



THEMES FOR THE IUCN WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS 2020

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a membership Union composed of State and non-State Members, has been operating at the forefront of the environmental agenda for the past 70 years. Powered by knowledge and underpinned by science, the Union offers a unique platform for change through a combination of knowledge generation, policy influencing and on-the-ground delivery.

Every four years, the IUCN World Conservation Congress brings together thousands of delegates – 10,000 in 2016 – including conservation experts and custodians, government and business representatives, indigenous peoples, scientists, as well as other professional stakeholders, who have an interest in nature and the sustainable and just use of natural resources. The IUCN World Conservation Congress is a unique platform for democratic decision-making, convening governments and civil society on an equal footing, to agree on actions for change. The decisions, resolutions and recommendations that emerge are the product of a fully inclusive process that widens the support and reinforces its legitimacy for environmental policy-making well beyond that of any other environmental organisation.

The 2020 Congress will be held in Marseille, France, from 11-19 June 2020, and will help set the environmental agenda for the next decade.

Our current socio-economic development trajectory is incompatible with a healthy natural world and the maintenance of the planetary life support systems upon which we depend. What we do in the next decade will be crucial for the future of life on earth. We know conservation works and that we have the knowledge and tools to change this trajectory. What is needed is leadership across the globe, clear objectives, and an unprecedented level of cooperation and engagement across all societies and economic sectors to make the transition to a more sustainable future.

We have the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework for action. We have innovative and integrated nature-based solutions that are essential to achieving these goals. However, some key SDG targets and all the Aichi targets under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) do not extend past 2020. Setting ambitious new targets for the decades ahead and having greater commitments to achieving them must be a global priority.

The IUCN World Conservation Congress is designed to facilitate thinking, collaborative solutions and decision-making to address critical challenges facing our world. The 2020 Forum, a hub of public debate, will focus on showcasing best practices and innovations in nature conservation, building new partnerships and forging a roadmap for action.

This will require heeding diverse voices, including those of environmental custodians – especially those that are often marginalised such as indigenous peoples and women. Youth and young professionals are our future and must play a lead role in securing a sustainable future. Their voices must be heard and they must be actively engaged as thinkers and leaders. To this end, the 2020 Forum will offer a platform to collect and organise contributions and commitments from a broad range of stakeholders, with a view to proposing concerted and viable options for the post-2020 framework that will be agreed at the CBD Conference of the Parties in China (October 2020).

The IUCN Congress will cover seven themes: four related to major dimensions of nature (landscapes, water, oceans and climate change), and three enabling conditions (governance and rights, finance and economics, and knowledge and innovation).

Managing landscapes for nature and people

Nature conservation remains a tall order: the rates of species extinction continue to be alarming, and good news, though it occurs, is all too infrequent. What are the key policy gaps that must be filled in the decade leading up to 2030 to halt the extinction of life forms? What tools, incentives, funding and ambition do we need to achieve a reversal of current trends? And how can we avoid repeating past errors?

By 2030, we must achieve a harmonious balance between ecological integrity for natural landscapes, shared prosperity, and justice for custodians on working landscapes within the limits that nature can sustain. How can we deliver climate-resilient and economically-viable development, while at the same time conserving nature and recognising its rights? What fundamental shifts are required to protect and maintain terrestrial landscapes, such as forests and drylands, while providing food security for over 10 billion people? Can agrobiodiversity offer a viable pathway to climate-resilient food systems? What makes for sustainable land use planning?

Urban environments and cities, often perceived as a part of the problem, are growing rapidly. We should aim to establish greener, biodiversity-positive, climate-resilient and healthy urban habitats with a lower carbon footprint and overall enhanced liveability. The growth of urban spaces must be in harmony with nature. What are some nature-based solutions to overcrowded and overheated cities, which will also increase resilience to floods and climate change? How do we contain the growing adverse impacts of pollutants and waste in urban areas?

Economic activities, such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry and ecotourism, will continue to thrive only if nature is sustained. What rights, governance, standards and best practices must the world advance to preserve protected and conserved areas, while respecting cultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems? How can we better engage with all stakeholders to achieve an optimal, credible and legitimate balance between extraction, consumption and preservation? How can we strengthen accountability in these sectors and redress harm where it has occurred?

What type of actions or levers can tackle the underlying drivers of land degradation and generate transformative change? How can we stimulate integrated systems thinking and approaches that reconcile multiple interests, values and types of resource use?

