human being has the potential to create wealth and wellbeing through work, and prosperity will be universal when this potential is fully realised. No one should be left unemployed.

For our material wellbeing, science provides measures of the state of nine planetary boundaries, defining limits of the Earth system where human activities risk going beyond the safe operating space that maintains the requirements for life on this planet. And followed over time, science can model the dynamics of various processes and project the consequences into the future to support planning and decision-making. We have already overshot seven of the boundaries, and are consuming the planet's capital rather than living off the interest, with existential threats to our future. Climate change is an obvious example, where extracting fossil carbon for energy has raised the CO2 concentration in the atmosphere causing global heating. We depend on biodiversity for food, materials and many ecosystem functions, yet excessive consumption and habitat loss are creating an extinction crisis. Changing land use and soil degradation are rapidly eroding the productive capacity of the planet. We are overusing freshwater, and it has recently been announced that we are facing global water bankruptcy (Madani 2026) https://iefworld.org/Water_bankrupt. The manufacture and overuse of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilisers has overwhelmed natural processes and is degrading ecosystems including the oceans. As carbon dioxide is absorbed into the oceans, it raises the acidity, impacting all species with carbonate skeletons. We have invented many novel entities like pesticides decimating insects; plastics and forever chemicals polluting everything including our bodies; antibiotics whose excessive use is generating antibiotic resistance and making old cures worthless; and many other innovations that are profitable in the short term but accumulate long-term threats. Only atmospheric aerosol loading and stratospheric ozone depletion are boundaries that have been addressed through global action and remain within safe limits.

Note that in almost all these cases, the excessive and damaging activities are driven by their profitability in the present financial system and are pursued by economic units, largely institutionalised in corporations, with no legal requirement to respect the common good, but only to provide short-term return on capital. In this economic framework there is no concept of moderation or sufficiency, but only the pursuit of endless growth in material wealth. This

leads to what has been described as the tragedy of the commons, where free access to a limited resource by selfish entities inevitably leads to overconsumption and destruction of the resource, now evident as we overshoot planetary boundaries. This may be true when the system is entirely selfish and there is no understanding of and respect for the common good. Fortunately science also demonstrates that the human species can be educated and has evolved great capacity for cooperation, solidarity and justice. Redefining economic prosperity means rethinking the values behind business (Nicholas 2026).

One of our problems is that our economic system relies on the wrong measures for determining the common good, whether the narrow pursuit of profit, or collectively relying on growth in GDP as a measure of economic performance. While GDP accounts for the movement of financial wealth through the economy, it fails to include many dimensions of human wellbeing such as the state of natural resource capital or the contribution of the subsistence economy of the poor, and is increased through many activities that are ultimately harmful, such as arms manufacture, automobile accidents, gambling, narcotic drugs, pollution and wastes. Economic growth today coexists with poverty, exclusion, violence, and serious violations of human rights. For the principal actors, the end of wealth generation justifies any means. Yet for the common good, the economy should take human well-being, sustainability and equity into account, and there are increasing efforts to look beyond GDP, including at the United Nations (UN 2025): https://iefworld.org/beyondGDP. …

Behind all of this is the economic assumption that human nature is inherently selfish and aggressive. It is true from a materialistic perspective, so dominant today in our society, that the animal dimension of humanity, seeking material satisfaction and superficial pleasures through consumption, physical satisfaction, and even addiction, is the present definition of prosperity. Yet human nature can be educated to higher purposes, and this has always been the role of religion in its purest form. The great spiritual teachers set the example of growth in higher human qualities like selfless love, forgiveness and spirituality through a simple lifestyle and moderation. The great civilisations of the past were built by cooperation for the collective good through altruism, justice and service to others, and torn down when the ego, greed and selfish power returned to dominate human behaviour, and religion became a lifeless shell. This is why religion has needed to be renewed throughout history. All the faith communities today can return to their spiritual core and contribute to educating humanity for a renewed economy that promotes human and natural wellbeing and serves the common good, leaving no one behind.

