



REPORT ON THE SECOND GLOBAL FORUM ON ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

*The Role of Ecological Restoration in Achieving Global Biodiversity Targets:
Broadening the Post-2020 Framework*

MARCH 17, 2020

Forum hosted by:

The Society for Ecological Restoration & IUCN Commission
on Ecosystem Management Thematic Group on Ecosystem
Restoration

September 2019, Cape Town, South Africa



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Second Global Forum on Ecological Restoration was a partnership of the Society for Ecological Restoration and the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management and its Ecosystem Restoration Thematic Group. Funding was provided by the Walton Family Foundation and in-kind support was provided by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) at Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden and the Institute for Regional Conservation (IRC). The Forum planning team included: Cara Nelson (IUCN CEM), Jim Hallett (SER), Steve Edwards (IUCN CEM), George Gann (SER, IRC), Liette Vasser (IUCN CEM), Bethanie Walder (SER). The implementation team also included Emily Gonzales (Parks Canada, overall Forum facilitator), and Ian Little (Endangered Wildlife Trust). For more information or queries, please email: SER_IUCN-CEM@ser.org.



Participants in the Second Global Forum on Ecological Restoration.

Front cover photo credit: Cape Town Tourism

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recognizing the increasing role of ecological restoration as a tool for addressing a wide variety of ecological and social challenges, the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) Ecosystem Restoration Thematic Group (ERTG) hosted their second biennial Global Forum on Ecological Restoration in Cape Town, South Africa on September 23, 2019. Thirty-eight experts from sixteen countries came together to address **The Role of Ecological Restoration in Achieving Global Biodiversity Targets: Broadening the Post-2020 Framework**, especially in view of the upcoming United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Participants discussed challenges, solutions, and priority actions regarding:

- Elevating ecological restoration as a mechanism to meet post-2020 biodiversity targets and goals
- Incorporating principles and standards for restorative activities into large-scale restoration initiatives
- Balancing the delivery of ecosystem services for human wellbeing with protection and restoration of biodiversity

A surprising number of synergies emerged in all three sessions (challenges, solutions, actions). In particular, communications strategies regarding ecological restoration emerged as a key challenge. Participants expressed the need for more effective, targeted, and audience-specific communications; more clarity regarding the messaging on restoration and restorative activities; more hopeful messages; and a more place-based approach that “meets people where they are.”

Another common issue was the need to integrate restoration into the broader climate discussion.

Participants identified that having different UN conventions each working in individual silos impedes integration of ecological restoration into their agendas and in some cases reduces the effectiveness of restoration for meeting multiple ecological and social goals. Participants were also interested in opportunities for using the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, as well as the CBD post-2020 Biodiversity Framework process, to improve coordination around ecological restoration planning, capacity building, funding, and delivery.

All groups discussed the importance of identifying and building stable funding for restoration, while also tying that funding to projects and programs that follow generally accepted restoration standards and guidelines. In the context of targets, participants recognized the importance of measuring and promoting how restoration creates overall “ecological lift” at regional, continental, and global scales. Ecological restoration should be recognized as a tool that can move us not just from degradation to land degradation neutrality, but to net improvement in ecological conditions globally.

Priority actions fell into the following categories:

- Integrating ecological restoration into existing activities, conventions, and treaties
- Capacity building to implement ecological restoration
- Promoting the use of standards for the implementation and funding of ecological restoration
- Improving governance
- Increasing funding for ecological restoration
- Monitoring both implementation and effectiveness, and communicating those results
- Communicating the benefits of ecological restoration for people, community economies, and nature

PROCESS

During the forum, participants were divided into three groups, as outlined above, and then each group worked together in three consecutive sessions over the course of the day. The first session focused on identifying challenges, the second on solutions to those challenges and the third on priority actions to implement the solutions. After each of the first two sessions (challenges and solutions) the working groups reconvened and shared their top results. Participants were asked to consider and address governance issues in all three groups, recognizing that governance is a cross-cutting challenge that can affect all aspects of ecological restoration. After

the final session, the working groups reconvened, shared all priority actions, and then undertook an informal voting process to identify top priorities. A list of all participants is included in Appendix A.



