

Combating Desertification

Table of Contents

- Overview2**
- Issues.....2**
- Initiatives.....3**
 - National Strategy to Combat Desertification 2014-2021 3
 - National Environmental Education & Awareness Strategy 2015-2021..... 3
 - UAE National Climate Change Plan 4
 - Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve 4
 - Youth Participation..... 5
 - Creation of Reserves..... 5
- Ecotourism.....6**
- Impact6**
- Conclusion7**

Overview

Protecting, restoring and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, managing forests sustainably, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation and biodiversity loss are the primary goals for [Sustainable Goal 15](#) (SDG) set by the United Nations.

Desertification, land degradation and drought are great threats to the economic and social development of a country and good land management is significant for progress. Desertification includes land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities. [Desertification affects as much as one-sixth of the world's population](#), seventy percent of all drylands, and one-quarter of the total land area of the world.

The UAE, with its ever-expanding urban landscape, is mindful of the potential harm to its biodiversity and environment.

Issues

Desertification is a term that is often used with reference to land degradation in dry areas leading to a change in the state of land. Land degradation in parts of UAE is driven by a number of natural and anthropogenic factors, including wind erosion, salinisation, waterlogging, vegetation loss, expansion of built-up areas, excavation and landfilling.

There has been a constant increasing pressure on natural resources with the fast pace of urbanization and encroachment on arable land. With an increase in population and food consumption systems, land degradation and desertification are becoming rampant.

[80% of the area of UAE](#) is desert, especially the western area. With no natural primary forests, UAE has taken efforts to establish a forest through [planting and/or deliberate seeding](#).

Initiatives

National Strategy to Combat Desertification 2014-2021

The U.A.E committed itself to protect the natural environment using preventive measures such as reducing carbon emissions and imposing regulatory measures to protect the ecosystem.

Among the U.A.E. efforts to [fight against desertification](#) is the focus on using modern techniques and relevant scientific research to protect native plants, encourage biodiversity, and reduce groundwater depletion through the implementation of agricultural policies that enforce efficient water management practices.

National Environmental Education & Awareness Strategy 2015-2021

The [National Environmental Education & Awareness Strategy](#) (NEEAS) 2015-2021 has strategic objectives through which it drives initiatives and programs. The six strategic objectives are:

- Educate youth and increase awareness that helps drive the UAE towards a sustainable future
Encourage incorporation of UAE's environmental priorities into the curriculum of schools so as to create a responsibility towards sustainability in the youth.
- Improve the commitment of the community towards sustainability and environmental protection and create collective responsibility
Engage ambassadors from the community to create awareness among various communities via awareness and outreach programs
- Direct businesses & industries in moving towards environmental sustainability
Reward and recognize businesses that fulfill their corporate social responsibility
- Engage key government stakeholders to support environmental sustainability
Ensure that government entities across all levels act as an example for creating sustainable practices
- Ensure alignment & effectiveness of environmental education and awareness efforts in the UAE

Periodically review and track progress of the strategy keeping it aligned with the target and goals

- Build adequate capabilities in the UAE to enable delivery of NEEAS
Create effective public-private partnerships that fruitfully implement the vision of the strategy.

UAE National Climate Change Plan

The [National Climate Change Plan 2017- 2050](#) was launched to ensure that national policies, strategies and initiatives have integrated climate change measures. It serves as a roadmap to encourage people across the nation to take action for climate mitigation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve

The [Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve](#) is the UAE's first national park. The government of Dubai has recognized the need to preserve the unique desert habitat that is replete with many threatened flora and fauna species within. Careful, consistent and planned rehabilitation over the years has resulted in a protected environment for the desert. This is a unique reserve that has been created for the protection of endangered species and conservation of the natural desert habitat and heritage. The Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve is a member of:

- IUCN, the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#), an organization helping the world find pragmatic solutions to the most pressing environment and development challenges
- UNEP, the [United Nations Environment Programme](#), an organization providing leadership and encouraging partnership that enable nations and people to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

Partnering with Malaga University, Spain, Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi and Zayed University UAE, the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve utilizes their expertise and specialization in the fields of research, training and development, dissemination of knowledge for ensuring their goals are achieved.

