004 Trails and conservation

CONSIDERING that trails are the customary routes that people use to travel through roadless parts of protected and conserved areas and other natural and semi-natural landscapes;

RECOGNISING that trails in such areas are used: by visitors for recreation, nature study, scientific research, sports, commuting, socialising and accessing scenic, cultural and spiritual sites; by conservation staff for interpretation, education, monitoring, fire management and maintenance; and by law enforcement and emergency responders;

RECOGNISING FURTHER that trails are used by people traveling on foot, and, where permitted, by bicycle, by wheelchair, by riding horses and other animals and by other non-motorized vehicles, such as snow travel equipment;

AWARE that connectivity among protected and conserved areas and other intact ecosystems is essential for conserving biodiversity and geodiversity, adapting to climate change and resisting disease, and that ecological corridors are a key method of making such connections, as described in the IUCN publication *Conserving connectivity through ecological networks and corridors* (2020);

RECALLING that the critical role of ecological corridors is recognised in: IUCN Resolution 7.073 *Ecological connectivity conservation in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: from local to international levels* (Marseille, 2020); Convention on Biological Diversity Decision 15/4, *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (2022), Target 3; and Convention on Migratory Species Resolution 14.16 *Ecological connectivity* (2024);

NOTING the potential for ecological corridors along trails to provide such connectivity through adequate management and appropriate application of the IUCN connectivity guidelines;

NOTING FURTHER that such trail corridors offer opportunities for trailside interpretation and education on ecological connectivity and conservation;

AWARE that trails in ecological corridors include those running through metropolitan greenbelts and those connecting urban, rural and natural places, as well as trails through remote areas;

CONCERNED that many trails, and their associated natural corridors, lack formal protection and are threatened by urban sprawl and expanding road networks; and

NOTING that IUCN has not given adequate attention to trails and their potential impacts on and benefits for biodiversity;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. CALLS ON the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) to explore means of providing guidance on zoning that would take trails into account, as well as their associated natural corridors, as conservation tools, including by developing clear definitions, gathering information, convening discussions and producing case studies and recommendations;

2. REQUESTS WCPA to conduct this work in cooperation with the IUCN Secretariat, other IUCN Commissions, IUCN Members, intergovernmental organisations, governmental agencies and non-governmental organisations, such as the World Trails Network;

3. ALSO REQUESTS WCPA to incorporate in this endeavour methods for:

a. defining and developing methods and/or criteria for planning, creating, restoring, protecting and securing legal recognition of trails;

b. interpretation and education, including wildlife viewing, use of trailside examples to demonstrate consequences and expected effects of climate change, and websites and apps that include in-depth information on the biodiversity, geodiversity, conservation and culture of the area;

c. preventing and lessening the harm trails may cause to people and the surrounding natural environment, in cooperation with the Species Survival Commission (regarding human-wildlife interactions and invasive species) and the One Health initiative, particularly regarding zoonotic diseases; and

d. managing conflicts among all kinds of trail users through inclusive governance mechanisms that involve local communities, Indigenous peoples, relevant authorities, landowners and user groups.