*Participants in working group.
Photo credit: Bethanie Walder*

The Global Forum was not intended to articulate a work plan or action plan for the Society for Ecological Restoration or for the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management, but to outline potential priority actions that members of the ecological restoration community can engage in individually or in partnerships. Ideally these

priority actions will spur collaborations and engagement from those who attended the Global Forum as well as other partners who were not able to participate.

A preliminary report was prepared in October 2019 and submitted to the Convention on Biological Diversity in advance of their thematic consultation on ecosystem restoration (6-8 November, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). SER and CEM plan to hold the 3rd biennial Global Forum on Ecological Restoration in conjunction with the 9th World Conference on Ecological Restoration in 2021.

DISCUSSION GROUP NOTES

While the discussion groups had robust conversations that covered many topics, they were asked to highlight their top five issues or recommendations to share with the full group in plenary. The discussion below synthesizes the results of each session.

CHALLENGES

All three working groups identified communications as their top challenge. Issues included ineffective and inadequate communication, oversimplified, misleading, and mixed messages, and a lack of audience-specific, theme-specific, or place-specific messages. Participants raised concerns that some ecosystems, especially forests, receive much more attention in the global restoration context than others. Another key communications issue that arose was the lack of understanding about the definition of ecological restoration and how it benefits both ecosystems and people, including by mitigating climate change. These communications challenges reverberate throughout many of the other challenges that the three groups identified.

Ongoing ecosystem degradation, and the fact that the principal drivers of degradation have not been addressed globally, continues to be a core challenge. Along with this is the challenge of collecting adequate and effective baseline data and metrics with which we can measure ecological restoration effectiveness. The issue of complexity and uncertainty came up in several contexts, including as related to restoration design, restoration effectiveness, and restoration in the context of climate change. The lack of ecosystem-specific principles and standards also affects how ecological restoration is approached.

Climate change came up in every group. The conflation of ecological restoration, restorative activities (see below), and other actions, especial-

ly reforestation and afforestation, is an ongoing challenge. All of the groups recognized that ecological restoration is a critical tool for addressing climate change, but also that not all activities that are being implemented to address climate change are ecological restoration, or even restorative. So how can we ensure that ecological restoration and other activities are recognized as distinct, and how can we help support and promote the implementation of more holistic approaches to restoration, especially those that restore biodiversity while simultaneously providing ecosystem services and improving human health and wellbeing. This point was raised repeatedly, with different examples throughout the workshop and in the follow up.

One participant explained, for example, that South Africa committed to 3.6 million HA of reforestation under the AFR100 (reforesting 100 million hectares of land on the African continent by 2030) before completing an ecological assessment to identify what was appropriate and possible. The preliminary assessments of historical data show that the maximum extent of forests in South Africa was likely only 1.06 million HA, most of which is still in natural condition. Thus, the country may have overcommitted to reforestation. To achieve those targets could require afforestation, leading to negative consequences for biodiversity and ecosystem services. Other participants explained that South Africa's most well-known restoration program has been focused on removing water-thirsty invasive species, including invasive tree species and forests, that have lowered water tables and water flows, exacerbating water supply issues in areas of the country that already face regular drought. That long-term restoration program has helped restore water flows for people and nature, addressing a very real climate issue in the country. This example illustrates some of the definitional and conceptual challeng-

es that participants discussed, especially regarding the intersection of afforestation, reforestation, ecological restoration, and climate change. Participants were particularly concerned about the “one size fits all” approach that can happen as a result of global targets, and especially the perverse incentives such targets can create.