Conserving freshwater to sustain life

Freshwater resources – including rivers, streams, wetlands, ponds and lakes contain only 3% of the total amount of water on earth. Yet these water bodies are integral to the survival of all forms of life on the planet. The world faces considerable challenges in equitably managing the freshwater available to us as populations grow and we try to manage the impacts of climate change.

Freshwater conservation and restoration are thus essential at all scales if we are to sustain life forms – people, animals, plants, fungi etc. How can we ensure that water-related and water-dependent ecosystems survive and flourish?

Achieving water security continues to be a major challenge. Dwindling freshwater resources of adequate quality and accessibility is contributing to tension and instability at local levels. Climate change

is magnifying these impacts and, consequently, changing the migration patterns of people around the world. Climate change impacts on freshwater resources are further affecting adaptation and sustainable urbanisation efforts.

Ensuring adequate quality, availability and accessibility of the resource is thus vital for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being and socio-economic development, and contributing to peace, security, and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems. Rights and equitable governance underpin this. How can existing laws, policies, and institutions be strengthened and adapted to ensure the more effective and sustainable management of water resources at the local, national and transboundary levels? How can we effectively strengthen governance and stewardship to maintain healthy watersheds, and address pollution and contamination? What could incentivise the private sector to lead in developing sustainable water systems? How can we manage the water needs of ever-growing cities as well as those of rural communities?

Restoring ocean health

Healthy oceans are at the heart of livelihoods for many, a source of sustenance, and key to a stabilised climate regime. Limiting harmful human activities, such as overfishing and pollution, will help build the resilience of marine ecosystems and communities dependent upon them. How can we better address pollution, notably plastics and chemicals, and improve marine spatial planning to ensure that the diversity of marine life is sustained?

Marine protected areas have demonstrated positive outcomes for biodiversity and human well-being. What are the conditions for successful protection measures, and how can we strengthen frameworks and collaboration across borders and beyond national jurisdictions?

Climate change directly affects the ocean's temperature and pH levels. How can marine organisms and, ultimately, coastal communities adapt to warmer and more acidic waters? The ocean offers tremendous opportunities for improved livelihoods. Enabling a sustainable blue economy can open new opportunities. What are tomorrow's "blue chips" for the blue planet?

Finding new ways to preserve and protect polar ecosystems and species is becoming increasingly important as economic activities thrive and the impacts of climate change accelerate. How can the losses in polar biodiversity due to rapidly changing climatic conditions be minimised? Polar conservation remains a test for international cooperation. What will it take to protect the commons in the face of mounting pressures?

Accelerating climate change mitigation and adaptation

Nature, the climate and human well-being are intricately connected in different ways and through multiple pathways. Risks posed by climate change to the natural world and human communities are on the rise, increasing the vulnerability of both. Ecosystems transformed by the impacts of climate change are disrupting natural environmental processes and hastening species decline, particularly in freshwater systems, culminating in the loss of cultural heritage and livelihood assets. Raising awareness of these climate change impacts, and pushing the world toward more effective collaboration in order to implement ambitious solutions, are critical for our future. How can we expand environmental knowledge, learning and capacity on climate change, reduce pressures and help people better adapt?

Harnessing nature-based climate mitigation and adaptation efforts is an essential strategy to overcome the challenges posed by a changing climate. The full potential of the world's natural carbon sinks and reservoirs that can contribute to a climate-resilient and biodiversity-rich future has yet to be unlocked. This will require strengthening institutional and governance capacity for ecosystem planning and management, as landscapes transform and adapt to climate change. How can healthy ecosystems provide effective solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation? What is the role of protected and conserved areas to meet the goals set out in the Paris Agreement on Climate Change? Policy and decision-making may require trade-offs to optimise the benefits for biodiversity, climate change and other relevant sectors. How do we ensure that synergies are found and negative trade-offs avoided?

Reducing the impacts of environmental hazards (extreme weather events, floods, etc.) is one of the most critical ways in which to strengthen resilience of affected communities. Successfully mitigating the

risks and consequences helps avoid an environmental hazard becoming a disaster and requires enhanced policy frameworks and institutional capacity. What are the most effective community-based solutions to ensure the inclusion of the most vulnerable? What kind of natural and built infrastructure best reduces exposure to natural hazards and increases socio-economic resilience of people and communities by sustaining local livelihoods?

