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NEAR EAST FORESTRY COMMISSION

NINETEENTH SESSION

NEAR EAST FORESTRY WEEK

HAMMAMET, TUNISIA
5 – 9 APRIL 2010

**Forests and range: adapting to global changes for sustainable
development**

FORESTS AND RANGE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

(A) RANGELANDS AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

1. This note has been prepared to inform the Commission about issues and needs related to rangelands and biodiversity conservation and present options to address them, mainly based on findings and recommendations of the Expert Consultation on Range Monitoring Including under Forest Systems in The Near East, held in Cairo from 26 to 28 November 2007, for discussion and recommendation.

Issues and needs related to rangelands and biodiversity conservation

2. The Near East Region has extensive and diverse rangeland types and ecosystems. Covering 70% of the land area, rangelands are the main elements of landscapes in the region. The past few decades have witnessed different pressures and changes on the rangelands. The effects of natural phenomena such as drought and unsustainable human activities that caused and/or accelerated the rate of land degradation, has accentuated the negative impacts of these pressures on socio-economic and environmental goods and services provided by rangelands, including a variety of products, biodiversity conservation, and soil and watershed protection.

3. Countries in the region have expressed serious concern about this alarming situation and noted that, although most of them have elaborated national action plans for combating desertification and participated in the preparation of sub-regional action plans, these efforts are

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hindered by inadequate information on the status and trends in forest and rangeland areas and ecosystems and the lack of assessment and monitoring to provide the baseline data and information needed to support the management and sustainable utilization of rangelands, including the biodiversity they contain.

4. An integrated approach should be adopted for natural resources monitoring and management in the Near East. There is a need to establish rational policies and regulations for range and forests monitoring and management that ensure synergies between different policies and legislation. Efforts should be made to formulate, improve and harmonize policies and legislation on rangelands and forest resources; and simultaneously ensure that they are aligned with policies and legislation of other natural resources and sectors. Specifically, legislation adapted to socio-cultural realities and environmental contexts should be in place to enhance the sustainability of these resources.
5. Standardization of monitoring systems and techniques at national and regional levels is required to ensure sustainability and consistent collection of data.
6. Protecting biodiversity does not merely involve setting aside areas as reserves. Halting the process of degradation and species loss requires an understanding of ecological processes that maintain biodiversity for its proper integrated management. This requires establishing training a core cadre of multidisciplinary national experts.
7. Efforts aimed at the conservation and management of natural resources must derive from a set of clear objectives, a mechanism for action and commitment from all stakeholders, valorizing indigenous knowledge and traditional systems.
8. Pilot activities and projects in integrated natural resources management would strengthen range and forests monitoring at national level for the purpose of enhancing biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and the sustainable management of natural resources in the region.

Options to address issues and identified needs

9. The Commission is invited to consider options to address the above-mentioned issues and needs:
 - to initiate national and regional dialogue to improve and harmonize policies and legislation on forests and rangelands management, and other natural resources sectors;
 - to review and test techniques, methods and systems for standardized integrated monitoring of natural resources, including forests, rangelands and the biodiversity they contain;
 - to improve knowledge, skills and capacity for integrated monitoring and management of natural resources, including forests, rangelands and the biodiversity they contain, through training and formal education; and
 - to prepare and implement pilot projects in integrated monitoring and management of natural resources, including forests.

