

FACT SHEET

WHY THE WORLD MUST COMMIT TO PROTECTING 30 PERCENT OF THE PLANET BY 2030 (30X30)



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Fully and highly protecting at least 30 percent of the ocean will provide a safe haven for marine life like this humpback whale calf and its mother.

Nature is in crisis. The degradation of our lands and ocean is destroying the planet’s ability to support life, and a million species worldwide currently face extinction, many within decades. But we have the tools to create a better, healthier future for our planet—and ourselves—if we act now.

Once per decade, the international community gathers under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD or “the Convention”) to set new global targets to advance nature protection for the next 10 years. These targets incentivize action by providing concrete, measurable goals against which governments can be compared and held accountable. The 2021 (postponed from 2020) meeting of the Convention in China represents one of our last, best opportunities to halt biodiversity loss and put nature on a path to recovery.

NRDC, alongside the governments of more than 40 (and counting) nations, numerous nongovernmental organizations, and prominent scientists and experts around the world, is supporting an ambitious global framework to protect at least 30 percent of the global ocean and 30 percent of global land and inland waters by 2030. This plan, known as 30x30, additionally calls on the world to strengthen conservation of all remaining areas to stem biodiversity loss, preserve ecosystem services, and combat and build resilience to climate change.

To achieve 30x30, NRDC calls on Parties to the Convention to adopt the following action target to protect and restore nature:

Fully and highly protect at least 30 percent of the global ocean and 30 percent of land areas and inland waters by 2030 through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative, and well-connected systems of protected areas.¹

Prohibiting all or most extractive activities from 30 percent of land and marine areas would bring the current targets set by the Parties to the Convention—to protect at least 17 percent of land areas and 10 percent of marine areas by 2020—into greater alignment with the latest science. It would also drive resilient economic growth to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, leading to at least \$250 billion in increased economic output annually.²

Crucially, adopting 30x30 will start us down a path toward even more ambitious conservation targets. 30x30 represents the floor, not the ceiling, of conservation, and the world should ultimately achieve the protection of half the earth in a natural state by 2050. As Jonathan Baillie, chief scientist of the National Geographic Society, and Ya-Ping Zhang of the Chinese Academy of Sciences wrote in *Science*, “We encourage governments to set minimum targets of 30% of the oceans and land protected by 2030, with a focus on areas of high biodiversity and/or productivity, and to aim to secure 50% by 2050. This will be extremely challenging, but it is possible, and anything less will likely result in a major extinction crisis and jeopardize the health and wellbeing of future generations.”³

In other words, 30x30 represents the minimum down payment we must make now to keep our global life support system in operation as we seek to protect half the earth in a natural state by 2050. In addition to 30x30, governments at all levels must commit to strengthening conservation and sustainable management of human activities in *all* land, freshwater, and sea areas by 2030.

30X30 IN THE OCEAN RESTORES FISH AND WILDLIFE, BOLSTERS CLIMATE RESILIENCE, AND HELPS SECURE THE LIVELIHOODS OF COASTAL COMMUNITIES.

The ocean stabilizes the climate by absorbing more than 90 percent of excess heat from climate change and one-quarter of human-produced greenhouse gas emissions. It generates clean water and oxygen and is the primary source of protein for more than one-third of the world’s population, and more than three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods.⁴ But the ocean faces growing threats from climate change and the burning of fossil fuels, overfishing, destruction of marine habitats, dead zones, seabed mining, offshore drilling, rising noise levels, and chemical and plastic pollution. The ocean is now the warmest it has been since scientists began measuring, more acidic than at any other time in the past 14 million years, and losing oxygen, fundamental to virtually all marine life.⁵ Many scientists have concluded that the



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Certain types of fishing such as bottom trawling, in which ships deploy nets that destroy bottom habitat while indiscriminately scooping all wildlife out of the ocean, lead to large amounts of bycatch and are not compatible with conservation.

THE GLOBAL OCEAN

While establishing protected areas within countries’ exclusive economic zones is important, the science is clear that we must fully and highly protect 30 percent of the whole ocean—which means also protecting international waters of the high seas, which account for two-thirds of the world’s ocean. Current international law does not provide a mechanism for creating fully protected high seas MPAs. However, governments at the United Nations are in the process of negotiating a new international treaty governing human activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction; when completed, it will create a legal mechanism for establishing fully protected MPAs on the high seas and enable achievement of the 30x30 goal.

