

For immediate release 2013-10-17

WILD10 Congress highlights the role of indigenous peoples and local communities in conserving wilderness

Salamanca, Spain –During an intense week of exchanges and debates, scientists, academics, activists and Indigenous peoples from diverse organizations and communities around the world met around nature conservation issues at WILD10, the 10th World Wilderness Congress.

The Congress brought to light many features of the “wilderness” concept, emphasizing that *wild nature can indeed embed peoples and cultures, and sustain livelihoods*. It also stressed that wild nature is not a luxury to be enjoyed by a few but an essential patrimony to sustain the health and prosperity of everyone. Wilderness – which some in the ICCA Consortium [1] proposed be re-named “well-conserved nature” – sustains the climate of the planet and provides fresh water, clean air, pasture, forest products, fisheries, wild foods and medicinal plants [2]. Wilderness is also the embodiment of beauty, culture, identity and spiritual experience for millions of people.

Among the numerous WILD10 events, a good number illustrated “people as custodians and part of wilderness”. The ICCA Consortium co-organised several such events, bringing the voices of custodians from around the world to present the strategies their communities have used for centuries for conserving nature while ensuring their own livelihoods. Two events can be singled out. The first dealt with the question of the meaning of the term “wilderness” for contemporary ethnic groups. The twelve delegates present in the event’s panel – nearly all indigenous peoples –powerfully articulated that wilderness is “well-conserved nature that intrinsically includes people”. The second showed different experiences in governance and stewardship of natural resources from communities in Madagascar, Guatemala, Taiwan, Niger, Ecuador, Spain, Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, The Philippines, Iran, and more. These local experiences with Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) showed how traditional governance systems are able to take and implement decisions that result in the conservation of nature and natural resources (e.g., via rules for preservation and sustainable use and processes of restoration and enrichment). Today, however, such traditional governance systems face a variety of external and internal threats.

For instance, a common problem that was referred to several times in both the events just mentioned as in others at WILD10 was that extractive industries are ominously interested in the mineral, oil and gas resources found within ICCAs. To get at those resources, industries are more than ready to sacrifice the ICCAs’ biological and cultural diversity and harm its people. Weak collective rights to the territories and natural resources contribute to such pressures. Last but not least, top-down approaches to conservation, such as government-imposed protected areas, add to the threats.

The congress organizers issued a final declaration [3] that stresses the contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and must be acknowledged as serious stakeholders and contributors to global conservation efforts, and making reference to the importance of asserting and adopting all international instruments that protect and recognize Indigenous Peoples and Local Community rights, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention on Biodiversity Article 10(c) Sustainable use and Article 8(j) Protection and Recognition of Traditional Knowledge.

It continues to note that “this is essential to protect and acknowledge Indigenous Peoples living on the front lines of protected area management and governance which are the front lines of resource extraction, uses and abuses. This is essential to accomplishing conservation goals to protect wild nature”. Likewise, it calls for “the creation of a Global Alliance of conservationists, Protected Area managers, indigenous peoples, local communities and custodians to assert ‘No-Go Areas’ for Extractive Industries and Industrial Activity in World Heritage Sites, and Protected Areas, including Indigenous Peoples’ and Local Communities Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs) and Sacred Natural Sites and Territories, in accordance with international norms, standards, treaty obligations and Natural and Earth Law.

Contacts:

Isis Alvarez isis@iccaconsortium.org
Tel. 0031645682575

Sergio Couto sergio@iccaconsortium.org
Tel. 0034619663867

Notes to editors:

[1] The ICCA Consortium is an international association dedicated to promoting the appropriate recognition of and support to ICCAs (Indigenous Peoples’ and Community Conserved Areas and Territories) in the regional, national and global arena. Further info <http://www.iccaconsortium.org/>

[2] <http://wild10.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/WILD10-Global-Gathering-opens-Press-Release-051013.pdf>

[3] Final declaration to come up soon, please check <http://wild10.org/en/>