NON-STATE RANGERS: IDENTIFYING AND SUPPORTING THE DIVERSE SET OF PEOPLE THAT FULFIL RANGER FUNCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Rangers are widely recognised as essential actors in conserving biodiversity, cultural heritage and the rights and well-being of present and future generations. Yet global ranger discourse and policy frameworks have largely focused on state-employed personnel operating within formally designated protected areas. Across Indigenous territories, community conserved areas, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), privately protected areas, etc., many individuals and groups perform comparable functions but remain poorly recognised and supported.

Building on the International Ranger Federation's definition of rangers, we introduce the concept of 'non-state rangers': individuals or groups who fulfil ranger functions but are not primarily employed or mandated by state authorities or subnational governments. We note that non-state rangers would include Indigenous rangers working for sovereign governments such as federally-recognised tribes in the United States.

Drawing on typologies and examples, the paper analyses relationships between state and non-state rangers and examines associated responsibilities, risks and opportunities. It proposes practical approaches to identifying, engaging with and supporting non-state rangers and offers recommendations for ranger associations, conservation organisations and governments to strengthen inclusive and effective conservation governance.

Keywords: rangers, environmental defenders, ICCAs, PPAs, OECMs

INTRODUCTION

Rangers are recognised as critical actors in conservation, safeguarding biodiversity, ecosystem services, cultural heritage and the rights and well-being of present and future generations in and beyond protected and conserved areas (PCAs; Stolton et al., 2023). The International Ranger Federation (IRF), together with regional ranger associations and initiatives such as the Universal Ranger Support Alliance (URSA), play a central role in advancing recognition of rangers, improving professional standards and advocating for better working conditions (Singh et al., 2021).

The IRF defines rangers as individuals or groups who play a critical role in conservation, within state, regional, communal, Indigenous or privately protected areas, to safeguard biodiversity, ecosystem services and cultural heritage and protect the rights and well-being of present and future generations (IRF, 2025). However, in practice, most policies, institutional frameworks and support mechanisms remain oriented towards state-based rangers operating in formally designated protected areas. Ranger surveys are also dominated by government rangers (Appleton et al., 2022; Parker, Hoffman et al., 2022). A significant set of actors who fulfil ranger functions outside state institutions remains under-recognised and under-supported.

Global conservation governance is undergoing profound changes. The Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) recognition of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), the expansion of privately protected areas (PPAs), and the increasing visibility of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and Indigenous and