Upholding rights, ensuring effective and equitable governance

Our ability to conserve nature depends on effective and inclusive governance, which cuts across all of nature's dimensions (water, land, oceans, climate, etc.) Empowerment through upholding rights, enhancing capacity and improving representation and accountability, has a significant positive impact on any development endeavour and on governance itself. Through effective and innovative governance of shared habitats and implementation of the environmental rule of law, communities can harness the benefits of healthy and biodiverse ecosystems for the realisation of social equity and human rights.

Challenges to the rights and the equitable access to natural resources are multifarious. Social, financial and political equity must be increased, while at the same time, the marginalisation and disempowerment of groups or individuals reversed. Half of the world's inhabitants – women – still do not have access to the same status, protection and opportunities as the other half. Decision-making and representation continue to be unbalanced. How can we improve engagement and representation of women, youth, indigenous people and other underrepresented groups in all governance-related issues? What avenues can be explored to guarantee access to opportunities for all? What are the biases that must still be debunked?

Equitable and effective governance requires the implementation of inclusive decision-making, as well as respect for cultural values and traditional knowledge. How can the roles and contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities be further reinforced? What are the missing pieces of governance that could help reduce tensions linked to conflicting interests around natural resources, and ensure more integrated approaches to knowledge sharing and implementation?

The environmental rule of law – including the obligation to protect nature, the rights of nature and the right to nature – will continue to be debated and strengthened. What new principles and instruments are needed in international environmental law? How can the world enforce the current legal regime, to more effectively root out the illegal trade in wildlife, protect environmental defenders and ensure non-regression?

Leveraging economic and financial systems for sustainability

Structuring economic systems in a way that supports human livelihoods and economic development, while at the same time sustaining nature and addressing the impacts of climate change, is necessary if we are to achieve the SDGs. A key challenge is how to decouple growth from its current deteriorating impacts on the very ecosystems that sustain life and underpin our economies. What is needed to shift current economic practices?

Market approaches that create economic incentives have been widely used to encourage positive outcomes for nature conservation. Such approaches include natural capital accounting to quantify benefits from natural systems; valuing biodiversity and ecosystem services; and encouraging the financial sector to invest in natural systems in order to generate financial returns.

Ecosystem accounting and market-driven approaches have proved useful in enabling the public and private sectors to more accurately recognise impacts on nature and promote positive conservation outcomes. However, these approaches are not without challenges, including accounting for social values, influencing public policy and priorities, and securing sustainability. How can the use of ecosystem accounting and economic valuation methods be mainstreamed to better understand the drivers of biodiversity loss? How can economic analyses be more effectively integrated into policy and decision-making at the national level? And, what are its implications for livelihoods, employment, development and governance?

Mobilising conservation finance remains a challenge, despite the growing consensus of the need to close the current financial gap, both for climate and nature. How do we shift from construing nature

conservation as a cost to framing it as an investment in a sustainable future? How do we change the way in which we measure economic returns? How can investments from the private sector in key ecological systems be enhanced? How do we ensure improved access to financial resources for conservation efforts at all governance levels? Also, how can environmental and social safeguards used by the financial sector be improved to advance nature conservation and protect the rights of indigenous people and local communities?

Advancing knowledge, learning, innovation and technology

Ongoing adverse environmental change, including climate change and the loss of ecosystems and species, requires innovations that are responsive to changing circumstances. The ability to apply both new and existing knowledge creatively is critical to strengthen the resilience of nature and people, and to make a sustainable future more likely.

This depends in part on the ability of the conservation community to engage with those at the cutting edge of technology. What kind of knowledge or new kinds of learning communities do we need to bridge the gap?

A current challenge is our ability to harness existing innovations, including artificial intelligence, remote sensing, mobile technology and the internet, to improve conservation outcomes. While these technologies are mainstreamed in many activities, they remain absent from large swaths of conservation. Why are there continued gaps in utilising these technologies? Is there sufficient capacity? How can we keep up with the rapid pace of technological change and use it to the advantage of conservation, resilience and sustainability?

Given the potential negative impacts on ecosystems from technology, do we need to develop appropriate risk and policy frameworks to guide technology and innovation, and minimise adverse outcomes? What solutions are needed to tackle these problems, while staying within risk levels that are acceptable to potential users? Are existing ethical and rights-focused safeguards sufficient and enforceable?

With the fast pace and dominance of new technologies, how can we ensure conservation continues to benefit from diverse forms of knowledge? What lessons can we learn from the past, and what are the 'new frontiers' to be explored? Can we use horizon scanning to more accurately identify emerging challenges and opportunities for mainstreaming conservation with innovative approaches?