SOLUTIONS

The solutions discussions in most groups addressed the key communications challenges that were initially identified. These included creating audience, theme, and place-based messages that would increase understanding and comprehension of ecological restoration, including among policy- and decision-makers. All groups agreed that communications needed to accentuate the positive and solutions-based aspect of ecological restoration, especially at a time when news about climate change is causing such despair. Story-telling, including directly from local stake-holders, while ideally also relevant to global policy, is an important communication approach as well. Finding well-known champions and spokespeople can improve message uptake. The participants recognized that communications have to be available in many different languages.

Participants offered a variety of solutions to address other identified challenges. Restoration targets and goals, in particular, need to be tied to and included with climate change targets and goals in an ecologically appropriate manner. Participants recommended incorporating ecological restoration into all of the United Nations conventions as well as the integration of those conventions more effectively with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). International bodies, as well as funding agencies, however, have to identify and use appropriate criteria, ideally based on principles and standards for ecological restoration and allied and restorative activities (e.g., other nature-based solutions). Restorative activities, in particular, are articulated as part of the SER Restorative Continuum in the SER International Principles and Standards. By considering the appropriate context for a wide variety of restor-

ative activities, we can implement the highest level restoration or restorative intervention, designed to fit the specific challenges being addressed.

All three groups recognized the value of stakeholder engagement and effective governance mechanisms for increasing the effectiveness of ecological restoration interventions. In addition, participants recognized that restoration is but one of many nature-based solutions and, as such, the restoration agenda can also be included in emerging discussions and priorities regarding investment in nature-based solutions.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

The discussions surrounding priority actions were exciting and inspiring, identifying a variety of existing strategies that can be expanded upon, while also brainstorming new approaches to increase investment and engagement in ecological restoration as a tool for improving biodiversity, addressing climate change, and improving human wellbeing. The priority actions can be consolidated into the following categories:

- Integrating ecological restoration into existing activities, conventions, and treaties
- Capacity building to implement ecological restoration
- Promoting the use of standards for the implementation and funding of ecological restoration
- Improving governance
- Increasing funding for ecological restoration
- Monitoring both implementation and effectiveness, and communicating those results
- Communicating the benefits of ecological restoration for people, community economies, and nature

For each of the categories, we have included the top 2-3 priority actions from the forum:

- **Integrating ecological restoration into existing activities, conventions, and treaties**
 - Examine potential to more efficiently ad-

dress existing treaties, SDGs, conventions, and other mechanisms (e.g., IPCC, ISO) through ecological restoration

- Convene diverse/broad stakeholders to draft language to balance ecological restoration and biodiversity
 - **Building capacity to implement ecological restoration**
 - Provide training platforms/toolboxes on ecological restoration in general and the SER standards in particular (create tools that enable practitioners and policy makers to operationalize the standards)
 - Identify synergies and gaps among the different entities working in restoration and fill the gaps
 - Develop a checklist and lexicon of enabling conditions to assist nations and groups in assessing restoration potential and setting restoration priorities
 - **Promoting the use of standards for the implementation and funding of ecological restoration**
 - Integrate standards as a driver for funders/donors to incorporate into their projects
 - Adapt the SER Standards to public/private/nongovernmental organization communities (not just for practitioners), and specific ecosystems and industries
 - **Improving governance**
 - Draft a template law that could be adopted by multiple countries to spur investment in green infrastructure in order to help governments balance investments in green and grey infrastructure
 - Assist governments with governance issues surrounding ecological restoration
 - **Increasing funding for ecological restoration**
 - Set up a public/private investment/impact fund for ecological restoration (e.g., raise \$500 million), and distribute for implementation
- according to the SER Standards; implement parallel with climate opportunities as possible
- Create guidance for valuation and to promote the huge return on investment that could come from restoration (work with/expand existing guidance, e.g., Ecosystem Services Partnership guidance)
 - **Monitoring both implementation and effectiveness, and communicating those results**
 - Incorporate restoration metrics into global targets, including for protected areas (e.g., develop a global scorecard on the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (or improve/build on/modify the Bonn Challenge Barometer)
 - Develop indicators of outcomes that go beyond implementation metrics and identify and promote indicators of success
 - **Communicating the benefits of ecological restoration for people, community economies, and nature**
 - Create a database of success stories on ecosystem services from ecological restoration (build on existing databases), and promote those success stories
 - Create a framework for measuring ecological lift from restoration and promote how restoration improves planetary conditions
 - Conduct stakeholder mapping for ecological restoration

