OPEN STANDARDS FOR THE PRACTICE OF CONSERVATION

VERSION 5.0 | 2025

Conservation Measures Partnership

PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation Version 5.0 is the product of inputs, field tests, and discussions among members of the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP), the Conservation Coaches Network (CCNet), and the Conservation Standards community more generally. CMP has final editorial authority over the Conservation Standards.

What Is the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP)?

The Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP) is a global community of NGOs, government agencies, funders, and private businesses working together to design, manage, and measure conservation action. Guided by the Conservation Standards, CMP members collaborate to share knowledge, adopt best practices, and avoid ineffective approaches—ultimately enhancing conservation efficiency and innovation worldwide.

Current CMP members (2025):

African Wildlife Foundation; Alcedo Conservation; Bush Heritage Australia; Chester Zoo; Conservation X Labs; Conservation Management; Disney's Animals, Science, and Environment; Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust; Endangered Wildlife Trust; Environmental Incentives; Foundations of Success; The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation; International Crane Foundation; Jane Goodall Institute; Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment; Kent Wildlife Trust; Lemu; Margaret A. Cargill Foundation; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; The Nature Conservancy; Nature Conservancy of Canada; NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program; The Pew Charitable Trusts; Puget Sound Partnership; Rare; San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance; The Summit Foundation; TRAFFIC; US Agency for International Development; US Fish and Wildlife Service; Walton Family Foundation; Wildlife Conservation Network; Wildlife Conservation Society; and World Wide Fund for Nature.

Revisions and Updates:

The Conservation Measures Partnership has editorial authority over the Conservation Standards. This is a living document that CMP members will continue to revise and improve over time. For updated versions, guidance materials, and further information, visit the CMP website (www.conservationmeasures.org) and the Conservation Standards' website (www.conservationstandards.org). We welcome feedback from anyone who uses these standards – please e-mail us at: CMPinfo@conservationmeasures.org.

Conservation Standards 5.0 Revisions Committee:

Version 5.0 was a highly collaborative effort. Eighty eight members of the broader Conservation Standards community (representing at least 33 institutions) actively contributed to this version, developing and refining content. CMP is very grateful to them for their time and insights. These individuals include:

Adrienne Marvin, Amelia Grigson, Anita Diederichsen, Anne Ntongho, Annette Stewart, Ash Baker, Becky Raboy, Becky Stewart, Beth Allgood, Bridget Mattingley, Carol Bogezi, Caroline Stem, Catherine Payne, Charles Latrémouille, Clair Dougherty, Claire Relton, Cristina Eghenter, Danica Schaffer-Smith, Daphne Yin, David Wilkie, Diane Detoeuf, Eduardo Cuevas, Elizabeth Nelson, Erica Cochrane, Felix Cybulla, Frank Weisenberger, Gayle Burgess, Giselle Block, Heather Barna, Helma Brandmeier, Iain Dickson, Jaclyn Lucas, Joaquin Riesgo, John Morrison, John Waugh, Jon Fisher, Josh Goldstein, Judy Boshoven, Karyne Bellehumeur, Katie Williamson, Kelly Swiech, Kelsey Schueler, Lauriane Besse Streit, Leander Lacy, Li Ying, Llara Kritzner, Lucy Rose, Maggie Lee, Marcia Brown, Mariano de la Maza, Marko Pecarevic, Matrida Simfukwe, Michael Looker, Moritz Spielberger, Nan Zeng, Narangerel Naranpurev, Nathan Karres, Nick Hutcheson, Nick Salafsky, Nick Tealer, Nico Boenisch, Nicole Gross-Camp, Olivia Millard, Paloma Bravo Córdova, Paola Mejía , Pavitray Pillay, Philippa Dyson, Preston Whitt, Quinn Shurtliff, Rachel Martin, Sarah Cotter, Sarah Pearson, Sheila O'Connor, Sophie Hall-Aspland, Stephan Funk, Sujata Ram, Tara Stephens, Terri Schultz, Theany Mout, Tessa Stienen, Tina Jansen van Vuuren, Vanessa Correa, Varsha Suresh, Vinaya Swaminathan, Wessyl Kelly, Will Beale, Xavi Escuté, Yaw Opoku Agyeman, Zeljka Rajovic

In addition, CMP is grateful to the CMP members who reviewed the final draft and provided important input to further refine and improve the Conservation Standards.

