INTRODUCTION

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organizations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organizations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

Created in 1948, IUCN has evolved into the world’s largest and most diverse environmental network. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its 1,300 Member organizations and the input of some 15,000 experts. The members of IUCN are represented in the Council – the governing body. Headquartered in Switzerland, the IUCN Secretariat comprises 1,000 staff in 45 countries.

In 2017, the German government officially recognized the legal status of IUCN as an “organization created by intergovernmental agreement”, reaffirming the Union’s important role on the global environmental and development stage. This decision recognizes the official functions IUCN carries out on behalf of its Member States and affords the Union a range of rights and benefits. The new legal status will allow IUCN to build on its strong presence in the city of Bonn, home to the ELC.

The IUCN Environmental Law Programme (ELP) comprises the World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL) and the Environmental Law Centre (ELC), which collaborate in their endeavours with the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law.

The mission of the ELP is to advance environmental law through the development of legal concepts and instruments, and to facilitate the use of environmental law as a tool to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. The ELP is an integrated programme of activities that assists decision makers with information, legal analysis, advisory services, legislative drafting, mentoring and capacity building at national, regional and global levels.

The WCEL is a network of environmental law and policy experts from all regions of the world who volunteer their knowledge and services to IUCN activities, especially to those of the IUCN Environmental Law Programme. As of the end of 2017, WCEL had a steadily growing membership of 850 members, including judges, prosecutors, government attorneys, private attorneys, law professors, and others engaged in the delivery of the Commission’s mission and work.

The ELC is a programme unit of the IUCN secretariat. It coordinates the promotion of environmental law as a tool for sustainable development and resource governance. It acts as the secretariat for the WCEL, and works in collaboration with the whole of IUCN, together with many other partners from around the world. The ELC also houses an extensive library of environmental law holdings and is the management unit for ECOLEX, ‘The Gateway to Environmental Law’ (www.ecolex.org), a web-based information system operated as a joint initiative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), IUCN and the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment).

2017 was a year of active and fruitful engagement by the ELP in various events concerning international environmental governance, contributing to the draft of the Global Pact for the Environment, and preparations for the Conference of Judges and Prosecutors on Water Justice to be held in Brasilia, Brazil in March 2018 during the 8th World Water Forum. 2017 marked the beginning
of implementing the IUCN Programme 2017-2020 approved at IUCN’s World Conservation Congress in September 2016 in Hawaii, USA.

(A) Environmental Law Centre (ELC)

Law is fundamental to just and effective governance of natural resources. The IUCN Environmental Law Programme (ELP) aims to advance environmental law through the development of legal concepts and instruments, and to facilitate the use of environmental law as a tool to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

The ELC’s work is guided by the IUCN Programme 2017-2020 which has three priority areas:

Programme Area 1: Valuing and Conserving Nature

*Valuing and conserving nature enhances IUCN’s heartland work on biodiversity conservation, emphasizing both tangible and intangible values of nature.*

(i) Wildlife Trade

Wildlife trafficking, the illegal cross-border trade in animals and plants, has transformed into one of the largest transnational organised criminal activities alongside drug trafficking, arms and human trafficking. It has developed into a multi-billion dollar business due to the fact that it is enormously lucrative while there is little risk to the perpetrators of being caught. In case this does happen, sentences these criminals face are relatively light.

The ELC joined other IUCN programmes, TRAFFIC, and WWF at the TRAFFIC/WWF/IUCN Programme Partnership Meeting in June 2017 held in Cambridge, UK. The meeting identified aims and proposed action for enhancement of governance and partnership management between the three organizations and supported the refinement of the TRAFFIC programme proposal 2017-2020.

The ELC presented a paper to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on use of the US Lacey Act as a model for legislation to combat illegal wildlife trade. Options are being explored for sharing legal information between WILDLEX (IUCN’s database of wildlife-related legislation and cases), and SHERLOC (UNODC’s database of law relating to international crime).

(ii) Water

BRIDGE (Building River Dialogue and Governance), a flagship programme co-led by the ELC and the Global Water Programme, started its third phase of implementation. The initiative is currently being carried out in 14 transboundary basins around the world, in six different regions extending from South America, Mesoamerica and Asia to the African continent, where BRIDGE covers five basins in the Horn of Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa, and West and Central Africa.

