

The SDGs' Environmental Goals for Wildlife Ranching

The UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals address the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development, all of which are critically important for the wildlife ranching industry. This article explores the environmental SDGs and subsequent articles will explore the social and economic SDGs.

The key environmental SDG for wildlife ranching is SDG 15 which aims to:

“Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.”

The short title for SDG 15 is ‘Life on Land.’ The goal’s aim is clearly to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of living natural resources and their habitats. Protection includes managing forests and other terrestrial ecosystems sustainably. Restoration includes reversing land degradation and combating desertification. Promotion of sustainable use includes halting biodiversity loss. These aims are all relevant to a well-managed and responsible wildlife ranches.

SDG 15 includes 12 targets, most of which are directly relevant to wildlife ranches. These targets can be used in a ranch’s management plans. They can also be used to communicate with investors, customers, neighbouring communities and regulatory authorities about a ranch’s contribution to sustainable development. Particularly relevant goals include the following:

SDG 15 Targets	Relevance to wildlife ranching
15.1 - By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements	Ecosystem services provided by wildlife ranches include soil formation, wild foods and raw materials, carbon sequestration, and recreation and tourism.
15.2 - By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally	Wildlife ranches can be managed to protect and enhance forested areas.
15.3 - By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world	Wildlife ranching can restore degraded lands.

SDG 15 Targets	Relevance to wildlife ranching
15.5 - Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species	Wildlife ranching can restore natural habitats, restore biodiversity, and contribute directly to preventing the extinction of species.
15.7 - Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products	Through the sustainable production, utilisation and trade of wild goods and services, wildlife ranching can provide a legal source of wildlife products for consumers.
15.8 - By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species	Managing natural habitats on wildlife ranch can include measures to eliminate or minimise the presence of invasive alien species.
15.9 By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts	Through transparent reporting processes, wildlife ranches can contribute information on biodiversity values in support local and national development processes.
15.A Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems	Through commercialised wildlife production and utilisation, wildlife ranches generate financial resources directly for biodiversity conservation.
15.C Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities	Wildlife ranches provide local livelihood opportunities including jobs through increasing the supply of wildlife, promoting sustainable utilisation and engaging in legal, regulated trade.

As the above table indicates, a responsibly-managed wildlife ranch can contribute directly to SDG 15 and its targets. Collectively, the wildlife ranching industry can contribute substantively to South Africa's national commitments to conserving and sustainably using terrestrial ecosystems. WRSA, for example, could work with its members to provide regular information to the government and other stakeholders on the SDG contributions of the industry.

In addition to SDG 15, there are several other environmental SDGs and associated targets which are pertinent to the wildlife ranching industry. These include the following:

Other relevant SDGs & Targets	Relevance to wildlife ranching
<p>2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</p> <p>2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species...</p>	<p>Wildlife ranching can play a key role in enhancing food security in dryland ecosystems and also in restoring and conserving stocks of important wild species for the food.</p>
<p>6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</p> <p>6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials</p>	<p>As water is a critically scarce resource in most wildlife ranching areas, responsible ranch management can include efforts to conserve water and improve water quality.</p>
<p>7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all</p> <p>7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix</p>	<p>Wildlife ranches can promote a range of renewable energy options for rural areas, notably the use of solar power and sustainable woodlot management.</p>
<p>11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</p> <p>11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning</p>	<p>With the increasing urbanisation of South Africa, wildlife ranches have a unique role to play in providing opportunities for urban dwellers to reconnect to the countryside and to understand the environmental linkages between rural areas and urban centres.</p>
<p>14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development</p> <p>14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics</p>	<p>As noted further below, wild ranches can benefit from understanding the relevance of the goals and targets for conserving marine and sustainably using marine ecosystems and resources to terrestrial ecosystems and resources.</p>

Of all these additional goals and targets, Target 14.4 looks at issues which are particularly relevant to the wildlife ranching industry. Though 14.4 is a target for the

sustainable use of marine resources, it can be reworded as a target for the sustainable use of terrestrial resources. For wildlife ranching, it could read as follows:

By 2020, effectively regulate utilisation and end overharvesting, illegal, unreported and unregulated harvesting and destructive utilisation practices and implement science based management plans, in order to restore wildlife stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

For planning and reporting purposes, such a rewording of Target 14.4 could be associated with terrestrial Target 15.5 in that this target aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and prevent the extinction of threatened species. Restoring wildlife stocks to levels that produce maximum sustainable yield is a direct way that wildlife ranches can contribute to these aims.

In short, well-managed and responsible wildlife ranches can tick many of the SDG boxes. In so doing, they can be a leading force for sustainable development in the drylands of South Africa and its neighbouring countries.

In this regard there is a real opportunity for WRSA to use the SDGs as a framework for delivering some its key objectives including:

- “Influencing, shaping and guiding national and provincial regulation and policy relating to wildlife ranching in partnership with government;”
- “Creating awareness of the benefits of wildlife ranching in South Africa;” and
- “Developing and embracing the reputation of the industry, locally and globally.”

Wildlife ranching, of course, can deliver more than environmental outcomes. In the next article in this series, we will look at how the wildlife ranching industry can contribute to the social SDGs.