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INTRODUCTION

PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON FOR USAID

BACKGROUND

The conservation community is tackling large, complex, and urgent environmental problems where the stakes are high. We have great potential to have lasting impact, and we have made inspiring advances. However, the crises of biodiversity loss, climate change, and inequality require systemic responses that challenge us to confront the structures that perpetuate these crises.

Since the release of Version 1.0 of the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation[1] (hereafter, Conservation Standards or CS) in 2004, the conservation community has made great strides in clarifying and measuring effectiveness and impact. Even so, many conservation organizations and agencies still struggle to provide evidence for what is working, what needs improvement, and what should change.

Without wider and more systematic measurement of effectiveness and disciplined recording of our efforts, how will we know if we are progressing as rapidly as needed to achieve our conservation goals? How will we become more efficient? How will we learn from one another? And how will we be able to demonstrate our achievements and build the public and political will needed to meet the challenges we face?

The Conservation Standards respond to this challenge by providing a set of principles and practices that bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology and promote accountability, transparency, and equitable conservation. All of this ensures that teams are in a better position to co-develop effective and inclusive strategies and assess their impact.

CMP's VISION

CMP is inspired by a vision that conservation impacts around the world are amplified as teams use evidence, measure effectiveness, and openly share lessons with the conservation community. To realize this vision, our respective organizations aspire to:

- Assess the conservation situation and formulate our problems and solutions in terms of available evidence, expertise, and experience
- State our desired results in terms of conservation outcomes, not actions
- Track our progress towards achieving desired results
- Adapt our strategies based on what we have learned
- Share our results respectfully, honestly, and transparently to facilitate learning and contribute to the evidence base

For a full description of member commitments, see CMP's Charter.

1 The term "Open Standards" is grounded in the Open Source / Creative Commons movement and means that these standards are developed through public collaboration, are freely available to anyone, and are not the property of anyone or any organization. See the Creative Commons ShareAlike license terms in the About This Document section.

PURPOSE OF THE CONSERVATION STANDARDS

To help conservation teams realize this vision, the Conservation Standards provide a set of best practices for the successful implementation of conservation projects,[2] oriented around a five-step management cycle:

1. ASSESS
2. PLAN
3. IMPLEMENT
4. ANALYZE & ADAPT
5. SHARE

START AT THE APPROPRIATE STEP FOR YOUR WORK

Not all teams will start at Step 1 of the Conservation Standards. Each team should consider what work they have done already and where they are in their project management cycle, using existing work as inputs to the Conservation Standards process. In some cases, teams may find it makes sense to enter the process at a later step and come back to earlier ones as they learn more about their situation.

The Conservation Standards are not an instruction manual to be followed exactly. Rather, they are meant to guide key management decisions in conjunction with other decision-support tools, while fostering collaboration and providing a transparent basis for shared decision making and learning. Likewise, the Conservation Standards are designed to complement, not replace, related administrative processes and functions, such as contracting and human resources management.

This document intentionally focuses on standards – high-level practices and principles – not "how-to" guidance, which is available from various resources that CMP and Conservation Standards community members have developed (see later section on Support for Implementing the Conservation Standards).

We encourage feedback from anyone who uses these Conservation Standards (email us at CMPinfo@conservationmeasures.org).

2 All conservation efforts at any scale can be explicitly or implicitly described as **projects** – a set of actions undertaken by a defined group of practitioners – including managers, researchers, community members, or other actors – to achieve defined goals and objectives. When thinking about scale, however, it can also be useful to organize groups of related projects into larger **programs**. These programs often serve as an administrative or funding unit, but they also may have their own higher-level goals, objectives, and actions – in effect, acting as a higher order project. In this document, we use the term "project" to represent both projects and programs at all scales.

EVOLUTION OF THE CONSERVATION STANDARDS

The Conservation Standards are a product of the collaborative work of the Conservation Measures Partnership. Version 1.0 (2004) drew upon the results of the Measuring Conservation Impact Initiative, a 2002 study that reviewed experiences across seven fields, including conservation, to determine common approaches to good project design, management, and monitoring.

Findings included a series of principles for adaptive project cycle management. Around the same time, CMP also conducted a "Rosetta Stone" exercise to line up the existing planning systems used by different member organizations and identify similarities and differences in approaches and terminology. Building on these products, CMP member organizations contributed their institution-specific planning and implementation approaches to develop and refine Version 1.0 of the Conservation Standards.

