



ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION CHANCE TO TURN THE TIDE ON GLOBAL GRASSLAND LOSS

A policy agenda for UNCCD COP17

ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION CHANCE TO TURN THE TIDE ON GLOBAL GRASSLAND LOSS

A Policy Agenda for the 17th Conference of the Parties of the UN
Convention to Combat Desertification

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 17-28 August 2026

The 17th Conference of Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), held during the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP), is a rare chance to focus attention on the conservation of grasslands, savannahs and rangelands, (hereafter “grasslands”) and on the contribution of pastoralism to climate resilience, food security, social stability and peace.

Grasslands are being degraded and destroyed at a rate almost four times that of forests. Yet natural and semi-natural grasslands, and sustainable pastoral and rangeland systems, offer abundant benefits.

They produce food and fibre, help achieve the UNCCD Land Degradation Neutrality targets, are huge above- and below-ground carbon stores, rich in biodiversity and economically productive, supporting countless human livelihoods, including some 500 million pastoralists.

We know grasslands are threatened but many countries struggle to find effective responses. The following actions from Parties to the UNCCD are critical:



- Ensure integration of regional and global commitments to sustainable grassland management.
- Improve knowledge of biodiversity, social and economic values and ecosystem services.
- Support pastoralist, transhumant, Indigenous and ranching communities, their culture, sustainable production systems and tenure rights.
- Build a comprehensive, representative, well-monitored network of protected and conserved areas.
- Address management challenges relating to fire, invasive species, degradation, and grazing pressures.
- Integrate grassland and soil health into national policies for climate adaptation, drought and flood preparedness.
- Mobilize finance and adapt economic incentives in agricultural policies and value chains

Success means prevention of further loss, recovery of functional, well-connected grasslands: native species at ecologically meaningful diversity and densities, intact food webs, healthy soils and waters, and equitable coexistence with pastoralist, ranching, Indigenous, and local communities. We explain each action in turn.

UNCCD COP-17 provides a chance for the world's governments to align grassland conservation with policies for sustainable and equitable development.



Ensure integration of regional and global commitments to sustainable grassland management for greater effectiveness, including key multilateral environmental agreements and national food policies:

- UN Convention to Combat Desertification's Land Degradation Neutrality target.
- Convention on Biological Diversity's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Kunming Montreal-Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF) targets, especially those on planning, restoration and area-based conservation.
- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals for ecological connectivity.

Improve knowledge of biodiversity, social and economic values and ecosystem services:

- Assemble multi-level assessments of grasslands and ecosystem services for planning and target setting and translate results into simple metrics for policy makers.
- Improve community-validated data collection on grassland biodiversity, human welfare and rights, and of third-party product tracing through supply chains.
- Identify intact grasslands and conversion frontiers to focus conservation efforts.
- Develop indicators of grassland functionality, e.g., species composition, abundance, connectivity, trophic interactions and social outcomes.
- Ensure consistent monitoring to provide data on trends and status, for adaptive management.
- Integrate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), science, digitisation, remote sensing, climate information and decision-support tools, to strengthen sustainable management.
- Work with the UNCCD, governments and donors to raise awareness of the values of healthy grasslands.

Support pastoralist, transhumant, Indigenous and ranching communities, their culture and sustainable production systems:

- Secure land tenure and pastoral mobility, including collective, shared and seasonal use, water points, grazing reserves, national and transboundary corridors and transhumance routes.
- Respect and strengthen inclusive, traditional and Indigenous governance structures and practices.
- Promote sustainable marketing schemes and financial services to improve the resilience and economic viability of pastoralist systems.

- Adopt participatory planning, multi-stakeholder and bottom-up approaches, including multi-sector mechanisms led by Indigenous peoples and local communities
- Support women and youth, noting their changing roles, including leadership, in pastoral governance.
- Recognise mobility as a climate-adaptation strategy.
- Invest in conflict-prevention and locally-led monitoring to reduce the costs of living with wildlife.