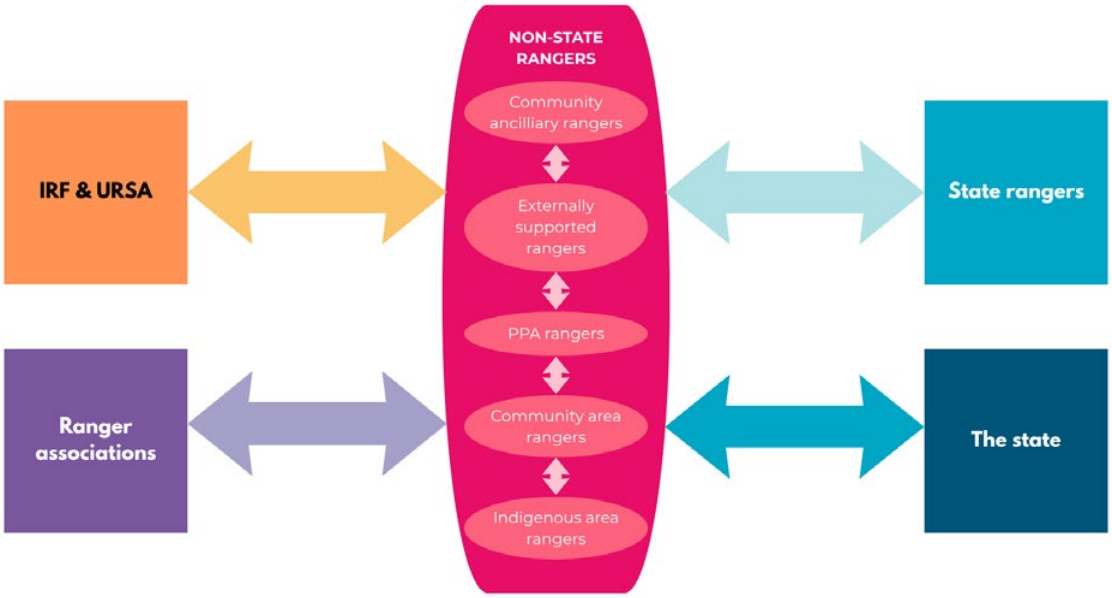

Figure 1. Relationships analysed in this study (see definitions in typology below)

Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) have broadened the range of governance arrangements (IUCN, 2019).

Within these contexts, many individuals and groups undertake responsibilities that resemble those of rangers, including monitoring, upholding customary and legal norms, managing resources, mediating conflicts, supporting visitors and responding to threats.

This paper, based on a literature review and discussions with ranger associations and some rangers, coins the new term 'non-state rangers' (NSRs) and proposes the concept of NSRs to better understand and engage with diverse actors. Building on the IRF definition of rangers, NSRs are defined as "individuals or groups who fulfil ranger functions but are not primarily employed or mandated by state authorities". They operate within Indigenous, community, private or civil society governance systems and undertake responsibilities for safeguarding nature, cultural heritage and territorial integrity. This definition does not replace existing categories such as Indigenous rangers or community wardens, but provides a typology highlighting shared functions, challenges and opportunities. A more complete investigation is now needed to collect feedback from NSRs in the field.

Recognising NSRs raises important questions about relationships between different actors in conservation. State rangers increasingly operate in landscapes where conservation outcomes depend on collaborating with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, private actors and civil society. Ranger associations are becoming more inclusive, yet mechanisms for engaging with NSRs remain limited. Similarly, NSRs may seek recognition or support while prioritising autonomy, customary governance and self-determination. Understanding these dynamics is essential for clarifying responsibilities, managing risks and designing appropriate support mechanisms.

Several types of relationships warrant closer examination (Figure 1). First, interactions between state and NSRs may vary from cooperation to conflict, shaped by legal frameworks, power dynamics and history. Yet research shows that collaboration between Indigenous and state actors can enhance social capital, legitimacy and conservation outcomes (Zhang et al., 2024).

Second, ranger associations face questions about representation, membership and legitimacy when engaging with actors who do not fit the state ranger model. Hybrid models that include different forms of membership and representation can balance inclusivity with respect for autonomy and local governance (Singh et al., 2024).

Third, relationships among different types of NSRs may create opportunities for learning, coordination and mutual support, but also raise issues of equity and accountability.

This paper addresses key questions: (1) How can NSRs be identified in ways that respect diverse identities and governance systems? (2) What tools and approaches are available to engage with them ethically, equitably and effectively? (3) How can conservation organisations, ranger associations and state institutions support NSRs without undermining their autonomy or customary governance? (4) What responsibilities and risks arise when state rangers operate beyond formal protected

Non-state Ranger in a private reserve in Belize talking with visitors © Equilibrium Research

areas or collaborate with non-state actors? (5) How do these dynamics vary across regions and governance contexts? (6) How can lessons from NSRs inform broader ranger practice and conservation policy?

Answers to these questions can contribute to a more inclusive understanding of rangers and provide guidance for identifying, engaging with and supporting NSRs.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Identifying non-state rangers within evolving conservation governance

According to the IRF, the term 'ranger' applies to any person regardless of title, including but not limited to wildlife warden, forest guard, forester, scout, watcher, game scout, marine ranger and park guard, who works in conservation and is responsible for safeguarding nature, biodiversity, landscapes and habitats, as well as cultural and historical heritage.