Once this treaty is adopted, CBD targets will automatically apply to the global ocean. CBD Article 4 already specifies that CBD provisions apply to Party activities that occur in or beyond national jurisdiction. At the CBD Open Ended Working Group meeting in Rome in February 2020, the CBD secretariat confirmed that targets in the framework can apply to areas beyond national jurisdiction. Further, Aichi Target II, by setting a goal to protect “coastal and marine areas,” has already established a precedent for targets to apply to the global ocean, not just territorial waters.

Without a treaty to conserve the high seas, it will be impossible to fully and highly protect 30 percent of the ocean by 2030. Governments committed to the 30x30 goals must be equally committed to the swift passage of this vital treaty.

single most important thing we can do for the ocean, beyond cutting carbon dioxide emissions, is to significantly reduce other major stressors through the creation of fully and highly protected marine protected areas (MPAs), parks in the ocean where industrial activities are prohibited.⁶

Fully protected ocean parks where extractive, polluting, and destructive human pursuits are banned provide sanctuaries for ocean wildlife. Highly protected areas may permit light extractive activities like certain types of recreational or indigenous fishing. Marine scientists agree with ecologist Enric Sala and colleagues, who wrote in *Marine Policy*:

“There is abundant evidence that no-take fully protected areas are the most effective type of MPA for restoring and protecting biodiversity . . . Areas that allow anything more than very minimal fishing or other extractive activities cannot safeguard the biodiversity in a given place, and these should not count towards the CBD target. They can have other important goals such as making fishing more sustainable, but that is not the same as biodiversity protection.”⁷

Achieving 30x30 in the ocean will significantly bolster the ocean’s climate resilience, enhance food security for the billions of people who rely on fish for food, and provide safe havens for endangered ocean life such as whales, seabirds, sharks, and turtles. The economic benefits of protecting 30 percent of the ocean are estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars.⁸

30X30 ON LAND AND INLAND WATERS SUPPORTS WILDLIFE CONSERVATION, SAFEGUARDS CLEAN AIR AND WATER, AND FIGHTS CLIMATE CHANGE.

The air we breathe is produced and cleansed by vast forests, the water we drink is filtered and conveyed by rivers, the food we grow sprouts from fertile plains, and the shelters we build come from various ingenious manipulations of resources. In short, our land and its freshwaters constitute our global life support system. They are also critical for combating climate change—and they are in jeopardy. As stated by the chair of the intergovernmental organization responsible for interfacing between biodiversity and policy, “The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever. We are eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide.”⁹ For terrestrial environments, the leading cause of this deterioration is land-use changes—converting wild areas from their natural state to a form that serves human uses—driven by agriculture, forestry, urbanization, and mining.¹⁰



Deforestation significantly alters forest and freshwater ecosystems, impairing our lands’ ability to function as our global life support system.



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Staff with the Centre for Sustainability Philippines, an NRDC partner, talks to local community youth about the importance of protecting biodiversity hotspots like Cleopatra’s Needle in Palawan Island, which was designated as a Critical Habitat by the Philippines in 2017.

To stop and reverse the deterioration of land, leading scientists are calling for at least 30 percent of terrestrial and inland water areas to be protected or brought back to their natural state by 2030, so that their original character, resources, and functions are restored and preserved for current and future generations.¹¹ While such protections exist on a limited scale, their global application to at least 30 percent of land and inland water areas would be the kind of transformative change scientists have concluded is necessary to reverse the negative impacts of our land use choices.

Protecting 30 percent of land and inland water areas will require using existing conservation tools, like the world’s various national park systems, and finding new ways to weave together conservation efforts over vast areas. World governments and organizations will need to mobilize financial resources and redirect existing harmful subsidies to activities that compel conservation, like converting privately held wildlands slated for development into protected areas. In addition, Indigenous-led conservation efforts should be strongly supported and fully resourced to promote effective stewardship of additional land and inland waters. Studies have shown that ecosystems’ biodiversity and climate values are better protected in areas where Indigenous land rights are strong.¹² The designation, management, and enforcement of any protected areas must uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including ensuring the right to free, prior, and informed consent for any resource management that affects the territories of Indigenous peoples.



Indigenous-led protection in places like the Canadian boreal forest is a critical pillar of 30x30.

