

International Union for Conservation of Nature

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The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is an international organization and the world's largest and arguably most important conservation network. It was founded in Fontainebleau, France in 1948 and its headquarters is located in Gland, Switzerland. IUCN has offices in more than 45 countries and runs hundreds of projects around the world, including a multilateral office located in Washington, DC that serves as a global embassy for IUCN. It plays a critical role in the conservation of nature as a knowledge-producing organization (IUCN, UNEP & WWF 1980, 1991).

Its vision is achieving a "world that values and conserves nature" and its mission is to influence, encourage, and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. According to its official homepage, IUCN helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environmental and development challenges. IUCN supports scientific research; manages field projects all over the world; and brings governments, nongovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, companies, and local communities together to develop and implement policy, laws, and best practice.

IUCN is a democratic membership union that includes 87 nation-states, 120 government agencies, and more than 821 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In addition it has 11 714 scientists and experts from 181 countries in its six commissions in a unique worldwide partnership. These are the Commission on Education and Communication (CEC, 625 members), Commission on Environmental,

Economic and Social Policy (CEESP, 1061 members), Commission on Environmental Law (CEL, 800 members), Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM, 400 members), Species Survival Commission (SSC, 7528 members), and World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA, 1300 members). These commissions contribute to the conservation of nature through action projects to research in their respective fields. In addition to these six major commissions, which include conservation-related international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, indigenous groups, and individual conservation experts and activists, there are also several groups working in specific subfields.

The IUCN Council is the principal governing body of IUCN in between sessions of the World Conservation Congress, the general assembly of the Union. The Council is responsible for oversight and general control of all the affairs of IUCN, subject to the authority of the World Conservation Congress. IUCN member organizations elect the Council every four years at the World Conservation Congress. Along with a President, Treasurer, and three representatives from each of the Union's eight regions, the Council also includes the chairs of the six commissions. The Council functions in a similar way to a Board of Directors, meeting once or twice a year to direct Union policy, approve finances, and decide on strategy. The Council can appoint up to six additional Councilors.

IUCN is a unique organization, formed by the secretariat, the members, and a diverse group of experts coming from various sectors. IUCN members (particularly commissions) hold different backgrounds. Most importantly, because of its working modality IUCN is not solely an international NGO, but it is also not an international governmental organization. That is, it follows the laws and regulations of member nations and does not work for or against particular national

interests, and works for the general interests of global citizens, advocating for civil societies and environmentally sound policies through various global, regional, and national programs.

From its inception in 1948, IUCN has focused on the conservation of nature and natural resources with special attention to the conservation of biodiversity. IUCN has various global, regional, and national programs. It runs global biodiversity conservation programs, its core goal, through its chain of networks. It works for knowledge building throughout the globe, aiming for the recognition of and respect for peoples' rights, and promotes dialogue between different knowledge systems. It also promotes the integration of traditional, local, and scientific knowledge in the management and conservation of natural resources and facilitates the exchange of knowledge across the world through human capacity building. Capacity building programs concentrate on education, training, and skill development; raising awareness; facilitating exchange of experiences; and providing opportunities for all stakeholders to participate in decision making (Robinson 2005; IUCN 2010).

IUCN also incorporates the globalized socio-political order by focusing on transparency, access to information and justice, public participation, coherence, respect for human rights, accountability, and the rule of the law. Emphasizing these intellectual themes, IUCN runs 13 major programs under the following headings; business and biodiversity, economics, ecosystem management program, environmental law program, forest program, gender, global policy, learning and leadership, marine program, protected areas program, social policy, species program, and water program (Robinson 2005).

In addition to these core programs IUCN also has special initiatives to coordinate work across individual programs on specific issues of climate change, energy, ecosystems and livelihoods, mangroves for the future, conservation for poverty reduction, and the future of sustainability. IUCN has programs specific to animal and plant species worldwide; all types of ecosystems; and a wide range of major environmental and sustainable development issues at the species level for fish, mammals, and wildlife conservation, and at the ecosystem level for dry lands, forests, islands, marine and water, and wetlands (Robinson 2005; IUCN 2010).

Funding for its programs comes through two major sources: (1) framework agreements and (2) voluntary contributions of members as well as nonmember organizations and individuals. Major donors are governments, multilateral agencies and conventions, NGOs, foundations, private sector, and individuals.

SEE ALSO: Ecological problems; Environmental Protection Movement; Sustainability; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Environment Programme.

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