In 2017, the ELC conducted nine training workshops in the BRIDGE regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America. A study tour was also arranged on transboundary water cooperation with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Zagreb, Croatia and in Koblenz, Germany in September.

The ELC was also actively engaged in international fora and conferences related to water governance, including the XVI World Water Congress in Cancun, Mexico and the World Water Week in Stockholm, Sweden.
(iii) Protected Areas

Protected Areas (PAs) are one of the oldest techniques used to safeguard places and resources for achieving conservation-related goals, and are widely recognized as a cornerstone of conservation policy and action. In order to be effective, PA systems, as well as individual PAs, must be supported by a firm legal infrastructure.

In 2017, the ELC began the implementation of a project on protected areas financing, in collaboration with the IUCN Global Protected Areas Programme (GPAP) and the Business and Biodiversity Programme (BBP). The goal of this project is to incubate innovative financing solutions in 10 sites from at least 3 regions of the world, and to share lessons learned from these sites globally.

A call for potential partner sites willing to test innovative ideas for financing conservation was sent out; proposals came in from all parts of the world -- Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe (protected area managers, NGOs, communities and private associations, private protected areas and community conserved areas, and areas governed by government or shared government structures). The proposed sites covered the full range of ecosystems, from mountains to islands, wetlands to desert, peri-urban areas to vast uninhabited landscapes. They include Ramsar Sites, World Heritage Sites, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. The Incubator for Nature Conservation (INC) Working Group evaluated each proposal to understand the needs and potential of each site and make a common decision on which sites to include in the INC pilot phase. Ten protected areas around the world were selected as pilots to explore innovative on-the-ground solutions for financing protected and conserved areas. During the UNFCCC COP 23, the ELC launched the INC (www.conservationincubator.org).

Mangrove conservation and rehabilitation
The ELC, jointly with the WWF and the IUCN Global Marine and Polar Programme, conducted a global desk study on legal frameworks on mangroves conservation with case studies in eight countries.

(iv) Marine

The ELC and the WCEL Oceans, Coasts and Coral Reefs Specialist Group have contributed, through a two-year process, to the UN Preparatory Committee on conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. In July, the Committee reached consensus to recommend that the UN General Assembly begin intergovernmental negotiations on a legally binding agreement. This concludes more than a decade of preparatory work to set the stage for a treaty to safeguard marine life in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Furthermore, the ELC helped to develop a series of case studies on legal issues associated with use of marine genetic resources, particularly on benefit sharing as well as synthetic biology. These case studies were presented at a meeting of the PharmaSea Advisory Panel of Policy and Legal Experts (APPLE) in New York, USA.

Programme Area 2: Effective and Equitable Governance of Nature’s Use

IUCN recognised that good governance of natural resources is not only a means to an end but it is a goal in its own right. Without good governance systems in place, effective environmental policies and laws cannot be realised. In this Programme Area IUCN continues to reinforce, expand and consolidate the work started during the 2013–2017 Programme cycle, taking advantage of the impetus and momentum given to the issue through global policy frameworks, in particular the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, within which SDG 16 is dedicated to governance aspects.
(i) Natural Resources Governance Framework (NRGF)

The NRGF is an IUCN initiative created for the purpose of providing a robust, inclusive, and credible approach to assessing and strengthening natural resource governance, at multiple levels and in diverse contexts. The overarching goal of NRGF is to set standards and guidance for decision-makers at all levels to make better and more just decisions on the use of natural resources and the distribution of nature’s benefits, following good governance principles, such that improved governance will enhance the contributions of ecosystems and biodiversity to equity and sustainability.

(ii) Access and Benefit Sharing

The ELC has been working on ABS issues and supporting the negotiations relating thereto for over ten years.

The Caribbean islands are of critical importance for global biodiversity conservation as large percentages of each species group are endemic to the region and often to particular islands and levels of endemism are very high in the region: thus, 50 per cent of the plant life of the Caribbean is unique (UNEP, 2010). These high valued genetic resources in the Caribbean are under threat due to land degradation, climate change, and pollution from nutrients, unsustainable use and invasive alien species. The Nagoya Protocol offers the opportunity to make the best possible use of these genetic resources, generate and share benefits derived from their utilization, and return some of the revenue generated from these activities to the protection of the resources and the development of the countries where they were sourced.