Build a comprehensive, representative and well-monitored network of protected and conserved areas:

- Employ a range of protected area approaches, from strict protection to integration of transhumance and other traditional uses with conservation.
- Implement protected areas with full social safeguards, including FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) to avoid conservation excluding traditional users.
- Maintain, monitor and restore ecological connectivity, particularly for migrant species and species displaced by climate change.
- Ensure that Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) deliver effective conservation.
- Support Indigenous and traditional territories to maintain high-quality grasslands.
- Invest the resources needed to ensure that protected and conserved areas conserve nature effectively.



Address management challenges relating to land degradation, fire, invasive species and grazing pressures:

- Prioritise invasive species control, in cooperation with local users, through prevention, early detection, rapid response and targeted control.
- Implement soil and water conservation to curb land degradation.
- Support working landscapes and agro-ecological grazing to maintain biodiversity, connectivity and ecosystem services, including where land abandonment is causing biodiversity loss.
- Implement fire management strategies to avoid over-use of fire and artificially high fire suppression.
- Promote adaptive management that combines TEK, science and climate information.

Maintain and restore grasslands for their biodiversity and ecosystem services

- Recognise grasslands as key carbon stores and integrate grassland and soil health into national policies; in NDCs for climate adaptation and mitigation, drought and flood readiness and long-term productivity.
- Ensure strategies to protect native grasslands from afforestation, agricultural or other land use change.
- Prioritise restoration of large, free-ranging herbivores and other keystone species to restore ecological function and resilience, including appropriate rewilding.
- Promote restoration that integrates sustainable grazing, livestock mobility and pasture management.
- Investigate sustainable, appropriate use of wild herbivores, for food security and as a climate adaptation strategy, particularly where such management has strong cultural traditions.
- Prioritise use of native plants, locally adapted and improved forage varieties and diverse seed systems to increase soil health and reduce emissions.



Mobilise finance and adapt economic incentives to support grassland conservation

- Eliminate perverse subsidies, insecure land tenure and other policies that encourage overgrazing.
- Support inclusive, verifiable, high-quality carbon and biodiversity markets, payments for ecosystem services, and certification schemes, including blended finance and public-private partnerships.
- Strengthen links between financial mechanisms for pastoral resilience and national investment, including climate finance, livestock insurance and digital financial services.
- Better representation of grasslands in funding mechanisms e.g., from development banks, GEF, the UNCCD LDN fund, the KM-GBF Fund and climate finance.
- Ensure that Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists and local communities have equitable access to financial incentives.
- Use corporate and government procurement policies to ease pressure on grasslands.
- Encourage companies and others to adhere to conversion-free commitments.
- Apply integrated, conflict-sensitive approaches to pastoral policy and investment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Publisher	WWF Deutschland (foundation under civil law, represented by board member Meike Rothschädl), Reinhardtstraße 18, D-10117 Berlin
Date	10 August 2026
WWF project manager	Leonie Meier
Author	Nigel Dudley (Equilibrium Research)
Reviewer	Adam Devenish (Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh), Adrian Cullis, Belen Valenzuela (IUCN), Chiara Villani (Alliance Bioversity-CIAT), Cleo Cunningham (BirdLife International), Daniel Kinka (American Prairie), Delphine Babin Pelliard (IUCN), Enrique Michaud (Global Alliance for Rangelands and Pastoralists, GA4RP), Harko Koster (SNV), Isaline Tihon (Global Rewilding Alliance), Jonathan Davies, Karl Wagner (Global Rewilding Alliance), Leigh Winnowiecki (CIFOR-ICRAF), Michele Bowe (RSPB), Natasha Maru (International Land Coalition), Rachel Hoffmann (Plantlife), Sairandhri Lapalika (IUCN), Sasha Alexander (UNCCD), Sasha Gennet (The Nature Conservancy), Sofia Rincon (WWF Colombia), Stefan Burkart (Alliance Bioversity-CIAT), Tchegoun Abedo Koba (SNV), and Ximena Bogarin (WWF Paraguay).

This policy brief was developed as part of the project "*Safeguarding overlooked Ecosystems: Protect, Manage and Restore Grasslands and Savannahs in Argentina, Colombia and Paraguay*" funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN).

Photo credits: © Bruno Ferreiro - Chaco Films / WWF



Disclaimer It should be noted that the views expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the external reviewers

© 2026 WWF-Germany, Berlin All rights reserved.