PPAs play an increasing role in conservation (Mitchell et al., 2018) and require capacity that mirrors state rangers. Similarly, many OECMs depend on teams to undertake surveillance, monitoring and community liaison. Establishing or strengthening these is key to sustained biodiversity outcomes (Jonas et al., 2024).

There is recognition in the literature that rangers' social and professional positions overlap in complex ways. Many are community or Indigenous members who maintain local roles and relationships alongside their ranger duties, presenting both opportunities and challenges in their work (Moreto et al., 2023; Parker, Singh et al., 2022; Stolton et al., 2024). Yet many individuals perform ranger duties without formal employment, and the implications of this remain underexplored. Global estimates of rangers in protected areas often include NSRs where organisations track workforce numbers, yet they almost certainly underestimate those in informal or ad hoc roles (Appleton et al., 2022). Despite their prevalence, NSRs remain only weakly integrated into formal ranger frameworks and professional networks (Mitchell et al., 2018; ICCA Consortium, 2025).

This gap reflects a broader structural bias towards state-centric models of governance and management. Local residents performing ranger duties in state protected areas often operate in a grey zone: while effectively state-mandated, they frequently lack the legal authority, protections and employment benefits afforded to state rangers. They are therefore included within the typology of NSRs used here (Table 1).

Relationships between the government and non-state rangers

As shown in Table 1, the spectrum of NSRs runs from formal embedding within state management systems to operating in parallel to state systems, to existing outside state authority. NSRs can enhance the effectiveness of state conservation actions by increasing workforces and contributing local ecological, social and cultural understanding.

Yet community rangers may be marginalised by state authorities, subject to inferior employment and working conditions and excluded from leadership. NSRs in Indigenous and community managed areas may distrust state authorities and be unwilling to cooperate, particularly where the state is perceived as undermining local rights (Verweijen et al., 2021). At the same time, community rangers may rely on state law enforcement and judicial authorities to address major threats (Franco et al., 2025; Sharkey et al., 2024).

Locally-recruited rangers often occupy ambiguous intermediary roles between conservation authorities and their communities, facing unequal power relations, limited influence over decision-making, and perceptions

Table 1. A tentative typology of non-state rangers

NSR category and definition (in decreasing level of formal state oversight)	Typical employment status	Typical roles and mandate	Specific issues	Example
A. Community ancillary ranger: a community member engaged by a state PA to support state rangers	A local resident performing ranger duties in a state-protected area on a voluntary, part-time or casual basis. While work is state-mandated, they do not have the employment status or benefits granted to state rangers (IIED & IUCN SULI, 2022).	Roles include monitoring, tracking, guiding, driving, maintenance, etc., plus an important role in liaison with communities, reducing conflict and helping de-escalate volatile situations.	Local knowledge adds to the effectiveness of state rangers. They may be discriminated against by full-time rangers and employers (for example, regarding training). There may be conflicts and conflicts of interest with the communities to which they belong.	Community patrol teams funded and supported by international NGOs but operating under state mandate on an ad-hoc basis.
B. Externally supported ranger: an externally employed and supported ranger operating inside a state PA	Two types are usually directly contracted by a supporting NGO or agency: i) Supplementary – supporting state rangers, working alongside them or with distinct duties and responsibilities. ii) Substitutional – entirely replacing state ranger forces and assuming a parastatal role. These usually include community members (often in non-leadership roles) and may operate under different working conditions to state rangers.	Conducting a wide range of duties for a project or partner of the site managing agency. Sometimes has a law enforcement mandate. May rely on accompanying state rangers or police for formal law enforcement. Type ii normally assumes all aspects or management of the PA.	Can significantly improve the effectiveness of PA operations and build capacity of state rangers. Type ii may be considered the only option where state managed protected areas (PAs) have failed. Lines of accountability and responsibility may be unclear, increasing the risk of misconduct. Different employment conditions may cause tensions with state rangers. State authorities may assume permanence of these teams, leading to underinvestment in state rangers. Externally supported rangers may assume permanence of their role, leading to problems when employment ends.	Type i) Many rangers funded by NGOs fall into this category. Many protected areas in Indonesia are supported by supplementary rangers (e.g. Rhino Protected Units supported by the Indonesia Rhino Foundation (YABI) in Ujung Kulon National Park (Talukdar et al., 2020). Type ii) Rangers employed by African Parks across 22 countries.

of being enforcers of external agendas (Parker, Singh et al., 2022). Rigid legal mandates, liability concerns, and professional hierarchies can reinforce inequalities. These factors can expose individuals and their families to ostracism, threats and violence (Dutta, 2020; Poppe, 2012).

