



Ecological Society of America

1990 M St, NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20036

September 22, 2020

H.E. Mendsaikhan Zagdjav
Minister of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia
13381 Zasglin gazriin IX bair
Enkhtaivnii urgun chuluu 16a Bayanzurkh duureg.
Ulaanbaatar MONGOLIA
ariunbayar@mofa.gov.mn

Dear Minister Mendasikhan Zagdjav:

I am writing in support of a proposal to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to recognize 2026 as an “International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists” on behalf of the Ecological Society of America (ESA), the world’s largest professional society of ecologists that was founded over 100 years ago. ESA hopes that you and the UN Environment Assembly will support this proposal when it comes before the UN General Assembly.

Nearly half of the Earth’s land surface is classified as *rangeland* and *grassland*, and the health and productivity of these lands are critical to the livelihoods of an estimated 500 million people around the world. Rangeland and grassland habitats provide a multitude of ecosystem services. They help mitigate droughts and floods, aid in seed dispersal, control agricultural pests and deter soil erosion. They also protect downstream water resources from runoff and maintain ecosystem biodiversity and climate stability. In addition to providing resources for livestock production and crop irrigation, they offer recreational and ecotourism activities.

Despite their many benefits, these lands are at risk due to many threats including cropland expansion, wildland fires, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and climate change. Designating an “International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists” would invigorate the scientific community to identify practical and strategic solutions that address these threats.

ESA members actively participate in the Rangelands Section which provides a forum to discuss all associated topics. Our five peer-reviewed journals publish the latest rangeland research. ESA’s Annual Meeting draws up to 4,000 ecologists to discuss the latest scientific discoveries in ecology, including rangeland research.

The Rangelands Section would lead ESA’s activities. This Section would implement two activities— one old and one new to help ESA take an active role in supporting the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists. First, each year the Rangelands Section sponsors a symposium that connects the Society’s overall theme with rangeland issues. This year, the theme was Big Data in Ecology and the symposium was entitled “Scaling Big Data on Big Landscapes to Make Big Decisions.” In support of the ‘International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists’ the theme would focus on the challenges pastoralists face as rangelands are impacted by human induced landscape change. Second, the Section plans to take on a proactive role in connecting

issues of social and environmental justice on lands that support a variety of peoples, wildlife and ecosystem processes that are threatened by misuse and violence. Assuring equitable access to rangelands and ensuring the wise and humane management of their resources will serve as the foundation for an initiative that will involve monthly seminars intermingling differing perspectives on rangeland dynamics by pairing speakers from different geographic backgrounds. In that spirit, pastoralists worldwide would be invited to contribute to these discussions.

The Ecological Society of America appreciates your global leadership on environmental stewardship and thanks you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Weathers', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kathleen Weathers
ESA President

cc: Dr. Batmunkkh Damdindorj, Director of Livestock Department, MoFALI, Mongolia and
Chair of the National Support of the IYRP
Mr. Ganbayar G. Permanent Representative to FAO, Mongolian Embassy in Rome
Gregorio VelascoGil, AGAG, FAO
Maryam Niamir-Fuller, Vice-Chair ISG for the IYRP