



Mensaje de Merida

From the Chairman and the Executive Committee
of WILD9, the 9th World Wilderness Congress
6-13 November 2009, Merida, Mexico

PREAMBLE

The human race was born, and for millennia was raised in wild nature. Even as technology and economic development have increasingly removed us from natural environments over the last few hundred years, wilderness has nonetheless continued to sustain us, generating the essential services that make possible our economic and social prosperity, our physical health and our spiritual well-being.

However, we are rapidly degrading our home. Runaway carbon emissions are driving the climate towards irreversible tipping points, we are contaminating our planet with pervasive toxicity, we are destroying the diversity of life on our planet, we are exhausting freshwater supplies and causing acidification in our oceans, and we are over-exploiting our oceans, causing fisheries to collapse. As a result, we are deepening poverty, weakening social structures and threatening global security. This situation is in stark contrast to the world we can have if wilderness and its contribution to natural life support systems are properly valued. Our essential choice – indeed, the imperative – has never been clearer:

With a healthy foundation of wilderness, we can realize our full potential as humans. But when wilderness is degraded, the promise of human societies dims. Without wilderness, the legacy for future generations is a deeply impoverished planet: biologically, culturally, economically and spiritually. We must act immediately to keep Earth's wilderness intact.

RATIONALE

The impacts of climate change are being felt around the world and we are already meeting or exceeding the worst case scenarios anticipated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). To avert further dangerous climate change impacts, we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to stabilize atmospheric carbon concentrations from current levels of about 385 parts per million (ppm) to 350 ppm as rapidly as possible.

About 70% of the greenhouse gases that humans have emitted into the atmosphere since 1750 come from burning fossil fuels. Drastically reducing fossil fuel use is therefore an immediate priority.

However, 30% of the greenhouse gases emitted by humans since 1750 are from deforestation and land-use change. Conversion and degradation of natural environments is a continuing problem: about 17% of annual global carbon emissions comes from deforestation, largely in the tropics. This number rises to between 20 and 25% when conversion of other ecosystems, such as peatlands, are included.

Wilderness conservation efforts are essential for stabilizing the global climate. We cannot make the substantial global emissions reductions required to reach 350 ppm quickly unless we halt carbon emissions from the degradation and transformation of natural environments.

There are around 2,400 billion tonnes of carbon stored in all ecosystem types (the equivalent of about 8-9 thousand billion tones of CO₂), of which about 45% is found in forests, in particular mature forests. Protecting mature forests in all biomes (tropical, temperate, and boreal) and preventing activities that deplete carbon stocks in mature forests is a central part of the climate change solution in developed and in developing countries. Intact wetlands, grasslands, and peatlands around the world also contain vast carbon stocks. In addition to storing large amounts of carbon, mature forests are not carbon neutral, but in fact absorb carbon out of the atmosphere.

The ocean's vegetated habitats, including mangroves, salt marshes and sea grasses cover a very small proportion of the sea bed, yet account for at least 50% of all carbon storage in ocean sediments. These ecosystems amount to only 0.5% of the plant biomass found on land, yet store similar amounts of carbon. Preventing the destruction and degradation of these habitats, and restoring degraded areas is also urgent.

Wilderness is also critical for protecting biodiversity. Biodiversity provides ecosystems with resilience and adaptive capacity, which are essential for ensuring ecological integrity. Degraded systems are vulnerable to climate change, and cannot provide the vital ecosystem services that human communities rely on around the world. Intact ecosystems are therefore necessary for both climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Protecting natural systems over the long term so that that nature can persist and adapt to climate change requires that intact areas, no matter how large, are connected to each other and do not become isolated. This approach, known as connectivity conservation, identifies "biological corridors" covering bioregional to continental scales within which protected areas provide the foundation for a whole-of-landscape approach to conservation management.

Restoring degraded ecosystems can in some areas be important in connectivity conservation initiatives, providing climate change, biodiversity and societal benefits. In many landscapes, restoration efforts are a necessary complement to protecting intact habitats.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provide the international community with the mechanisms to address climate change, biodiversity and wilderness conservation. The UNFCCC and CBD emerged together from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, yet have become separated in their implementation. It is time to take a holistic view of the purpose of the CBD and UNFCCC by ensuring that actions under the one help the other. Policies and measures taken under both conventions must serve to maintain the carbon already stored in primary forests, wetlands, peatlands, grasslands and other intact ecosystems, and must recognize and appropriately value the role of biodiversity in conferring resilience and adaptive capacity.

The UNFCC and the CBD must again be seen as two parts of an inseparable whole: an integrated and closely coordinated response to global environmental degradation. For the good of the planet, the time has come for a major initiative to reunite climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts with biodiversity conservation and wilderness protection.

THEREFORE, THE CHAIRMAN AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF WILD9: THE 9TH WORLD WILDERNESS CONGRESS:

- Call on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to recognize that large-scale nature conservation is a first-order climate change strategy for both mitigation and adaptation, and is necessary to address both the climate change and biodiversity extinction crises, and to protect and restore the ecosystem services, such as freshwater supply, on which all humans rely.

