

**Protecting rivers and their associated ecosystems as corridors in a changing climate**

RECOGNISING the many ecosystem services healthy rivers and their associated ecosystems provide, including drinking water, fisheries, sediments and nutrients, biodiversity, and recreational and cultural values;

NOTING WITH CONCERN that freshwater species populations are declining over twice as fast as terrestrial and marine species and that nearly one-third of freshwater species are threatened with extinction;

NOTING that climate change is altering the water cycle, as demonstrated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);

AWARE that riparian areas, floodplains and other wetlands absorb and filter pollutants and slowly release precipitation into rivers, and help mitigate extreme floods, droughts and storm surges;

KNOWING that river systems must retain their four-dimensional connectivity to support freshwater species, ecosystems and many of their services;

NOTING Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 for terrestrial, freshwater and marine conservation through “well-connected systems of protected areas” and Strategy 1.7 of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands to “ensure... policies and implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)...particularly concerning... catchment/river basin management”;

UNDERSTANDING that connected rivers transport organic matter and nutrients to and from floodplains and release them in deltas, supporting important agriculture and fisheries, and homes and livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people;

KNOWING that many freshwater and terrestrial species must move along rivers to survive and that connected rivers are diminishing with only one-third of long rivers remaining free-flowing;

AWARE that climate change can impact human populations and that deltas and wild-capture fisheries, nourished by free-flowing rivers, can contribute to resilience of coastal and inland communities; and

CONCERNED by the lack of river protection and expanding development that harm river flows and freshwater species;

**The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020, at its session in Marseille, France:**

1. ENCOURAGES the Director General, Commissions, Members and states to promote the inclusion of river protection and connectivity within the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the monitoring of Sustainable Development Goal Target 6.6;

2. ALSO ENCOURAGES IUCN to:

a. assess the sustainability of existing river protection models (i.e. the effectiveness of legal mechanisms in maintaining the values and free-flowing nature of rivers) (World Commission on Protected Areas – WCPA, World Commission on Environmental Law – WCEL);

b. support learning exchanges, innovation and adoption of durable protection and governance models for rivers and associated ecosystems (WCPA, Water Programme);

c. assess free-flowing river status and its relationship to protection of the underground water system; and

d. encourage countries to support protection and restoration of rivers and their associated ecosystems, including through funding;

3. ENCOURAGES governments to:

a. work with civil society, communities, indigenous groups, the private sector and others to identify, restore and protect free-flowing rivers or stretches, and their associated ecosystems, that provide essential services, or resilience in a changing climate;

b. balance development by enacting durable legal protections and enhanced governance for rivers, including riparian buffer protections and other IWRM approaches and tools;

- c. restore rivers or stretches, and their associated ecosystems, in which sufficient connectivity and flows could feasibly be restored;
  - d. promote cooperative management among governments to strengthen transboundary river governance;
  - e. use the IUCN *Guidance for Conserving Connectivity through Ecological Networks and Corridors*;
  - f. support protection and restoration of rivers and their associated ecosystems;
  - g. ensure that all contracts involving major infrastructure projects impacting national waterways include a provision that local stakeholders are included in the initial planning stages and that their concerns are incorporated in further discussions; and
  - h. ensure that employment or retraining opportunities are provided by developers to the local communities whose livelihoods are most disrupted by such projects; and
4. URGES civil society to support identification, restoration and protection of free-flowing rivers or stretches and their associated ecosystems.