
A new deal for Nature – Conserve wildlife and wild spaces

The loss of the world's biological diversity poses an existential threat to the future of the planet. As key species are declining at alarming rates, some estimates point to 1,000 times the natural rates, natural systems begin to unravel and fall apart and their ability to provide for human well-being erodes. The key threats jeopardizing the survival of this planet's wildlife are habitat loss, overconsumption of wildlife, climate change, illegal trade, invasive species and pollution.

Wildlife and their habitats are coming out as losers locally and globally, which in turn represents a threat to humanity. While progress in alleviating poverty and food insecurity has been made, these gains have been largely at the expense of ecosystems. To stop this trend and avoid going increasingly past imminent points of no return, more integrated and inclusive approaches to land and coastal planning and wildlife use and conservation are needed; significant investment in protecting, expanding and restoring critical habitats and their functionality are also required and radical institutional reforms need to be launched. Wildlife and wild spaces can no longer remain solely a priority within the conservation community.

The situation today

Wildlife populations for which information is available have declined on average by over 60% since 1970. The viability of an individual species is influenced by many factors, including overexploitation and related trade (whether legal or illegal), habitat destruction, invasive species and diseases, pollution and climate change. In turn, each of these factors are driven by several underlying social and economic causes, all of which need to be addressed in a systemic manner to secure long-term survival of species.

One of the most significant trends driving degradation and fragmentation is the conversion of natural landscapes into land for agriculture, urban development and resource extraction. Unsustainable harvest and trade in wildlife and related products is a major threat to biodiversity. Although much attention is given to trade in charismatic fauna such as elephant ivory and rhino horn, a much wider range of species is impacted, used for pharmaceutical, food, medicinal and pets or ornamental purposes.

Furthermore, the illegal trade in wildlife and forest products poses significant environmental, social, security, and economic threats to many countries. Illegal trade undermines sustainable development and the rule of law and is an impediment to progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Where we need to be by 2030

Traditional conservation approaches are important, but more innovative solutions that tap into new financing and skills are also necessary, given the historically low level of investment in wildlife and habitat conservation. Nature-based solutions to make the necessary transformation in favour of human and wildlife coexistence include some of the following key transformational pathways.

Integrated land- and water-use planning and decision making must be tackled in both government and corporate board rooms. Tools from systems-thinking and scenario modelling highlight previously ignored negative consequences for wildlife, but also promote more inclusive governance models for lasting solutions. More efforts are needed to practically integrate these approaches in real world decision-making.

Creating and expanding robust wildlife economies offers enormous potential to increase the values of wildlife while generating much needed income flows. Value chains must be developed, including consumptive and non-consumptive products, to ensure sustainability and ethical practices from source to consumer.

More cohesive and concerted efforts are needed when it comes to combating illegal and unsustainable trade in wildlife. National legal frameworks need to be strengthened and harmonized to allow for adequate enforcement actions in countries of origin, transit and destination. However, these must be supplemented with efforts to prevent and reduce demand, through awareness raising and comprehensive social and behavioral change communication strategies. Finally, competitive and viable alternatives, especially for communities living with valued wildlife, must be made available.

Increased habitat protection and restoration is also necessary to realize a future with humans living in harmony with nature. In particular, multi-use areas that adequately address both human and wildlife security need to become a priority. The science shows where critical habitats are being lost and degraded and what is driving those dynamics. However, the commitment and resources to hold the line on what remains and restore critical areas are not sufficient.

What UNEP advocates for

COMMITMENT

Full global commitment for no net loss of wildlife habitat and improved biodiversity and protected area targets; application of innovative approaches to address the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss, to achieve appropriate balance between conservation and use of wildlife and wildlife spaces.

AWARENESS

Promote greater understanding within countries, companies and consumers on the impacts of consumption choices on wildlife and their habitats.

FUNDING

Increased bilateral and multilateral donor support for protecting wildlife and critical habitats. New models of financing and business partners to grow a sustainable wildlife economy.

Key UNEP reports

- Wild life, Wild Livelihoods: Involving Communities in Sustainable Wildlife Management and Combatting the Illegal Wildlife Trade. United Nations Environment Programme, 2018
- IPBES 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
- The environmental impacts of Illegal trade in Wildlife: An Analysis. UNEP, 2016.
- "The Environmental Crime Crisis: Threats to sustainable development from illegal exploitation and trade in wildlife and forest resources". UNEP-INTERPOL, 2014
- Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration, 2018
- GRASP & IUCN (2018). Report to the CITES Standing Committee on the Status of Great Apes. United Nations Environment Programme Great Apes Survival Partnership, Nairobi, and International Union for Conservation of Nature, Gland.
- UNEP-WCMC, IUCN and NGS (2018). Protected Planet Report 2018. UNEP-WCMC, IUCN and NGS: Cambridge UK; Gland, Switzerland; and Washington, D.C., USA

SDGs served



Relevant United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolutions

UNEP/EA.1/L.3 Illegal trade in wildlife

UNEP/EA.2/L.12 Sustainable coral reefs management

UNEP/EA.2/L.14 Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products

UNEP/EA.4/L.11 Innovations on biodiversity and land degradation UNEP/EA.4/L.12 Protection of the

Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities UNEP/EA.4/L.13 Sustainable Management for Global

Health of Mangrove UNEP/EA.4/L.14 Sustainable coral reefs management

UNEP/EA.4/L.19 Conservation and Sustainable Management of Peatlands

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