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**For immediate release**

## **IUCN summit delivers major commitments to save Earth's most precious natural areas**

**IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 closes today in Sydney**

**Sydney, Australia, Wednesday 19 November 2014 (IUCN) –**

The IUCN World Parks Congress 2014, the once-in-a-decade global forum on protected areas, closes today with the release of *The Promise of Sydney*. The *Promise* sets out an ambitious agenda to safeguard the planet's natural assets, ranging from halting rainforest loss in the Asia-Pacific and tripling ocean protection off Africa's coasts to a business commitment to plant 1.3 billion trees along the historic Silk Road.

The *Promise* includes pledges from governments, international organizations, the private sector, Indigenous leaders, community groups and individuals, with many more still being recorded.

The document highlights the need to invigorate global efforts to protect natural areas, including scaling up the protection of landscapes and oceans. It includes commitments to boost investment in nature's solutions to halt biodiversity loss, tackle

climate change, reduce the risk and impact of disasters, improve food and water security and promote human health. It also aims to inspire people around the globe, across generations and cultures, to experience the wonder of nature through protected areas.

*“Protected areas are by far the best investment the world can make to address some of today’s biggest development challenges,” says **Julia Marton-Lefèvre, IUCN Director General**. “The Congress has propelled major commitments from leaders across all levels of society to secure the benefits protected areas provide to humanity and ensure a sustainable future. Drawing on the collective knowledge of over five thousand top protected area experts – and many others who care about the future of our planet – the Promise of Sydney now captures innovative strategies to protect these exceptional places.”*

Organized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and hosted by the Australian and New South Wales Governments, the Congress brought together more than 6,000 participants from over 170 countries.

*“Australia is proud to have co-hosted such a successful Congress and equally proud of our own commitments in the Promise of Sydney,” says **Greg Hunt, Australian Environment Minister**. “They range from banning capital dredge disposal in the Great Barrier Reef and a historic agreement with China to ban mining in Antarctica, to new initiatives to recover the rainforests of the Asia-Pacific and to halt species loss in our national parks. It has been an inspirational Congress – now it is time to deliver the innovative solutions to the challenges facing our planet.”*

*The Promise of Sydney* outlines a pathway for achieving the global target to protect at least 17% of land and 10% of oceans by 2020.

The Protected Planet report, launched in Sydney by IUCN and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), showed

that while the world is on track to meet the target, more work is needed to ensure that areas of importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services are well and equitably managed. The *Promise of Sydney* also called for an urgent increase in ocean protection, including areas beyond national jurisdiction.

The meeting highlighted the need to scale up investment and the quality of governance and management of protected areas. Diversity, quality and vitality of governance emerged as a key prerequisite for ensuring the effectiveness and long-term success of protected areas. Delegates called for a stronger recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples through policies and management practices of protected areas. They acknowledged the critical role of traditional wisdom and management systems in long-term conservation outcomes and community well-being.

Best-practice examples of equitable governance were recognized by the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas – the first global standard set to define excellence in protected area management, presented at the Congress. This award was granted to 23 sites in Australia, China, Colombia, France, Italy, Kenya, Spain and South Korea, including a number of Indigenous Protected Areas. Croatia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nepal, Peru and Russia expressed their commitment to undergo the IUCN Green List assessment in the next phase of the initiative. The Congress also highlighted the need to ensure that protected areas are established in the right places to prevent further species extinctions. The world's largest-known earwig was among species declared extinct at the Congress by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, with the Pacific Bluefin Tuna, Chinese Pufferfish and American Eel among those listed as threatened due to the growing appetite for resources.

A key focus was on economic benefits and cost-effectiveness of conserving the world's natural areas, including their contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation. It also called for new financing models to maintain them, combining public and private funding. Modern technology emerged as a new player in

nature conservation, with the launch of Google's underwater street view and a tool to track illegal fishing. NASA provided cutting-edge satellite imagery to improve the monitoring of protected areas.