Youth Participation

[Youth climate activists](#) are important components of a society that act as catalysts for the initiatives taken to tackle climate change. Masdar Institute of Science and Technology has an outreach initiative called [Young Future Energy Leaders](#) that helps students to engage in an active dialogue about combating climate change and its effects by innovative solutions. They conduct various workshops and campaigns to help create awareness among the general population regarding the effects of climate change.

The [Abu Dhabi Climate Meeting](#) acted as the precursor to the UN Climate Action Summit and encouraged youth to actively participate in a dialogue session that provided a platform for them to voice out their opinions and solutions for climate change issues.

“The UAE has always held its youth in the highest regard, because we believe young people are the greatest change agents and strongest citizen diplomats.”

~ His Excellency Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi
UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment

Creation of Reserves

The [Federal Law no 24 of 1999 for the Protection and Development of Environment](#) ensures protection of the environment and conserves the biodiversity in UAE. It is a framework that encourages and promotes rational use of natural resources to maintain the balance in the ecosystem.

Creating a reserve of native plant species will help preserve them and replant them as and when needed. The [Sharjah Seed Bank and Herbarium](#) focuses on exploring and safeguarding UAE's flora by building herbarium collections and seed collections, research and genetic diversity studies along with DNA barcoding and capacity building for seed banking, seed science and molecular genetic research.

Protected areas are created ensuring the preservation of critical ecosystems in its natural habitat. Terrestrial habitats are protected by creating reserves that control activities leading to endangering species. [Sheikh Zayed Protected Areas Network](#) was one of the major initiatives created in 2018 to honor UAE's commitment for wildlife protection and conservation.

A list of protected areas in UAE can be found [here](#).

Ecotourism

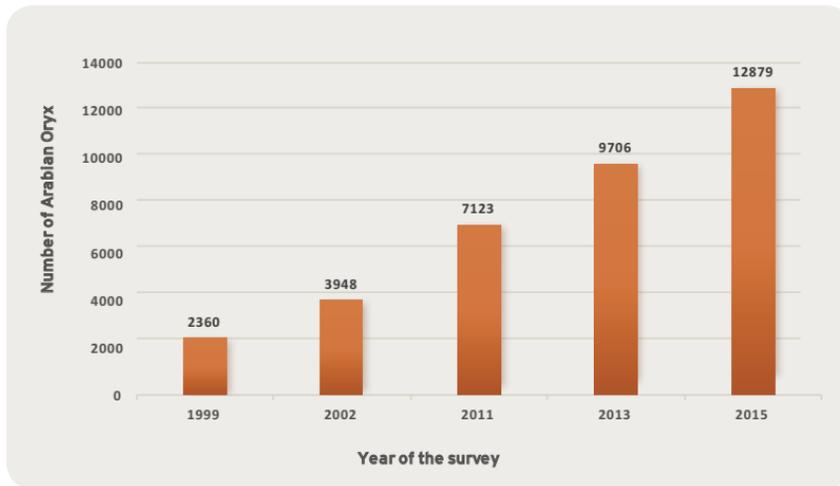
The efforts taken to preserve unique biodiversity that exists in UAE along with flora and fauna has given rise to ecotourism in the region. With [14% of the total area of the country](#) being dedicated to protected areas, UAE provides various options for tourists to visit and explore its rich biodiversity.

An e-book about UAE's natural wonders was launched by the [Ministry of Climate Change and Environment](#) (MOCCA) to promote ecotourism highlighting the unique natural features present across all the 7 emirates in the country.

Impact

One of the major achievements of UAE in combating desertification is the [increase of forest area](#) from 245,000 hectares in 1990 to 322,600 hectares in 2015. Mangroves plantation has also seen a steady increase with an estimated 800 to 1200 hectares of mangroves planted since 1972. Read more about mangroves plantations in UAE [here](#).

Many endangered species such as the Arabian Oryx, Houbara and several other species of animals and birds were bred and reintroduced into their natural habitat to re-populate their kind and protect them from extinction.



Source: [Middle East Arabian Oryx Survey](#)

The creation of eco-reserves such as the [Al Wathba Wetland Reserve, Mangrove National Park](#) encourages and promotes eco-tourism making more and more people aware of the unique habitats existing in the country.

Conclusion

By empowering the future generations with awareness and knowledge about the unique desert habitat that is prevalent in the country, UAE has taken the right steps to ensure that it combats desertification and preserves the natural habitat in a good form leading to a well-balanced ecosystem.