**Briefing: Identifying priority grasslands and savannahs**

**Aim**: to identify criteria of grassland and savannah ecosystems that are priorities for a global conservation initiative

**Background**: there are major gaps in understanding about location and status of many of the world’s grassland and savannah ecosystems, which hamper conservation planning. Given the high degree of cultural modification of these ecosystems, identification criteria will need to cover both ecological and social concerns. The information is needed urgently to address some immediate concerns – e.g. the post-2020 biodiversity framework and the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration – so the priority is to develop *a simple methodology that can be applied quickly*. As much as possible, it should use existing methods and information rather than going through a long process of development.

**Criteria**: issues that might be considered (*to be discussed*) include various aspects related to:

* Ecological importance
* Socio-cultural importance including ecosystem services, governance type
* Status and trends including existing protected areas, OECMs and sustainable management
* Pressures including conversion threats and projected climate change
* Restoration potential

Indicators need further discussion; some initial ideas are presented below (this is by no means complete, nor will all these indicators apply in every situation):

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| **Criteria** | **Indicators** |
| Ecological importance | Endangered species |
|  | Endemic species |
|  | Overall species richness (particularly herbaceous plants) |
|  | Ecological integrity or similar |
|  | Spatial configuration, continuity of natural habitat |
| Socio-cultural importance | Cultural importance – presence of traditional uses |
|  | Presence of sacred sites |
|  | Ecosystem services |
|  | Recreational importance |
|  | Governance type |
| Status and trends | Size of area of near-natural grassland remaining |
|  | Rate of land use chance and fragmentation |
|  | Territories of Indigenous People and Local Communities |
|  | Size and condition of protected and conserved areas |
|  | Areas under sustainable management |
| Pressures | Drivers of land-use change |
|  | Projections of climate change |
| Restoration potential | Proportion of land available and suitable for restoration |

A number of issues are likely to be particularly critical in grasslands and savannahs as compared to other ecosystems; for instance, the extent to which non-native species dominate. Some initial thinking on approaches has already been done, particularly related to applying the High Conservation Value framework to grasslands and savannahs, although this does not usually include analysis of conservation potential. The extent to which global mapping exercises and use of satellite imagery can help to distinguish the most important grassland and savannah areas from a conservation perspective needs further discussion.

There are also several existing global analyses that could be useful reference, checking material and backstopping, such as Key Biodiversity Areas (which will in any case be an important indicator), Global 200 ecoregions, the Centre of Plant Diversity analysis, and the CI Global hotspots. Some of these are quite old now; all will be useful for checking for gaps in any analysis.

**Timing**: if it to be useful in current and time-limited discussions, a draft analysis should be available early in 2021. This should not be impossible; there is a lot of information already available and results can be modified later.

Next steps: the following steps are all needed

1. Initial identification of interest and collaborators
2. Agreement on a draft list of indicators
3. Collection of existing or easily obtainable information to supply data for indicators
4. Application of these to draw up an initial list of priority sites
5. Checking against existing global datasets for obvious gaps
6. Thorough review and finalisation