The ELC jointly with the Regional Office for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean (ORMACC) provided technical support to eight Caribbean countries in implementing the Nagoya Protocol on ABS. This support was taken in the form of analysis of existing legal frameworks, advice on proposed laws, drafting of model Mutually Agreed Terms and Prior Informed Consent agreements, drafting of legislative clauses, and development of a regional cooperation mechanism leading Antigua and Barbuda to ratify the Nagoya Protocol in 2017.

Programme Area 3: Deploying nature-based solutions to the global challenges of climate change, food security and sustainable development

This Programme Area focuses on mainstreaming nature-based solutions (NBS) to meet societal challenges. This Programme Area also reflects a clear interface with the implementation of a number of SDGs beyond Goals 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land) and it contributes to several specific goals, targets and commitments embodied within the three Rio Conventions.

(i) Integrated Planning for climate change and biodiversity

Land-use planning frameworks have traditionally focused on developing urban and semi-rural settlements and related infrastructure. Biodiversity conservation and climate change considerations are generally not reflected as an integral component in the design and use of land-use plans. In some countries, planning frameworks are either weak or poorly implemented and national agencies face gaps in experience, knowledge and tools to make decisions ensuring win-win situations for society and the environment. As a result, the potential of planning in these countries to address biodiversity conservation and help prepare for the impacts of climate change has not been realized, and the quality of governance remains unfulfilled.

The ELC in collaboration with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) have been developing learning courses on integrated land-use planning and ecosystem-based climate change adaptation. In March the ELC, together with the Global Protected Areas Programme (GPAP),
Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), Regional Office for South America (SUR) and Vietnam country office organized the annual meeting held in Cartagena, Colombia. In addition, an extended workshop in Colombia was organized together with the Parques Nacionales de Colombia (Colombia's national parks). This provided a platform for cross-sectoral discussions on integrating climate change and biodiversity into land-use plans across Colombia.

Furthermore, the ELC supported the IUCN Netherlands Committee in strengthening the legal understanding and capacity of civil society organizations in 16 countries. Shared Resources – Joint Solutions (SRJS) is a 5-year strategic partnership between IUCN NL, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Netherlands and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a collaboration with civil society organizations working on food security, climate resilience and water provisioning in Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Benin, Madagascar, Zambezi region, Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines, Indonesia, Guianas region (Suriname and Guyana), and Chaco/Pantanal region (Paraguay and Bolivia). Efforts have been made to develop a joint Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) on law and conservation jointly with the Programme on African Protected Areas & Conservation. In addition, a training needs assessment survey was put online in October 2017.

(ii) Climate Change

With the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, climate change adaptation law and governance was acknowledged formally by the international community as a key area of work for the future within the context of an international (legally binding) agreement. The instrument entered into force on November 4th 2017, thirty days after the date on which at least 55 Parties to the Convention accounting in total for at least an estimated 55 % of the total global greenhouse gas emissions deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

Within this context, the ELC has been working on law and governance of climate change on a spectrum of activities which range from local to national and to international level.

In 2017, the ELC continued to support and overview state level and local level governance processes in the framework of a multi-stakeholder climate change governance. These efforts are supported from a governance perspective by ELC-led activities geared towards strengthening social cohesion and opportunities for exercising procedural and substantive rights in planning and implementing adaptation strategies which have impacts on the ground.

At the national level, the ELC assisted several Central American countries with the development of their legal frameworks on climate change law and policy, by providing technical input and advice to various instruments that are currently being drafted and negotiated to ensure that ecosystem-based adaptation is taken into account. The ELC by means of AVE (Adaptation – Vulnerability and Ecosystems) is also instrumental in supporting countries to help them understand and implement their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) on water and biodiversity under the Paris Agreement. At the international level, outcomes and lessons learned from this project are being promoted and disseminated directly into the UNFCCC processes. The ELC took part in the UNFCCC COP 23 conference held in Bonn, Germany, 6-17 November 2017. Specifically, the ELC in collaboration with UN Agencies, State Party Delegations, NGOs and other partners presented within the framework of the UNFCCC COP 23 the “Keep it legal” side event on legal tools to address the challenges of climate change.
**Knowledge Management**

**ECOLEX, the Gateway to Environmental Law**

ECOLEX is one of the most comprehensive global information platforms on national and international environmental and natural resources law. It includes extensive information on multilateral and bilateral environmental treaties (2,170), treaty decisions (11,674), national legislation (147,160), jurisprudence (2,356) and law and policy literature (39,383) on one common platform. A faceted search approach by period, thematic area, country, geographical area and keywords enables the user to filter results.

