



# ESSENTIAL PLANETARY HEALTH WORKERS:

## POSITIONING RANGERS WITHIN GLOBAL POLICY

A Ranger Roundtable initiative developed in partnership between the International Ranger Federation, The Thin Green Line Foundation and Universal Ranger Support Alliance with supporting partners.

This paper is endorsed by Ranger Roundtable partners including Cristina Romanelli, World Health Organisation; Andrew Seidl, UN Development Programme-BIOFIN and Colorado State University; Madhu Rao, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas.

### PREFACE

*Many young kids want to be firefighters, football players, astronauts or famous rockstars when they grow up. In my case, when I was 12 years old, I said I wanted to be a Park Ranger. What can be more beautiful than working in the wild, discovering hidden forests, pristine lagoons, and new plant and animals? My visits to Costa Rica's first National Parks in the early 1970s had a big influence on me. Even though I was never a full-time Park Ranger, I worked very closely all my life to them, their lives, their families, and their hardships. Out of the many positions I've ever held as a professional in the field of nature conservation, being Director of the National Park System was the most rewarding by far. Once you become a Park Ranger, you will be one for the rest of your life.*

Today we are facing increasing challenges around the Globe: climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and pandemics with a high human and economic impact. These and many other problems are closely linked to a deteriorating environment generated by our unsustainable production and consumption patterns which heavily depend on nature and its services. The system change requires a new social contract with Nature at the center. There are many tools and proven mechanisms that can effectively protect nature. Without any doubt protected areas are one the most effective tools for the conservation of biodiversity. However, no protected area is manageable without Park Rangers.

Even though they are one of our most important assets, Rangers working in protected and conserved areas, and responsible for managing large tracts of the planet's lands and waters, are often underutilized, underrecognized and under-equipped. Men and women rangers around the planet are key to securing and improving management of all protected areas, in particular with the need to protect 30% of land and oceans.



In his preface for this paper, Carlos Manuel Rodriguez, CEO and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), writes about the vital role of rangers.



Awapy Uru Eu Wau Wau and his wife Juwi Uru Eu Wau Wau are photographed at Kanindé Ethno-Environmental Defense Association in the surroundings of Porto Velho, Rondônia State, Brazil. © Marizilda Cruppe / WWF-UK

Collective investment is needed because Ranger employment is currently characterized by few benefits, high exposure to risk, and often a lack of capacity to effectively carry out core tasks.<sup>1,2</sup> All of these issues could be significantly improved if rangers had better working conditions and labor rights, if their voices were heard, and if their roles were better recognized in policy debates, development and implementation.

The Global Environment Facility, the GEF, is aware of the important work being done by the Ranger Roundtable, and we congratulate the authors of the policy paper on Park Rangers entitled: *“Essential Planetary Health Workers: Positioning Rangers within Global Policy”*. This is an excellent initiative that will serve to both create awareness and propose actions to national governments. This paper aims to advocate for the professionalization of Rangers and ensure better recognition of the role of Rangers in sustainable development. To achieve this, the paper calls on global leaders across multiple sectors to recognize the profession of Rangers as essential planetary health workers, and to position Rangers more effectively within global conservation and environmental policy mechanisms. These kinds of efforts are instrumental to the GEF in our effort to work with national governments in our common effort to reduce biodiversity loss and be nature positive in the next decade.

**Carlos Manuel Rodriguez**  
CEO and Chairman of the GEF.

## SUMMARY

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This policy document has two aims:

1. To advocate for the professionalisation of rangers.
2. To ensure better recognition of the role of rangers in sustainable development.

To achieve this, we call on global leaders across multiple sectors, to **recognise the profession of rangers as essential planetary health workers** and to position rangers more effectively within **global conservation and environmental policy mechanisms**.



Rangers rescue a young Dalmatian Pelican shot and injured in Khar-Us Lake National Park, ASER, Mongolia.  
© WWF-Mongolia / Munkhзориг.

## INTRODUCTION

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We are facing increasing challenges as a planet: climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics and poverty. These and many other problems are closely linked to a deteriorating environment. Meanwhile, one of our most important assets, rangers working in protected and conserved areas, responsible for managing large tracts of the planet’s lands and waters, are often underutilised, underrecognized and underequipped. They are generally left out of the debate about sustainable development policy, whilst being central to the success of those policies.

