



media release

International Mountain Day, 11 December 2023 and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

Mountains make up 27 percent of the earth's landscape and host almost half of the world's biodiversity. According to the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), up to 84 percent of endemic mountain species are at risk of extinction, while populations of a range of other montane plant and animal species are projected to decline and face extinction.

December 11 is International Mountain Day. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) proclaimed it as such when the year 2002 was declared as the UN International Year of Mountains. The aim of this International Day is to create awareness about the importance of mountains to life, and to highlight opportunities and threats surrounding mountain sustainability. It is also a time for developing partnerships that will bring positive changes for the world's highlands and mountain areas. International Mountain Day has its origins in the adoption of Chapter 13 of Agenda 21, 'Managing fragile Ecosystems; Sustainable Mountain Development', at the UN Conference on Environment and Development.

The theme for International Mountain Day 2023: Is 'Restoring Mountain Ecosystems', inspired by the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, a collaborative effort of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The FAO coordinates annual celebrations for the day and is mandated to lead observation of it globally. The decade is an opportunity to amass political support, scientific research and financial resources to adequately create restoration plans and implement measures to combat further degradation of mountain ecosystems.

Eco-services of mountains and the stressors that threaten them: Mountains are the water towers of the world, supplying freshwater for a vast majority of species. They play other essential roles in nature such as soil maintenance and conservation, and climate regulation. Mountain ecosystems and those around the mountains are threatened by the effects of climate change and unsustainable development practices. Increasing heat conditions affect downstream water flow and force mountain species to migrate. Development in the form of agriculture and building mean clearing of vegetation and making slopes steep which results in erosion and loss of topsoil which in turn affects stream water quality.

Regulations and operational procedures for protection of mountain areas: The 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference developed an agreement which pledges to protect 30 percent of the earth's lands, oceans, coastal areas and inland waters by 2030. This included an impetus to restore and protect mountain landscapes. In addition, the UNGA declared 2023-2027 as the 'Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions' for its sustainable mountain development resolution. The objective of these years is to raise funds for education on mountain area protection and create new digital technologies for conservation, as well as channels for tapping into the green economy. These innovations will help increase the resilience of mountain ecosystems and enhance their ability to adapt to changes and threats.

Breathtaking mountain ranges of South Africa (SA) that are worth a visit: SA has remarkable geology as well as breath-taking elevations and landscapes. Table Mountain in Cape Town is arguably the most well-known, earning its name from its level plateau running up to 3 kilometres from side to side. Its peaks and valleys make up the Table Mountain National Park where visitors can hike, bike, enjoy cable car rides and paragliding throughout the year, including during the December holidays. Upon reaching the top, fantastic views of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans can be seen.

The Cederberg Range in the Western Cape and the Baviaanskloof Wilderness in the Eastern Cape are also excellent tourist attractions. At these ranges, visitors can do hiking, biking, fishing, rock climbing and bird watching.

There is also the Magaliesberg Mountain Range extending across the Gauteng and North West Province. It forms a ridge between the highveld grassland and the bushveld, and is perfect for leisurely outings for weekends and holidays if you live in Gauteng or North West.

The Blouberg meaning 'blue mountain' in Afrikaans, located in Limpopo, holds decades of history of the local Batswana communities that live in and around the area. It was declared a Biosphere Reserve by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2009.

The KwaZulu-Natal Ukhahlamba-Drakensburg Mountain range contains more holiday destinations. It is a World Heritage Site and is the highest mountain range in SA, at approximately 3000 metres spanning across 150 kilometres. It has the most beautiful rock formations, flora and fauna, which include endemic species such as the Drakensberg dwarf chameleon and the Transvaal flat lizard.

Visit the mountain tile on the STEMulator to learn more about the way that water runoff and glaciers shape the landscape around them. STEMulator.org is an exciting interactive learning platform and project of the NSTF proSET membership sector. Visit it virtually these holidays, at no cost!

About the NSTF (National Science and Technology Forum): NSTF is an independent non-profit stakeholder body and network – a civil-society forum of organisations involved in science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation in SA.

Note: Work related to this theme can be nominated for the prestigious [NSTF-South32 Awards](#) for outstanding contributions to SET and innovation in SA. Register your [nomination](#) online by Thursday, 14 December.

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References/Sources:

<https://www.fao.org/international-mountain-day/theme/en/>

<https://www.internationaldays.org/december/international-mountain-da>

About the NSTF

The National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF), established in 1995:

- is a broadly-representative stakeholder body for all science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation organisations in South Africa
- gathers stakeholders around burning issues of national and global interest, across the public and private sectors, including matters of public policy
- includes a network of professional societies in SET and STEM education (STEM = science, technology, engineering and mathematics) - the NSTF proSET membership sector.
- recognises, awards and profiles the outstanding contributions of individuals and groups to SET and innovation through the prestigious NSTF Awards
- runs and supports collaborative projects and youth outreach, including recognition of top performance in mathematics and science, role modelling, bursary and STEM career information
- runs and supports the STEMulator.org which attracts youth and educators to Explore>Discover>Learn the world of STEM including careers. (Established by NSTF proSET)

For more information

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