Where externally supported NSRs operate as parastatal rangers, systems of leadership, accountability and oversight vis-à-vis both employers and the state may be unclear, increasing the risk of conflicting management decisions and of misconduct.

Relationships between state rangers and non-state rangers

Coordination between state and NSR can range from co-management and partnership to conflict and exclusion. For instance, co-management on the Qinghai–Tibet Plateau has enhanced social recognition, mutual learning and legitimacy between Indigenous rangers and state institutions, contributing to improved conservation (Zhang et al., 2024). Kenya Wildlife Service rangers collaborate with rangers from Kenyan conservancies

Table 1. A tentative typology of non-state rangers cont.

NSR category and definition (in decreasing level of formal state oversight)	Typical employment status	Typical roles and mandate	Specific issues	Example
C. PPA ranger: working in conservation areas under private ownership or management	Two types usually employed by managing entities: i) NGO-employed rangers – protecting areas managed by the NGO. ii) Private sector-employed rangers – protecting areas managed by companies. Employed under terms and conditions of employer, usually in line with national employment regulations.	Wide range of roles from tourism rangers on private wildlife reserves to enforcement rangers on private game reserves. They may be subject to state regulation, oversight and inspection (e.g. South Africa Game Reserves). They may rely on state rangers or police for formal law enforcement. Work may be coordinated with national or local government rangers.	Potential lack of accountability for national laws and regulations. Continued deployment is dependent on the financial status of the employer. PPAs constitute a minimum of 6.5% of all PAs recorded globally (Lewis et al., 2023), indicating that private-sector rangers form a significant component of the workforce. However, there is limited information available on this area.	Type i) UK charities such as the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust and the RSPB employ staff to support reserve management. Type ii) Rangers employed in private game reserves in South Africa often have full law enforcement powers.
D. Community area ranger: a local community member who works as a ranger	A local community member responsible for managing and conserving a PCA under community governance. Often voluntary. Ranger work may be integrated into main occupation (e.g. in managed use areas). They may operate in informal or formal ways (under guidance of state authorities). They may be considered 'environmental defenders'.	A variety of roles depending on the area's goals. These may include patrols, monitoring, wildlife management and use regulation. They are unlikely to have law enforcement rights unless specifically deputised. They may be mandated to enforce community-agreed regulations and their work may be coordinated with law enforcement authorities.	They can provide effective, informed management but often have limited capacity to respond to major violations. They are reliant on authorities for support in law enforcement, yet may not be recognised by state authorities and may dislike or distrust these authorities. They are vulnerable to threats and violence and may not use the national language. They may not be linked into, be aware of, or see the relevance of ranger networks, tools and standards.	Community Wildlife Ambassadors in South Sudan manage community conserved areas. Community Surveillance and Monitoring Teams (CSMT) in India undertake systematic wildlife surveillance and stewardship in landscapes beyond formal PAs.

(KWCA, 2018). In South Sudan, joint patrols and training between Wildlife Service rangers and Community Wildlife Ambassadors have increased community participation and reduced conflict between state rangers and communities (Fauna & Flora, 2024).

Conversely, conflicts arise where state ranger enforcement clashes with customary governance, or where Indigenous territorial defenders face criminalisation (Global Witness, 2021). When state rangers operate alongside NSRs, questions of legal authority, accountability and personal safety arise. Conservation NGOs report effective collaboration where joint training on standard operating procedures and Codes of Conduct clarifies roles, jurisdictions and limits on enforcement powers. Fauna & Flora has applied this approach in South Sudan, Mozambique and Liberia (Fauna & Flora, 2024).