Ranger employment is currently characterised by having few benefits, high exposure to risk and often a lack of capacity to carry out tasks effectively.<sup>1,2</sup> All these issues could be improved significantly if rangers had better working conditions and labour rights and if their voices were heard and their roles better recognised in policy debates, development and implementation.



# THE DIVERSITY OF RANGERS

Rangers are known by various titles and are defined by the International Rangers Federation (IRF) as individuals or groups of individuals that play a critical role in conservation. Rangers are responsible for safeguarding nature, cultural and historical heritage, and protecting the rights and well-being of present and future generations.<sup>3</sup> As representatives of their authority, organization or community, they often work for extended periods, in protected and conserved areas and wider land- and seascapes. These include state, regional, communal, Indigenous and privately managed areas.<sup>4</sup>

Rangers are not a homogenous workforce, just like other essential workers, they come from many backgrounds and include Indigenous rangers, community rangers and government rangers. Rangers are increasingly gender diverse, have many specialisms and perform many different tasks<sup>5</sup> (see Figure 1). A diversity that needs to be accelerated specifically in relation to women rangers, and local and Indigenous rangers. As frontline workers conserving much of the world's land and waters, rangers' roles are complex, diverse and expanding into what could be described as essential planetary health workers.

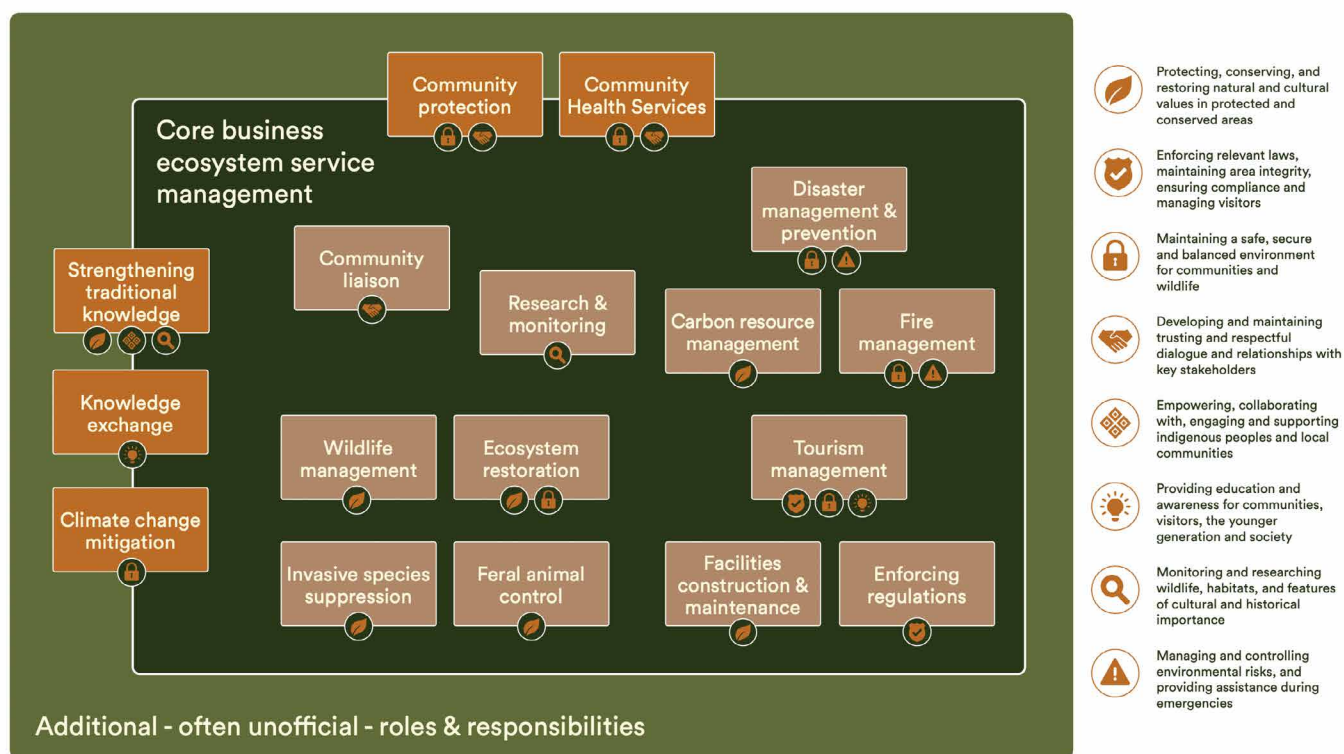


Figure 1: The diversity of ranger roles



From left to right: A ranger team from Chitwan National Park, Nepal, examine a rescued ill white rumped vulture, a critically endangered species. © Smritee Lama. Ilian Gonzalez, a ranger based in Nexaca Protected Area, Mexico, manages a fire. © Hector Garduño. Conservancy ranger Musa meets with villagers who have lost livestock to wildlife in Elangata Enderit village in lower Loita, Kenya. © Ami Vitale / WWF-UK. Park ranger Deneb Saldierna performing underwater monitoring in support of the Sea Shepherd in Socorro Island Protected Area. © Melissa Romao

