

Forum:	Environmental Commission
Issue:	Measures to safeguard wild natural areas from human activities
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Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG 15), titled "Life on Land," is a critical component of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda aimed at safeguarding Earth's terrestrial ecosystems. This goal focuses on protecting, restoring, and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems such as forests, wetlands, mountains, and drylands, while combating desertification, halting land degradation, and preventing biodiversity loss.

Human activities, including deforestation, land conversion for agriculture, poaching, and pollution, pose significant threats to these natural habitats, leading to diminished biodiversity and ecosystem services that underpin human well-being and economic prosperity. The rapid decline in biodiversity has direct consequences for food security, climate regulation, and access to clean water, emphasizing the urgent need for effective conservation and management strategies.

SDG 15 calls for urgent and significant measures to preserve natural habitats, protect endangered species, and integrate biodiversity values into policy frameworks, ensuring equitable benefit-sharing and preventing illegal wildlife trade.¹

Definition of Key Terms

Biodiversity

The variety and variability of life on Earth, including the diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems. Biodiversity underpins ecosystem resilience and provides essential ecological services such as pollination, nutrient cycling, and climate regulation.²

Ecosystem

A community of living organisms interacting with their physical environment, functioning as a system. Ecosystems can range from forests, wetlands, and grasslands to mountains and deserts, each supporting unique species and services.³

Desertification

The degradation of land in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities. It leads to loss of productivity and threatens livelihoods.⁴

Deforestation

The large-scale removal of forest cover for purposes such as agriculture, logging, or urban development. It results in habitat loss, reduced carbon sequestration, and biodiversity decline.⁵

Protected Area

Geographically defined regions designated and managed to conserve nature and biodiversity. These areas aim to preserve habitats, maintain ecological processes, and protect endangered species.⁶

Sustainable Land Management

The adoption of land use systems and practices that balance environmental health, economic productivity, and social equity to maintain land resources for present and future generations.⁷

Ecosystem Services

The benefits humans derive from ecosystems, including provisioning services (food, water), regulating services (climate, disease control), supporting services (soil formation), and cultural services (recreational, spiritual).⁸

Background Information

Main concepts

Wild natural habitats and areas, like forests, grasslands, wetlands, mountains, and deserts, are examples of ecosystems that may be largely free from large-scale human development. These landscapes are crucial as a whole for biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, water regulation, and cultural heritage. However, they are now coming to be threatened by human activities expanding across their regions such as deforestation, mining, urbanization, or tourism.⁹

Key statistics and trends

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, 75 percent of the world's land surface has been significantly altered by human activities, including 85 percent of wetland areas.¹ The same UNEP sources note that about 66 percent of marine environments are also impacted by human actions. The Convention on Biological Diversity reports that approximately one million species are currently threatened with extinction due to human pressures.¹⁰ The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) estimates that roughly 25 percent of assessed species are threatened, rising to about 25 percent for endemic species in some regions.⁹ As of 2024, only 17.6 percent of land and inland water areas and 8.4 percent of oceans and coastal zones globally are under documented protected or conserved area status, well short of the "30 by 30" global target.¹² The Protected Planet Report 2024 highlights that many protected areas remain under-resourced or poorly managed, meaning mere coverage is insufficient without effective stewardship.

Relevant existing global commitments

In 2022, parties to the CBD adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which includes a headline goal to conserve 30 percent of Earth's land and aquatic systems by 2030 (30×30 target).^{11 12} The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) aims to prevent, halt, and reverse degradation of ecosystems worldwide.⁹ The initiative calls for restoring one million hectares of degraded land and strengthening policies to restore natural systems. Scientific analyses emphasize that achieving societal goals needs combining protected-area expansion with improved management, ecological connectivity, and integration into broader landscapes.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Kenya

Kenya's system of wildlife conservancies is often cited as a strong model for safeguarding wild natural areas through community-based and private land conservation. Conservancies in Kenya now cover about 11 percent of the country's land area. These include both private and community conservancies, many managed under umbrella bodies like the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association (KWCA). Convention on Biological Diversity. These areas provide habitats for numerous endangered species, contribute to connectivity beyond formal protected areas, support rural livelihoods, and involve local landowners in conservation governance.^{13 14}

Estonia

Estonia offers a European example of wilderness protection through strong legal controls and

preservation of coastlines, islands, and forested areas. The country has some of the strictest protections in the European Union for its wild natural landscapes. That includes longstanding traditions of preserving natural zones and regulating human intrusion.¹⁵

WILD Foundation / Wilderness Specialist Group (IUCN-WCPA Wilderness Specialist Group)

The WILD Foundation, through its Wilderness Specialist Group under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)'s World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), works globally to promote wilderness protection.¹⁶

Viable Solutions

Management of protected areas

Countries set aside lands for protection, yet these places frequently suffer due to insufficient resources, spotty oversight, alongside disjointed administration. Growing these networks (particularly where wildlife thrives) coupled with better caretaking will shield vital ecosystems from intrusion. To help animals move around and keep their populations healthy, governments need to link up separate wild spaces with safe pathways. Moreover, better training for park rangers alongside tools like drone patrols plus stricter rules against poaching will transform reserves from promises on maps into genuinely safeguarded environments.

Working with local populations

People whose lives depend on the land: local populations, Indigenous groups, typically protect nature best because of how connected they are to it by their context of life. Working with them via shared management, community efforts, alongside fair distribution of advantages fosters responsibility then sustained safeguarding. When people have secure land ownership alongside time-honored ways of caring for nature (like shifting crops or protecting special forests) everyone benefits. Local environments thrive because people's lives do too. To make this happen, governments alongside aid groups could offer learning opportunities, jobs that don't harm the environment, also tourism focused on appreciating natural spaces, ensuring local communities gain from ecosystem preservation.

Proper management of tourism

Instead of keeping people away completely, thoughtfully managed tourism offers a way for nations blessed with stunning landscapes to make a living. Limiting numbers, demanding careful handling of trash, then letting locals lead tours, work in hotels, or maintain parks keeps damage low. Eco-tourism dollars fuel efforts to protect nature in and around supporting wildlife areas, local communities, moreover, repairing

damaged ecosystems. These programs inform visitors about respecting our planet; consequently, travel becomes a force for good, not harm.

Incentives and reforms

Economic incentives could help to nudge behavior in a sustainable direction. Governments should dismantle environmentally destructive subsidies (such as those promoting mining, logging and agricultural expansion in protected areas) and reinvest in conservation. Payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes Emerging, PES works for the landowner or community that is paid to maintain a forest cover, clean water source, or wildlife corridor. Putting environmental performance into national accounts can mean that nature's value is considered in GDP and economic planning, leading to more balanced development.

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Appendix or Appendices