

Ideologies of Global Conservation

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)—World Parks Congress (WPC)
Sydney Olympic Park, November 13-19, 2014

The WPC held 500 sessions. This article highlights underlying philosophies which give life to global conservation projects in response to changes in climate and the unequivocal need to rejuvenate and protect the precious places we call home.

Our way of life is tied to the land—without our land we lose ourselves, as from it we form our relationship with the rest of the world. Steven Nitah,
Thiadene Nene, Canada

The concept of global stewardship for united critical action resounded at the World Parks Congress. From Brazil to Mozambique, from Indonesia to Alaska, and from New Zealand to Nepal, people united to broadcast the central message of ‘act now before it is too late’—too late for our species, too late to mitigate climate change, too late to ensure food security, and too late to safeguard life on this planet.

Climate change is the greatest environmental injustice of all time. Lesley Hughes, Macquarie University, NSW

To demonstrate this injustice, a photograph was projected of a valley and a mountain in China where Indigenous people had grown crops since time immemorial. A horizontal line was drawn through the base of the mountain and marked with a recent year to show the height where crops could grow. Successive lines were drawn on the image higher and higher with rising temperatures. It seems that the only place where cultivation will be possible in 10 or 20 years, is near the mountaintop. And after that, how do these Indigenous people feed themselves?

Simple people doing simple things in places of little importance can make a great change. African concept

This anthropogenic age demands that restoration of ecosystems should be a part of day-to-day life because, as Rajendra Khanal (International Union for Conservation of Nature, Nepal) stated, “We need nature; nature didn’t need us”. Panchase Protected Forest lies in the nine Village Development Committees in western Nepal. This once degraded forestland is now managed by local people as a community forest and the upper forestland is protected. The vision was to sustainably manage biodiversity, water resources and ecotourism through a participatory management approach ensuring environmental stability and promote the livelihood of local people.

Anthropogenic influence was demonstrated by an experience from the 300 Traplines managed by families in Quebec. The people embrace a miiyuupimaatisiun philosophy holding to the belief that living well is engaging in the activity of harvesting the gifts of the land. Rodney Mark (Grand Council of the Crees [Eeyou Istchee]) stated that engagement with the Trapline managers was not merely about cultural accommodation, it was about cultural integration. He also explained how the area is subject to developmental pressures such as hydro electricity, mining and forestry. Extractive industries are having a major impact on James Bay where the quality of the upflow of

water destroys eelgrass, which filters sediment as mangroves do, and is causing major siltation problems.

Strong culture—strong country. Phil Rist, Girringun Aboriginal Corporation
Dean Yibarbuk (Warddeken Land Management Limited) recounted how, as people left Indigenous Country in West Arnhem Land and moved to the coast, they “orphaned” plateau land subsequently invaded by water buffalos and weeds, and waterways were damaged. Work in West Arnhem Land was about securing the future and continuing the culture. Manangrida’s senior Elders met to talk about the orphaned land and the Warddeken Ranger program was introduced to bring people into the area so children could learn about home and culture and traditions in the land of their forefathers. Paul agreed that cultural legitimacy gives an organisation strength.

Parks are our home— a tangible and an intangible heritage. Ian Walker,
Pilbara, Western Australia

Congress speakers emphasised that the key solution to climate change is protection of our natural land and marine areas, and creation of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs). Given that the world’s most biodiverse environments are found in these areas, and in natural World Heritage Sites, speakers stressed that prioritising designation of more of these sites could expedite climate change mitigation.

Canada’s IPAs within boreal forest comprise 77%, or 4,856,227 square kilometers; in Australia, IPAs comprise 11%, or 550,000 square kilometers. This is an indictment of the lack of recognition of the rights of the Indigenous people and it denies Australia benefitting from traditional ecological knowledge and traditional resource management.

For example, Registered Aboriginal Owners Iris White and Paul Stewart spoke about the Gulaga and Biamanga Boards of Management which, with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, manage their protected Parks. However, the 137.5 square kilometer Biamanga National Park in southeast NSW includes sacred Mumbulla Mountain, and the mountain’s wholeness is fractured by State Forest logging coups.

An IPA is not just a piece of land—but a way of being. Fred Nelson, Director,
Maliasili Initiatives Ltd, Tanzania

Indigenous people are the original conservationists. Australia needs more Indigenous and state government co-managed agreements, and to draw knowledge from their success, with an increased focus on Aboriginal land management. We need to realize that, as Ian Walker (Australian Connectivity Council) said regarding connection to place, “the bond isn’t broken even when the concept of connection is severed”. By drawing on global and national wildlife and conservation organisations with histories of culturally appropriate and contextually driven outcomes, more IPA proposals can get off the drawing board and onto the ground. Steven Nitah believes such treaties should last “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the river flows”.