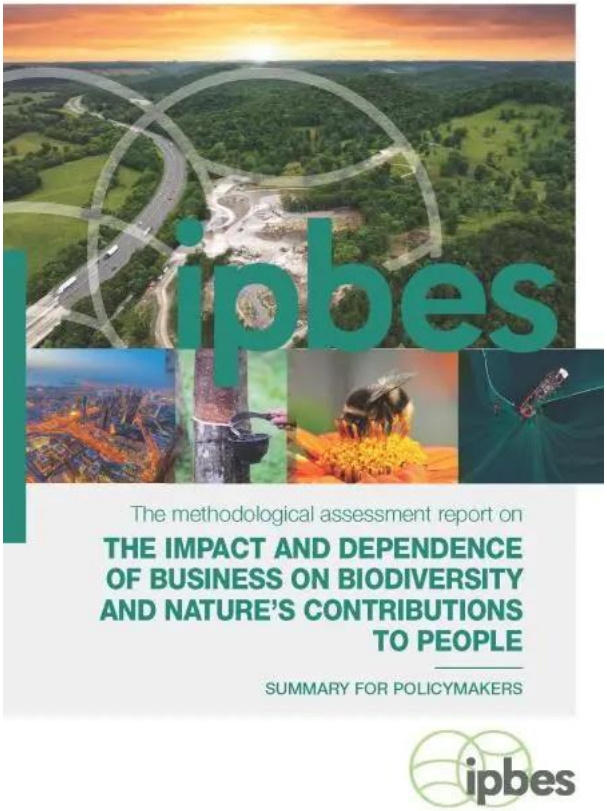
In this perspective, rising above the narrow view of the material economy, there are requirements at the social and institutional level for human security and the common good, such as peace rather than war, love rather than hate, cooperation and solidarity rather than winner takes all. These are the qualities reinforcing human relationships, forging a sense of community and leading to civilisation-building. For the individual, these are the lessons at the heart of religion and all forms of spirituality. Collectively, this is the way to build communities. While national sovereignty was a reasonable scale of social organisation in previous centuries, with globalisation the world has become one country, and the nationalism that gives priority to the national interest over other states or the common good at a planetary level is now just another expression of the dysfunctional values of greed in the materialist struggle for power and domination through competition, if not outright imperialism and war, that are today driving the disintegration of modern civilisation. As the nations come to see that their individual well-being depends on the common good, and the planet is demanding that its limits be respected by sending warning signals of its distress, there will be no alternative to a federation combining close cooperation with the autonomy necessary for unity in diversity founded in economic prosperity for all.

This article is slightly shortened. You can read the entire article and its references here: https://iefworld.org/Dahl_commons

IPBES Business and Biodiversity Assessment

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) released its landmark Business and Biodiversity Report last month.

FutureEarth reports:



Developed over three years by 79 experts from 35 countries and regions, the report brings together perspectives from science, the private sector and Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It underscores that global economic growth has come at the significant ecological cost, creating systemic risks to the economy, financial stability and human wellbeing.

In 2023, public and private financial flows harming nature were estimated at $7.3 trillion. By contrast, just $220 billion was directed toward biodiversity conservation and restoration.

Dr. David Obura, Chair of IPBES and member of the Earth Commission, highlighted the urgency of the assessment:

"This first-ever fast-track IPBES Assessment Report was delivered with urgency as we begin the second half of this decade, at the request of our Governments, as a vital contribution to efforts by businesses, governments, financial actors and the whole of society to meet the goals and targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It relates very directly to Target 15 of the Global Biodiversity Framework, which focuses on businesses, but ultimately to all our shared global goals because businesses are at the center of how our economies, and large parts of our society, depend on and impact nature."

The report concludes that businesses are pivotal to halting and reversing biodiversity loss, yet insufficient information about their impacts, dependencies, and risks continues to hinder progress.

Sources: FutureEarth https://futureearth.org/ipbes-12th-plenary-launch-of-the-landmark-business-and-biodiversity-report/, also https://iefworld.org/IPBES_biodiversity.
For more information: https://www.ipbes.net/bba-report/media-release
To download the report, go here: https://www.ipbes.net/business-impact

Market humanism:
towards a new paradigm for the economy and economics

Is there an alternative to the failed orthodoxies of neoliberalism or the chaos of economic populism? Yes, according to Oxford economist Professor Eric Beinhocker and technology entrepreneur and civic activist Nick Hanauer. A new paradigm is emerging that they call 'Market Humanism" which has the potential to reshape our economy and our politics. It places humans, ethics and values at the centre, and thus reflects many Bahá'í principles.

The **booklet *Markets Built for Humans*** is available here: https://oms-inet.files.svdcdn.com/production/files/MarketsBuiltForHumans.pdf?dm=1771519645

The recording of the excellent **webinar** launching the release of the booklet *Markets Built for Humans* is available here: https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/videos/market-humanism

You can read Arthur Dahl's *summary of the webinar* here: https://iefworld.org/Beinhocker_humanism

This was a joint event with the Institute for New Economic Thinking at the Oxford Martin School (INET Oxford).

