

WCS brings science and wildlife conservation expertise to UNCCD COP17 in Mongolia, August 17-28

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Mongolia's vast rangelands offer a powerful model for balancing wildlife conservation, sustainable pastoralism, and ecosystem restoration



As land degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate change increasingly threaten ecosystems and communities around the world, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) will urge governments at the 17th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP17) to place wildlife conservation and ecological integrity at the heart of global efforts to restore degraded lands and build climate resilience. The conference will convene in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia between August 17-28.

At a time when nature faces unprecedented pressures, from accelerating land degradation and biodiversity loss to climate change and increasing demands on natural resources, COP17 represents a critical opportunity for governments to advance solutions that recognize healthy ecosystems as the foundation for sustainable development. Protecting and restoring the world's rangelands will be essential not only for people and livelihoods, but also for conserving wildlife, maintaining ecological integrity, and building resilience in a rapidly changing world. Held under the theme "Restoring Land. Restoring Hope," COP17 comes during the United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists and offers a critical opportunity to elevate the importance of healthy rangelands in addressing biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable development.

WCS experts from Mongolia and around the world will participate in policy discussions focused on the role that science-based conservation can play in achieving land restoration goals. "Healthy rangelands are far more than grazing lands—they are some of the planet's most important ecosystems, supporting extraordinary wildlife, sustaining pastoral communities, storing carbon, and maintaining ecological processes across vast landscapes," said Dr. Susan Lieberman, Vice President of International Policy for the Wildlife Conservation Society. "As governments seek solutions to land degradation, protecting

biodiversity and maintaining ecological integrity must be recognized as essential to long-term restoration and resilience."

"Mongolia's vast rangelands demonstrate that healthy ecosystems, thriving wildlife, and sustainable pastoral livelihoods are deeply interconnected," said Dr. Justine Shanti Alexander, Country Director of WCS Mongolia. "Hosting COP17 provides an opportunity to share lessons from Mongolia with the world while reinforcing that conserving ecological integrity is fundamental to restoring land and securing a sustainable future for both people and nature." WCS works across globally important rangelands in 17 countries, partnering with governments, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, and local communities to conserve wildlife, restore ecosystems, and advance science-based land management.

As host nation, Mongolia offers a powerful example of the importance of conserving intact rangelands. WCS has worked in Mongolia for more than two decades, helping conserve one of the world's largest remaining temperate grassland ecosystems while supporting research on iconic migratory species including the Mongolian gazelle, saiga antelope, wild ass, and snow leopard. During COP17, WCS will emphasize that successful land restoration depends on protecting functioning ecosystems, conserving wildlife and migration corridors, strengthening climate resilience, and ensuring that science and local knowledge guide decision-making.

WCS experts will be available throughout the conference to discuss rangeland conservation, biodiversity, wildlife migrations, land restoration, climate resilience, One Health, and the role of science in informing international policy.