There is clear scope for consolidation. IRF could play a mediating role by developing ethical guidance, risk frameworks and operational protocols to support collaboration across governance systems.

Table 1. A tentative typology of non-state rangers cont.

NSR category and definition (in decreasing level of formal state oversight)	Typical employment status	Typical roles and mandate	Specific issues	Example
E. Indigenous area ranger: an Indigenous Person who works as a ranger	A person belonging to an Indigenous community who manages and conserves their traditional territory, exercising customary governance, ecological stewardship, and culturally informed conservation on behalf of their community. Not usually employed in a conventional sense. Ranger work may be integrated into main occupations and lifestyles. Individuals and teams may be assigned ranger equivalent duties by their community and may be compensated in various ways. They may be considered 'environmental defenders'.	They are unlikely to have law enforcement rights unless specifically deputised. They may be mandated to enforce community-agreed local regulations and their work may be coordinated with local state rangers. They may be able to call on state authorities when needed. Some Indigenous groups have organised their own ranger forces that are trained to operate in similar ways to state rangers.	They can provide highly effective, locally based and culturally appropriate management. They often have limited resources and capacity to respond to major violations. They are reliant on authorities for support in law enforcement, yet may not be recognised by state authorities and may dislike or distrust these authorities. They may not recognise state governance over the territory and conflicts may arise where Indigenous territories overlap state PAs. They are vulnerable to threats and violence, may not use the national language and may operate in ways not understood by the mainstream conservation sector. They may not be linked into, be aware of, or see the relevance of ranger networks, tools and standards.	Australia's Indigenous Rangers Program assists First Nations people in managing Country according to Traditional Owners' objectives (National Indigenous Australians Agency, n.d.).

Relationships among non-state rangers

Coordination among different types of NSRs remains limited but presents significant opportunities. Networks linking Indigenous rangers, community wardens and private conservation actors could support shared standards, exchange of good practice and mutual support, particularly where state engagement is weak or contested.

However, differences in governance structures, power relations and priorities pose challenges. Global guidance emphasises the need for governance systems that enable collaboration while respecting autonomy and rights (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013). IRF, URSA and ranger associations could support such polycentric networks by acting as conveners.

Bangangai Game Reserve Ranger Post Commander Captain Michael Luciano with Community Wildlife Ambassador Sorophina Nauruyo on bio-monitoring patrol © Justin Purefoy / Fauna & Flora

Bangangai Game Reserve bio-monitoring patrol in South Sudan
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Relationship between environmental defenders and NSRs

The UN defines environmental human rights defenders as "individuals and groups who, in their personal or professional capacity and in a peaceful manner, strive to protect and promote human rights relating to the environment, including water, air, land, flora and fauna" (UNGA, 2016). Based on this definition, working as a ranger should not automatically exclude individuals from being recognised as defenders contrary to suggestions by Verweijen et al. (2021).

Many NSRs, particularly Indigenous or community area rangers, are likely to fall within this definition. For other NSRs the situation is more complex, if for instance they are engaged in enforcement activities. Large numbers of NSRs are embedded in communities and actively promote environmental and social justice. NSRs and state rangers alike may, in their private capacity, engage in community activism and advocacy, and may require support in navigating conflicts of interest and personal risk arising from these dual roles.

Relationships between professional bodies and non-state rangers

Understanding how professional ranger bodies engage with NSRs is key to questions of their legitimacy, representation and inclusion within the global ranger workforce. The International Ranger Federation (IRF) has made progress in broadening the conceptual definition of rangers. However, beyond volunteer rangers in state protected areas, operational identification of NSRs remains challenging. Tools developed for identifying OECMs and ICCAs could be layered with established ranger competency frameworks (Appleton, 2016; IRF & URSA, 2023a) to help map NSRs within diverse governance systems. Inclusion of NSRs in ranger discourse, frameworks and support networks could strengthen legitimacy, recruitment, retention and morale (Moreto et al., 2021).