(B) WILDLIFE AND PROTECTED AREAS MANAGEMENT

Background

1. The Near East countries have a diverse range of habitats, including coastal areas, forests, wetlands, mountains, steppes and deserts. Accordingly, they have a rich and diverse wildlife consisting of species strongly adapted to the harsh climatic and resource conditions, such as Oryx, antelopes, gazelles and mountain goats.
2. Most of the above-mentioned species have populations that are very small and extremely fragmented due to over-hunting and loss of natural habitats through deforestation, forest and rangeland degradation, desertification, agricultural expansion, human encroachment (settlements, urbanization) and climate change, as well as competition with livestock for limited food resources, the use of pesticides in agricultural practices, and the introduction of non-native species. They are thus in immediate danger of extinction in the wild.
3. Other factors threatening the survival of the region's wildlife are found in the prevailing poor economic conditions of rural regions and in population growth, together with insufficient governmental and non-governmental institutional frameworks and capacities to effectively address the problem.
4. The combination of such factors has led to the extinction of some species (e.g. Atlantic lion, leopard, gazelles) while some countries have applied measures to successfully reintroduce (or re-stock) them (e.g. *Oryx dammah* and *Gazella dama* in Tunisia and Syria). However, in most countries no long-term significant action has yet taken place.
5. In most countries of the Near East, policies and legislation on wildlife are at an initial stage of development, not up-to-date or remain unimplemented. Coupled with a lack of public awareness, this made hunting and poaching easy and led to a critical status of conservation of many wildlife species.
6. In March 2009, FAO conducted a survey of institutions for wildlife and protected area management, including the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGO). This led to the organization of a regional workshop in Damascus on wildlife conservation and protected area management in the Near East from 25 to 28 May 2009. The workshop gathered 27 experts from 11 countries in the region from both the forestry and wildlife sectors, as well as from one NGO. Participants reviewed and discussed the situation of wildlife conservation and protected area management, identified constraints and recommended actions for the future.
7. This paper is a compilation of the outcomes of above-mentioned workshop together with an analysis of the participants' country reports.

Achievements

8. To ensure long-term conservation of wildlife and its habitats, most Near East countries have so far established a number of protected areas under varying management regimes (usually not classified according to standardized World Conservation Union (IUCN) categories) and, in some cases, re-introduced particular species.
9. Most countries of the region have some hunting regulations and have acceded to the major international conventions (e.g. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention).

Areas for improvement

10. In recent years, a few countries have requested FAO's support in the formulation, review or updating of forest policies and legislation and, in some cases, to make recommendations for the re-organization of forestry institutions, through technical cooperation projects: Algeria,

Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia. However, these only marginally took into account wildlife and protected area policies.

11. Mostly, there are few management plans adequate for wildlife and protected areas due to a lack of human or financial resources and commitment, and often weak institutional frameworks and coordination.

12. Law enforcement and the control of illegal hunting require additional efforts to reverse the negative trend, particularly for large mammal and bird species.

Recommendations for discussion by the Commission:

- (i) Legislation needs to be reviewed, updated and made coherent with existing international conventions and agreements which most countries of the region have ratified.
- (ii) Capacities of wildlife institutions in the region need to be strengthened to enable them to effectively design and enforce laws and regulations pertaining to wildlife and protected area management.
- (iii) Exchange of information and sharing of experiences between wildlife and protected area institutions and experts in the region should be enhanced, for example through the creation of databases, newsletters and websites.
- (iv) Participation of local communities, the private sector, NGOs and other civil society organizations in wildlife conservation and protected area management is considered a precondition for ensuring long-term sustainability. This will require efficient networking and awareness raising to be carried out at local and national levels as well as information campaigns involving the media.
- (v) Forest and rangeland management need to be closely associated with the management and conservation of wildlife given the limited primary production and availability of water and food resources in the region.
- (vi) Creating new reserves would not be very effective unless adequate financial resources are made available to develop appropriate management plans for protected areas and employ the staff needed for enforcement.
- (vii) Wildlife, rangeland and forestry services, water and agriculture administrations, as well as the regional and international organizations and NGOs active in conservation (e.g. IUCN, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Ramsar Convention, FAO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) should work closely together and consult each other to ensure coordinated and sound management of wildlife species and their habitats.
- (viii) At the Damascus workshop in May 2009 a Near East Working Group on Wildlife and Protected Area Management (NEWPAM) was informally established for improved networking, information exchange and capacity building on wildlife issues in the Near East countries. The Near East Forestry Commission's 19th Session provides an opportunity to evaluate if this working group should be formalized under the umbrella of the Commission, taking into account the earlier experiences of the African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (AFWC).