

Our Global Commitment for People and Earth's Protected Areas

We, the 3,000 participants of the Vth World Parks Congress, celebrate, voice concern and call for urgent action on protected areas. We bear witness to those places most inspirational and spiritual, most critical to the survival of species and ecosystems, most crucial in safeguarding food, air and water, most essential in stabilizing climate, most unique in cultural and natural heritage and therefore most deserving of humankind's special care. We urge action for the benefit of protected areas so that their benefits may be conserved and equitably shared.

Who We Are

We are a gathering of resource managers, scientists, civil servants, and industry leaders. We include leaders of non-governmental organizations—both large and small, of international bodies and grassroots groups. We include indigenous and mobile peoples and local communities. We are men and women of younger and older generations, hailing from major urban centers and small communities across 154 countries. We share experience from the Earth's wildest frontiers and its most degraded lands. We carry the voices of countless concerned people from every corner of the world.

The Rapidly Changing World

All around us we see profound transformations: climate change, fragmentation of landscapes and seascapes and the spread of invasive alien species. We see growing populations, globalization, urbanization, decentralization, and rising demands for food, fiber, fuel and water. We see loss of biological and cultural diversity and failing ecosystems that serve as vital organs of the Earth. We see 3,000,000,000 people in poverty, gripped by daily struggles for survival. We see the changing faces of global and community leaders, too often too burdened by societal demands to nurture Earth's life support systems.

A New Paradigm for Protected Areas

In this changing world, we need a fresh and innovative approach to protected areas and their role in broader conservation and development agendas. This approach demands the maintenance and enhancement of our core conservation goals, equitably integrating them with the interests of all affected people. In this way the synergy between conservation, the maintenance of life support systems and sustainable development is forged. We see protected areas as vital means to achieve this synergy efficiently and cost-effectively. We see protected areas as providers of benefits beyond boundaries—beyond their boundaries on a map, beyond the boundaries of nation-states, across societies, genders and generations.

Cause for Celebration

We celebrate the miracle of the diversity of nature and of cultures that possess the wealth, the wisdom and knowledge to enable conservation and sustainable use.

We celebrate protected areas as places where we conserve biodiversity—for its inherent value, for its value as a public good and as a local livelihood resource.

We celebrate protected areas as providers of ecosystem goods and services, as irreplaceable sources of fresh water, fish stocks and flood protection and as buffers against climate change.

We celebrate protected areas as refugia for life in the face of rapid, perhaps cataclysmic, ecological shifts.

We celebrate protected areas as contributors to poverty reduction and economic development and as creators and sustainers of livelihoods.

We celebrate protected areas as living classrooms—special places where people connect to their roots, where cultures, values and knowledge systems carry on through generations.

We celebrate protected areas as promoters of friendship and peace, as the common ground for nations that share in the proliferation of transboundary parks.

We celebrate one of the greatest collective land use commitments in the history of humankind—a worldwide system of some 100,000 protected areas and a tripling of the world's protected areas over the last twenty years.

And we celebrate the conservation successes of local communities, indigenous peoples, governments, private individuals and volunteer organizations and their efforts to make protected areas places of natural, cultural and spiritual convergence.

Cause for Concern

We voice concern that many areas of irreplaceable and immediately threatened biological diversity have not yet been protected.

We voice concern that many places which have been conserved over the ages by local communities, mobile and indigenous peoples are not given recognition, protection and support.

We voice concern that wild and natural areas outside of protected areas have shrunk by half in the last twenty years, and that biological diversity, in turn, is on the brink of mass extinction.

We voice concern that many proclaimed protected areas exist more on paper than in practice, especially in developing nations and in the marine realm.

We voice concern that while 12% of the world's land area now enjoys protection, less than 1% of the world's oceans, seas and coasts have protected status, exposing fisheries and rich storehouses of biodiversity to overexploitation.

We voice concern that freshwater ecosystems—natural reservoirs for a non-negotiable element for life on Earth—are largely unprotected.

We voice concern that protected areas are often islands in a sea of degradation, ignoring natural life lines drawn through river basins, migratory corridors and fertile ocean currents.

