PRESS RELEASE

First-ever study finds rangers largely missing from plans to deliver global 30x30

Yereva, Armenia, 22nd October 2026 (IRF-URSA) – The first empirical baseline of ranger visibility in global conservation policy has found that rangers are almost entirely absent from the plans intended to deliver the global goal of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030—even though rangers make up more than half of the protected and conserved area workforce.

The study analysed 45 macro-governance documents (high-level policy and governance documents) and 21 National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs, countries' national plans for protecting biodiversity) found that references to "rangers" or equivalent terms were almost entirely absent, highlighting an oversight of the workforce needed to deliver sustainable and effective nature protection.

The findings expose a glaring gap between global ambition and the workforce needed to deliver sustainable and effective nature protection. An estimated 1.5 million rangers are needed to achieve 30x30, but closing that gap by formally recognising and funding the ranger workforce could be the difference between 30x30 succeeding on paper and succeeding on the ground.

Further analysis shows that only two macro-governance documents and fewer than half of the NBSAPs studied formally integrate rangers into policy and forward planning.

"We found that health workers are 130 times more visible in global health frameworks than rangers are in Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) documentation. Planning for area-based conservation targets without talking about rangers is like planning health targets without talking about doctors and nurses. If a workforce is not named, it cannot be planned for; if it is not planned for, it will not be funded – and hence nature protection at its very core will fall apart" said **Valerie Hickey, Director of Environment, World Bank Group.**

"Rangers and their equivalents are essential to turning global conservation commitments into effective action on the ground. Right now, the CBD mentions area 300 times more often than it mentions the people needed to protect these areas. If we expect protected and conserved areas to deliver for biodiversity, climate and people, we must also recognise, plan for and invest in the workforce responsible for their day-to-day stewardship. Closing this gap is fundamental to achieving Target 3 and ensuring that ambition is matched by effective implementation. Recognising rangers in policy, planning and investment is therefore not optional; it is central to delivering effective and equitable conservation," said **Madhu Rao, Chair, IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas.**

Delivering the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's 30x30 target will depend heavily on effective area-based conservation. Rangers are a critical part of the workforce needed to deliver 30x30 (Target 3), supporting the establishment and effective management of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), while working alongside Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Yet, their role remains largely absent from official plans to reverse biodiversity loss.

Published in Springer's Ambio journal and co-authored by researchers and practitioners from URSA-IRF and across the conservation sector, the paper provides critical evidence that failing to recognize rangers in global conservation frameworks risks creating ambitious targets without the workforce planning needed to implement them.

Rangers fulfill diverse roles across conservation, law enforcement, community development and ecosystem management. Through this work, they help mitigate climate change and disease, reduce human–wildlife conflict, and prevent biodiversity, species and ecosystem loss, making them essential planetary health professionals.

However, if global frameworks like the Convention on Biological Diversity fail to recognise rangers in official plans, officials cannot effectively plan for and fund their work. This contributes to a significant ranger shortfall (estimated at 1.5 million to meet Target 3) and leaves many rangers working in poor conditions with inadequate equipment and training.

Turning ambitious global targets into real-world results requires rangers to be properly planned for, funded and supported. The next few years (2026–2030) offer a crucial opportunity to put this right.

The paper calls on governments and those shaping conservation policy to recognise rangers as essential workers, and ensure they are correctly reported on, and have the funding, support, and legal protection they need to do their jobs.

Supporting Quotes:

"*Protected and conserved areas do not protect themselves. If they are at the heart of 30x30, then the rangers who make that protection possible must be recognised as essential to achieving the target. We need a ranger workforce sufficient in size and properly resourced to really make a difference.*"

Lars Scharfe, Vice President, European Ranger Federation (ERF)

"As we gather in Yerevan for the 17th biodiversity COP, the usual question arises: can this process move the dial for the future of our planet? The answer is it can, but we need cross-party momentum behind priority issues. Whether a national leader, a local NGO, or a conservation funder, we all must remember: 30x30 cannot be equitable and effective without a well-trained, recognised and formally reported-on workforce. We all need nature, and nature needs rangers."

Rob Small, People & Nature Director, Fauna & Flora

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About IRF

The International Ranger Federation (IRF) was founded in 1992 and is a worldwide, non-profit membership-based organization, established to develop, advance, and promote the ranger profession. The IRF recognizes rangers and protected and conserved area workers, whether state, regional, communal, Indigenous, or private, as essential on-the-ground planetary health professionals that are responsible for safeguarding nature, cultural and historical heritage, and protecting the rights and well-being of present and future generations. The IRF is the standard-bearer for the ranger profession globally and the voice of ranger associations and rangers everywhere.

www.internationalrangers.org

About URSA

The Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA) is a global coalition of leading conservation organizations united to strengthen the IRF and champion the role of rangers worldwide. The URSA purpose is to elevate rangers as essential frontline conservation professionals to ensure that they are recognized, respected, and represented fairly across the globe. Through their collective strength, URSA reinforces IRF's leadership and capacity and helps include rangers' voices and priorities into international conversations and policy frameworks.

www.ursa4rangers.org