# THE NEED FOR IMPROVED PROFESSIONALISATION

Rights groups’ concerns about increased ranger militarisation and resulting risks of human rights abuses,<sup>7,8</sup> highlight the need for adequate training, safeguarding procedures, ethics and accountability and for explaining the wider roles of the ranger community beyond enforcement. The global community of rangers is responding to these calls. Local, national and international bodies, such as the IRF, the Thin Green Line Foundation and the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA), are providing opportunities to share experience and develop guidance and policy.<sup>9</sup> Through these bodies, a better understanding of ranger roles, rights, responsibilities and challenges is being developed. Initiatives include a code of conduct providing principles for behaviour, ethics and accountability<sup>10</sup> and global ranger competencies.<sup>11</sup>

This push for greater accountability needs to be matched by the recognition of rangers as a valued and regulated profession. This need is about to become more urgent as new, ambitious targets for conservation and environmental protection are agreed as a response to climate change and biodiversity loss, and new legislation and business standards in environmental, social and governance policy are developed. There are currently around 286,000 rangers worldwide. This number is already far short of what is considered necessary and it has been estimated that 1.5 million rangers will be needed to protect 30% of the planet by 2030, the likely goal of ongoing discussions linked to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).<sup>12</sup>

# RECOGNIZING RANGERS AND THEIR ROLE IN CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Rangers already contribute to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the CBD’s Global Biodiversity Framework and many other conventions and commitments in a variety of ways. (see Figure 2)<sup>13</sup> However this role is rarely reflected in national and international institutions, conservation and development budgets or through the involvement of rangers in policy development aimed at implementing these global initiatives.

