



## Global Grassland and Savannah Dialogue Platform

### Session 1: 21<sup>th</sup> July 2020

WWF hosted a meeting involving many like-minded institutions<sup>1</sup> to explore ways of working more closely together on issues related to the conservation of grassland and savannah ecosystems.

**Alissa Wachter** introduced the **WWF Global Grassland and Savannah Initiative (GSGI)**. Grassland and savannah play key roles in carbon storage, food and water security, biodiversity, local livelihoods and cultural identity. Some 40% of total and 80% of agricultural area is located here, with only 8% protected and around half already converted or degraded. Lack of awareness of the importance of grasslands and savannas has resulted in poor conservation. The GSGI aims to address these challenges through a mixture of protection, good management and restoration, with work-streams at global and local levels, the latter including running model projects.

**Martina Fleckenstein** outlined aims of the **Global Grassland and Savannah Dialogue Platform**. Many imminent decisions: on post-2020 CBD biodiversity targets, UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and on climate and land degradation, risk downplaying grassland and savannah. The Platform will bring together knowledge from practical experience, convene influencers, advocate globally, and share information on grassland and savannah ecosystems. Monthly calls will exchange information, with a larger meeting in September and during IUCN World Congress in January 2021. This is an open platform with all welcome. The platform will encourage collaboration on key topics, such as mapping the biome, identifying conservation priorities and developing indicators for the CBD post-2020 framework.

**Maria Eugenia** outlined early work of Fundacion Vida Silvestre on **High Value Grasslands** in Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina during 2002-2004. Data collection took place through surveys, online surveys and expert consultation, resulting in fact sheets for 68 valuable grasslands, published in a report. Monitoring is now needed to see how many of these areas still exist. New mapping tools which make it possible to distinguish between pasture and grasslands are being developed, which will help to refine and update this information.

**Fiona Flintan** summarised work by ILRI and the International Land Coalition on **mapping global rangelands**. Research shows data are insufficient, terms for rangeland, grassland etc used loosely, and estimates for land cover out-dated and varying dramatically. Mapping is being carried out, combining existing data. Grassland, drylands etc. are combined and filters applied to show e.g. protected areas or key biodiversity areas overlapping rangelands. The aim is for an atlas to be launched at the WCC in 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> The meeting included colleagues from Agrecol – CELEP; Cuenca Los Ojos; Equilibrium Research; Food and Agriculture Organisation; Fundacion Vida Silvestre; Great Plains Conservation Network; Humboldt University; International Livestock Research Institute; International Union for Conservation of Nature; Nature Conservancy; Thuenen Institute; UN Convention to Combat Desertification; University of Arizona and Wuerzburg; Wildlife Conservation Society; World Agroforestry & WWF

**Sophie Reinermann** presented research on **Assessment of Grassland State, Production and Management** using remote sensing. Multiple satellites are used, focusing on different scales and development of different maps (e.g. using Leaf Area Index). Satellite mapping allows regular data collection and time series can show dynamics (e.g., changes over years or seasonal changes). Large scale/global mapping distinguishing different grassland types and conditions is possible using new satellites, but this needs good criteria and definitions.

**Discussion:** key points in the following discussion included:

- The need for clear definitions and objectives in regard to the UN Decade on Restoration
- Terminology that is agreed but also understandable by non-specialists
- The urgency of some issues also means that terminology must be agreed soon, even if as an interim
- Local level actions to mirror any policy initiatives at global level
- Mapping of old-growth and natural grasslands to distinguish from degraded grasslands
- Indicators to measure the health of grasslands are needed
- The platform should consider joint activities with the International Year for Rangeland
- An app to monitor extensively/intensively used grasslands was designed in the Netherlands, combining remote sensing and field information from farmers, and can be shared
- Social importance of the biomes need to be included in any conservation work
- The G20 currently has a proposal to UNCCD to address land degradation, where there is an opportunity to point out the lack of attention to grasslands and savannahs
- FAO indicated some finances for the mapping, and is working on a monitoring tool, combining remote sensing with traditional knowledge.
- A clear focus for the platform needs to be developed, there was support and enthusiasm for continuing.