We voice concern that development plans do not include attention to protected areas.

We voice concern that many costs of protected areas are borne locally—particularly by poor communities—while benefits accrue globally and remain underappreciated.

We voice concern that while conservation funds are promoted as available, they often prove inaccessible and are sometimes misdirected.

We voice concern that perverse subsidies encourage overexploitation of resources in and around protected areas.

We voice concern that existing protected areas suffer an annual funding gap of some US\$25 billion, excluding additional resources required to expand protected area systems.

We voice concern that many protected area practitioners lack access to technology, knowledge, lessons learned and best practice models for effective and adaptive management.

We voice concern that the capacity of our younger generations to participate in the new protected area agenda is insufficient.

We voice concern that human-induced climate change threatens to reverse our past achievements and jeopardize future efforts and that the world has not started substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

We voice concern that we face a closing window of opportunity, that if we fail to act now we will miss our last chance to pass our rich natural and cultural heritage onto future generations.

Call for Commitment and Action

We urge commitment to the irreplaceable role of protected areas in the implementation of the Millennium Development Declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Ramsar Convention, the World Heritage Convention and other global agreements.

We urge commitment to ensure that globalization and trade agreements do not hinder the capacity of protected areas to achieve their core aims.

We urge commitment to establish and strengthen policy, legal and institutional frameworks for protected area systems that are accountable and transparent.

We urge commitment to expand and strengthen worldwide systems of protected areas, prioritized on the basis of imminent threat to biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage.

We urge commitment to safeguard representative ecosystems, habitats and species, so filling gaps in conserving the irreplaceable building blocks of Earth's natural order.

We urge commitment to build resilience into the selection, design and management of protected area networks, so insuring their survival in the face of human-induced climate change.

We urge commitment to mainstream protected areas within overall development agendas, engaging support from broad cross-sections of government, communities and the private sector.

We urge commitment to the mobilization of financial and technical resources to implement the African Protected Area Initiative and the African Protected Area Trust Fund.

We urge commitment by extractive industries to fulfill their responsibilities for the careful stewardship of protected areas.

We urge commitment to the integral relationship of people with protected areas, fully incorporating the rights, interests and aspirations of both women and men.

We urge commitment to involve local communities, indigenous and mobile peoples in the creation, proclamation and management of protected areas.

We urge commitment to engage and enlist younger generations in the stewardship of protected areas, recognizing that they have legitimate stakes in the future of those areas.

We urge commitment to ensuring that people who benefit from or are impacted by protected areas have the opportunity to participate in relevant decision-making on a fair and equitable basis in full respect of their human and social rights.

We urge commitment to protected area management that strives to reduce, and in no way exacerbates, poverty.

We urge commitment to protected area management that shares benefits with indigenous peoples and local communities.

We urge commitment to innovation in protected area management including adaptive, collaborative and co-management strategies.

We urge commitment to recognize, strengthen, protect and support community conservation areas.

We urge commitment to the provision of substantial additional financial, infrastructural and material resources for maintaining and enhancing protected area systems.

We urge commitment to the economic valuation of protected areas in recognition of their significance to local, national and global economies so as to motivate increased investment and funding.

We urge commitment to innovative and diversified income generation strategies, thereby securing predictable financial returns for payment to the stewards of ecosystems goods and services.

We urge commitment to redirect perverse subsidies toward support mechanisms for protected areas.

We urge commitment to build the capacity of protected area managers, including through cutting-edge information services and technology transfer.

We urge commitment to value and use all knowledge systems on protected areas, both scientific and traditionally based.

We urge commitment to communications and education to improve and broaden support for protected areas.

Our Pledge

Our strongest commitments will fail if we neglect to maintain avenues for open dialogue. Such dialogue thrives in a climate of humility, credibility and trust. Towards this end we pledge to facilitate understanding and collaboration. We pledge to engage and embrace all constituencies. We pledge to share our vision that a sustainable future for humankind depends on a caring partnership with nature. We pledge to bequeath protected areas, as precious heritage, to future generations.