

Interpreters Note!

The following excerpts, from an article by Chris Maser, author of *The Redesigned Forest*, that appeared in the March 27 issue of the *Corvallis Gazette-Times*, provide material for illuminating the sometimes elusive subject of biodiversity.

“Biodiversity—the diversity of living species and their biological functions and processes—acts as an ecological insurance policy for the flexibility of future choice of management options. This is because every ecosystem adapts in some way to changes in its environment. In turn, the degree of a system’s adaptability depends on the richness of its biodiversity, which provides a redundancy of function that retains the system’s ability to respond to continual change.

“Redundancy—duplication or repetition of the elements of a system—provides alternative functional channels in case of a failure. Each ecosystem contains built-in redundancies that give it the resilience to resist change or to bounce back after disturbance ...

“There is a point, however, at which the loss of one more species will tip the balance and cause the system to begin an irreversible change that may well signal a decline in quality and productivity. This point of irreversibility is an unknown biological threshold in that we don’t know which species’ extinction will trigger its effects. That’s why it pays us to save every species we can.