Indeed, global ranger support tools, such as the IRF's Rangers for 30x30 Framework, were designed for state-employed rangers but are increasingly applied in non-state contexts. For example, the IRF Code of Conduct has been developed with Community Wildlife Ambassadors in South Sudan. Extending such tools requires adaptation to diverse governance systems and sensitivity to differences in resources, mandates and strengths.

Recognition mechanisms are evolving. The IUCN WCPA International Ranger Awards explicitly recognise community, private and Indigenous rangers. Since 2021, while most recipients have been state-employed (29 individuals and teams), 13 non-state individuals and teams have been recognised, reflecting progress but continued imbalance (IUCN, n.d.).

Research on Indigenous and community governance emphasises co-design, respect for customary institutions and rights recognition as prerequisites for engagement (Dawson et al., 2021). The CSMT model in India illustrates this approach: support focuses on capacity-building, safety, documentation and information-sharing rather than extending enforcement authority, thereby reducing conflict and avoiding interference with customary governance.

Indigenous and community governance systems often generate innovative conservation practices and strong local stewardship (Charles, 2021; Esmail et al., 2023; Reyes-García, 2023). Privately protected area rangers may contribute technical expertise and resources (Stolton et al., 2024), while OECM ranger teams – often

Non-state Ranger in the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge in Armenia © Equilibrium Research

drawn from existing land management roles such as forestry – bring distinct skills and stakeholder engagement experience. Supporting polycentric networks and cross-learning among these groups could enhance conservation outcomes.

At the national level, ranger associations have traditionally represented state-employed rangers. Including NSRs raises questions of membership, legitimacy and accountability. While association membership may provide access to advocacy, professional networks and welfare support, it may also risk imposing external norms or undermining customary governance. Hybrid models that combine different forms of membership and representation for formal associations and community-based networks may offer a balanced approach (Singh et al., 2024).

The desirability of association-based representation varies regionally. In areas with strong Indigenous governance traditions, such as parts of Latin America and the Pacific, NSRs may prioritise territorial autonomy over professional identity. In regions with expanding private conservation sectors, including parts of Europe and Africa, private-sector rangers may seek integration into professional associations. These differences underscore the need for context-specific rather than universal models.

DISCUSSION

Towards an inclusive framework for rangers

While the IRF definition accommodates diverse actors, there is a structural disconnect between the expanding diversity of rangers and the institutional frameworks supporting them. Recognising NSRs requires both a refined typology, as proposed here, and a functional approach to identification based on roles, responsibilities, risks and governance rather than employer or legal status.

This discussion intersects with debates on environmental human rights defenders. Many NSRs, particularly Indigenous and community rangers, operate at the interface of conservation, land rights and social justice. Ranger and defender identities are not mutually exclusive, and exclusion based on occupational labels risks misrepresenting lived realities (Global Witness, 2021; Verweijen et al., 2021).

Ultimately, recognising and supporting NSRs is not merely a technical or institutional challenge but a transformative opportunity. By highlighting the diverse actors who safeguard nature, conservation governance can become more inclusive, equitable and

Non-state Ranger, Samburu District, Kenya © Jack Hewson

effective. NSRs embody forms of stewardship that offer alternative pathways to conservation. Integrating their knowledge, practices and governance systems into ranger discourse has the potential to reshape the architecture of conservation governance.

Power, legitimacy and ethics in engaging non-state rangers

Engagement with NSRs is inherently political. Indigenous and community actors often operate within contexts of marginalisation and dispossession. Formal recognition by state or international institutions can bring benefits but also risks, including increased surveillance or loss of autonomy. In line with a rights based approach, NSRs should not merely be incorporated into existing structures but engaged as partners with distinct rights and knowledge systems. Ranger associations face a choice: to remain professional bodies for employed rangers or become inclusive platforms representing diverse conservation actors, who may not self-identify as rangers but fulfil ranger equivalent roles. The analysis suggests that a hybrid model is ideal, combining formal professional representation with flexible mechanisms for engaging NSRs. IRF is well positioned to facilitate this by developing global guidance, adapting training and promoting ethical standards.