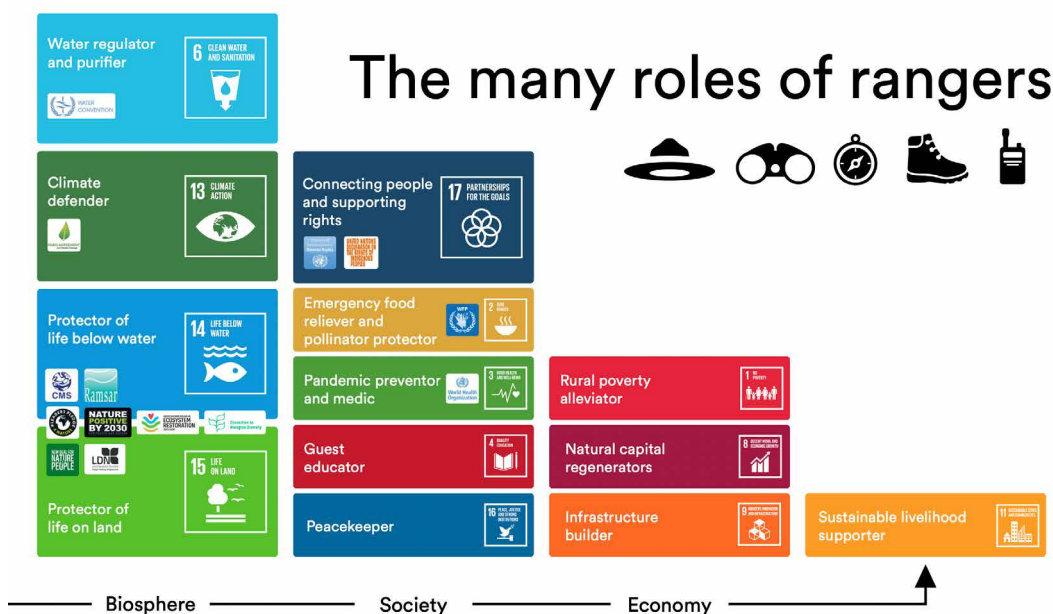


Figure 2: The contributions of rangers to global conservation and development policy

# POLICY STATEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

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Under-investing in rangers, undervaluing their role and leaving them out of the conversation is a missed opportunity which is hindering our collective ability to achieve global conservation and sustainable development targets effectively and equitably. Recognising the role that rangers play in tackling global challenges, will help raise rangers **higher on the political agenda** and should increase opportunities for rangers to take part in **policy discussions**.

As a first step, protected area authorities, conserved area managers, conservation organisations, funders and all other relevant bodies should support the series of actions outlined to help achieve the vision and goals identified at the IRF's 9th World Ranger Congress<sup>14</sup> and subsequent URSA action plan: specifically, the vision of *a network of well-supported, professionally competent, mandated, motivated, responsible and representative rangers working effectively as custodians of biodiversity and the life systems upon which we all depend supported by a goal of by 2025, there is a global enabling environment providing a unified voice for rangers and standards for capacity, employment, equality and conduct to build a demonstrably professional, accountable and competent ranger workforce, whose contributions are formally recognised and respected*.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, we call for rangers to be rebranded as **essential planetary health workers**, to be fully recognised as a valued and vital profession and to be better recognised and accountable for effective and equitable sustainable development. To achieve this, we call on:

- ☑ **The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** to build on previous World Conservation Congress Resolutions to call on governments and intergovernmental organization to recognise rangers as essential planetary health workers and involve rangers in policy debate, development and implementation.
- ☑ **The International Labour Organisations (ILO)** to treat rangers like other similar professions such as teachers, police and first responders by codifying them in a convention on workers' rights to provide guidance to countries on good and equitable practices for ranger employment and deployment.
- ☑ **The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement** to recognise and adequately support the role of protected and conserved areas as tools for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and of rangers for managing natural ecosystems for climate change mitigation and adaptation, including their role in implementing nature-based markets.
- ☑ **The Global Biodiversity Framework** to recognise rangers as essential implementers and to ensure the role of rangers is highlighted in the achievement of effectively and equitably managed protected and conserved areas.
- ☑ **Donors**, such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and associated implementors of conservation projects, to ensure rangers are a valued and regulated profession with appropriate safeguards, policies and due diligence in place when supporting effectively and equitably managed conservation and sustainable development projects. Donors should also actively support countries to professionalize their ranger force making them more inclusive, accountable and appropriately trained.
- ☑ **The World Health Organisation (WHO)** to recognise the role of wildlife management in pandemic prevention and recognise the role of rangers in the prevention of zoonotic diseases.
- ☑ **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** to recognise rangers as key agents in achieving Land Degradation Neutrality.



## CONTRIBUTORS

This draft has been prepared by Equilibrium Research (Hannah Timmins, Sue Stolton and Nigel Dudley) drawing on the Ranger Roundtable (RRT) sessions and stakeholder workshops, facilitated since July 2020.

The text has been developed through several rounds of conversation and comment including: Olga Biegus, Chris Galliers, William Jackson, Marianne Kettunen, Barney Long, Tim Schneider, Andy Seidl, Rohit Singh, Matt Sykes and Sean Willmore.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

International Ranger Federation, The Thin Green Line Foundation and Universal Ranger Support Alliance (2022). *Essential planetary health workers: positioning rangers within global policy*.

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A ranger from Dongning Forest, China records her observations during patrol.  
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