



IUCN WCPA TRAILS AND CONSERVATION TASK FORCE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

A. BACKGROUND

Trails need to be taken much more seriously by the global conservation community.

Trails can be powerful tools for protecting biodiversity and educating people about natural and cultural heritage. On the other hand, if not properly planned and managed, trails can cause harm to people and the surrounding environment.

1. Trails are powerful tools for conservation

- a. Trails are the customary routes that people use to travel through roadless parts of protected and conserved areas and other natural and semi-natural landscapes.
- b. Trails in these areas are used: by visitors for recreation, nature study, scientific research, sports, socialising, accessing scenic, cultural, and spiritual sites, and even commuting between home and place of work; by conservation staff for interpretation, education, monitoring, and maintenance; by fire authorities for fire prevention, fire suppression, and prescribed burns; and by law enforcement and emergency responders.
- c. Trails are used by people traveling on foot, and, where permitted, by bicycle, by wheelchair, by riding horses and other animals, and by other non-motorised vehicles, such as snow travel equipment.

2. Ecological corridors along trails promote conservation

- a. Connectivity among protected and conserved areas and other intact ecosystems is essential for conserving biodiversity and geodiversity, adapting to climate change, and resisting disease. Ecological corridors are

a key method of making such connections, as described in the IUCN publication *Conserving Connectivity through Ecological Networks and Corridors* (2020).

b. Ecological corridors along trails can provide such connectivity, especially when managed for this purpose according to IUCN guidelines. Such corridors include not only those running along trails in remote areas, but also those running along trails through metropolitan greenbelts, and those connecting urban, rural, and natural places.

c. Ecological corridors along trails offer opportunities for trailside interpretation and education on natural science, conservation, and cultural heritage.

3. Trails and their corridors often need better protection

Many trails and their associated natural corridors lack formal protection and are threatened by urban sprawl and expanding road networks.

4. Trails can cause harm to people and surrounding environments

Even if properly planned and managed according to generally accepted standards, trails and those who use them can cause harm to people, native animals and plants, and cultural resources. Informal, user-created trails add to the problem. Main challenges:

- Human-wildlife conflict, including with carnivores and large mammals, can harm wildlife as well as humans. This is addressed in detail in the *IUCN SSC Guidelines on Human-Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence* (2023).
- Conflicts can arise between different kinds of trail users, for example, hikers with bicyclists, equestrians with pedestrians, and legal trail users with illegal drivers of prohibited motor vehicles.
- Trails can be conduits for invasive non-native species of plants, fungi, and animals.
- Trails can be conduits for unauthorized encampments, informal settlements, and planting and harvesting crops.
- Trails can facilitate criminal activity, including poaching and illegal trade in protected plants, wild animals, and animal parts, and intentional spread of pathogens or invasive species (often termed "agro-terrorism" or "eco-terrorism"). These crimes frequently converge with each other

and other forms of international criminal activity, including organized crime.

- Zoonotic diseases, that is, infectious diseases that can be transmitted naturally from vertebrate animals to humans and vice versa, can spread along trails. These diseases are numerous but specific to locations, and new threats and outbreaks emerge, including due to climate change and increased travel. The pathogens involved can be viruses, bacteria, parasites, or fungi. Among many vectors are mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, lice, and midges. Certain mammals and birds can be hosts and reservoirs for pathogens.

5. Origins of this effort

This effort started in the IUCN WCPA Urban Conservation Strategies Specialist Group. In looking for effective models of conservation in metropolitan areas, the Specialist Group came across several kinds of trails, included them in its flagship publication, *Urban Protected Areas: Profiles and best practice guidelines* (2014), and pointed out that for urban people such trails can be strong psychological, as well as physical, connectors to the natural world.

B. MANDATE & PURPOSE

The Trails and Conservation Task Force is part of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It reports administratively to the IUCN WCPA Urban Conservation Strategies Specialist Group.

1. IUCN Resolution 8.004

The Task Force was created pursuant to IUCN Resolution 8.004, Trails and Conservation, adopted at the 2025 World Conservation Congress held in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Resolution 8.004, also known as WCC-2025-Res-004, is posted in English, French, and Spanish at <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/52654>. It formally acknowledges the importance of trails and ecological trail corridors as conservation tools and sets out steps for providing guidance on their management. The Resolution was proposed by InterEnvironment Institute and cosponsored by nine other NGO Members of IUCN.

2. Extension of authority

Progress of the Task Force will be reviewed prior to the 2029 IUCN World Conservation Congress, when it could be authorized to continue beyond the 2026-2029 quadrennium in its present form, or made a WCPA Specialist Group.

3. Helping to implement conservation strategies broadly

The Task Force's work on trails and conservation will help implement such strategies and decisions as:

- The IUCN Programme.
- The WCPA Mandate.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations.
- IUCN Resolution 7.073 (Marseille, 2020), Ecological connectivity conservation in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework: from local to international levels.
- Convention on Biological Diversity Decision 15/4 (2022), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Target 3 (the “30x30” Target).
- Convention on Migratory Species Resolution 14.16 (2024), Ecological connectivity.

4. Objective and goals

The objective of the Task Force is to explore and make recommendations on neglected opportunities and problems at the intersection of (a) trails and their associated natural corridors and (b) conservation of nature and cultural heritage.