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5 ways forests drive inclusive and resilient economies

Forests generate employment, support rural and urban livelihoods, underpin food systems, supply raw materials and energy, and provide ecosystem services that enable productivity across sectors. Yet, despite their wide-ranging economic, social and environmental contributions, forests remain systematically undervalued in economic planning, investment strategies and financial systems.

In 2026, the theme for the International Day of Forests, Forests and Economies draws attention to the essential role forests play in sustaining global and national economies.

Here are five things you need to know:

1. **Forests underpin the global economy.**
   More than 1.6 billion people depend on forests for subsistence, income or employment. From timber and non-wood forest products to tourism and bioeconomy value chains, forests contribute directly to growth and development — particularly in low-income and forest-rich countries.

2. **Forests are economic infrastructure**.
   Beyond market products, forests regulate water supplies, protect soils, store carbon and reduce disaster risks. These ecosystem services sustain agriculture, energy systems, cities and industry — forming the natural foundation of many sectors.

3. **Much of forests' value remains invisible**.
   Conventional economic indicators capture mainly formal, cash-based transactions. Subsistence use, informal employment and ecosystem services are often excluded from national accounts, leading to systematic undervaluation and underinvestment.

4. **Forests are lifelines in times of crisis**.
   During economic shocks, conflicts or climate-related disasters, forests provide food, fuel, shelter and income — acting as safety nets for vulnerable communities and strengthening resilience.

5. **Investment is not keeping pace with ambition.**
   Despite their central role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Forest Goals, financing for sustainable forest management remains far below what is required to halt deforestation and restore degraded landscapes.

This year, #ForestDay will be observed at UN Headquarters on 24 March 2026. The United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, will host a panel discussion to explore how valuation, governance and finance can better reflect forests' full economic, social and environmental contributions. The event will be livestreamed on UN Web TV.

The International Day of Forests is observed each year on 21 March, following its proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly. This year's observance calls for a simple but urgent shift: recognising forests not as peripheral environmental assets, but as engines of inclusive growth, poverty reduction and long-term prosperity.

For more information: International Day of Forests

Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN DESA Voice, Volume 30 | No.3 | March 2026
https://desapublications.un.org/un-desa-voice/things-you-need-to-know/march-2026/5-ways-forests-drive-inclusive-and-resilient
Also here: https://iefworld.org/node/2021

Mobilising an Earth Governance Alliance (MEGA)

The International Environment Forum is a steering committee organisation with MEGA, Mobilizing an Earth Governance Alliance, along with the Bahá'í International Community.

Here is an excerpt of MEGA's February newsletter:

We are in a planetary crisis. Armed conflicts and lack of effective global governance are pushing us across the nine planetary boundaries. But there is cause for hope. Scientists, like-minded governments, policy makers, lawyers and civil society organizations are joining together to establish - and more effectively use - global governance mechanisms and processes to protect the planet for current and future generations.

However, on January 28, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sent a letter to UN members warning that the UN is facing an imminent financial collapse.

“Austerity” measures started in 2024, have already had a devastating impact with numerous lay-offs at the UN. These have been compounded by key UN Member States not paying their dues, or paying them extremely late, causing program cancellation and forcing the UN to have to return some unspent dues allocated for cancelled programs. (See Guterres warns of UN's 'imminent financial collapse', Reuters, January 30, 2026).

This is bad news for the environment. The UN hosts a number of important environmental governance bodies and programs, including the UN Environment Assembly, UN Environment Program, UN Oceans, UN Forum on Forests, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

The UN also provides a forum for negotiating international environmental agreements, and then provides administrative support (often serving as the secretariat) for the resulting treaty bodies. These include, amongst others, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement.

Further cuts to UN funding, or a financial collapse, threaten these programs and treaty bodies. In addition, further cuts or a financial collapse, would make it even more difficult to reform/strengthen these bodies and programs in order to enhance their governance over the environment, or to use the convening power of the UN for the establishment of additional earth governance mechanisms, as promoted by MEGA (see MEGA priority proposals below).

For this reason, many MEGA participating organizations endorsed the Joint statement calling for urgent action to prevent UN collapse organized by Women’s Major Group.