The deployment of NSRs alongside or in the place of state rangers presents several challenges, in terms of mandates, legality, oversight and accountability. To avoid risks to communities, individuals and employers, these arrangements should be unambiguous and transparent to all, including the rangers themselves.

Risk, responsibility and accountability

The interaction between state and NSRs raises complex questions of responsibility and risk. State rangers may be legally accountable for actions taken beyond formal protected areas, while NSRs often operate without legal protection. Collaborative frameworks must address liability, safety and accountability. Joint protocols for collaboration, risk assessment and conflict resolution could mitigate these risks. Such protocols need to be context-specific but guided by shared principles of equity, transparency and mutual respect.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework will not only rely on increasing state-governed PAs, but also a substantial increase in

non-state conservation areas and a subsequent increase in the NSR workforce. NSRs constitute a significant, under-recognised component of global conservation. Across PCAs, diverse actors perform functions that closely align with the IRF's definition of rangers. NSRs are not peripheral actors but central contributors to conservation, which increasingly depends on plural governance systems and locally embedded stewardship. Non-state actors are key in generating social capital, legitimacy and adaptive governance.

NSRs often operate without formal mandates, legal protection or access to professional networks. This creates uncertainty regarding responsibilities, legitimacy, accountability and safety, and reflects deeper tensions between state-centric conservation models and pluralistic governance arrangements.

The concept of NSRs provides a useful analytical and operational lens. However, NSRs are not a homogenous group; they range from parastatal agents to groups operating independently of (and sometimes in opposition to) state systems, and their role overlaps with that of environmental defenders.

Ultimately, recognising NSRs is not merely a technical exercise but a political and ethical imperative. It requires rethinking who is considered a legitimate conservation actor and how power, knowledge and responsibility are distributed across governance systems. It is about reshaping institutional architectures, professional identities and values. By engaging with, learning from and supporting NSRs, conservation institutions can enhance effectiveness, equity and resilience. Conversely, failure to do so risks perpetuating structural inequities and undermining the legitimacy of conservation efforts.

Based on the above conclusions, we propose the following recommendations:

a. Adopt a functional approach to ranger recognition – 2026–2028
International ranger associations should operationalise ranger identification based on functions, responsibilities, risks and governance context rather than employment status or formal titles, and reflect this in their metadata collection. Adopting the definition of NSRs should have direct implications on the formal and voluntary recognition of the ranger profession by international bodies such as the ILO and IUCN (see IUCN Member's Assembly Motion 102, 2025).

b. Develop guidance on the roles and functions of NSRs and their relationship to state rangers and institutions – 2027–2029
This should be co-developed with relevant NSRs and groups, and should include
- Guidance for employers and supporters on the benefits and risks associated with NSRs and on recommendations to address these;
- Clear, context-sensitive guidance on collaboration between state rangers and NSRs, addressing authority, liability, safety, accountability and information-sharing, grounded in rights-based approaches, including free, prior and informed consent. Joint training on codes of conduct and standard operating procedures represents a practical entry point.

c. Adapt global ranger tools for NSRs – 2027–2030
Existing ranger tools and standards and capacity development materials should be reviewed and adapted for NSRs. Case-based learning should inform this process, ensuring sensitivity to legal pluralism, customary governance and resource constraints. Using these standards, NSRs should be held to similar levels of standards and competencies as their state counterparts.

d. Support inclusive and hybrid models of representation – 2027–2035
Ranger associations should explore hybrid engagement models that combine formal professional representation with flexible mechanisms for engaging and representing NSRs, without undermining autonomy or customary institutions. IRF could play a convening role.

