

**Submission of the
Natural Resources Defense Council
to the
Secretariat
of the
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
-“Rio+20 Earth Summit”-
November 1, 2011**

The Natural Resources Defense Council (“NRDC”), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with UN Economic and Social Council, is pleased to submit our views as a contribution for “inclusion in a compilation document to serve as basis for the preparation of zero draft of the outcome document” for the June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio+20 Earth Summit”). Here, we set out our vision for a different kind of summit, provide a list of potential deliverables from Rio+20, and describe NRDC’s international activities and experience with international sustainability summitry.

A Vision for a Different Kind of Summit

The June 2012 Rio+20 Earth Summit will be held “at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government or other representatives.” It will mark the 20th Anniversary of the first “Earth Summit”, held in Rio in 1992. Rio+20’s key objectives are to stimulate a transition to a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and to strengthen global governance. This Summit comes at a critical point in the world’s collective efforts to support “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

In January 2012, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon warned that the world is running out of time to avoid future “disasters” due to our ever growing consumption and pollution. He called for a “**free market revolution for global sustainability**”. We couldn’t agree more, and hope that this Summit will be truly transformative and historic. As world leaders, CEOs, civil society, and citizens gather in Rio next year, the Summit must do more than just deliver another agenda with lofty goals for the distant future. There are already hundreds of existing commitments and pledges in various treaties and plans of action, many of which have failed to be enacted. Instead, Rio+20 should generate real actions on the part of governments at every level, as well as by businesses and civil society groups, to immediately deliver the necessary actions to put us all on a more sustainable path.

Often overlooked is that Earth Summit 2012 itself will be an important milestone in global governance. We hope that the zero document will provide the basis for a discussion of how best to structure the Rio+20 meeting so as to assure its success. The Summit's success is particularly important after the perceived failure of the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit and growing skepticism worldwide about the ability of such international negotiations and gatherings to do anything worthwhile on the huge environmental and economic challenges we face. In the end, the summit process will involve thousands of officials, business and civil society leaders throughout the world and a collective investment of hundreds of millions of dollars. Learning from previous UN gatherings, here is our vision for the Rio+20 Earth Summit to make sure that it produces real results and progress.

Three Days of Recognition and Support for Country Actions

The official high-level Rio+20 meeting now scheduled for June 4-6 must be different than earlier summits. The three-day meeting should put the spotlight on individual and collective actions of presidents and prime ministers to move toward sustainable development. These sessions should:

- Encourage all presidents and prime ministers to use their allotted time for speeches – usually about 5 minutes - to present on the specific sustainable development initiatives, challenges, and needs in their respective countries.
- Create the expectation for new or substantially scaled-up commitments from all countries, which are specific and short-term; and identify partners for technical assistance and coordinating actions.
- Produce a politically-binding outcomes document of not more than ten pages that recognizes the imminent threat of exceeding our planet's natural boundaries, the need to move to a new green economy, and recommits governments to act on their promises to move towards sustainable development, and
- Generate an appendix of country commitments to the outcomes document that provides a foundation for a registry of such commitments at a new global center for sustainability actions.

Four Days of Engagement and Cooperation with Major Stakeholders

The period of four days (May 31-June 3) following the final preparatory meeting and before the official summit provides an unprecedented opportunity to engage sub-national governments, businesses and civil society on an equal footing. These sessions should be coordinated closely and in parallel with the official meeting; they should:

- Invite, regional, provincial, state, and local government officials, CEOs of major corporations, and civil society leaders to give presentations on sustainable development challenges and opportunities in their sectors
- Create the expectation for commitments from all major businesses and governments that are specific and meaningful, and complement or exceed national goals, and
- Produce a listing of major stakeholder commitments and is in parallel with the national registry above and could contribute to the global center.

Proposed Rio+20 Earth Summit Deliverables

A central goal of the 2012 Earth Summit should be to generate specific “deliverables”. Each of these “deliverables” should consist of: (1) specific, short-term commitments by countries, communities, corporations, and civil society groups; (2) commitments to work together where appropriate, including sharing technical assistance and coordinating actions; and (3) provisions for monitoring and reporting to ensure that the commitments are delivered on the ground. The zero draft document should include an initial compilation of such actions which should be developed, agreed to where appropriate by “coalitions of willing”, and launched at Rio+20.