In 2017, ECOLEX reached approximately 800,000 sessions and 1.5 million page views; an indicator that ECOLEX is an interesting and useful knowledge tool designed for a broad audience, ranging from students and lawyers to civil society and policy makers worldwide. ECOLEX access is free of charge and featured in three languages: English, French, and Spanish. The top ten user countries are: Philippines, Mexico, India, Peru, United States, United Kingdom, Kenya, Canada, Argentina and Bolivia. 75% of all users accessed ECOLEX from a desktop and 25% via mobile phone or tablet.

**Thesaurus on Environmental Law and Conventions**

The UNEP-supported Multilateral Environment Agreement Information and Knowledge Management (MEA IKM) Initiative seeks to develop harmonized interoperable information systems for the benefit of Parties and the environment community at large. One of the MEA IKM projects is the implementation of a controlled vocabulary, the Thesaurus on Environmental Law and Conventions or Law and Environment Ontology (LEO), an initiative funded by the European Union.

The ELC has compiled this thesaurus in a multi-stakeholder approach with affiliated MEAs. In the second phase of this project the thesaurus has been implemented by pilot MEAs, such as the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions (BRS), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (RAMSAR). The ELC supported these developments (i.e. mapping of controlled keywords to the thesaurus) and compared available auto-tagging tools in order to process backlog and large bulks of documents and make them retrievable in InforMEA (www.informea.org), as well as in ECOLEX (www.ecolex.org). In this context the 8th MEA IKM Steering Committee Meeting, held in Montreux in June, recommended the development of a LEO Tagger, a technology already known as Climate Tagger, built in close cooperation with the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP), on the basis of the LEO Thesaurus. The thesaurus is constantly validated and updated at the ELC. The project is based on semantic technology and supports potential linkages of the large data resources of Multilateral Environmental Agreements to analytical research.

**Other information tools**

Wildlex (www.wildlex.org) is a free database gathering court decisions, relevant legislation, literature and training materials related to wildlife law. The court decision database currently contains cases from Tanzania, and IUCN is working with partners to expand it to other countries in the region and around the globe.

Law for Sustainability (http://www.lawforsustainability.org) is a database with tools and resources for assessing and improving legal aspects of natural resources governance.
Protected Areas Law (http://www.protectedareaslaw.org) provides capacity building materials and resources on legal aspects of area-based conservation, including protected areas and connectivity.

Water Law and Governance (http://www.waterlawandgovernance.org/) is a database to provide legal expertise and support on water law and governance issues in national and transboundary contexts.

Incubator for Nature Conservation (www.conservationincubator.org) is the pilot phase of this new initiative to support on-the-ground solutions for financing protected and conserved areas around the world.

ELC Interns
Nine interns from Australia, France, Italy, Germany, Spain and Thailand worked at the ELC in 2017 for periods of three to six months. They contributed to activities and projects on diverse topics including: access and benefit sharing, water governance, rights-based approaches to conservation, protected areas, and climate change adaptation.
The IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL) organized its work in 2017 around signature initiatives. WCEL renewed focus on recruiting and activating the membership, and further improving communication to promote and strengthen work for the environmental rule of law at international, regional, and national levels.

Listed below are a number of the major events and meetings that WCEL was involved in during 2017 as an organizer, partner or participant:

- A 2nd meeting of the Founding Members of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (GJIE) was held on 19-21 May 2017 in Brasília, Brazil. With support of UN Environment, the Organization of American States, the Asian Development Bank, and WCEL, participants formalized the GJIE Statute of Incorporation, appointed three coordinators of the Interim Governing Committee (Justice Antonio Herman Benjamin, Justice Ragnhild Noer, and Justice Michael Wilson), and planned the 1st meeting of the Interim Governing Committee to meet in March 2018. In intervening months, 12 of 14 Founding Members were nominated to and approved as the Interim Governing Committee (the remaining two spots being held for nominees from China and West Africa). In parallel with creation of the Interim Governing Committee, the GJIE entered into the final stages of becoming a registered international non-profit association in Switzerland and explored options with UN Environment for establishing the GJIE Interim Secretariat.

