

High Level Political Forum – Sustainable Development Goal 15: Life on Land

United States Statement

Thank you Mr./Ms. Chairperson. Thanks also to the distinguished members of the panel for that interesting discussion. The United States believes that countries do not need to choose between their economies and the environment, that we can be pro-economic development and pro-environmental conservation at the same time. U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt once famously said, “Conservation means development as much as it does protection.” As just one illustration of this concept, in the United States we have more than 560 wildlife refuges providing visitors with access to 263 docks, 530 observation decks and 1,318 trails which help generate revenue for nearby communities as well as to the U.S. GDP.

Wetlands are among the most diverse and productive ecosystems, providing essential services for people and the environment. Supplying hundreds of liters of freshwater per person per day, they ensure food and water security, support livelihoods, reduce risks of disasters, and more. For example, in the United States, the protected wetlands and forests of the 2,000 square mile New York City Watershed supply 1.2 billion gallons of clean drinking water daily, serving half the population of New York State, including the nearly nine million residents of New York City, while saving billions of dollars in avoided wastewater treatment. The United States actively engages in the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, known as the Ramsar Convention, collaborating with other governments and stakeholders to wisely use wetlands. Efforts undertaken through Ramsar make important contributions to wetland conservation and to the achievement of Goals 6, 15, and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Forests are also crucial for sustainable development. Like wetlands, they comprise part of the essential “natural infrastructure” for sustainable economic development, poverty alleviation, and improved wellbeing. In addition to sustaining the forest industry, U.S. forests support hundreds of thousands of jobs in recreation, grazing, and other uses. Since 2011, the U.S. Forest Service and its partners have worked to restore 14.6 million hectares of degraded forestland, generating local jobs and revenue. The United States works with the UN Forum on Forests, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Tropical Timber Organization, as well as the private sector and partner governments to advance sustainable forest management and strengthen forests’ contributions to Goal 15 and others.

The impacts of desertification, land degradation, and drought pose a significant threat to national, food, and water security; and can destabilize communities and countries. Poor land management practices and sustained droughts led to the “Dust Bowl” in the United States in the 1930s and had a catastrophic and lasting impact on some of our most productive agricultural lands. The Dust Bowl also taught us valuable lessons about sustainable land management and drought early warning systems that we share with other countries. The United States actively participates in the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, which supports countries’ efforts to manage their land more sustainably and ensure its productivity for generations to come. This work also contributes to the achievement of multiple SDGs including Goal 15.

Wildlife trafficking is a global challenge with devastating impacts, threatening security, undermining the rule of law, spreading disease, robbing local communities of their natural resource bases and livelihoods, and pushing species to the brink of extinction. It also affects the wildlife-related tourism that accounts for sizeable portions of some range states' GDP and supports thousands of jobs. The United States supports work to combat wildlife trafficking and conserve wildlife through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and with many partners worldwide including other governments, local communities, and stakeholders. All these efforts help address Goal 15 and other SDGs.

The United States will continue to work with our domestic and international partners to leverage the potential of multilateral environmental agreements and bilateral collaboration to enable all to do their part to protect life on land. Thank you Mr./Ms. Chairperson.