Operationalizing the Conservation Standards is an ongoing, dynamic process that has included the development of closely aligned organization-specific standards, production of more detailed guidance materials for each step, and training of project teams across the globe. CMP members and partners have been a driving force behind the Conservation Standards becoming the common and accepted practice within the conservation community. Likewise, the Conservation Coaches Network (CCNet) has been an instrumental mechanism to promote the Conservation Standards and build global capacity to implement them. Collectively, the Conservation Standards community has shared key insights and expertise to help CMP continue to improve the Conservation Standards, with updated versions released approximately every 5 years. Indeed, Version 5.0 is a product of extensive feedback and input across our community; at least 88 individuals, covering 33 separate organizations, actively helped develop the content. Moreover, many of those individuals and additional CMP organizations helped review the final content. Box 1 highlights the main updates in Version 5.0.

BOX **1**

WHAT'S NEW IN VERSION 5.0?

Version 5.0 reflects the collective input and collaborative effort of CMP members and the broader Conservation Standards community. These individuals worked together to develop content for CMP-prioritized updates, drawing on their diverse on-the-ground implementation experiences. Main highlights include:

- Changes to and clarifications of terminology to better communicate key concepts
- Greater detail on Steps 3-5
- Additional emphasis on the use and importance of evidence across all steps of the Conservation Standards
- Clarification of the relationship between the Conservation Standards and other decision-support frameworks
- Attention to the importance of scale to achieve greater impact
- Emphasis on how behavior change and behavioral insights inform conservation actions
- Update of climate change considerations
- Refined explanation of considering and incorporating human wellbeing
- Additional principles on equitable conservation
- Recognition of spatial dimensions relevant to various steps
- Initial linkage with tools and techniques from the Market Systems Development community

USING THE CONSERVATION STANDARDS

The Conservation Standards are designed for teams working in "real-world" situations. CMP feels it is important for these teams to see how the CS are relevant to them. With this in mind, these standards include a range of examples and use more accessible first- and second-person language.

Using the Conservation Standards is part science, part art. Your team[3] may find that you need to be adaptive to apply them effectively to your real-world situations. For example, although the Conservation Standards appear as sequential steps, teams rarely go through the process in a linear fashion from start to finish. Instead, they typically move back and forth through various stages of the cycle. Likewise, not all standards or outputs are appropriate under all conditions, so you will need to determine how to adapt or combine these standards with other frameworks and tools appropriate for your context (see Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit for ideas).

For each step in the Conservation Standards cycle (Figure 1), this document provides a brief description of the standards of practice and the expected outputs for that practice (see Annex 4 for a list of all outputs). The Conservation Standards process might appear complex or involved, but depending on where you are with your project, you may have already done many of the steps. You should not aim to produce flawless outputs as you go through each step. Instead, it is helpful to think of this as an iterative process in which you deliberately, yet rapidly, move through the steps, develop a credible draft of the outputs, and then revise your work as your project changes and matures. Likewise, when you encounter data gaps, do not be paralyzed – state your assumptions, move forward with the best available information, and document key decisions and priority information needs.

3 Throughout the Conservation Standards, we use the familiar terms "you" and "your" intentionally to make the Conservation Standards feel more comfortable and approachable – it is a process for everyone involved in the project, including, but not limited to, organizational staff, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples.

UNDERSTANDING CONSERVATION STANDARDS ADAPTATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER FRAMEWORKS AND TOOLS

The Conservation Standards are one of several frameworks with associated tools used to support conservation decision making and adaptive management.[4] To understand how the CS have been adapted by some users and how they relate to other frameworks and tools, it is helpful to differentiate among categories. As you design, implement, and learn from your project, consider what is the most appropriate combination of decision-support frameworks and tools for your context.

Organizational and audience-based adaptations of the CS: Some organizations modify the CS to represent their own policies, procedures, constituents, and ways of working (e.g., WWF's Project and Programme Management Standards). In other cases, groups adapt the CS for specific audiences, particularly when Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities are leading or collaborating (e.g., Healthy Country Planning). These CS adaptations may include changes in terminology, refined guidance, or specific tool recommendations.

