

EDITORIAL

At this writing, four on-going international processes are addressing critical aspects of the law and policy relevant to global conservation and the environment: the 69th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); the 53rd GEF Council Meeting; the 53rd Session of the International Tropical Timber Council; and the Third Meeting of the Open-ended Committee of Permanent UNEP Representatives (leading into the Third Session of the UN Environment Assembly). Like most of the environmental and conservation action at national and international levels, however, these critical discussions are taking a back seat in the media – even the environmental-policy-oriented media – to the negotiations of the 23rd Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and related events.

With all due respect and admiration for the intense efforts involved in the numerous annual negotiations that have continued for 25 years without a break under the UNFCCC umbrella (to be covered in our next issue), we find it difficult to reconcile the apparent unification of all environmental issues under that single heading. The aspirational (national commitment) approach of the UNFCCC processes is commendable; however, we must not undervalue the real successes of more conventional approaches such as monitored bans and quotas under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (the most successful multilateral environmental agreement (MEA)) and the UNEP Chemical Conventions; the trade-based non-compliance system under CITES; and the collaborative approach toward protecting the green web of life on Earth as exemplified by the text of the Convention on Biological Diversity and by that Convention's relationship with other MEAs.

Most important, despite the global focus on climate change, national progress on many of the substantive components of climate change (pollution of land, water and air; destruction of protected areas, forests and untouched ecosystems/landscapes; *etc.*) seems to be rolling back, whether by direct actions and threats of more such roll-backs (as in the US), by lack of enforcement, or by the determination that national standards should be altered to reflect the (lower) standards described under international instruments.

It seems important at this point to remember that progress in any overarching problem area, such as climate change, is best achieved by moving forward a step at a time – for example, by raising standards regarding particular pollution concerns in one environmental medium, while our climate change overview allows us to remain aware of and to close out the possibilities that these higher single-medium standards might be circumvented by switching to pollution of another medium.

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