

September 25, 2020

H.E. Mendsaikhan Zagdjav
Minister of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia
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Dear Minister Zagdjav,

BirdLife International's *Southern Cone Grasslands Alliance* initiative enthusiastically supports the establishment of an **International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP)**.

As you are aware, native grasslands and savannahs are facing the fastest and largest rates of conversion and degradation of any biome. The critical importance of grasslands and savannahs for climate mitigation, maintaining freshwater resources, ensuring food security, providing habitat for some of the planet's last large wildlife herds as well as endemic and threatened species, supporting livelihoods, and maintaining the cultural identity of millions of rural and indigenous people has not been appropriately recognized. A key problem is the lack of awareness of their value. We believe IYRP is an historic opportunity to change this at the global scale.

BirdLife International, led by its four South American Partners (Aves Argentinas, SAVE Brasil, Guyra Paraguay and Aves Uruguay), established the Southern Cone Grasslands Alliance Initiative to halt biodiversity loss derived from grasslands conversions and/or unsustainable grassland management. Fifteen years later, we have expanded Alliance to address the sustainable production and conservation across the 4-country region. Some of the achievements so far:

- Protected over 500.000 has of native grasslands (working with over 500 ranch members);
- Established a certification system for beef commercialization that conserves natural grasslands (currently offered in the region and exported to Europe);
- Worked with regional governments of the region to provide official incentives for ranchers;
- Collaborated with other American countries to launch their own grasslands conservation programs (eg. Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico); and
- Currently strengthening cooperation with USA and Canada to step up the initiative into a hemispheric effort for grassland conservation across the Americas.

With the support of BirdLife's permanent supporting institutions (such as United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Forest Service, Bobolink Foundation, among others), the initiative has recently launched the preparation of a 10-year Conservation Investment Strategy. We envision that this BirdLife-led SGGGA will contribute to future IYRP activities through the following:

- 1) Win-win success stories: we work on the ground with ranchers (more than 500 now and increasing). We have established National Governance Boards in each of the four countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) to integrate the productive sector, governments, academia and civil society. We have many good success stories to show;
- 2) Monitoring Program: we have created a regional monitoring program (which will be enhanced during the Conservation Investment Planning process) to evaluate the impact of our grassland management practices on biodiversity;
- 3) Climate change: we are working with IICA (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture) to better understand the contributions that Alliance ranches (with good grassland management) provide; and
- 4) Scaling up: BirdLife is global network of partners in more than 100 countries covering all continents. We plan to use the global network to reach countries that are facing similar challenges and share lessons learned so far in the Americas.

BirdLife International is comprised of a network of partner organizations supported by a Secretariat in the Americas. Many of these organizations are committed to grassland and savannah conservation in in the Americas and would benefit from the elevation of this ecosystem through IYRP. **Thus, we urge the UN to establish the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists to raise global awareness about this ecosystem** that is critical to addressing climate change, nature loss and food insecurity. For further information on our efforts to advance the sustainable development and conservation of the world's vital grasslands, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Most sincerely,



Dr. Alberto Yanosky
Chair, Americas Regional and Global Council Member
Americas Regional Council
BirdLife International

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- BirdLife International Partner CEOs (Americas): Hernan Casanas, *Aves Argentinas*; Pedro Develey, *SAVE Brasil*; Adrian Stagi, *Aves Uruguay*; Jose Luis Cartes, *Guyra Paraguay*
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- Dr. BATMUNKH Damdindorj, Director of Livestock Department, MoFALI , Mongolia, and Chair of the National Support Group of the IYRP, (batmunkhdamdindorj@yahoo.com)
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