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### **Key commitments include:**

**Australia** committed to AUD2 million to boost threatened species protection in national parks; AUD6 million to support Coral Triangle marine protection; AUD6 million to combat illegal logging across the Asia-Pacific as well as new initiatives to protect the Great Barrier Reef and Antarctica.

**Bangladesh** committed to create the country's first Marine Protected Area, Swatch of No Ground, to safeguard whales, dolphins, sea turtles, sharks and other oceanic species.

**Brazil** committed to protect 5% of its marine waters and to consolidate 60 million hectares of protected areas in the Brazilian Amazon by 2020.

**China** committed to increase its protected areas territory by at least 20% and its forest area by 40 million hectares.

**French Polynesia** committed to create a new large-scale marine protected area initiative in the Austral Islands.

**Gabon** announced its decision to create a network of new marine protected areas equivalent to 23% of its marine waters. The 18,000 square mile (46,000 sq km) area includes a range of ecosystems and bans commercial fishing.

**Japan** committed to provide guidelines to protected area managers on disaster risk reduction.

**The Republic of Kiribati** signed an agreement with the **United States of America** to jointly conserve nearly 490,000 square nautical miles in the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (Monument) in the United States and the Phoenix

Islands Protected Area in Kiribati.

**Madagascar** announced plans to triple its marine protected areas and reported the achievement of commitments made ten years ago to triple its overall network of protected areas. Madagascar also announced a 'zero tolerance' approach in tackling illegal wildlife trade and called for international support to achieve this.

**Panama** committed to restore 1 million hectares of degraded lands within protected areas.

**Québec**, Canada, committed to protect 600,000 km<sup>2</sup> from industrial activity to conserve biodiversity.

**Russia** pledged to create 27 new federal Protected Areas and expand 12 existing ones. It committed to increasing Marine Protected Areas by 28%. Russia also pledged to increase its marine protected areas to cover 17 million hectares. It also announced its plan to restore the once extinct Persian Leopard and establish two more wild roaming populations of the European Bison to bring the number of populations in Russia to 2,000 individuals.

**South Africa**, host of the IUCN World Parks Congress 2003, pledged to triple ocean protection in the next 10 years.

**The U.S.** National Park Service is also setting up a programme to engage 100,000 youth in US Protected Areas.

**Elion Foundation** and **The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** announced the creation of a public-private partnership to reduce land degradation and increase the rate of restoration of degraded land. The partnership will include the planting of 1.3 billion trees along the historic Silk Road.

The **United Nations Development Programme** committed to mobilize at least US\$100 million in support of the diversity and quality of governance of protected areas, including through the appropriate recognition and protection of indigenous and community conserved territories and areas (ICCAs), in at least 50 countries.

The *Promise of Sydney* is available [here](#).

Best-practice case studies showcasing how protected areas provide solutions to some of the world's challenges have been captured in the Panorama database launched at the Congress and available [here](#).

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**Notes to editors**

Held once every decade since 1962, the IUCN World Parks Congress is the only global forum dedicated to protected areas – national parks, nature reserves and community conserved areas, established to conserve nature and the benefits it provides.

Today's 209,000 protected areas come in many forms, such as national parks, marine reserves, community and privately conserved areas. Covering over 15.4% of land and 3.4% of the oceans, they are places that people establish to conserve nature and the benefits it provides. They are home to magnificent wildlife and unique cultures and allow people to connect with nature for inspiration, education and recreation.

While protecting ecosystems that are essential for life, these areas support human livelihoods and are the foundation for a green economy. Protected areas provide drinking water to many of the world's largest cities, keep climate change in check by storing vast amounts of carbon, sustain the burgeoning tourism industry and protect communities against disasters.

**About IUCN**

IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. IUCN's work focuses on valuing and conserving nature, ensuring effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development. IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world, and brings governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws

and best practice. IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, with more than 1,200 government and NGO Members and almost 11,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

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