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OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



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EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: CITES AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
REPORT OF THE YOUTH FORUM FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

1. This document has been submitted by the United States of America in relation to agenda item 20 on *Empowering the next generation: CITES and Youth Engagement – Report of the Youth Forum on People and Wildlife.**

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YOUTH FORUM FOR PEOPLE & WILDLIFE



Empowering the Next Generation: CITES and Youth Engagement *Report of the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife*

I. Importance of Engaging the Next Generation in Wildlife Conservation Conversations

Species populations are shrinking every day due to habitat declines, disease, and wildlife trafficking. Monarch butterflies are struggling to find plants to lay eggs on, white-nose syndrome is devastating multiple bat populations, and pangolins are regularly smuggled for food. The conservation community wants to save not only these species, but all wildlife for generations to come, and we emphasize the importance of inviting youth to participate in conversations to find strategic solutions. Millennials will be in decision making positions within the next several years, and organizations responsible for wildlife conservation decisions must engage these young adults now to equip them to be stronger leaders in the future. By welcoming Generation Y into conservation conversations to develop strategic plans, our decision makers will add a rich diversity of ideas and solutions. Young adults have come of age in a generation very different than those before it, largely filled with technology advancement. The skills held by our younger colleagues can be put to use to combat wildlife trafficking and expand the awareness of global conservation issues. The next generation is ready to be engaged in dialogue related to wildlife conservation, and current leaders must understand how valuable it is to include them in these conversations to finding solutions.

Azzedine Downes, president and CEO of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), says, “Interacting with people from around the world at such a young age changes a person forever, and debating an issue from 20 different perspectives is how we move humanity and conservation forward.” Engaging youth in conservation dialogue provides a different viewpoint than current leaders. Their ideas and solutions are largely influenced by their surroundings and beliefs, much of which is vastly different than the childhood the current leaders experienced. In a society full of technology and a passion for advanced education, the next generation values innovation and creativity. Young adults are environmentally conscious and have the skills that can be used in developing novel solutions to aging problems. Millennials have a global mentality, seeing not only what is around them, but also understanding how their actions and decisions affect other parts of the world. This ability to see past boundaries can be used to our advantage when developing landscape conservation strategies. It is critical to not only welcome, but actively involve the next generation when discussing conservation solutions. Integrating multiple perspectives and skill sets maximizes our ability to keep species around for their generation and beyond.

II. International Fund for Animal Welfare: Youth Forum for People and Wildlife

IFAW has recognized the growing concern regarding the lack of youth participating in the outdoors and natural world, and the deficiency of young adults being invited to engage in conversations regarding wildlife conservation issues including wildlife trade. Thus, IFAW partnered with organizations and countries including the CITES Secretariat, South Africa, United States of America, the Disney Conservation Fund, the Jane Goodall Institute, and the Global Youth Biodiversity Network to create the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife (Youth Forum), which welcomed young adults to discuss these very issues. After reviewing nearly 1,000 applications, 34 delegates aged 18-25 years old were selected from 25 countries around the world to represent this critical generation that ultimately holds the future of wildlife in their hands.

The months leading up to the Youth Forum in Johannesburg, South Africa included the 34 delegates participating in online discussions amongst themselves and with other participants worldwide. Topics focused on human and environmental education, human-wildlife conflict, and wildlife trade. The in-person portion of the Youth Forum gathered young adults from various demographic and cultural backgrounds to brainstorm solutions to the same wildlife conservation issues facing our global leaders, and focused on skill-building exercises and thoughtful dialogue. Workshops during the six day forum strengthened participants' skills as they focused on wildlife trade chain, CITES, resolution development, critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills. The opportunity to connect with conservation experts from IFAW, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, African Wildlife Foundation, Endangered Wildlife Trust, South Africa's Department of Environment Affairs, and other organizations allowed the delegates to ask questions of leading professionals and provide their thoughts to existing conservation efforts. The Forum concluded with the 34 delegates attending the CoP17 opening ceremony.

Dan Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is extremely supportive of the Youth Forum and believes it will ultimately influence the careers of these individuals. He says, "For these dedicated and inspiring young conservationists, we hope the Youth Forum will be an important, perhaps defining moment in their lives. The training that is provided and the personal connections that are forged may shape not only careers, but also future conservation efforts." The Youth Forum did just that, as it not only provided pertinent skills and inclusive dialogue to brainstorm solutions, but provided a network for young, like-minded conservationists to rely on as they continue through their careers.

III. Current Platforms to Engage Youth into Conservation Conversations

Although there is a large disconnect with young adults being invited to participate in wildlife conservation conversations, there are currently some platforms engaging youth into these dialogues.

- The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is a forum of the United Nations focusing on the economic, social, and environmental factors of sustainable development. ECOSOC has hosted its Youth Forum annually since 2012 to engage young adults in conversations regarding sustainable development and brings young minds together to brainstorm ideas collectively. The forum provides a place for youth to discuss the

Millennium Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda with each other and current leaders. The theme for ECOSOC's 2016 Youth Forum was "Youth Taking Action to Implement the 2030 Agenda."

- The Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) has made a commitment to youth engagement in conservation through its collaboration with the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. The purpose of this network is to raise awareness regarding the loss of biodiversity and engage youth with policy.
- South Africa is establishing a Youth and Conservation Programme (Programme) as part of CoP17. The Programme is designed to foster youth involvement in the conservation community and encourage ideas from young conservationists.
- Youth 4 African Wildlife (Y4AW) is a non-profit organization that focuses on internships for young adults and provides participants with the skills to be global conservation ambassadors. Through this organization, young adults capitalize on the skills they have developed in a technology filled world, and create documentaries and awareness campaigns. Since its inception in 2013, more than 25 young adults have participated in internships that increase awareness of wildlife species by creating short documentaries that share the concerns devastating the conservation community including rhino poaching.

IV. Recommendations by Delegates at the Youth Forum for People and Wildlife

After meeting from September 17, 2016 through September 23, 2016, the 34 delegates to the Youth Forum discussed opportunities to increase youth engagement surrounding the CITES community and provide recommendations to address the lack of youth engagement into wildlife discussions in the CITES community. We understand youth engagement is a very complex and gradual process, and after discussions amongst the youth delegates, we have focused our efforts into two categories that we believe are feasible. We ask the CITES Secretariat to review this report and consider the following recommendations:

- Outreach and Community
 - Suggest the CITES Secretariat improve its targeted outreach towards the younger generation by incorporating an increase in its social media use, specifically Instagram.
 - Expand the existing CITES website to incorporate language targeted towards youth.
 - Suggest the CITES Secretariat works with advanced learning centers, such as universities, to help wildlife and conservation students understand CITES, how decisions are made, and how conservationists can contribute.
- Delegation Capacity
 - Encourage the CITES host country to bring a youth delegate as part of their official delegation.
 - Encourage countries to have a youth delegate as part of their official delegation when feasible and appropriate.

- Recommend the host country coordinates a facilitated side event for young delegates attending as part of an official delegation. This will serve to fill the knowledge gap between our current and future leaders by providing an opportunity for our younger generation to be engaged in the CoP process.

The youth delegates hope the long term trajectory of these recommendations leads to further involvement such as established youth forums, a CITES Youth Liaison, and eventually observer status at future CoP meetings. If support is needed, the youth participating in the Youth Forum are available for assistance in carrying out these recommendations, if accepted. Delegates to the Youth Forum ask the CITES Secretariat to consider the above recommendations to engage the younger community in conservation conversations.