BROAD POLICIES TO SUPPORT A GREEN ECONOMY

Governments, corporations, and civil society should support laws and policies to speed the transition to a **green economy** – defined by UNEP as “low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive” - including:

1. **Replace or supplement GDP** and other traditional economic metrics with broader indicators, such as the UN System of Environmental and Economic Accounting.
2. Actively **phase out environmentally-harmful subsidies**, including fuel subsidies, following the binding commitments already made by G-20 countries.
3. **Remove barriers to trade** in environmental goods and services, as outlined in the WTO’s Doha Development Agenda.
4. **Adopt the mitigation hierarchy** in standard corporate and government operations, so that the environmental impacts of extractive industries and infrastructure activities are: (1) avoided, (2) minimized, or (3) offset by responsible parties.
5. Institute **sustainable procurement standards**, including ones encouraging the use of recycled products and renewable energy.
6. Implement **aggressive and sustained green jobs policies**, particularly those focused on youth.

ENHANCED GOVERNANCE

Governments should:

1. Establish a **Global Center for Sustainability Actions** to record, monitor and aggregate, encourage, and support all the various commitments on sustainability.
2. Negotiate **regional treaties on Principle 10’s environmental access rights**, including access to information and justice.
3. Take specific actions at the national and sub-national levels to **increase access to information, public participation in decision-making, and access to justice.**

CLIMATE AND ENERGY

While the climate change treaty negotiations will continue, governments, companies, and civil society groups should come to Rio prepared to take tangible steps towards greater deployment of low-carbon energy technologies; improved energy and water efficiency; reduced deforestation emissions; reduced black carbon emissions; and the stimulation of low-carbon economies, such as:

1. Develop and enforce **best practice and minimum performance energy and water standards** for appliances and equipment and ensure an ongoing process to develop all cost effective standards by 2015
2. **Phase out inefficient light bulbs** through the establishment of minimum energy efficiency standards that reduce energy use of new bulbs by at least 65%
3. **Scale-up renewable energy** use by countries undertaking specific policies and programs to speed up the deployment of clean energy in their country in order to more than triple the amount of wind, solar, geothermal, and tidal power that is used throughout the world.
4. **Promote clean and efficient vehicles** that will cut greenhouse gas emissions from new vehicles by 30% by 2020 and by 50% by 2030, including policies, programs and standards adopted by individual countries that address sales and use of new, and where appropriate, imported and/or used vehicles.
5. **Adopt low carbon fuel standards** to avoid of the use of fuels with higher lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions than conventional petroleum.
6. **Stimulate a market for clean cook stoves and invest in the efficient production of biomass fuels**, with the goal of having clean and efficient stoves in 100 million homes by 2020 and thereby minimizing incidence of respiratory illnesses; deforestation; and destruction of local habitats
7. **Replace polluting, inefficient, expensive, dangerous and unhealthy kerosene-based lighting** with cleaner alternatives, such as solar lanterns.
8. **Phase down HFCs and other “super greenhouse gases”** by governments adopting new commitments covering these super greenhouse gases under the Montreal Protocol and by companies agreeing to phase down their use in products that they produce, use, or sell. Develop programs and policies to recover CFCs and other super greenhouse gases from fridges, foams, electrical transformers, and other equipment from which they are leaking to the atmosphere.
9. **Reduce deforestation emissions by key corporations committing to avoiding purchasing products that cause deforestation**, such as soy or cattle from deforested lands in the Brazilian Amazon, palm oil from deforested agricultural land in Indonesia, or illegal wood and wood products throughout the world. More countries should also commit to adopt, implement, and enforce **requirements that all imported wood and wood products come from legal sources**.
10. Undertake large-scale, **environmentally and socially responsible reforestation** efforts
11. **Strengthen and increase the use of green building technologies and standards** by working with the new GLOBE Alliance
12. **Phase out lending** by public and private financial institutions for **energy projects with high GHG emissions** and scale-up the financing for renewable sources of energy (e.g., at multilateral development banks, export credit agencies, and other financial insitutations)
13. Commit to systematically evaluating, and where cost-effective, applying **ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation** (e.g., rehabilitating mangroves may be more cost-effective against storm surge than building a sea wall).

14. Create and enforce standards to **reduce environmental risks associated with natural gas development**, including the use of “fracking” to access natural gas.
15. **Promote the development of clean transportation fuels** by adopting low carbon fuel standards and eliminating subsidies for fuels with higher lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions than conventional petroleum.

