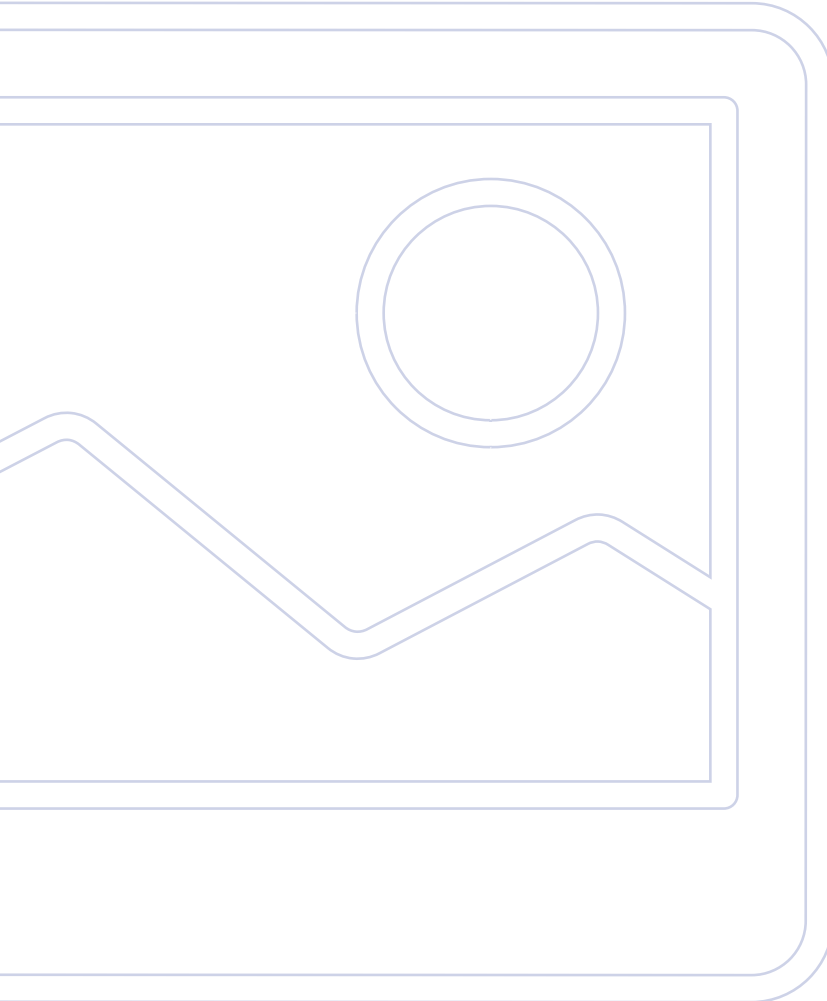


Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.



RELEASE JUNE 2019

Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

June 2019

Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA)

P.O.Box: 116688 Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Coordinates: 25°17'14.0"N 55°21'02.4"E

Telephone: +971 4 7774049

E-mail: info@tra.gov.ae

Web: www.tra.gov.ae

CONTENTS

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND | 4 |
| NEED..... | 5 |
| IDEA | 5 |
| PROJECTS | 5 |
| IMPACT | 8 |

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The state of biodiversity in the United Arab Emirates reflects its desert environment and its maritime location on the one hand, and the rapid pace of development and high population density on the other. The UAE's terrestrial and marine environments face a variety of pressures and threats, including economic and urban development, Land use and increased consumption of groundwater resources, as well as overgrazing, over-exploitation of living marine resources, pollution from land and marine sources, invasive alien species and climate change.

Living marine and terrestrial species in the UAE have adapted to harsh environmental conditions, but normal adaptation to warm temperatures may not be sufficient to withstand increasingly warm temperatures resulting from climate change. As the coastal area is predominantly sandy and low-lying, its vulnerability to climate change is very high. Expected impacts from high temperature and sea level rise include erosion, direct immersion, coastal erosion and saltwater intrusion. These impacts involve risks to existing and new infrastructure and important coastal ecosystems and are likely to result in significant economic costs through the impact on fisheries and aquaculture.

Forests are the key to combating climate change, protecting biodiversity and providing food security. Forests cover one-third of the world's land area. A quarter of all modern medicines come from tropical forest plants. Wood fuel provides 40 percent of today's global renewable energy supply. However, thirteen million hectares of forests are being lost every year combined with the degradation of drylands that has led to the desertification of 3.6 billion hectares.

The United Arab Emirates forests contain 16 million metric tons of carbon in living forest biomass. Biodiversity and Protected Areas: the United Arab Emirates has some 339 known species of amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles.

NEED

The UAE, with its ever-expanding urban landscape, needs to be mindful of the potential harm to its biodiversity, environment and protective nature areas.

IDEA

The UAE has enacted various laws and launched strategies to protect the biodiversity, environment and protective areas.

PROJECTS

Laws, Strategies and Policies

The UAE has been an early adopter of protecting the environment, biodiversity and protective areas. It has enacted federal law No. 24 of 1999 for the Protection and Development of Environment which promotes and enacts policy to conserve UAEs desert environment and terrestrial ecosystems. It protects the environment, develops natural resources, conserves biodiversity, and rationalize its usage across the country.

In 2013, the UAE launched a four-year national strategy and action plan for bio-security to ensure that the country is protected against biological hazards.

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, adopted in 2014, is based on the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and guides the UAE's efforts in conserving biodiversity for the coming decade, contributing mainly to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 14 and 15.

Conserving the Environment in the UAE

The leadership of the UAE has long held the opinion that the environment is a precious gift that needs to be protective. It faces a delicate balance between economic growth through urban expansion and maintaining biodiversity. In order to succeed, the UAE leadership understood that economic growth without concern for the environment is a losing proposition.

