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A strategy of innovative approaches and recommendations to **improve health and well-being in the next decade**

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A promising future

Nature is essential for human health and well-being. We are all part of the natural world. This has been known by Indigenous Peoples for tens of thousands of years. The growing body of evidence on the connections between nature and human health and well-being call for our urgent attention.

Nature provides fresh water, clean air and food, upon which all human life and health depends. It influences disease occurrence and spread, supports sustainable economies and is the source of current and potential medicines. Nature provides places for physical activity, social connection, inspiration and calm contemplation. Nature benefits people's mental, physical, cultural, and spiritual health and well-being. There is no alternative.

We know that when ecosystems are disturbed, biological diversity is often lost. As is human health. Protected areas restore and safeguard nature. Protected areas are critical for healthy and sustainable communities. In an urbanizing world, with a growing population, protected areas are natural solutions for securing our health and well-being while adapting to the impact of climate change. But to realize this opportunity, the protected areas and conservation community need to collaborate with the human health and animal health sectors, and work alongside researchers, governments, businesses, non-government organisations and communities, to create a new approach that ensures healthy protected areas that support healthy people. The *Healthy Parks Healthy People* approach will unlock the values of protected areas for health and well-being, while conserving biological diversity.

We cannot afford to delay taking action. This new approach is essential to achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity and fully realize the universal right to health enshrined in the World Health Organization's Constitution.

* The term protected areas includes city and urban parks and refers to terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems conserved by various management arrangements.

The current situation

The 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion described the inextricable links between people and their environment as the basis for health and the resulting global responsibility to conserve natural resources. The Vth IUCN World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa, 2003, called for a global effort to advance conservation, maintain ecosystems and achieve sustainable development. Yet, in the past ten years, as the world's population has increasingly urbanized and become further disconnected from nature, the gap remains between efforts to mutually advance conservation and sustainable development, while maintaining biodiversity.

Also over this last decade, there has been an alarming global increase in non-communicable diseases such as heart diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. The risk of non-communicable diseases is linked to four factors, including physical inactivity. Whilst urbanization has brought many benefits to society, it increasingly denies people of opportunities for the mental, spiritual and physical health benefits from nature. The research is very clear about the human need for nature, but this situation is likely to worsen as the global population shifts from 54 per cent of people living in cities today to a forecast 70 per cent by 2050. Almost all of this urban growth will occur in less developed countries.

There has been some progress. The number and extent of protected areas has grown and now covers 15.4 per cent of the Earth's land area and 8.4 per cent of the marine and coastal waters. International approaches such as One Health, Ecohealth and *Healthy Parks Healthy People* are fostering international research, collaboration and actions across sectors. Significant research has deepened scientific understanding of the human need for, and connection to, nature. The understanding of the diverse health benefits of protected areas has deepened to also consider the physical, mental, social and spiritual health and well-being benefits. This was a focus of the 1st International *Healthy Parks Healthy People* Congress in Melbourne, Australia, 2010.

However, greater global action is needed. Eco-health experts caution that human impacts on the environment lead to the spread of emerging and infectious disease. Health and well-being decision-makers advocate for a greater focus on preventative health care as a way of reducing the disease burden and associated costs. Conservationists are struggling to win the hearts and minds of an increasingly urbanizing world to conserve biodiversity, even though protected areas contribute to a range of natural solutions to a range of society's challenges, including health and well-being. There is clearly a convergence of interests and the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 has provided the incentive for change.

We have set a new health and nature agenda for the world. But to realize this opportunity, we need to mobilize the conservation community and human health and animal health sectors, along with researchers, governments, businesses, non-government organisations and communities; and we need to intentionally scale up the body of evidence on the connection between nature and human health and well-being and incorporate it into policy and practice. We must further expand protected areas on land and inland waters, and in coastal and marine areas, and integrate nature into our cities. We must adequately resource and build capacity for the effective management of protected areas to safeguard biodiversity with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. And, we must find new ways to communicate with more persuasive voices to new audiences that parks and protected areas are essential for physical, mental, social and spiritual health of current and future generations.

Recommendations for change

1. Continue to build the evidence base on the connections between health and nature through knowledge and research using accepted methodologies and share this widely with the conservation and health sectors, researchers, governments, businesses, non-government organisations and communities.
2. Ensure better access by Indigenous communities to natural places that are special to them for health, spiritual well-being and cultural connections.
3. Learn from indigenous and local communities, which have multi-dimensional approaches to health and well-being including connection to country and spiritual and traditional knowledge and practices.
4. Integrate the preventative health contribution made by protected areas, including urban parks, into all development planning and accounting processes.

5. Strengthen global, regional, national and local policies to promote nature's role in health and well-being and address the universal right to nature for health.
6. Establish and nurture coalitions of practitioners, policy-makers, change leaders and researchers from diverse sectors to accelerate health and nature approaches at local, national, regional and global scales.
7. Revitalize the establishment, governance and management of marine and terrestrial protected areas, including urban parks, to improve biodiversity and maximize human health and well-being outcomes.
8. Build the skills and capabilities across the health and protected area sectors.
9. Use innovative mechanisms and experiences to connect children and youth to parks and protected areas to engender a love of nature and for the restorative and preventative health and wellbeing benefits provided by nature.
10. Ensure that parks and protected areas offer diverse and inclusive opportunities for people to access and experience nature to improve their health and well-being.

Key partnerships needed

IUCN Health and Well-being Sectors Education Sector Research Institutions / Knowledge Organisations
 Protected Area Managers, including Urban and City Parks Local, Sub-National and National Governments
 Urban Planners, Architects and Designers Civil Society Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other
 Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) United Nations Agencies, particularly the World Health
 Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Funders (Non-Government Sources)

IUCN

- Promote health and nature linkages and co-benefits for protected areas to all Union members, partner organisations and all relevant sectors.
- Advocate for the health and nature linkages to be more strongly reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Health and Well-being Sectors

- Develop and implement nature-based approaches in preventative health promotion campaigns and activities, including for Indigenous and Local Communities.
- Collaboratively address the management of non-communicable disease and infectious disease by public health, medicine and allied health providers, with health insurers, that are compatible with and maximizes the benefits for human health and ecosystem health (health and protected area co-benefits).
- Develop and support partnerships with the protected areas sector, including urban parks, which incorporate the principles of protected areas, ecosystem health and human and animal health linkages.
- Engage in an ongoing effort to mobilize health and well-being sectors, non-government organizations and civil society to support specific practices that improve health and environmental co-benefits, including for Indigenous and Local Communities.

Protected Area Managers, including Urban and City Parks

- Incorporate the principles of protected areas, ecosystem health and human health linkages, including for Indigenous and Local Communities, into protected area management (*Healthy Parks Healthy People*)

principles and approach), adapted to local requirements and conditions.

- Drive the development of partnerships with the health and well-being sectors that incorporate the principles of protected areas, ecosystem health, and human and animal health linkages.
- The World Protected Areas Leadership Forum (WPALF) members to champion the establishment and resourcing of new regional alliances (communities of practice) to accelerate collaborative work across sectors in support of the *Healthy Parks Healthy People* principles and approach.