- Call on the Conference of the Parties to the CBD and UNFCCC, and their Secretariats, to integrate implementation of the conventions to:
 - Ensure enhanced action on mitigation and adaptation that fully reflects the value of natural ecosystems, including ensuring policies and measures for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in developing countries (REDD+) and Land use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) that recognize the roles of natural ecosystems and wilderness areas; and
 - Revise and implement the CBD Programme of Work on Protected areas (PoWPA) to maximize its contribution to addressing the climate change crisis.

- Call on all countries to act immediately to protect their own natural ecosystems, and in particular primary forest and other intact ecosystems and wilderness areas, including coastal and marine areas, in an interconnected manner to ensure that:
 - Carbon stocks in natural systems are not depleted through land use activities;
 - Natural adaptation to climate change is optimized;
 - The Program of Work on Protected Areas under the CBD is implemented; and
 - Restoration of degraded forests is ecosystem-based and occurs in the context of connectivity conservation initiatives.

- Call on Parties to the UNFCCC to design a REDD+ mechanism that will assist tropical countries in protecting their naturally forested landscapes and intact wilderness in an interconnected manner. This REDD+ mechanism should:
 - Maximize mitigation and biodiversity benefits by prioritizing wilderness conservation and avoided deforestation with the explicit primary objective of protecting intact natural forests.
 - Include restoration of existing protected areas and expansion of protected areas as eligible REDD+ projects.
 - Ensure that projects designed to reduce forest degradation do not support the introduction of degrading activities to primary forests.
 - Explicitly avoid perverse outcomes that lead to losses in biodiversity, including the conversion of natural forests or other sensitive ecosystems such as grasslands, to plantations.
 - Recognize and protect the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities by ensuring their free, prior and informed consent before approving projects, and ensuring their participation in project design, their role in project implementation, and their fair share of project benefits.
 - Include broad participation from all tropical countries, and in particular those countries with high forest cover and historically low rates of deforestation.
 - Only provide “offset” credits from REDD+ projects to developed countries if those countries commit to deep domestic emissions reductions.

- Call on Parties to the UNFCCC to ensure that LULUCF is designed to:
 - Ensure that developed countries achieve substantial emissions reductions additional to deep reductions in other sectors and protect their wilderness in an interconnected manner;
 - Create accountability for actual changes in forest management emissions from real, historical levels (rather than projections);
 - Ensure that the effect of biomass harvesting for energy production on forest carbon stocks/sinks is fully accounted for;
 - Ensure that emissions from the degradation of peatlands is fully accounted for.

- Call on Parties to the UNFCCC to:
 - Provide financial and other resources, additional to overseas development assistance, to support natural ecosystem based adaptation efforts around the world.
 - Substantially increase support for adaptation efforts to developing countries, in particular those highly vulnerable countries such as small island states, countries prone to droughts, desertification, flooding, or extreme weather patterns.
 - Recognize that local and traditional knowledge can play an important role in formulating natural ecosystem based adaptation strategies.
 - Report on goals and verifiable measures to protect reservoirs of greenhouse gases in natural forests, wetlands and grasslands, for example through the creation of protected areas

- Call on Parties to the UNFCCC to recognize that the global community must adopt a target for atmospheric carbon concentrations of 350 parts per million to avoid the disappearance of key elements of life on Earth such as coral reefs.

- Call on Parties to the UNFCCC and CBD to recognize that it will take several years at a minimum for a Copenhagen climate agreement to be fully designed and implemented, that we cannot wait for this process to unfold before taking action to protect wilderness, and that concerted action and large-scale funding is necessary immediately to protect our planet's remaining wilderness in the face of global climate change.

- Call on Parties to the CBD to develop:
 - A comprehensive vision, based on connectivity conservation principles, combining conservation objectives for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services and mitigating and adapting to climate change in terrestrial, freshwater and marine biomes, with comprehensive ecosystem restoration objectives.
 - A 2020 goal focusing on the actions necessary to alleviate current threats to maintain current biodiversity and its associated ecosystem services, and to avoid crossing dangerous thresholds (tipping points), both for biodiversity and climate change.
 - An indicators framework including available information on biodiversity status, threats, and responses, and benefits to ecosystem services and human well-being, for use in developing protected areas and connectivity conservation strategies.
 - Revised and measurable post-2010 targets for biodiversity, protected areas, wilderness protection, and biological corridors, and their ecosystem services, in line with the indicators framework.

Without wilderness, the legacy for future generations is a deeply impoverished planet: biologically, culturally, economically and spiritually. We must act immediately to keep Earth's wilderness intact.

We have the international mechanisms in place to achieve this global objective in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). However, the UNFCCC and CBD, two treaties that emerged together from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, have become separated in their implementation.

The UNFCCC and the CBD must again be seen as two parts of an inseparable whole: an integrated and closely coordinated response to global environmental degradation. For the good of the planet, the time has come for a major initiative to reunite climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts with biodiversity conservation and wilderness protection.