Therefore, the UAE establish economic and environmental policies that would be mutually

beneficial to each other. They issued policies to protect natural resources such as the UAE's environmental conservation policies. One of the main elements of the UAE's environmental conservation policies is to raise awareness among new generations to adopt greater responsibility for its natural resources. Supported by the launch of 'The National Environmental Education and Awareness Strategy 2015-2021', the strategy aims at educating the youth of the UAE towards a sustainable future and strengthening the community's commitment to sustainability and environmental protection.

The UAE is working hard to ensure that relevant entities and the public are aware of the issue of illegal wildlife trade, and a number of campaigns have taken place in recent years. The 'Beautiful in the Wild' campaign was kicked-off in 2015, to raise the awareness of the importance of keeping wild animals in their natural habitats and the effects of invasive species on local biodiversity using visual simulation technologies. In 2016, the campaign targeted Abu Dhabi and Dubai airports in cooperation with partner organizations to raise awareness among UAE visitors and residents.

Furthermore, Al Ain Zoo incorporation with the MoCCE launched the second Nature Conservation Festival in 2016, under the theme 'Illicit Trafficking in Endangered Species.' The festival helped to raise awareness on the different endangered species and roles and responsibilities for the community in addressing illegal wildlife trade.

The UAE is committed to protecting and managing the rich biodiversity of the state and prevent the extinction of threatened species. The creation of natural reserves intends to improve the environment and protect wildlife in the country and promote eco-tourism.

The UAE aims to conserve its native plant species and use them sustainably. In 2014, the UAE's Ministry of Climate Change and Environment (MoCCE) in collaboration with the UAE University, completed the first phase of its date palm tree identification through DNA profiling. The project aims to offer all kinds of support to preserve, identify, and classify all genetic assets of date palm trees. Establishing a reference database for all types of palm trees found in the UAE, identifying and documenting the extent of their diversity. The project will increase the contribution of palm tree planting and date production to the country's gross domestic product.

In addition, many initiatives were launched to preserve the UAE's plant species, including the establishment of 'gene' banks for plants' genetic resources. One initiative will be implemented by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi (EAD), which is set to document and preserve plants through establishing Abu Dhabi Plant Genetics Resources Centre. The purpose of the center is to collect and document native plants so that if any species became extinct in the wild, it could be cultivated in captivity and reintroduced back to nature.

The UAE boasts a diverse range of marine and terrestrial ecosystems such as coral reefs, mangrove forests and dunes as well as a wide range of flora and fauna inclusive of vulnerable and/or endangered species such as Arabian leopard, Arabian Oryx, green turtle, and dugongs.

To date, the UAE has designated 43 federal protected areas of which 5 have officially been designated as Ramsar Sites (wetlands sites recognized under the Ramsar Convention). These amount to a total of up to 12 percent of marine and coastal areas and 16 percent of terrestrial areas of the UAE, there are plans to increase this coverage. The management effectiveness of the UAE's protected areas is evaluated annually to ensure sustainable management of species and ecosystems in close cooperation with relevant entities. In 2016, 5 areas in the UAE were identified as Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) under CBD, in recognition of their contribution to healthy marine ecosystems.

Initiatives for Biodiversity Conservation

In 2014, the MoCCE launched the UAE Smart Map of Natural Capital as a means of gauging environmental and economic benefits offered by ecosystems and to facilitate their sustainable utilization. This initiative enables users to identify available natural resources and value in monetary terms the national ecosystem services.

International Days

In 2016, MoCCE celebrated biodiversity through several international and regional environmental days such as World Day to Combat Desertification, World Wildlife Day, International Day for Biological Diversity, World Shark Day, GCC Biodiversity Day and World

Animal Day.

IMPACT

All the actions and initiatives taken by the UAE resulted in positive outcomes. The UAE has not lost any forest areas. It is ranked second behind Oman in the GCC in terms of the percentage of land covered by forest. Forest areas have increased from 245 thousand hectares in 1990 to approximately 318.36 thousand hectares in 2019. This is in spite of the harsh climate (80% of the UAE is desert) and limited water rations. The federally protected reserves increased from 2 reserves in 2010 to 43 reserves in 2019 occupying 14.35 percent of UAE area.

The assessment of the effectiveness of protected area management is a key element in the development of these areas. Since 2014, stakeholders in the UAE have been using METT, a tool developed by the World Wide Fund for Nature for tracking and monitoring progress in achieving the objectives of protected areas. In 2016, the average effectiveness of the protected area management at the national level was about 67 percent, beating the global average of 53 percent.

Humans pose the greatest danger to biodiversity. The UAE has raised awareness of the potential damage that is being done by uncaring people damaging the desert with its off-road vehicles and the garbage that is being left behind by campers. This has led to a change in attitude among Emiratis and expatriates. Keeping the desert clean and healthy is one of the major environmental campaigns.

The UAE and since its establishment has not spared efforts to conserve its environment, develop natural resources on sustainable bases and combat desertification. The UAE considers this as one of its development pillars and thus was able to accomplish great achievements in the various fields related to the environment and desertification.

Reference

- <http://www.uaesdgs.ae/en/goals/life-on-land>

- <https://beeatna.ae/en/Biodiversity-and-Environment>
- <http://www.fao.org/zhc/detail-events/en/c/1033884/>
- <https://gulfnews.com/business/banking/evolution-of-e-banking-in-the-uae-1.2077132>
- <https://government.ae/en/about-the-uae/leaving-no-one-behind/15lifeonland>
- <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170615-uae-and-the-muslim-brotherhood-a-story-of-rivalry-and-hatred/>
- <https://government.ae/en/information-and-services/environment-and-energy/environmental-protection>
- <https://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/uae-celebrates-world-biodiversity-day-2017-05-22-1.653272>