RESOLUTION #13

TITLE:
Mountain Trails Networks

WHEREAS

Mountain ecosystems and societies are uniquely threatened because of their isolation, ruggedness, and vulnerability to climate change;

Montane biocultural diversity depends on altitude gradients, steep slopes, and biomeass ranging from glaciers through tarns to tropical forest to sustain a wide range of niche ecosystems and habitable areas;

Mountain indigenous peoples' and community conserved territories and areas (ICCAs) and protected areas (PAs) are especially vulnerable because of the social exclusion of mountain communities, poor governance, border and water conflicts, uncontrolled resource extraction, and climate change that drives organisms and ecosystems across PA or ICCA boundaries;

The connectivity of mountain chains as biocultural reserves is increasingly fragmented, hindered, or diminished because of jurisdictional, cultural and ecological challenges;

Mountain trails connect ecosystems through migration routes, watersheds, river systems, and shared floral and faunal diversity across separate sites of similar elevation and aspect;

Mountain trails connect communities through shared water, forest and pasture resources, through caravan, pastoralist and pilgrimage routes, through borders and significant shared mountain peaks.

We observe that:

Conservation of biocultural diversity in mountains must focus on large-scale ecological *and* social connectivity encompassing whole mountain ranges and their communities, and ideally connected systems of mountains such as the entire Andes, Cordillera Pacifica, or Himalaya-Hindu Kush-Karakorum in order to overcome the combined threats of socio-ecological fragmentation and environmental change, such as anthropogenically-induced climate change.

The inherent connectivity of mountains as biocultural landscapes is epitomised in **mountain trail networks** that act as wildlife corridors, cultural conduits, and—for the walker—powerful experiences that impress upon us such as the majesty of nature, the devastating effects of climate change, the fragility of the planet, and narratives of human-human as well as human-wildlife interfaces.

Ancient mountain trail networks are an unrecognised and highly effective indigenous means of protecting and enhancing biocultural diversity; they serve to facilitate intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge and to create connected ICCA landscapes that includes a system of access, maintenance and upkeep across hundreds, and in some cases thousands of kilometres of trail shared among many different local communities who may well share no common language or currency. They are therefore a special kind of ICCA in themselves.

Ancient mountain trail networks are complex biocultural systems that may be used as caravan routes, pilgrimage routes, pastoralist paths to pastures or markets, post runner roads, military roads, routes for refugees or migrants, and many other culturally significant uses, often at the same time. They are shared with, shaped by and even shaped for working animals such as mules, yaks, camels or llamas. They are often sites of ancient anthropogenic biodiversity and can include medicinal plants for both humans and pack animals, managed forage or pasture areas, amenity trees for shade and rest, and culturally or ritually important trees, as well as being arterial routes through anthropogenic landscapes such as swidden areas, managed forests or pastures, or ritually managed medicinal plant collection areas.

Mountain areas are often areas of conflict (international, environmental and social) and violence, and in this context, mountain trails are trails of complicity, facilitating insecurity and conflict (e.g., as trafficking routes for arms, natural resources and humans, or in presenting interfaces for human-human/human-wildlife conflict and access for unsustainable extraction and development) or even the source and site of conflict, but they can also serve as pathways to peace, storylines of truth and reconciliation and networks of human-nature interface that promote biocultural unity and harmony.

Mountain trail networks are an effective way to integrate large-scale socio-ecological connectivity while at the same time learning from and empowering traditional custodians, knowledge-holders, and processes of common or overlapping tenure and responsibility.

These trail networks can extend beyond mountains, and in some cases such as the Pacific Coast of North America or the Scottish Hebrides indigenous trail systems connect coasts, seaways, mountain chains, inland valleys and islands.

THEREFORE

We commend
- **the many different projects** undertaken by, or together with, indigenous and local communities to steward, recover or restore ancient mountain trail systems in the Andes, Alps, Himalayas, Rift Valley, Altai Shan, Pacific Coast, Caucasus and elsewhere;
- **the challenging work** underway to preserve and transform historically recent mountain trail systems such as in the Carpathians or Appalachian Mountains;
- **the wide range of efforts** to establish new mountain trail networks, whether local, national or continental in scope;
- **efforts to co-ordinate** mountain trail projects globally;

We honour
- **the wise stewardship** of indigenous and local communities who have gifted to our generation the precious biocultural heritage of the ancient trail systems;

We applaud the important work being done with mountain trail networks
- to highlight social, economic, biological and political issues related to mountain conservation connectivity;
- to co-ordinate skill-sharing and best practices among different initiatives
- to protect wild mountain areas;
- to enhance biocultural resilience in mountain wilderness;

- to create awareness of natural beauty and the fragility of our planet;
- to deepen and broaden the constituent base that can support mountain wilderness.

We understand
- that the importance of mountain trail networks as powerful tools for creating large-scale connectivity and as lifelines for biocultural diversity should be better and critically understood by all conservation scientists and activists, as well as PA managers, regional and national authorities, and global policy bodies;
- that political, linguistic, financial and other obstacles hinder efforts to restore or implement networks of mountain trails that could be connected at the scale of whole mountain ranges;
- that coordination among existing mountain trails networks can further benefit the individual networks, mountain wilderness, mountain biocultural diversity, mountain peoples, and mountain connectivity;
- that the conflict dimensions of mountain trails must be understood and addressed in order to transform them into opportunities for cultivating positive peace;
- that there is a need for specific efforts to understand and co-ordinate mountain trails within the context of social and ecological connectivity in montane areas, and that this work is being undertaken by the Working and Walking Mountain Trails group within TILCEPA.

RESOLVED

Recognise traditional mountain trail systems as a unique and precious form of biocultural heritage—the original conservation connectivity among ICCAs;

Offer thanks and respect to their custodians and knowledge-holders;

Acknowledge the need to preserve the traditional knowledge that has created, maintained, repaired and conserved not only mountain trail networks but also the terraced agricultural systems and (high altitude) seed varieties for future generations;

Grasp clearly the remarkable effectiveness of mountain trail networks as arteries for the flow of biocultural diversity among PAs and ICCAs in the especially challenging mountain context as well as the inherent biocultural diversity of these trail networks themselves;

Support the Working and Walking Mountain Trails initiative in sharing skills, research and best practices among the custodians and stewards of mountain trail networks and the PAs and ICCAs they connect;

Offer support to efforts to restore, create, enhance or rediscover trail networks in mountain chains for connectivity among PAs and ICCAs in mountain chains and montane regions worldwide;

Encourage further efforts to learn from and work with traditional custodians and knowledge holders in revitalising and promoting other mountain trail systems;

Transform and mitigate conflict and violence in mountain areas and mountain trails towards positive peace;

Foster a spirit of co-operation among and within mountain trail networks;

Enjoy and learn from mountain trails and their custodians, and encourage others to do so as well.

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