



Foundation Statement: The Conservation Trust

The G20 South Africa 2025, Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group, chaired by Dr Dion George, Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, agreed the **Cape Town Ministerial Declaration on Crimes that Affect the Environment**.

The declaration reads:

The Ministers of Environment and Climate of the G20 Members and Invited Countries, met in Cape Town, South Africa on the 16th and 17th October 2025, and adopted the following Ministerial Declaration on Crimes that Affect the Environment:

1. We recognise the serious threat posed by the following illegal activities: illicit trafficking in wildlife, including inter alia, flora and fauna, in timber and timber products, in hazardous wastes and in precious metals, stones and other minerals, as well as poaching, and the illegal movement and disposal of waste and hazardous substances which are addressed under relevant MEAs (multilateral environmental agreements) such as CITES. We note that these illegal activities are closely interlinked with other crimes, including illicit financial flows. We underscore that actions on these illegal activities can serve as a lever for progress on a wider set of G20 objectives.
2. We recognise the urgent need to strengthen national responses to address crimes that affect the environment. We call on all countries to respect national legislation on crimes that affect the environment and put in place measures to prevent the entry of natural resources sourced illegally elsewhere.
3. We welcome the South African Presidency's initiative to convene a series of technical workshops and expert meetings on topics referred to in paragraph 2.1 (Cape Town Expert Meetings on Crimes that affect the Environment) building on the 2017 G20 High-Level Principles on Combating Corruption Related to Illegal Trade in Wildlife and Wildlife Products, and to report back on the outcomes of such exchanges in 24 months.

The Conservation Trust part-activates this declaration. It is an international, nonpartisan, nonprofit dedicated to evidence-based policymaker education, practical policy solutions, and global durable coalitions to combat illegal wildlife trade while advancing sustainable conservation worldwide. We operate on principled science-led foundations that apply universally, drawing from established international frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – international framework for conservation, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) guidelines – global conservation standards, CITES resolutions – wildlife trade regulations, and the United Nations recognition of environmental rights – universal environmental protections.

We recognise the value that ecologically sustainable use of wildlife brings in appropriate contexts globally. When properly regulated and managed, these practices create strong

economic incentives for landowners, communities and governments to maintain and expand habitats for free-living wildlife.

This has demonstrably resulted in increased conservation of wildlife populations, habitats, and overall biodiversity in many regions – through private land management that supports higher species richness, population recoveries for certain threatened species, habitat restoration on degraded lands, reduced pressure on state-protected areas, funding for anti-poaching and research, community development and alternative livelihoods that turn wildlife from a liability into an asset encouraging long-term stewardship.

Wildlife cannot be reduced to mere line-items on a balance sheet or economic resources. We affirm that wildlife possesses intrinsic value – inherent worth independent of any utility to humans – and deserve protection, stewardship, and respect for their right to exist as integral components of ecosystems and the web of life.

This recognition aligns with widely held conservation ethics (e.g. as endorsed by the Society for Conservation Biology and reflected in many scholarly and policy discussions), which view wildlife as having moral standing beyond instrumental benefits, while still allowing for balanced, regulated sustainable use where it demonstrably supports conservation goals.

We uphold the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, as recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 76/300 (2022) and affirmed by the Human Rights Council. This emerging human right underscores that everyone, everywhere, is entitled to an environment that supports health, well-being and dignity.

We support -

Intergenerational Equity: Protecting resources for future generations

Precautionary approach: Acting to prevent environmental harm before it occurs

Integrated protection: Combining environmental protection with sustainable development

It aligns with core international principles, ensuring that conservation efforts safeguard both nature and human societies for present and future generations.

We support wildlife conservation practices that, within the scope of national and international law, promote the ecologically sustainable use of wild animals in natural, free-living conditions. This means prioritising systems where animals live with minimal human intervention, retain natural behaviours, move freely across appropriate habitats, and participate in ecological processes.

Such approaches – aligned with the CBD's definition of sustainable use (the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biological diversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations) and IUCN principles (equitable, ecologically

sustainable use as a conservation tool) have proven effective when governed by robust regulations, scientific monitoring, community involvement, and adaptive management.

The Conservation Trust will give legs to the G20 outcome by providing practical, evidence-based support – through our global curriculum, Policymaker’s Field Guide, model toolkits, rapid-response mechanisms, regional convenings, and engagements with governments and international bodies to help countries translate the Cape Town Declaration into strengthened national policies, interagency coordination, legislative reforms, enforcement capacity building, intelligence sharing, and cross-border coalitions.

Our work directly supports the declaration’s emphasis on enhanced multilateral cooperation and national action against illicit wildlife trade and related environmental crimes, ensuring commitments lead to a measurable, enduring impact on disrupting criminal networks and protecting biodiversity.

The organization will focus on closing policy loopholes, advancing effective enforcement frameworks, and helping governments translate conservation priorities into implementable laws, budgets, and interagency action.

To ensure clarity, we adopt the following:

The Conservation Trust does not oppose “sustainable use” in its intended format.