OCEANS

1. Establish and monitor **marine protected areas on the high seas** and protect vulnerable marine ecosystems within national waters.
2. Integrate assessment and management of the various uses of ocean resources (wildlife migration routes, fishing grounds, fossil fuel operations, shipping lanes, etc) using **marine spatial planning techniques**.
3. Ensure that human activities with the potential to negatively affect marine life are subject to **prior environmental assessment**.
4. **Reduce and control ocean noise pollution** by incorporating noise into the design and management of marine protected areas and marine spatial plans, and by requiring use of best available noise-reduction technologies in commercial and industrial activities, including oil and gas exploration.
5. **Reduce plastic pollution in the oceans**, including by banning or taxing single-use plastics, supporting the use of recycled plastics in new products, and holding manufacturers responsible for plastics through their entire life cycle.
6. **Stop “ghost fishing”** – fishing gear lost or abandoned at sea that destroys fragile habitats and catches fish and mammals for decades after it is lost – by improving fishing technologies and providing incentives to prevent loss of gear and return old fishing equipment to shore for recycling.
7. Establish an **international monitoring network for ocean acidification** to enable the identification of vulnerable regions and industries and to provide an early warning system for industries already experiencing harm.
8. Designate the high seas of the **Central Arctic Ocean as a zone for international scientific cooperation**, where extractive and polluting activities are suspended until we have a better understanding of the area and the potential effects of such activities.
9. **End** the harvest, sale and trade of **shark fins**.
10. Schedule, as a matter of urgency, an intergovernmental conference to address **multiplying threats to ocean areas beyond the jurisdiction of individual nations**.

PUBLIC HEALTH

1. Endorse the finalization of a **global mercury treaty by February 2013** that will aggressively limit the global use and trade in mercury and reduce global mercury emissions.
2. **To immediately reduce the global supply of mercury, ban the export of mercury** from remaining large exporters in the developed world, and the primary mining of mercury for export, and secure the agreement by chlor-alkali and large mining companies not to place mercury into commerce and take responsibility for ensuring its safe management.
3. Create new partnerships around the **responsible sourcing** of raw materials for production and the **regulation of specific harmful chemicals**.

4. To reduce vehicle pollution in cities worldwide, reduce **sulfur in the global gasoline and diesel fuel supply to 50 ppm by 2020**, concurrent with the adoption of cleaner vehicle emission technologies and standards.

WATER

1. Develop an independent certification system for the sustainability of public and private sector water use.
2. Adopt action plans for sustainable financing of equitable water supply services and watershed protection based on reviews of charging structures for all categories of water use, as well as strategic financial planning, tariffs, taxes and transfers.
3. Establish policies to provide rivers with the quantity, quality, and timing of flow they need to sustain life within them.

About NRDC

NRDC is a non-profit environmental advocacy organization headquartered in the United States with more than 1.3 million members and e-activists. With a staff of more than 400 people, NRDC addresses the broad range of pressing environmental challenges, including climate change and energy, oceans, toxics, wilderness and wildlife, and sustainable communities. We have five offices in the United States and one in Beijing, China. Over the last four decades, our staff attorneys, scientists, and other resource specialists have advocated and cooperated with the U.S. and other governments, international agencies, corporations, and other NGOs to produce major policy changes and progress in many arenas.

NRDC has a long history of international involvement. In addition to our office in China, we have an initiative on India and significant engagement on key issues in Canada, Mexico and elsewhere. Over the years, we have been very active on ozone layer protection, climate change, international toxics, and selected biodiversity matters.

NRDC has had a particular interest in international sustainability summitry. NRDC was one of the few American environmental groups that participated in the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment. We were very active in the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. ("Earth Summit") NRDC created "Earth Summit Watch" to monitor the implementation of commitments made in Rio. In 1993 and 1994, we undertook unprecedented surveys of national sustainability actions. Our 1994 report contributed to the start of an informal global network which made major progress over the several years towards the global phase out of leaded gasoline.

NRDC also participated in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. NRDC was and continues to be a proponent of the "partnership and initiative" approach as a vehicle for delivering on sustainability commitments. For the last decade, we have been actively involved in the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles which has now achieved success with the removal of virtually all lead from the world's gasoline supply. For almost two years, we have been working



with other civil society organizations in the U.S. and worldwide on preparations for the Rio+20 Earth Summit.

NRDC's Director for Global Strategy and Advocacy [S. Jacob Scherr](#) is leading NRDC's "Race to Rio" campaign. In launching the campaign last June, NRDC President Frances Beinecke wrote that its main purpose is "to encourage leaders from all sectors and levels of society—government officials, CEOs, mayors, activists—to come to Rio to talk about what they are doing now to address the huge challenges we face." NRDC staffers from across the organization are involved in NRDC's preparations for Rio+20, including the development of this document. Special thanks for their contributions so far to my colleagues Michael Davidson, Jake Schmidt, Leila Monroe, and Lisa Speer. We also want to acknowledge the research assistance of our graduate student team at Yale University.