

SER 2017 Call to Action

1 September 2017

Iguassu Falls, Brazil

Message from the 7th World Conference on Ecological Restoration

The world is entering an “ecological restoration era,” with governments across the globe making impressive commitments to the restoration of degraded ecosystems. The delegates of the Society for Ecological Restoration’s 7th World Conference on Ecological Restoration, the 1st Brazilian Conference on Ecological Restoration, and the 5th Iberoamerican and Caribbean Congress on Restoration Ecology (SER 2017) congratulate and encourage the emerging global collaboration for its work to elevate the importance of restoration programs at all scales around the world. From the ambitious forest restoration agenda of the Bonn Challenge, including Initiative 20x20 in Latin America, to the Short-term Action Plan on Ecosystem Restoration of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, never has there been such momentum to turn the tide from ecosystem degradation to ecological restoration around the world.

To meet these commitments will require an incredible scaling up of the investment in both human and financial resources dedicated to restoration. And with that scaling up come both challenges and opportunities that will determine whether restoration activities meet their social and ecological goals. If done effectively and sustainably, with a focus on real outcomes over metrics, ecological restoration will greatly aid in protecting biodiversity, improving human health and well-being, increasing food and water security, delivering goods, services and economic prosperity, and providing critical contributions to both climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, ecological restoration cannot replace nature conservation, and should never be used to justify the destruction or degradation of ecosystems, including through perverse incentives for the restoration of ecosystem services. The present level of landscape and ecosystem degradation should be halted and all remaining wild, roadless, non-developed areas should be protected. Ecological restoration will not suffice to revert a global, overwhelming environmental crisis if ecosystem destruction is not stopped.

This call to action is issued on behalf of more than 1000 SER 2017 delegates, including scientists and restoration practitioners, representatives of environmental and development NGOs, private corporations, government agencies, and community leaders from 55 countries. We

gathered together in Iguassu, Brazil from August 27-September 1, 2017, to address the challenges and opportunities associated with restoring all ecosystems, as well as the urgent need to re-vitalize and reinforce the essential links between nature and human society.

Recognizing the critical importance of forests and all other ecosystems as part of our global ecological infrastructure, the delegates strongly urge all engaged governments, industries, agricultural producers, funders, NGOs, communities and other key stakeholders to act swiftly to not only deliver on the commitments and aspirations embedded in global restoration initiatives, but also to:

- Clearly state in all communications that the ecological restoration, ecosystem restoration and related restorative activities should never justify the destruction or further degradation of the world's remaining ecosystems;
- Ensure that all restoration projects and programs are based on the best available science, that they effectively balance the delivery of benefits to biodiversity and human society, and that free and open communication between scientists, the public, governments and the media is maintained;
- Develop, adopt, utilize and refine guidance tools, such as the SER International Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration and other national and local standards based on restoration ecology principles, to help establish priorities, implement projects, and improve the effectiveness of all ecological restoration and related restorative activities;
- Plan forest restoration projects to favor a biodiverse mix of native species over monotypic and/or nonnative plantings, and protect intact, native, non-forested ecosystems (e.g., grasslands, savannas) from conversion to forest cover through afforestation projects;
- Implement ecological restoration in conjunction with supporting activities to improve connectivity within and between protected areas, and across the spectrum of ecosystems that are critical for biodiversity conservation;
- Design ecological restoration projects to improve human health and well-being, increase food and water security, and deliver goods, services and economic prosperity;
- Emphasize the use of ecological restoration as a tool in ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation strategies aimed at: 1) enhancing social and ecological resilience; and 2) and increasing capabilities for long-term storage of carbon in the vegetation and soils of landscapes undergoing restoration;
- Ensure that local and indigenous communities have an active role in restoration planning and implementation, and safeguard their right to a healthy and sustainable future;

- Facilitate on-the-ground capacity-building and the transfer of funds, knowledge, tools and technologies between and among global, regional and local constituencies, including indigenous communities;
- Promote the development of local plant materials centers that train and employ local community members to identify, collect, save, and cultivate high quality plant materials for nearby restoration projects.
- Increase capacity building and financial investment in all phases of ecological restoration, from assessment and design through implementation and monitoring, from the World Bank, Global Environmental Facility, national and international development banks and other public and private funding institutions;
- Ensure that developed countries make significant efforts to commit their own territories for restoration, and not just contribute to global restoration by supporting projects in developing countries.
- Integrate ecological restoration into legislative and regulatory frameworks and into political agendas at the national and local levels that include all sectors of society that use and manage natural capital.

Ecological restoration at the global scale is moving from promise to reality, but significant challenges remain. Only by communicating openly, guaranteeing the integrity of science, and incorporating all stakeholders into the process can we ensure that ecological restoration conserves biodiversity, addresses climate change, and improves human well-being around the world.