We endorse the internationally accepted understanding of sustainable use as a legitimate conservation mechanism – when it is truly sustainable, evidence-based, equitable, and does not lead to long term biological harm.

This includes regulated practices that generate incentives for habitat protection and species recovery, while respecting wildlife’s intrinsic value and ensuring no detriment to wild populations. Sustainable use, properly implemented can complement strict protection measures by aligning human needs with ecological integrity, as affirmed by the CBD (one of its three core objectives alongside conservation and benefit-sharing) and IUCN policy statements that position sustainable use as an important tool for incentivising stewardship.

The Conservation Trust does not oppose fair chase hunting.

We do not oppose fair chase hunting as an ethical, sportsmanlike, and lawful form of regulated harvest that adheres to principles of restraint, skill, respect for wildlife, and natural challenges – without artificial advantages that compromise the animal’s ability to evade (as defined by the Boone and Crockett Club and widely adopted in conservation ethics). This emphasizes self-restraint, skill, respect for wildlife, and natural challenges, prohibiting artificial aids like vehicles, electronic calls, or confined enclosures that limit escape.

When governed by science-led quotas, seasons, and enforcement, fair chase hunting can contribute to population management, generate revenue for conservation, and reinforce incentives for habitat retention.

There is a difference between fair chase hunting and caged animal killing (“canned hunting”).

The Conservation Trust strongly opposes the pursuit and killing of any big game animal kept in or released from captivity into an escape-proof fenced or confined area, virtually assuring the shooter a kill. This practice violates fair chase principles by denying the animal a reasonable chance of escape and is widely regarded as unethical and contrary to conservation values.

The Conservation Trust rejects the “ranching” of iconic species (such as rhinos, elephants, lions and other charismatic megafauna) in intensive or commercial captive systems that undermine their free-living status, natural behaviours, or ecological roles.

While we do not oppose sustainable wildlife ranching for non-iconic or ecologically appropriate species where it demonstrably expands free-living habitats and biodiversity, we view ranching of iconic species as incompatible with their intrinsic value, welfare needs, and the broader goal of maintaining wild populations in natural conditions.

Such practices risk commodification that could exacerbate illegal trade pressures or ethical concerns, and we advocate instead for their protection through habitat-based conservation, anti-poaching, and community stewardship models.

The following definitions apply:

Wildlife Ranching – the commercial or semi-commercial management and husbandry of wild species on private or communal land for recreation, products, or profit, often involving extensive (low intensity) or intensive practices. When ecologically sustainable, it contributes to habitat expansion, species recovery, and biodiversity gains by incentivising land retention for free-living wildlife.

Captive breeding – the propagation of wildlife in controlled environments (as defined under CITES Resolution Conf. 10.16 and related guidelines) where parents mate or gametes are transferred in a controlled setting, with offspring produced reliably in subsequent generations. It is intended for species preservation, genetic management, or reintroduction, provided it does not detrimentally impact wild populations and avoids commercial exploitation that fuels illegal trade.

Hunting – The lawful pursuit, trapping, shooting, capture, or killing of wildlife, or attempts thereof, regulated by seasons, licences, methods, and quotas to ensure sustainability and alignment with conservation goals.

Sanctuaries – Facilities or areas providing lifetime protection and humane care for animals, often rescued from exploitation, in a non-exploitative environment with ethical policies prohibiting commercial trade, breeding for profit, public handling, or disruptive exhibition (aligned with standards of the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries). True sanctuaries

prioritise animal welfare, natural behaviours, and no commercial exploitation; we condemn unethical operations that involve chaining, forced performances and poor conditions.

Our Commitment: Practical, evidence-led Action

The Conservation Trust provides practical, evidence-based support – through our global curriculum, Policymaker’s Field Guide, model toolkits, rapid-response mechanisms, regional convenings, and engagement with international bodies – to help countries translate the Cape Town Declaration into strengthened national policies, interagency coordination, legislative reforms, enforcement capacity building, intelligence sharing, and cross border coalitions.

Our work directly supports the declaration’s emphasis on enhanced multilateral cooperation and national action against illicit wildlife trade and related environmental crimes, ensuring commitments lead to measurable, enduring impact on disrupting criminal networks and protecting biodiversity.

Our position is principled, balanced, and evidence-led: we endorse regulated, sustainable use as a legitimate conservation mechanism where it demonstrably enhances free-living populations, protects and expands habitats, funds protection efforts, reduces human-wildlife conflict through incentives, and supports equitable livelihoods – particularly in biodiversity-rich regions facing land-use pressures. We reject practices that compromise animal welfare, undermine free-living conditions, or contribute to illegal trade or overexploitation.

Through our global curriculum, Policymaker’s Field Guide, toolkits, and convenings, we aim to equip decision-makers world-wide with neutral, practical resources to design frameworks that maximise these conservation benefits while closing vulnerabilities, enforcing standards, and ensuring long-term ecological integrity. This reflects our commitment to rational, reasonable conservation that works for biodiversity, people and ecosystems across borders and cultures.

We welcome collaboration with stakeholders to advance policies grounded in international principles and shared evidence-based goals.