For the future: make something with teeth. Douglas Neasloss, Great Bear
Rainforest, BC, Canada

Speakers emphasised that we should not give up on distressed ecosystems but push for conservation, push for connectivity using examples from other

countries, and focus on restoration of degraded landscapes. Nagulendran Kangayatkarasu (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Malaysia) spoke about the problems of poaching of tigers and elephants and fragmentation of forests and consequent water loss. Primary and secondary linkages are proposed for forest connectivity in Malaysia. Bridges have been built across wildlife corridors, but the success of these for wildlife is not apparent as Nagulendran astutely noted, “elephants don’t publish their findings”.

Dynamic and practical methodologies for environmental protection involve expediting conservation programs, learning from Indigenous people’s land management practices, attracting volunteers, and using more efficient wildlife tracking technology—even satellites.

Moving beyond economic rationale and having the courage to protect, is a gift to humanity. Arrogant assumptions of decision makers who miss the point on land and sea need tempering. Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UNEP

We need to create smarter economic models. Prof. Jonathan Baillie (Zoological Society of London) is working with partners on a Royalty endorsed Rhino Impact Bonds project to secure the long-term future of rhinos globally.

Ecotourism has boomed in many countries after logging of native forests stopped. Greg Carr (Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique) told how the Park was destroyed by war, mines, guns and bombs, so species destruction was extensive. Restoration was spearheaded by the public sector, and recently, rangers in helicopters counted 72,000 animals roaming the park. This project proved that distressed ecosystems can be restored and attract tourism. Greg proved that eco-tourism is a powerful force which helps conservation. “If you visit Gorongosa, you help save it!” Mozambique now boasts it is one of the world’s top five most biodiverse ecosystems. Erustus Kanga (Kenya Wildlife Service) also claimed that, after restoration, tourists pay to see the wildlife coming back to the waterholes.

Doug Neasloss spoke of The Great Bear Rainforest, a name coined by environmental groups in the mid-1990s referring to a temperate rainforest in Canada, on the coast of British Columbia between Vancouver Island and Southeast Alaska. The bears there are unique. To save the forest, people tied themselves to trees and refused bribes. The public raised \$60 million to compensate for loss of logging and the government met the same amount and created an endowment fund to manage stewardship of the land. Area management and operational planners share decision making regarding economic opportunities. The area is designated for ecotourism and people pay \$10 per day to see the bears.

The Inuit are completely dedicated to finding solutions: if there are no caribou—there are no Inuit. Steven Nitah

Congress evidence showed that Australia might be the last country on earth to stop the environmentally destructive and economically unsustainable native forest logging industry. Cyril Kormos, (IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas Vice Chair for World-Heritage) stated: “Paraguay has the most degraded landscape in the world and Australia, the second”.

Steven emphasized that the effect of climate change can be managed by keeping the forests on the land. Other speakers narrated how native forests are being protected; tree nurseries are being created to restore degraded forestlands and to increase seed production; wildlife is being monitored; forests are being connected; seed banks of resilient species are being established; tourists pay to see newly restored landscapes and wildlife; extraction industries are being discarded; Indigenous people are adapting practices to counter the effects of climate change; and youth are being drawn into conservation activities.

Nghi Viet Nguyen (Daloc Community Based Mangroves Reforestation, Vietnam) reported that mangroves were lost to aquaculture and 30% of the coastline was eroded. As sea level rose, 50% of replanting of mangroves was unsuccessful. Mangrove forests were restored by planting melaleuca fences in the water to retain the mud for seeds to propagate. The fences assisted in the natural recruitment, enhanced marine biodiversity and the plan has been scaled up nationally.

Loss of plants and animals means we lose a part of who we are. Gregory Andrews, Australian Threatened Species Commissioner

Achim Steiner is convinced that we have “moved beyond the last line of defence and are now on the first line of defence”. He warned that, “there is a detrimental polarity between opinion from people whose psyches are committed to conservation and those who are distinctly removed and whose avaricious appetites are based in arrogance and ignorance”.

Professor Patrick Dodson (Australian Indigenous Peoples' representative) spoke about the need to focus on reconciliation between humans and nature to create a reliant and resilient prosperity. He stated: “survival lies in the truth relating to connectivity and destiny, to live with respect for what is given or face doom” and that drivers of modernity must recognise the need for connection.

Sky is the Father and Mother earth needs to be treated with reciprocity and respect. Aroha Te Pareake Mea (Chair IUCN Environment & Social Policy)

The peaking temperature graphs can fall; the world has woken up and gone into action. When will Australia's decision makers form essential enlightened philosophies for conservation and respect decisions made and actions taken in other parts of the world, to help perpetuate a healthy living environment for all life upon this planet? Dr James Watson (President-Elect of the Society for Conservation Biology, University of Queensland) stated, “We need to think big and act fast”.

People protect their histories and return to them for generations. We need to leave a history of honour for future generations to be proud of—one which showed we inherited a problem we determined not to perpetuate.

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Representation of Mother Gulaga (Mt Dromedary) NSW



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