MEGA priority proposals and campaigns

MEGA (and our participating organizations) are promoting a number of climate governance proposals and campaigns for general consideration, adoption and implementation in relevant international forums. Priority proposals for MEGA include:

UN General Assembly Resolution on a Planetary Crisis (Unprecedented Earth System Risk);

Establish an International Earth System Crisis Response Mechanism with a coordinated international Earth system scientific monitoring system;

Strengthen the UN Climate Convention Conference of Parties (COP) process;

Upgrade the UN Environment Program (UNEP) to a Global Environment Agency;

Strengthen and expand the International Judicial Institutions;

Establish a UN Envoy for Future Generations and institutional representatives for future generations at all governance levels;

Advance Earth Trusteeship

Source: February 2026 newsletter of MEGA https://mailchi.mp/548f9ec6a968/earth-governance-and-the-un-crisis-plus-upcoming-un-environment-days-and-meetings?e=b643638df4, see also https://iefworld.org/node/2023

Vanuatu calls for UN Action on Climate Change

UNGA Resolution on International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on Climate Change

Moving forward together on climate

Six months ago, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a landmark advisory opinion that clearly outlines the responsibilities of nations in safeguarding their peoples and communities against climate change and climate-related disasters. Vanuatu has now introduced a UN General Assembly resolution to endorse and operationalise the ICJ decision. This is expected to be more contentious than the previous resolution. The draft not only welcomes and endorses the ruling but also includes some implementation measures.

Today, the global community has an opportunity to stand together in translating that guidance into concrete action. Vanuatu and its partners are fostering an inclusive, collaborative process that welcomes all voices, aiming to turn the Court's vision into reality and build a resilient future for everyone.

From legal clarity to real-world action

The ICJ has provided clear guidance; the next step is for governments to work together to translate those words into concrete measures. We call on all states to engage in good-faith cooperation with Vanuatu and the Core Group to craft and adopt the strongest possible resolution for the planet and for humanity. The Core Group's diverse membership, including the Pacific, Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, Asia and Europe, underscores that this is a truly global concern.

We cannot delay any longer

Climate impacts are accelerating faster than political responses, and no one is spared. The past three years have been the hottest on record, and projections show that the critical 1.5°C threshold has already been exceeded. We can no longer afford to let action stall.

The ICJ advisory opinion offers one of the most pragmatic pathways for the world to cooperate on the climate crisis. It sets out shared rules and responsibilities that can restore confidence in international law and underscores that every nation has a duty to protect the communities already feeling — and continuing to feel — the adverse effects of climate change, wherever they are located.

Backing this resolution strengthens multilateralism at a moment when it is urgently needed. It is more than a symbol of hope; it is a decisive affirmation of our collective commitment to climate justice.

Global cooperation to solve a shared climate crisis

This resolution is presented in the spirit of inclusivity and collaboration. Climate change affects every nation and demands coordinated global action. From Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, the Pacific, and the Europe, the resolution invites all countries to help operationalise the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion.

Three years ago, governments, youth, civil-society organisations, and frontline communities came together, leading to the historic Climate-Change Advisory Opinion. Today, we renew that call, urging governments to listen to the voices of their peoples, unite once more, and

lead the way forward. The informal sessions currently underway at the UN General Assembly provide a concrete opportunity for the international community to move from rhetoric to real, measurable action.

A time for the world to come together

The resolution testifies to continued cooperation among states even in uncertain moments. It builds on the inclusive collaboration that defined the ICJ Advisory Opinion campaign, a historic effort that achieved unprecedented consensus, broad participation, and genuine solidarity across nations.

SOURCE: Vanuatu Advocacy Package:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Sr5ATZsuVGHPkGohAEJJSW7kkXub18K6/view
https://iefworld.org/node/2023

GEO7 Scenarios

UNEP Global Environment Outlook 7 Scenarios
Transformation to a Sustainable Environment

An environmentally and socio-economically sustainable and just future is achievable but would require unprecedented, coordinated, rapid, and innovative transformations across the economic and financial, materials/waste, energy, and food systems, while ensuring a resilient environment system.

GEO-7 target-seeking scenarios

There are still several pathways to achieving the intended goals. The GEO-7 Behaviour-focused Transformation Pathway and the Technology-focused Transformation Pathway assessed here achieve the goals based on different combinations of social and technical shifts, but both have major implications for energy, materials/waste and food systems.

Behaviour-focused transformation pathway

The Behaviour-focused transformation describes a world in which society transforms its core values towards sufficiency, placing less emphasis on material consumption and status, and reducing the pressure on natural systems.

