



Native Seeds

Importance of Native Plants

Protection of Biodiversity - Genetic diversity is critical for the survival and adaptation of plant species in changing environments.

Restoration of Habitat - Native seeds are essential for restoring degraded ecosystems affected by deforestation, wildfires, and activities like mining.

Resilience to Climate Change - Native plants and drought resistant crops are critical for adapting to a changing climate and ensuring healthy ecosystems and habitat for wildlife.

Medicinal and Cultural Significance - Many native plants have medicinal and cultural importance. The knowledge and practices associated with many of these plants are integral to indigenous traditions.



photo credit: Adam Bronstein, Western Watersheds Project

Experts' Insights

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS), commissioned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), completed a comprehensive analysis on the native seed supply chain in January 2023. NAS made ten recommendations, including:

- Federal agencies need and use the most native seeds. The BLM, Forest Service, Park Service, and other agencies revegetate and restore native ecosystems to millions of acres every year requiring millions of pounds of different kinds of native seeds.
- Inadequate supply of native seeds is a major barrier to ecological restoration on federal lands (which make up 1 in 3 acres in the US).
- Federal agencies often use non-native seeds due to the lack of native seeds appropriate to their regions. At the scale of millions of acres, the effect to native wildlife and biodiversity is significant.

National Academy of Sciences (2023):
[An Assessment of Native Seed Needs and the Capacity for Their Supply](#)



The Bureau of Land Management's Central Role

The success of a national native seed strategy hinges on BLM. As the steward of 245 million acres of public lands and the largest seed collection program in the United States, BLM plays a pivotal role in ensuring the availability of native seeds for restoration projects.

BLM Native Seeds Challenges

Staffing - BLM faces a shortage of skilled botanists and plant ecologists who are essential for the proper identification, collection, and management of native seeds. This shortage limits the agency's capacity to conduct effective seed collection and restoration.

Structural Capacity - BLM lacks the necessary infrastructure, including warehouses and supply chains to scale up native seed production and distribution. This hampers the agency's ability to meet a growing demand for native seeds in restoration and rehabilitation efforts.

Program to Support Growers - There is a need for comprehensive programs to support native seed growers and producers. Such programs should provide guidance, funding, and technical assistance to encourage the cultivation and harvesting of native plants and seeds.

Seed Collection Permit Program - The absence of a centralized and transparent commercial seed collection permit program poses challenges for both native seed collectors and land managers. A well-structured permit system would streamline the collection process, ensure sustainable harvesting practices, and promote transparency in seed procurement.

Changes Needed

National Priority for Native Plants and Seeds - Native plants and seeds should be recognized as a national priority in conservation and restoration efforts. This prioritization should include increased funding, research, and policy support at the federal level. Federal agencies currently have a national seed strategy in place, but progress has been slow and uncoordinated.

Secretary Haaland's Order - We hope to see Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland issue an order phasing out the purchase of non-native seeds by Interior agencies by 2028. This policy shift would encourage the use of native seeds and drive demand, thereby bolstering the native seed supply.

National Seed Strategy Reforms - Developing a reliable native seed supply is achievable, but it will take substantial commitment from the Department of the Interior, Department of Agriculture, and others working together to implement a comprehensive vision at a much more intensive and expansive level. We urge the White House to help lead and coordinate the effort as it aligns with President Biden's direction to invest in nature-based solutions, climate change adaptation, and climate smart agriculture.

Why is it Difficult to Obtain Native Seed?

- Generating the variety and volume of native seeds needed by land managers is complicated. It requires estimating needs years in advance, collecting wild seed, directing farmers to grow it according to strict protocols to retain natural genetics, harvesting, cleaning, storing under specific conditions, shipping, distributing when the seed is needed (for example, after a wildfire), and then planting under the right conditions so the plants have the best chance to grow and thrive.
- An under-developed supply of native seeds keeps costs high, often prohibitively so, causing restoration to be implemented with non-natives or substitute species that are less suited for the region and therefore less resilient. This creates a vicious cycle that continues to limit the supply of diverse native seed, while public funds are spent on less effective restoration.

Coalition for Native Seed Conservation

PEER is part of a coalition of organizations and stakeholders who are actively engaged in the promotion and conservation of native plants and seeds. This coalition includes conservation groups, botanical research institutions, native seed growers and producers, and indigenous communities.



"We need to respect the whole of creation and all its biodiversity, from the tiniest insect to the greatest whale." - Jane Goodall

Contact Us

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