

107 Scaling-up Indigenous leadership in the protection of nature and the sacred

RECOGNISING that respect of different understanding and approaches of the sacred are of utmost important to humankind's relationship with the life-giving world;

AFFIRMING that these approaches and understanding may be the underpinning and foundation for ways in which sacred areas are recognized and managed;

RECALLING resolutions adopted at the 12th World Wilderness Congress (WILD12) calling for moratoriums on mining on sacred regions, Indigenous leadership in the protection of keystone species (e.g. American bison), and Indigenous leadership in the protection of sacred animals (e.g. white animals);

ACKNOWLEDGING ALSO the IUCN publication *Sacred Natural Sites: Guidelines for Protected Area Managers*, recognising the role of sacred areas in nature conservation, and ALSO BEING AWARE of the challenges of adapting "Western science" to the "holistic and traditional-knowledge based cultures at sacred sites";

FURTHER RECALLING the IUCN publication *Cultural and spiritual significance of nature: Guidance for protected and conserved area governance and management* that cites the "growing need to make conservation more inclusive" and also the need to recognise "legal pluralism" in the management of sacred sites;

RECOGNISING that practising "legal pluralism" can be aided by continual guidance that emphasises different ways of knowing;

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING that the ways of life of Indigenous peoples' and Local communities' are social systems with a positive track record for the stewardship of nature and that these systems must be preserved for their reservoirs of knowledge and wisdom that could be the basis for ecological transformation;

HEARING from Indigenous peoples and Local communities that they want to lead on the conservation of their lands, territories, traditional sites and sacred species, and that mainstream institutions often exclude their involvement and leadership through restrictive ways of knowing; and

HONOURING the themes of the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, including "disruptive innovation" and "delivering on equity", means taking immediate action to centre the leadership of Indigenous peoples and Local communities at the core of conservation actions;

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

1. CALLS ON IUCN constituents for a strengthened recognition that sacred sites, landscapes and elements exist within all protected area categories (including category Ia), for further guidance on how different protected area categories can safeguard such sites and for familiarising relevant actors with existing IUCN guidance for the management of these areas by achieving:

a. the explicit recognition of sacred landscapes and seascapes within IUCN protected area category V, areas that can span millions of hectares, and increased promotion of such regions;

b. recognition of the interdependence between Indigenous peoples' cultures and keystone species in the regions they inhabit and the long-term role of Indigenous peoples in stewarding sacred species and increased efforts to include and centre the conservation of such species around Indigenous, local and spiritual leadership; and

c. recognition of humanity's relationship with sacred natural areas, beginning with substantially increased efforts to widely disseminate guidance that maintains traditional peoples' and Indigenous peoples' unrestricted and full access to and relationship with existing sacred spaces in all protected area categories while continuing to align with all elements of the IUCN protected areas definitions;

2. ALSO CALLS ON IUCN Member States to take measures to understand, conserve and enhance traditional and Indigenous peoples' sciences, knowledges and practices, uses, crafts and sites of geodiversity, including sacred sites, to support their conservation within the natural and cultural heritage, and to encourage intergenerational transmission among Indigenous peoples and among local communities; and

3. CALLS ON IUCN and INVITES the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to prioritise and deepen guidance to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee to support their efforts in protecting sacred spaces and ensuring that these spaces continue to be accessible for the benefit of nature, traditional lifeways of Indigenous peoples and Local communities and the human spirit.

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