Goals are:

- Raising awareness within the global conservation community of the importance of trails and ecological corridors along trails.
- Providing guidance to national, subnational, and local authorities responsible for planning and managing protected and conserved areas.
- Providing guidance to authorities responsible for land-use planning and regulation more generally.
- Identifying and finding sponsors and funding for projects that require in-depth studies, pilot projects, and convening.
- Taking into account the need for trails that link urban, rural, and wild; and serve as connectors to places representing cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and moral values.

C. SCOPE OF WORK & SPECIFIC OUTPUTS

See also E. Mode of Work & Operation, below.

1. Trails and ecological corridors as conservation tools

The Task Force will:

- Define the terms used in relating trails and conservation.
- Identify trail-related organizations and pursue cooperation with them.
- Produce guidance on zoning that takes into account trails and their associated natural corridors as conservation tools.
- Devise methods, including criteria, for planning, creating, restoring, protecting, and securing legal recognition of trails.
- Recommend methods of interpretation and education along trails and ecological corridors, including for wildlife viewing and use of trailside sites to show consequences and expected effects of climate change.
- Identify and publicize good examples of websites and apps that include detailed information on the biodiversity, geodiversity, conservation, and culture of the areas transited by trails.
- Develop guidance for managing conflicts among all kinds of trail users through inclusive governance mechanisms that involve local communities, Indigenous Peoples, relevant authorities, landowners, and user groups.

2. Preventing and lessening harm

In terms of preventing and lessening the harm trails may cause to people, wildlife, and surrounding ecosystems, the Task Force will draw on the special expertise of IUCN Commissions and other organizations, including those listed under E.3, below.

3. Specific outputs

Outputs will vary depending on subject and target audiences, but will emphasize WCPA publications. The work plan will cover this.

D. MEMBERSHIP & COMPOSITION

This will be discussed at the organizational meeting.

The initial group will be composed of:

- (a) A dozen leaders and experts who were involved in identifying trails as a conservation tool as members of the IUCN WCPA Urban Conservation Strategies Specialist Group. They include, among others, individuals from Brazil, the Hong Kong SAR of China, Portugal, South Africa, the UK, and the US.
- (b) Individuals invited from the 9 NGOs that cosponsored IUCN Resolution 8.004, Trails and Conservation.
- (c) Individuals suggested by the World Trails Network.

Members will be appointed by the Task Force Chair, taking into account the need for geographic, gender, and age diversity and succession planning.

E. MODE OF WORK & OPERATION

See also C. Scope of Work & Specific Outputs, above.

1. First steps

One or more organizational meetings will be held in early 2026 in hybrid form. These will be convened by the Brazilian Ministry of Environment and Climate Change. The proponent of IUCN Resolution 8.004, Trails and Conservation, InterEnvironment Institute, will provide administrative support.

A draft work plan will be prepared by a small group for discussion before and during these meetings. The initial work plan will be limited to a small number of high-leverage activities, including projects that promise to be adequately funded and make substantial progress during the 2026-2029 IUCN quadrennium. The work plan will include details about meetings, decision-making processes, and communication within the group.

One or two projects will be selected that will produce results in time for presentation and discussion at the 7th IUCN World Protected and Conserved Areas Congress (WPC 2027) in September 2027 in Panama.

2. Operation

The Chair and a small steering committee will lead the work of the Task Force.

A Secretariat will be provided by the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change of Brazil. A branch provided by InterEnvironment Institute, located in Claremont, California, US, will assist with coordination and communication.

Outputs will emphasize publications in WCPA series. These will usually be prepared in cooperation with WCPA and other IUCN groups and Members.

3. Cooperation with other programs and organizations

The work of the Task Force will be carried out in cooperation with the IUCN Secretariat, other IUCN Commissions, IUCN Members, intergovernmental organisations, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organisations. These will include:

- WCPA:
 - IUCN WCPA Urban Conservation Strategies Specialist Group
 - IUCN WCPA Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group
 - IUCN WCPA Protected Areas and One Health Task Force (diseases)
 - IUCN WCPA Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group
 - IUCN WCPA Transboundary Conservation Specialist Group
 - IUCN WCPA Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of PAs
- IUCN Species Survival Commission:
 - Center for Species Survival, CSS: Behavior Change
 - IUCN SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group
 - IUCN SSC Human-Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence Specialist Group
- IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law, CAE Specialist Group
- CAE (Expert Group on Crimes that Affect the Environment, UNTOC)
- International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime
- Nature Crime Alliance
- World Trails Network

4. Focal countries and regions

Focal countries and regions will be designated based on expectation of sustained leadership by Task Force members and partnerships and activities continuing over the medium to long term. These will start with building on existing networks centered in Brazil, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the US states of California and New Hampshire.

F. ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORTING

The Task Force reports to the Co-Chairs of the WCPA Urban Conservation Strategies Specialist Group. It will follow WCPA requirements for reporting progress and results (e.g., technical and financial reports), and conform to IUCN guidelines for fundraising activities and financial accountability, noting that neither WCPA nor IUCN accepts liability for cost overruns.

G. CODE OF CONDUCT & ETHICS

The Task Force will adhere to the IUCN Code of Conduct and related policies, including those concerning conflicts of interest.



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