- The Judicial Colloquium for Latin America and the Caribbean: “Constitutions, Environment, and Human Rights: Practice and Implementation” convened 22-23 May 2017 at the Federal Senate of Brazil in Brasília. With nine sessions chaired by representatives in the legislative branch, the Colloquium brought together over 70 judges, academics, and experts from over 20 countries to engage in interactive sessions held in formal sessions of the Environment Committee and the Joint Senate and House Permanent Committee on Climate Change of the Federal Senate of Brazil. This was the second in a series of a larger “Environmental Rights Initiative”, supported by UN Environment and under leadership of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, to enhance judicial capacity in environmental constitutionalism, identifies gaps and opportunities, and support judges worldwide. It also took place within the framework of the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Program on Sustainable Development.

- In July 2017, the “Global Pact for the Environment” was launched to serve as a basis for a new UN treaty to define fundamental environmental rights. The Pact synthesizes fundamental and common principles of environmental law, including the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, the 1982 World Charter for Nature, the 1992 Rio Declaration, the 2016 IUCN World Declaration on the Environmental Rule of Law, and other instruments to solidify and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It sets out principles that compel States and other legal persons to protect the environment, promote sustainable development and intergenerational equity, and ensure the right of access to information and environmental justice, among others. Members of WCEL, GJIE, and the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law were involved in producing the draft, which was prepared by a group of more than 150 experts from 54 countries across all five continents under the leadership of Laurent Fabius (President of the French Constitutional Council and formerly the President of UNFCCC/COP 21). The resulting draft for a Global Pact brings together and expands upon 26 fundamental principles of environmental law in hope of serving as a legally binding “umbrella
• The Organization of American States’ 2nd Inter-American Congress on the Environmental Rule of Law took place on 4-6 September in Santiago, Chile among judges, legislators, politicians, representatives from international agencies, and NGOs from across the region. Participants discussed key issues to further contribute to achieving IUCN WCEL goals related to the progressive development of legal and institutional frameworks built on the core principles of the environmental rule of law.

• High-Level Preparatory Colloquia for the Conference of Judges and Prosecutors on Water Justice during the 8th World Water Forum were held on 8 December in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. WCEL Chair Antonio Herman Benjamin is serving as Coordinator for this first-ever event under the Political Process for the 8th World Water Forum to be held 19-23 March 2018 in Brasília. Two high-level events included the invitation-only International Colloquium “Sharing Water” in the morning at the Museum of the Future, to begin drafting the “Brasília Declaration of Judges on Water Justice.” Outcomes advanced the draft “Brasília Declaration of Judges on Water Justice” as a set of guiding principles for the utilization, management, and protection of all forms of fresh water resources; planned for the “1st WCEL International Water Justice Moot Court;” and launched a new initiative to establish the “Global Institute of Prosecutors for the Environment” with the leadership of the Attorney General of Brazil, Raquel Dodge.

Additional notable activities during 2017 included:

• Promotion of the IUCN World Declaration on the Environmental Rule of Law through wide distribution, translation into Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish, and preparations for a multilingual annotated commentary to further understanding and application of the principles worldwide.

• Creating partnerships to eventually build an “Environmental Law Video Library” to be anchored within the WCEL website.

• Preparations for the 2nd World Environmental Law Congress to be held in the first half of 2020.

• Presentation of oral arguments at a public hearing, following joint submission with the Organization of American States to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, addressing environmental implications and ramifications in respect to the request by the Republic of Colombia for an advisory opinion concerning the interpretation of Article 1(1), 4(1), and 5(1) of the American Convention on Human Rights.

Specialist Groups

WCEL’s thematic Specialist Groups, Joint Specialist Groups, and select Task Forces are essential to the work of the Commission at large. Many WCEL members participate in one or more Specialist Groups that work to promote, develop, and implement their areas of environmental law for conservation and sustainable development at national, regional, and international levels. Focus during the year was on reconstituting leadership and activities of a number of the groups. Here follow summaries and reports submitted for the year 2017:

i. Climate Change Specialist Group

Christina Voigt was approved as Chair of the Specialist Group on Climate Change in 2017 and will place a stronger focus on climate change related legal questions. Throughout the year, the future plans of the Specialist Group were refined, and contacts established across IUCN to the ELC in Bonn,
the climate change coordinator in the Global Policy Unit, and the Climate Change Task Force of the IUCN Council. The Specialist Group held a session to reactivate its work on the margins of UNFCCC/COP 23 in November 2017 during the Climate Change Law and Governance Day and at a special event organized by IUCN and the ELC.

