

Protecting and restoring endangered grassland and savannah ecosystems

RECOGNISING the global importance of grasslands, which occupy 30% of the Earth's land surface and harbour up to a third of terrestrial biodiversity, and which include the Cerrado, Pampas, Gran Chaco, Pantanal and Orinoco, Andean and Afroalpine grasslands; grasslands of Northern America such as the Great Northern Plains; Eurasian steppe, in particular the Mongol-Manchurian grassland and steppes in Russia, Nepal, and China; savannahs in Africa; and lowland grasslands of south-eastern Australia;

RECOGNISING the multiple ecosystem services (carbon sequestration, filtration and storage of freshwater, soil retention), animal and plant biodiversity and the strong economic, social and cultural bonds that tie many traditional pastoralist people to grasslands and savannahs;

RECOGNISING that 500 million people across the globe identify themselves as pastoralists, many of whom are historically marginalised, with limited access to health, education and other services;

CONCERNED that the world's native grasslands and savannahs are undergoing land-use change and degradation at a rate likely exceeding that of any other biome;

FURTHER CONCERNED that threats to native and natural grassland and savannah ecosystems have received far less attention than losses of forests, freshwater or coastal systems;

ALSO CONCERNED that according to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) approximately 20% of the Earth's vegetated land surface showed a persistent decline in productivity caused by land degradation;

CONCERNED that grassland ecology is inadequately understood and grassland biodiversity is insufficiently valued and these knowledge gaps contribute to under-investment and un-supportive policies;

AWARE that immediate drivers of land conversion include agricultural developments for livestock, food, fibre and energy production, mining and other extractive industries, unsustainable grazing and climate change;

AWARE, conversely, that well-managed agricultural practices and sustainable grazing systems on natural and semi-natural grasslands can provide important conservation and social benefits; and

ALSO AWARE of the full range of options for the world's grasslands and savannahs, such as protection, sustainable management and restoration;

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

1. CALLS ON the Director General to support actions to address urgent issues relating to conversion and degradation of these ecosystems;

2. CALLS ON IUCN Commissions and Members to support the preparation of a Global Status Report on grasslands and savannahs identifying:

a. areas of chief conservation concern, including existing and projected conversion fronts and degradation trends, fragmentation of landscapes and Key Biodiversity Areas;

b. the value of associated ecosystem services and their benefits for human communities addressing local knowledge, land rights and customary institutions; and

c. successful and replicable grassland restoration practices, indicators of grassland and savannah quality and best practices for protection, sustainable management and restoration of grasslands and savannahs, including those that can be implemented on working lands;

3. RECOMMENDS that IUCN and its Members work, as appropriate, with their national-level and other counterparts engaged in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to encourage them to seek to support the inclusion in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework of a target on zero net loss of natural ecosystems, including grasslands and savannahs, thus avoiding leakage from one biome to another;

4. CALLS ON Commissions and Members to support efforts to foster grassland and savannah protection and restoration in the focus of the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, possibly through setting targets for integration of grassland and savannah protection in land-planning policies, as part of an Ecological Restoration Plan, and requesting governments to designate resources for the implementation of such a plan;

5. ENCOURAGES Members and governments to apply the UNCCD's Scientific Conceptual Framework for Land Degradation Neutrality as a means to support implementation of the UNCCD and to fulfill Sustainable Development Goal 15.3. within all areas of grassland and savannah around the world; and

6. REQUESTS IUCN to seek support from State Members for the process initiated by the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, to designate a 'United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists' in order to increase worldwide understanding of the importance of rangelands, including grasslands and savannahs, for the conservation of biodiversity and local livelihoods, to be voted on at the 27th session of the COAG.

Note: The proposal to designate a 'United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists' was endorsed at the 27th Session of the FAO Committee on Agriculture. It will proceed to votes at the 165th Session of the FAO Council meeting in December 2020, the 42nd Session of the FAO Conference in June 2021, and the United Nations General Assembly in September 2021.