e. Recognise overlap with environmental defender roles – 2027–2032
Policies should avoid assuming that ranger status excludes recognition as environmental human rights defenders or vice versa. Social safeguards, risk mitigation and advocacy mechanisms should consider NSRs operating at the intersection of conservation, land rights and social justice.

f. Address research gaps – 2027–2032
Despite growing recognition of governance diversity, empirical research on NSRs remains limited. Priority areas include:
(i) systematic mapping of NSR roles, numbers and governance contexts;
(ii) comparative analysis of collaboration models between state- and NSR;
(iii) assessment of risks, legal vulnerabilities and support needs;
(iv) evaluation of representation and legitimacy within ranger associations;
(v) documentation of ranger-specific learning emerging from NSRs.

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RÉSUMÉ

Les gardes forestiers sont largement reconnus comme des acteurs essentiels de la conservation de la biodiversité, du patrimoine culturel, ainsi que des droits et du bien-être des générations actuelles et futures. Pourtant, le discours mondial sur les gardes forestiers et les cadres politiques se sont principalement concentrés sur le personnel employé par l'État et intervenant au sein d'aires protégées officiellement désignées. Sur les territoires autochtones, dans les zones de conservation communautaire, dans le cadre d'autres mesures de conservation efficaces par zone (OECM), dans les aires protégées privées, etc., de nombreux individus et groupes remplissent des fonctions comparables, mais restent peu reconnus et peu soutenus.

En nous appuyant sur la définition des gardes forestiers donnée par la Fédération internationale des gardes forestiers, nous introduisons le concept de gardes forestiers non étatiques : des individus ou des groupes qui remplissent des fonctions de gardes forestiers mais ne sont pas principalement employés ou mandatés par les autorités étatiques ou les gouvernements infranationaux. Il convient de noter que les gardes forestiers non étatiques incluent les gardes forestiers autochtones travaillant pour des gouvernements souverains, tels que les tribus reconnues au niveau fédéral aux États-Unis.

S'appuyant sur des typologies et des exemples, cet article analyse les relations entre les gardes forestiers étatiques et non étatiques et examine les responsabilités, les risques et les opportunités qui y sont associés. Il propose des approches pratiques pour identifier, impliquer et soutenir les gardes forestiers non étatiques et formule des recommandations à l'intention des associations de gardes forestiers, des organisations de conservation et des gouvernements afin de renforcer une gouvernance de la conservation inclusive et efficace.

RESUMEN

Los guardabosques son ampliamente reconocidos como actores esenciales en la conservación de la biodiversidad, el patrimonio cultural y los derechos y el bienestar de las generaciones presentes y futuras. Sin embargo, el discurso global sobre los guardabosques y los marcos normativos se han centrado en gran medida en el personal contratado por el Estado que opera dentro de áreas protegidas designadas oficialmente. En los territorios indígenas, las áreas conservadas por la comunidad, otras medidas de conservación eficaces basadas en el área (OECM), las áreas protegidas de titularidad privada, etc., muchas personas y grupos desempeñan funciones comparables, pero siguen sin recibir el reconocimiento ni el apoyo que merecen.

Partiendo de la definición de guardabosques de la Federación Internacional de Guardabosques, introducimos el concepto de guardabosques no estatales: personas o grupos que desempeñan funciones de guardabosques, pero que no están empleados ni reciben su mandato principalmente de las autoridades estatales o los gobiernos subnacionales. Cabe señalar que los guardabosques no estatales incluirían a los guardabosques indígenas que trabajan para gobiernos soberanos, como las tribus reconocidas a nivel federal en los Estados Unidos.

A partir de tipologías y ejemplos, el documento analiza las relaciones entre los guardabosques estatales y no estatales y examina las responsabilidades, los riesgos y las oportunidades asociados. Propone enfoques prácticos para identificar, colaborar con y apoyar a los guardabosques no estatales, y ofrece recomendaciones a las asociaciones de guardabosques, las organizaciones de conservación y los gobiernos para fortalecer una gobernanza de la conservación inclusiva y eficaz.