



URSA  
UNIVERSAL RANGER SUPPORT ALLIANCE

SUPPORTING RANGERS

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# The vital role of Rangers

Now more than ever we are appreciating how much we need nature, wild places and green spaces – for our health and well-being, and for our water, air and food.

Rangers play a critical role in conserving wild places and green spaces and the diversity of life they support. Without these environmental defenders, we would see more deforestation, biodiversity loss and degradation of life sustaining ecosystem functions. Responsible rangers also help safeguard the rights of people whose lives and cultures are inseparable from nature. Rangers are women, men, government staff, community members, landowners, indigenous peoples, volunteers and more. Their work varies widely, both in scope and complexity: combating poaching and land grabbing, guiding tourists, fighting fires, providing an early warning system for threats, collecting scientific data, and turning our conservation hopes into real change. In these ways, a healthy future for people depends on rangers, who can be viewed as the first responders of the planetary health service.

Rangers know better than anyone what they need to do their jobs well. At the International Ranger Federation's 2019 World Congress in Chitwan, Nepal, more than 550 Rangers from 70 countries agreed to the **Chitwan Declaration**, which sets out a detailed list of needs and priorities for rangers.

Much of the evidence for these needs comes directly from rangers, 7,110 of whom contributed detailed responses to a major **global survey, the results of which were published** in 2019.

## The Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA)<sup>1</sup>

The Chitwan Declaration calls for international support and cooperation; in response a group of international conservation organisations has formed the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA) to help implement the Declaration, and address the issues and obstacles which rangers have said they face. URSA's founding members share a vision of a healthy, thriving natural world, and an understanding that this cannot be achieved without taking the necessary steps to bring about positive and lasting change for rangers worldwide.

URSA has developed a global action plan that can help all those working with rangers support them to do their jobs effectively and responsibly. By ensuring that the urgently needed investment, tools, reforms and policy changes are put in place, the Alliance's purpose is to improve the well-being of rangers, the local communities with whom their work is intrinsically linked and, in turn, the planet. Specifically, URSA aims to enable and advocate for better training, support, safety, and equality for rangers, as well as a greater recognition of the critical value of their work.

<sup>1</sup> Fauna & Flora International, Force for Nature, Global Wildlife Conservation, the International Ranger Federation, Panthera, the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, the Worldwide Fund for Nature, and the Zoological Society of London



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# An action plan for Rangers

URSA's members have developed an action plan that helps implement the Chitwan Declaration and establishes a pathway for the ranger occupation to be recognised as a skilled, trusted and respected profession. URSA's vision is that the ranger workforce should become:

**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.**

The plan includes a wide range of measures across five main areas.

## BETTER PAY, WORKING CONDITIONS AND EQUIPMENT

**By 2025, a common set of global minimum standards for ranger employment and welfare is developed, and increasingly implemented nationally to enhance ranger working conditions and well-being.**

Many rangers do their jobs without proper pay, contracts, equipment or insurance. They spend weeks away from home, often with inadequate accommodation and in harsh and dangerous environments. What many of them have achieved in such conditions is remarkable, but we should not take it for granted. Many get sick, are injured or killed, and many simply cannot afford to continue as rangers.

*The plan sets out a framework for establishing global minimum standards of working and employment conditions for all rangers.*

- ⦿ 41.8% have insurance for serious on-job injury
- ⦿ 37.7% have insurance for on-job fatality

*"We are monitoring the health and behaviour of wild animals, someone should do the same for us."*

## BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINING AND LEARNING

**By 2025, a framework for ranger capacity (including competences and management capacity) is in place and increasingly adopted and implemented at the national level, supporting rangers to effectively perform their tasks in a responsible, accountable and competent manner.**

The work we expect from rangers is varied and highly skilled. We need them to be communicators, educators, first responders, monitors and law-enforcers. Yet around half of them across the world feel that they are inadequately trained. Opportunities for training and learning are improving, but there is still no common framework of competence and standards, and many of the programmes are not accessible to rangers.

*The plan sets out a process for establishing general standards of competence, performance and conduct and for enabling much wider access to quality training and learning.*

- ⦿ 21.3% always had access to communication devices while on patrol
- ⦿ 34.4% say their training did not adequately prepare them to meet their job responsibilities.

*"All conservation efforts will amount to very little without a well-led, well-supported, well-skilled, well-resourced, dedicated and motivated field force."*



## FAIRER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CONDITIONS

**By 2025, systems and structures have been developed, and adopted by IRF and across its ranger associations, to enable equal opportunities, fair treatment, and safe working environments for all rangers, including women and rangers from Indigenous People and Local Communities (IPLCs).**

We rely on the dedication and commitment of rangers, but they need to see a future in the work for themselves and their families and a fair chance for advancement and for building a career as trusted professionals. There are not nearly enough rangers currently to do what we are asking, so creating more jobs is a priority. We know that women can be excellent rangers, but not enough of them have the chance or support to fill those jobs. And enabling Indigenous Peoples and local community members to join ranger units or establish their own teams would help empower those who have a real interest in caring for their own lands and waters.

*The plan sets out the development of support systems and mechanisms that promote equal employment opportunities by recognizing and promoting the importance of underrepresented groups in the ranger workforce.*

- ⊙ 41.4% of rangers unsatisfied with their chances for promotion and advancement
- ⊙ Only 36% of rangers come from nearby villages

*“Gender discrimination is the barrier for female rangers”*

## MORE TRUST AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**By 2025, rangers in all IRF Regions are operating within a framework of working practices, ethics and conduct that value and build trust with communities and the public and promote responsibility and accountability.**

Rangers work in tough environments and have to deal with complex ecological and social problems. Trust is a critical element. Rangers need to treat people fairly, to strictly observe the law and the rights of others and to be accountable for their actions. Responsible behaviour requires clear guidance, leadership and oversight as well as appropriate mechanisms for addressing possible instances of misconduct.

*The plan specifies the development of codes of conduct, safeguarding mechanisms and means for reporting and responding to wrongdoing*

- ⊙ 21.5% of rangers believe that communities don't trust them
- ⊙ 82.2% of rangers believe that part of their success depends on the community providing information

*“It is frightening to note that nearly six in ten surveyed wildlife rangers fear for their own safety if exposing corruption in wildlife protection.”*

## BETTER REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY

**By 2025, the ranger profession is increasingly and formally recognized by governments globally, with rangers effectively represented and connected.**

The IRF is the global professional body for rangers; its membership comprises over 100 ranger associations around the world. But many rangers remain unrepresented nationally and internationally, and the IRF needs support and resources to implement the plan and advocate globally for rangers.

*The plan includes measures to strengthen the IRF's capability to make its voice heard, and to expand and empower the global network of ranger associations.*

- ⊙ 38.1% have access to a worker's association that represents them
- ⊙ 30.2% have associations for collective bargaining on their behalf

*“I trust my fellow rangers 100 per cent because I cannot go alone to the forest - and if I am wounded, he will carry me back to the village. We all wear the same uniform, so he is more like my brother.”*



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# What next?

URSA will start implementing the plan at once through its members and through the member associations of IRF. We will focus first on a global framework of standards and performance for rangers and seek support and endorsement from donors, international organisations and NGOs. We will then work with IRF members, governments and other relevant stakeholders around the world to start implementing the plan at the national level.

Over the next weeks there will be a number of events and announcements about URSA and this plan, leading up to the World Conservation Congress in Marseille, France in January 2021.



For further information contact  
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To learn more about the IRF visit  
[www.internationalrangers.org/about](http://www.internationalrangers.org/about)

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