

## Foreword

Sound decisions about the use and conservation of natural resources require high-quality, independent scientific information accessible to all who need it. Provision of such information, particularly on the status and trends of the nation's biological resources, is central to the mission of the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) Biological Resources Division, formerly the National Biological Service (NBS). This report, *The Status and Trends of the Nation's Biological Resources*, is a major contribution to meeting the nation's need for better information about our nation's living resources.

This two-volume book provides the first large-scale assessment of the health of the nation's plants, animals, and ecosystems and is intended for use by managers, scientists, policy makers, and the general public. It synthesizes existing and new information about birds, mammals, fishes, plants, and other species and summarizes what is known about the status and trends of major U.S. ecosystems. The findings reported here offer valuable insight into both successes and failures in resource management and point the way to better management of biological resources in the future.

The manner in which this report was produced typifies the partnership approach that the Biological Resources Division (BRD) will use to fulfill its mission of providing sound information about biological resources to decision-makers and the public. Information in this report came from state and federal agencies, universities, and nongovernmental organizations; the varied authorship of the articles and chapters in the report reflects this diversity as well. We must and will continue to build on the long history of collaborative efforts in the collection, cataloguing, and interpretation of information about our nation's living resources. The future calls for more coordination and integration, not less.

This report is the second major publication of the BRD's comprehensive inventory and

monitoring program and the first in a continuing series of scientific publications that will compile and present status and trends information for use by resource managers and the public. The first publication, *Our Living Resources: A Report to the Nation on the Distribution, Abundance, and Health of U.S. Plants, Animals, and Ecosystems*, was published by the fledgling NBS (LaRoe et al. 1995). With these publications, and with related scientific efforts such as the establishment of uniform standards for collecting biological information, the inventory and monitoring program is well on its way toward meeting its goal of providing scientifically sound, timely, and relevant information—a cornerstone of the USGS—about the health of the nation's biological legacy.

The merger of the National Biological Service with the USGS provides an important context for release of this report. The NBS was created to address the historical fragmentation and agency-specific focus of scientific activities in the Department of the Interior. Merging NBS with the USGS was an additional, critical step in providing unbiased, independent, integrated information about plants and animals, their habitats, and how they are affected by human and natural change. The merger allows integration of biological and physical science perspectives on important natural resource issues, thereby giving us more comprehensive information to support better decisions. With these capabilities, and an ability to communicate complex scientific information to decision-makers and the public, the USGS stands to play an even larger role in supporting natural resource management in the twenty-first century.

Americans value this nation's natural heritage and expect that those who are entrusted with its management will exercise care and make smart, informed decisions. This report and the Department of the Interior can help ensure that we meet that expectation, now and in the future.



Bruce Babbitt, Secretary, Department of the Interior