

Oral presentation

Conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants: an overview of current global and regional initiatives

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Introduction. Recent reassessments of the world's flora, threats to plant species and habitats, and the use, trade, and management of medicinal plants indicate that, worldwide, a much larger proportion of plant species is used in medicine than previously suggested, and that a substantial proportion of medicinal plant species may be threatened with extinction. However, current global and regional efforts to better understand and manage impacts of wild harvest can greatly advance the conservation and sustainable use of this important plant resource.

Objectives. To review current challenges and progress towards conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants in North America and globally.

Methods. Research and analyses of published floras, trade data, and threat assessments undertaken by members of the Medicinal Plant Working Group (USA) and the Medicinal Plant Specialist Group (global) were reviewed to present a synthesis of the global situation and outlook for medicinal plant conservation and sustainable use. Global and regional research and other initiatives simultaneously addressing conservation, sustainable use, collection, and trade were summarized.

Results. Approximately 17% (70,000 species) of the world's flora, and about 11% (2,500 species) of the flora of the United States, is used medicinally. Threats to natural habitats, and the continuing strong growth in demand for traditional medicines and other herbal products threaten the survival of an estimated 21% (15,000 species) of the world's flora. Cultivation contributes to material in trade for approximately 900 species of medicinal plants worldwide, indicating that the vast majority of medicinal plants in use are sources from wild populations. Engagement of collectors and the herbal trade industry in addressing concerns about conservation and sustainable use has led globally to the development and implementation of an international standard for sustainable wild collection of medicinal and aromatic plants (ISSC-MAP), and regionally to the progress collection protocols and management plans for specific, commercially important medicinal plant species.

Conclusion. Research on sustainable harvest protocols undertaken by members of the MPWG, and development an international standard for sustainable wild collection of medicinal and aromatic plants (ISSC-MAP) are two initiatives with potential to reduce the threat of over-collection and habitat degradation for commercially important species of medicinal plants in North America and world-wide.

Keywords: standard, certification, threatened species

Selected References

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