REALIZING 30X30 WILL REQUIRE ROBUST IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

The world does not have a strong track record of achieving global conservation goals. Reaching 30x30 will require learning from our experience with these past goals, especially when it comes to implementation and accountability. For example, nearly every one of the 2010 Aichi Global Biodiversity targets (which set goals for protecting and ensuring greater biodiversity by 2020) exhibits an implementation gap, with efforts stymied by a lack of political commitment, resources, and measurement of progress.

A robust implementation and accountability mechanism is critical to the achievement of any new global targets for nature protection, and 30x30 in particular. Specifically, such a mechanism should require that Parties clearly announce in advance of any review which national targets and actions they intend to implement with respect to each global target. These intended national targets and actions will likely come in the form of uniform and high-quality National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)

established by national governments in consultation with key stakeholders. These targets should be measurable, with clear metrics by which to judge their success.¹³ The first intended national targets and actions should be communicated by all Parties shortly after the CBD meeting in China in 2021.

Individual Party progress toward national targets and actions should be regularly reviewed through a stocktaking, as should collective progress toward each global goal. Strong guidelines to standardize national biodiversity targets—including NBSAPs—are essential to facilitating the aggregation of national efforts and track overall global progress toward 30x30. Based on the stocktaking, national targets and actions should be revised in a progressive manner to facilitate achievement of the global targets. This cycle of action over time—announce intended target/action, report, review, and ratchet up—is essential to meeting the 2030 action targets in practice rather than solely in aspiration.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Fully* and *highly protected* definitions were developed for oceans and come from Oregon State University, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, Marine Conservation Institute, National Geographic Society, and UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre. See Protected Planet, “An Introduction to the MPA Guide,” 2019, <https://www.protectedplanet.net/c/mpa-guide>. The definitions are largely applicable to land areas and inland waters as well.
- 2 Campaign for Nature, “Economic Benefits of Protecting 30% of Planet’s Land and Ocean Outweigh the Costs at Least 5-to-1,” July 8, 2020, <https://www.campaignfornature.org/protecting-30-of-the-planet-for-nature-economic-analysis>.
- 3 Jonathan Baillie and Ya-Ping Zhang, “Space for Nature,” *Science* 361, no. 6407 (August 2018): 1051, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/361/6407/1051.full>.
- 4 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, “Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources,” United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/oceans/> (accessed July 22, 2020).
- 5 Julia Short, “Ocean Acidification to Hit Levels Not Seen in 14 Million Years,” *Phys.org*, July 23, 2018, <https://phys.org/news/2018-07-ocean-acidification-million-years.html>. Denise Breitburg et al., “Declining Oxygen in the Global Ocean and Coastal Waters,” *Science* 359, no. 6371 (January 2018): 7240.
- 6 Callum M. Roberts et al., “Marine Reserves Can Mitigate and Promote Adaptation to Climate Change,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 24 (June 2017): 6167-75.
- 7 Enric Sala et al., “Assessing Real Progress Towards Effective Ocean Protection,” *Marine Policy* 91 (2018): 11-13.
- 8 Anthony Waldron et al., *Protecting 30% of the Planet for Nature: Costs, Benefits and Economic Implications*, working paper, July 2020, https://www.conservation.cam.ac.uk/files/waldron_report_30_by_30_publish.pdf.
- 9 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, “UN Report: Nature’s Dangerous Decline ‘Unprecedented’; Species Extinction Rates ‘Accelerating,’” United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/> (accessed August 4, 2020).
- 10 IPBES, *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (Bonn, Germany: IPBES Secretariat, 2019), <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>.
- 11 E. Dinerstein et al., “A Global Deal for Nature: Guiding Principles, Milestones, and Targets,” *Science Advances* 5, no. 4 (April 2019), <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/4/eaaw2869>.
- 12 See, e.g., Stevens, Caleb et al., *Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change: How Strengthening Community Forest Rights Mitigates Climate Change*, World Resources Institute, July 2014, <https://www.wri.org/publication/securing-rights-combating-climate-change> and IPBES *Global Assessment Report*.
- 13 In addition to a robust accountability mechanism, it is important that targets be designed according to SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely) principles. The 30x30 target has a quantitative component by which progress can be measured. The part of Aichi Target 11 that calls for protecting 10 percent of marine and coastal areas by 2020 hasn’t been fully achieved, but it is widely viewed by Parties to the Convention as more successful than the targets that lack metrics by which to measure their progress. Creating an expectation for countries to set and be reviewed against SMART targets can help bridge the gap between global ambition and national action.