In the Behaviour-focused transformation, goals are achieved through lifestyle, behavioural and value changes. It envisions a future where increased societal awareness of global environmental crises drives a shift toward a sufficiency worldview. This transformation is guided by principles of sharing, reciprocity, responsibility and care, local-to-global outlooks, and aiming to reconcile human well-being with ecosystem health. Multiple forms of knowledge are combined, including mainstream science and Indigenous and Local Communities (ILC)'s philosophies, practices and values. Examples include climate change adaptation measures, regeneration of abandoned lands, and governing fisheries and rivers. Aligned with these general assumptions, coherent solutions are adopted for each system:

Environmental systems:
Guided by principles of land sharing, there is an increase in symbiotic/sustainable use of protected areas (terrestrial, freshwater, marine), aiming for 50% of the world in 2050. Natural regrowth/restoration on abandoned agricultural lands due to changes in the food system provides carbon removal service.

Economic systems:
Beyond economic growth and GDP as a measure of well-being. Reduction of externalities through a combination of pricing and non-pricing instruments. Investments in technological and social solutions oriented towards enabling human and nature wellbeing.

Energy systems:
Behavioural and lifestyle changes lead to reductions in energy demand in rich regions, while middle-and lower-income gain access to basic energy services. Emergence of "prosumers" facilitated through small-scale decentralized electricity generation. Micro-grids, demand-side management, and distributed storage are scaled up.

Food systems:
Shift from input-based to biodiversity-based practices, use of mixed systems, and Indigenous and local knowledge in production. Rainwater management increases yields on rainfed cropland. Waste reduction by community- based food production and distribution. There is a strong shift to plant-based foods, particularly amongst populations with over consumption of meat produced unsustainably. Lower demand for industrial and processed foods, with an emphasis on recovering traditional foodways.

Circularity:
Reduced material footprints by avoiding conspicuous consumption and a digitally supported sharing economy. Reusing, repairing, refurbishing, recycling of products and materials becomes the norm. Informal circularity networks are fostered by providing access to infrastructure and training. Unsustainable and harmful components and products are replaced by more environmentally friendly, humane and sustainable alternatives.

Technology-focused transformation pathway

The Technology-focused transformation describes a highly globalized and market-driven world that relies primarily on technological development and efficiency gains in both supply and demand to overcome the global environmental crises.

In the Technology-focused transformation, the goals are achieved through innovation and technological solutions. It envisions a future characterized by an urbanized world with significant global trade and technological spill-over and leapfrogging, in which society relies on price-mediated and technological solutions together with expert and scientific knowledge:

Environmental systems:
Guided by the principle of sparing, biodiversity hotspots are protected, and the efficient use of non-protected areas allowing the regeneration of large areas of natural vegetation. Natural vegetation covering more than 30% is pursued together with significant afforestation via planted forests.

Economic systems:
Reduction of externalities through pricing mechanisms and efficiency gains. High investments in technical solutions to environmental and social problems, while valuing multiple ecosystem services and human capabilities as a metric of well-being.

Energy systems:
Supply-side investments with a focus on efficiency, clean energy, interconnectivity, and high levels of electrification. The electricity system is built around centralized distribution networks, large-scale supply and storage of electricity, and large-scale grid interconnections. Technological solutions, including power-to-liquids, advanced biofuels, hydrogen, and carbon capture and storage are made mainstream.

Food systems:
Aligned to the land-sparing principle, i.e., producing more in less area, freeing land for nature restoration, biodiversity protection, and conservation. Adoption of efficient irrigation, automated agricultural production, and the substitution of animal products by novel foods such as cultured meat. Technical means are adopted to tackle food waste and losses.

Circularity:
Design driven by cradle-to-cradle concerns, increased efficiency, and reduced waste. Monitoring, reviewing, and redesigning of products and implementation of necessary infrastructure, improves recyclability and enables high recycling rates. Efficient modular design in buildings and goods reduces their material footprint and increases their longevity and ability to be refurbished. Technological solutions including machine learning contribute to waste management and circular supply chains.

Continue reading this article with the next section on **Scenario Requirements** here: https://iefworld.org/GEO7scenarios

Source: https://iefworld.org/GEO7scenarios

US Nature Record

Scientists and other experts prepared an assessment of the health of nature in the United States, the first time this has ever been done. They released a 868-page draft for public comment and scientific review. The drafts for 13 chapters are ready to be viewed and for comments. The first two chapters are still in development.

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