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By Ashley Anderson, Elana Nager, and Madeline Ward

As 2022 wound down, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP 15) convened in Montreal. The conference ended with around 190 of the world's nations adopting the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which establishes four goals and twenty-three targets to be achieved by 2030. The most prominent of these was a "30×30" commitment: to conserve thirty percent of the earth's lands, oceans, coastal areas, and inland waters by 2030. Striving for 30×30 is seen as crucial because biodiversity is declining at unprecedented rates.

California showed up at COP15 in more ways than one. California is the first–and only–U.S. state to act as an official observer at the talks, as reported by CalMatters. State lawmakers and members of the Newsom administration were physically in Montreal.

But California's presence was felt in another way: California has a pre-existing 30×30 commitment that can serve as a roadmap for implementation of the COP commitment. Following a 2020 executive order, California started implementing its own 30×30 initiative, with three main goals: to protect and restore biodiversity, to expand access to nature for all Californians, and to build resilience to climate change. In April 2022, California's Natural Resources Agency released "Pathways to 30×30," which lays out the Newsom

administration's plan to get there. It includes ideas like executing strategic land acquisitions, increasing voluntary conservation easements, and strengthening coordination with federal and tribal governments.

So how is California's 30×30 pledge going? That was the question we dove into over several months of extensive research last semester in the California Environmental Legislation and Policy Advocacy Clinic. We dug into California's 30×30 initiative and spoke to scores of stakeholders at state agencies, state conservancies, NGOs, and environmental consultancies, all deeply committed to making California's 30×30 pledge a reality. What we learned about these early stages of California's 30×30 implementation can provide useful guidance for other jurisdictions striving to achieve that goal. Here are a few of our key takeaways:

- **Representation matters.** The Natural Resources Agency undertook a robust stakeholder engagement process as it was putting together its Pathways plan, including in-person and virtual meetings around the state designed to be accessible to a wide range of voices, and targeted working groups to address key implementation questions by engaging diverse stakeholders. Stakeholders uniformly praised the robustness of the approach, which led to a framework that recognized the needs and involvement of historically underrepresented communities like low-income Californians of color and indigenous groups.

In the context of the COP15 agreement, coordinated efforts with the world's Indigenous peoples, who currently protect eighty percent of the world's biodiversity, will be crucial. In implementing 30×30 initiatives, care should be taken to establish a policy of free, prior, and informed consent before undertaking conservation projects that would affect Indigenous peoples. Coordinated efforts could include Indigenous co-management of lands, resources, and species. In California, for example, the Ocean Protection Council funds the Tribal Marine Stewards Network, which is a coalition of California Native American tribes that manage coastal areas in their ancestral territories in alignment with their traditional ecological knowledge.

- **Publicly accessible data can drive implementation.** Publicly accessible data is vital to any 30×30 pledge. The Natural Resources Agency has created the CA Nature tool, maintaining a database that tracks already-protected areas of the state and allows stakeholders to layer on important data related to access and climate change. Keeping this data up-to-date and using it to inform future conservation decisions can help ensure that the state preserves the right mix of lands to achieve its 30×30 objectives. For example, more than 30 percent of certain biomes, like desert

shrublands, are already conserved in California, while other biomes, like grassland habitat, are underrepresented among already-conserved land. As 30×30 implementation continues, California can use this data to make sure it's conserving the lands and coastal waters most valuable for protecting biodiversity in climate-smart ways.

The same principles can apply to a global 30×30 target. Currently, about 17 percent of the planet's land and 8 percent of its oceans are protected, according to the New York Times. Tracking both existing and newly conserved efforts can help jurisdictions tailor their approaches to conservation in ways that maximize biodiversity.

- **Ongoing maintenance is important, too.** Both the California and COP15 30×30 commitments are framed as objectives to conserve a certain amount of land and water by 2030, but the biodiversity benefits of all of this conservation will only be unlocked if these areas are protected well into the future. California's 30×30 plan bakes the idea of long-term protection into its designation of conserved lands: Only "durably protected and managed" lands make progress toward the 30×30 target. But the need for reliable maintenance funding was a constant theme in our research and conversations with experts.

While it is relatively easy to source funds to acquire lands, or uplift them on a one-time basis, acquiring funding for ongoing maintenance is difficult. Without maintenance funds, conserved lands become degraded lands. The need for steady maintenance funding is a problem without an easy solution. While there are some strategies to ameliorate funding needs—for example, supporting the use of regenerative practices that ultimately reduce the amount of ongoing maintenance required in an area—continued efforts to secure maintenance funding will be necessary if the conservation gains envisioned by 30×30 are to endure in future decades.

With only 7 years left until 2030, this is a critical time to preserve biodiversity and combat climate change. 30×30 is a unique opportunity with global support, and California is leading the way in implementing a formal plan to achieve 30×30 targets. As California pushes ahead, lessons learned from its example can be valuable across jurisdictions.

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