NEXT STEPS

The Global Forum on Ecological Restoration provides an important opportunity for restoration partners from around the world to share ideas, learn from each other, and strategize solutions to some of the biggest challenges facing the restoration field. This forum, the discussions it fostered, and the priority actions it identified are especially timely given the pending launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

The priority actions are not intended to be a final list of activities, nor to provide a specific blueprint for the UN Decade, but they are

intended to provide some guidance for potential next steps. Actions will be implemented and/or undertaken as participants and other restoration entities choose their individual priorities and act on those. SER and CEM hope that the relationships fostered at the Forum will catalyze engagement on some of the priority actions. In that context, we are pleased to report that several of the priority actions identified are already underway or under discussion by different organizations and entities, including some entities that were not able to participate in the Forum.



Participants review notes from working group meetings. Photo credit: Bethanie Walder.

SER and CEM will continue to engage with participants to track activities and actions post-Forum. We will also re-engage participants from prior forums in early 2021 when planning starts for the third Global Forum. We thank all participants for sharing their time, enthusiasm, and ideas at the Second Biennial Global Forum on Ecological Restoration.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS

Group A: Elevating Ecological Restoration

Facilitators: Cara Nelson (IUCN CEM ERTG) and Jim Hallett (SER)

James Aronson (US) *Missouri Botanical Garden/SER*

Nora Berramouni (Ghana) *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

Renato Cruzeilles (Brazil) *International Institute for Sustainability*

Anita Diederichsen (Brazil) *World Wildlife Fund*

Kay Montgomery (South Africa) *South African Green Industries Council (SAGIC)*

Musonda Mumba (Kenya) *United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*

Louise Stafford (South Africa) *The Nature Conservancy*

Taole Tesele (Lesotho) *GIZ Lesotho*

Group B: Principles and Standards

Facilitators: George Gann (Institute for Regional Conservation / SER) and Ian Little (IUCN - Endangered Wildlife Trust)

Rafael Chavez (Brazil) *Secretariat for the Environment of the State of São Paulo / University of São Paulo / SOBRE*

Fangyuan Hua (China) *Peking University*

Peggy Olwell (US) *Bureau of Land Management*

Peter Skidmore (US) *Walton Family Foundation*

Karen Esler (South Africa) *Stellenbosch University*

Andrew Whitley (South Africa) *Wildlands Conservation Trust / SER*

Daniel Vallauri (France) *WWF*

Rene Beyers (Canada) *University of British Columbia / IUCN CEM rewilding task force*

Paul Smith (UK) *Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI)*

Nancy Shaw (US) *US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station*

Jose Marcelo Torezon (Brazil) *Londrina State University*

Group C: Balancing Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity

Facilitators: Emily Gonzales (Parks Canada) and Bethanie Walder (SER)

Dolf DeGroot (NL) *Wageningen University*

Marcello De Vitis (US/Italy) *International Network for Seed-based Restoration*

Kingsley Dixon (Australia) *Curtin University*

Cristina Eisenberg (US) *Earthwatch Institute*

Boze Hancock (US/Australia) *The Nature Conservancy*

Magamese Mange (South Africa) *UNEP*

Stephanie Mansourian (Switzerland) *University of Geneva*

Luiz Moraes (Brazil) *Embrapa - Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation / SER*

Kirsty Shaw (Kenya/England) *Botanic Gardens Conservation International*

Jasper Slingsby (South Africa) *South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON)*

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Pelle Bågesund (South Africa) *IUCN*