ii. Compliance and Enforcement Specialist Group
Chaired by Jean-Philippe Rivaud, this Specialist Group is supporting establishment of the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment and the Global Institute of Prosecutors for the Environment.

iii. Early Career Specialist Group
The Early Career Specialist Group, co-chaired by Michelle Lim and Nicholas Bryner, is a cross-cutting platform for early career environmental lawyers, policy makers, and scholars. In August, the Early Career Group hosted the webinar “The Future of Ecology and Civilisation – What Role for Law?” Additionally, Michelle Lim chaired the Fellows of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) webinar that included a presentation from Specialist Group members. At the end of May, the Specialist Group and partners organized and facilitated the Graduate and Law Students Forum “Charting New Paths in Environmental Law” during the Annual Colloquium of the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law in Cebu (Philippines). Progress continues to publish the edited book “Charting Environmental Law Futures in the Anthropocene” in 2018.

iv. Ethics Specialist Group
The Specialist Group on Ethics under Chair Klaus Bosselmann established the Biosphere Ethics Initiative (BEI) and introduced the Relato Methodology (RM) into the IUCN’s component programmes, while continuing working on the projects “Climate Ethics” and “Earth Democracy.” In 2017, the Ecological Law and Governance Association (ELGA) was launched to further implement the “Oslo Manifesto” and continued with the “Planetary Integrity Project” between universities, NGOs, and professional organizations. It also began working on rights of nature initiative as a focal point in IUCN’s decision-making and to reach a large global audience to inform about the UN Harmony with Nature Initiative, jurisprudence on “rights of nature,” and to create a “Universal Declaration of River Rights” through publications and e-learning courses with background and objective legal analysis.

v. Forests Specialist Group
The WCEL Forests Specialist Group was formally established in 2017 and is chaired by Raul Telles do Valle. To jumpstart the group’s work, the WCEL Steering Committee decided that a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) be signed between the Commission and the Secretariat of the UN Forum on Forests. The MoU is to promote cooperation and collaboration particularly in the interest of strengthening legal aspects of the protection of global forests, including investigation, preparation, and dissemination of forest best-practice legal systems, such as a “Model Forest Act” in order to inform the drafting and updating of forest legislation globally.

vi. Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Law Joint Specialist Group
The Steering Committee has recently approved the appointment of Kanyinke Sena as Chair of this Joint Specialist Group with the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy.

vii. Law and the IUCN Red Lists Joint Specialist Group
In 2017, the Steering Committee decided to establish a Joint Task Force under this rubric to use the Amazon as a test case for reviewing concepts applied in the Red List on Ecosystems.

viii. Oceans, Coasts and Coral Reefs Specialist Group
Co-Chaired by Nilufer Oral and David Vanderzwaag, the Specialist Group on Oceans, Coasts, and Coral Reefs joined the IUCN delegations to the two UN Preparatory Committee meetings to develop
an internationally legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. Furthermore, members participated in side-events at the UN Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on Conserving and Sustainably Using the Oceans at UN Headquarters. In 2017, the co-chairs launched a project inviting Specialist Group members to contribute chapters to a book proposal by Edward Elgar, tentatively titled “Ocean Acidity Post-Paris: Gauging Ocean Law and Policy Responses.”

ix. Soil, Desertification and Sustainable Agriculture Specialist Group
The Specialist Group under Chair Ian Hannam and Deputy Chair Irene Heuser was active during 2017 continuing investigation and discussing options for an international instrument for soil. Further activities included reviewing and assisting with drafting of national soil law, and discussing the legal aspects of land degradation neutrality (LDN) with the Secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, international environmental law groups, and soil science groups. Members participated at a number of global events including a contribution to the IUCN Technical Brief on Land Degradation Neutrality (IUCN Dryland Initiative), and to editorial and advisory board responsibilities for the “2017 International Yearbook on Soil Law and Policy” (Springer).

x. Water and Wetlands Specialist Group
The Specialist Group, under Chair Owen McIntyre, has been pursuing broad research goals while promoting the work of WCEL at key international meetings and fora, and through numerous publications. The main focus in 2017 was preparation of events related to the 8th World Water Forum.

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