

The Valdeavellano de Tera Declaration on the Recognition of the Commons and Community Conserved Areas in Spain



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We, the undersigned, within the framework of the ICCA Consortium meeting held in Valdeavellano de Tera in the province of Soria on 4 and 5 October 2013 and in accordance with the agreements reached during that meeting to constitute “The Commons Initiative”—a working group to promote the study, advocacy and recognition of **the Commons and Community Conserved Areas (ICCA)** in Spain, **declare**:

1.- That traditional **commons and related customs, resources and collective rights** are part of the cultural heritage (including intangible heritage), environmental heritage and socio-economic heritage of Spain. That the use of resources in the commons (for example in the form of fishing, grazing, hunting, forestry, irrigation, etc.) has been key to both the socio-economic survival of rural society and Spanish society in general and to the protection and integration of disadvantaged social groups and territories, as well as to the sustainable land management of these territories. For this reason, the commons must be studied, recognized and defended.

2.- That the commons and their uses have been key to the conservation of biodiversity, landscapes and ecosystems in Spain, as well as to the proper management and conservation of the resources, services and values provided by these ecosystems to society. These governance and management models and their ecological processes are essential parts of the great richness and diversity of our natural and cultural heritage.

3.- That, in general, the heritage related to the commons has been assaulted in numerous ways over the course of history. Confiscations, usurpations, municipalisation, alienation, a lack of social, legal and administrative recognition and bad political decisions have led to the irreparable loss of an immense portion of our human, social, economic, natural and cultural heritage. The attacks continue today in various forms, taking governance and management rights over the commons and their associated assets out of the hands of local communities.

4.- That despite these attacks, the historical position adopted by beneficiaries and rightholders in defence of their communal rights succeeded in maintaining them alive, so that they still constitute a widespread and successful form of governance for our natural and cultural heritage. Neighbourhood and communal woodlands; woodlands under shared ownership; shellfish and fishing guilds; grazing, neighbourhood and valley councils, fishing weirs, hunting societies, communal irrigation systems, different types of pastureland shared among villages variously known as *facerías*, *parzonerías* or *ledanías* and other forms of communal governance control several million hectares of land with high natural, economic and cultural value and are an expression of the empowerment and participation of hundreds of thousands of citizens in the participatory, direct, resilient and sustainable management of local natural resources.

5.- That each one of the three pillars that characterize the commons – **community, governance and conservation of nature** – as described in the definition of community conserved areas (ICCA) acknowledged by several international organizations - must be recognized, supported, promoted and protected. In this regard, special attention must be paid to preserving and promoting the values that, as a general rule, characterize communal uses and make them especially valuable to society, including sustainability, adaptability, multifunctionality, the integration of cultural values, the equitable distribution of resources, social justice, responsibility, participatory processes and the empowerment of local communities.

6.- That major international organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are increasingly recognizing the important role of community conserved areas (ICCAs) in nature conservation and the sustainable management of resources at a global level. However, despite this, in Spain there is a serious lack of recognition of their value by the government and a general lack of knowledge in society. In this sense it is urgent to claim the social, economic and environmental role of ICCAs and their potential for conservation, rural development and for society in general.

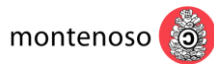
7.- That the health and economic, social and environmental performance of commons and their uses depend on the people who manage them, the true specialists in their governance and operation. These men and women must be supported by society so that they can further carry out their efforts under fair conditions. Therefore, their participation in the political decisions that affect the commons is critical to ensure their future maintenance and sustainability.

8.- That, considering the above, to ensure the survival of the great wealth and variety of forms of ownership and collective governance in Spain and to make it possible to develop their enormous potential and associated values, it is necessary to foster new partnerships and synergies from the local to the global, based on grassroots participation, empowerment of local communities and participatory ("bottom-up") approaches. This requires paying special attention to the establishment of channels of mutual solidarity between the communities managing and using the commons as well as the establishment of common objectives with new social partners, especially in the fields of scientific research, nature conservation, education, law and communication, in addition to an alliance between commons users and urban communities to strengthen the diverse links that connect them.

9.- That there is a sound scientific basis that demonstrates, as a rule 1) the historical contribution of the commons and their use to more sustainable and equitable development and 2) their important social, economic and environmental contribution today, as well as 3) their potential to develop initiatives to help address many of the social, environmental and economic challenges faced by society today and future generations. In this regard, we consider the research pioneered by Dr Elinor Ostrom, winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics, particularly noteworthy. Her work showed "how the commons can be managed effectively by a group of users", transcending the public/private dichotomy, rescuing the values of collective ownership and thus dismantling a concept that is both ingrained and at times self-interested: that the management of the commons is doomed to disaster by its own nature.

10.- That for the reasons stated above, a priority for rightsholder communities, the various authorities and society as a whole must be to ensure the protection and recognition of this collective heritage based on the principles of **inalienability, indivisibility, imprescriptibility** and **unseizability**, as well as to ensure respect for the written and customary laws of communities, their full legal recognition, full legal capacity in the defence and management of their resources and appropriate involvement of their governing bodies in any decision affecting this heritage. In this respect, present and future legislative reforms must respect the historical rights and autonomy of local communities in the management of community assets. Likewise, the use of the commons, and the associated resources and rights, must be managed in a participatory and sustainable manner in order to ensure that this heritage is passed on for the enjoyment of future generations without in any way impairing its economic, social and environmental values.

Signatories:



Federación Estatal de Pastores

Comunidade de Montes de Vilar de Triacastela

Mancomunidade de Montes Veciñais en Man Común de Castrove-Salnés



Mancomunidade de Montes Veciñais en Man Común do Morrazo

Translated from the Spanish original by Helen Newing and Grazia Borrini-Feyerabend