Alternative adaptive management frameworks: Alternative frameworks (e.g., Collective Impact Framework, Conservation Planning Specialist Group's Principles and Steps, and Systematic Conservation Planning) share common goals with the CS but differ in focus and prioritize different methods or tools. However, these approaches and the CS can often complement each other, helping to strengthen both. For example, BirdLife's Project Toolkit has adopted the CS and integrated the Collective Impact Framework for multi-partner programs.

Complementary decision-making tools: To support specific CS steps, teams may use complementary decision-making tools (e.g., consequence tables or system maps) from other approaches. Teams can select and combine these tools based on the complexity of the problem and the preferences of the planning team. Indeed, the CS are intentionally designed to integrate principles and tools from other frameworks and approaches, allowing for flexibility and more informed decision making.

Other conservation-related standards: Other frequently used standards (e.g., IUCN's Green List of Protected Areas or Conservation Assured Tiger Standards) focus on demonstrating best practices in conservation management but are not adaptive management frameworks themselves. They serve to assess how well initiatives meet specific criteria, leading to recognition or support. The use of these standards is similar to how the Conservation Audit Tool is used to support the CS.

For a deeper discussion, see this "living" table that shares a range of frameworks and tools, highlighting their complementary value.

4 See glossary for definitions of bolded technical terms.

BOX **2**

GETTING MORE INFORMATION ON KEY THEMES

CS 5.0 includes deeper treatment on a number of themes prioritized by our community, as summarized here. Where relevant, each CS step section integrates concepts related to these themes. In the interest of keeping the Conservation Standards focused primarily on high-level practices and principles, some thematic groups have developed supplemental briefs that explain more about the theme, provide high-level guidance, and share resources.

Behavior Change: Almost all conservation involves human behavior. As such, applying behavioral and social science principles will help us be more effective and strategic in our work.

Climate Change: Addressing climate change is a global conservation priority that practitioners must consider in the design and management of most conservation projects. Because potential climate impacts are complex and often not completely understood, monitoring will be key for testing hypotheses and determining where adjustments are needed. As with previous CS versions, climate change considerations are shared in green call-out boxes throughout this document.

Evidence: Conservation practitioners make decisions, take actions, and test assumptions based on a variety of **evidence** (e.g., traditional knowledge, basic data from studies, tacit knowledge, synthesized data sets, and well-supported theories). The CS emphasize the importance of bringing evidence into all steps.

Equitable Conservation: In order to secure the future of our planet, we need everyone to have a voice and an opportunity to take action. CMP recognizes that to support the conservation community most effectively, we must promote **equitable conservation**.

Human Wellbeing: Conservation is an inherently human endeavor, and it is important to reflect how humans affect and are affected by conservation. This version includes additional information to better reflect CMP's more detailed guidance, as well as lessons learned in applying these concepts in practice.

Scaling: The magnitude of the conservation issues we face means that we cannot simply work site by site. Instead, we also must take systematic action at the spatial, institutional, and temporal scales needed to address these global issues. This requires both "working at scale" and "going to scale."

FIGURE 1 **Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation Project Cycle**

1. ASSESS

- Purpose & team
- Scope, vision, & focal values
- Critical threats
- Conservation situation

2. PLAN

- Goals, actions, assumptions, & objectives
- Monitoring plan
- Operational plan

3. IMPLEMENT

- Team structure & process
- Work plan & timeline
- Budget
- Implement plans

4. ANALYZE & ADAPT

- Data preparation
- Analysis
- Adaptation of plans & budgets

5. SHARE

- Documentation of learning
- Sharing learning
- Fostering learning

SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTING THE CONSERVATION STANDARDS

There are various ways project teams can get hands-on support and guidance to implement the high-level practices and principles laid out in the Conservation Standards.

Coaches

Because using a results- and evidence-based approach to planning and implementation often reflects a major shift in the way organizations and individuals think and work, it can be very helpful for teams new to the Conservation Standards to work with a coach. Some organizations have in-house coaches trained in the Conservation Standards and key facilitation techniques. In addition, some organizations and consultants specialize in providing CS-oriented coaching and facilitation and have a good understanding of the supporting resources and technologies that teams can use. Many of these individuals are part of the Conservation Coaches Network (CCNet), a close partner of CMP that aims to foster an engaged cadre of coaches on every continent to support teams. CCNet also provides training and guidance for practitioners who want to become coaches, as well as a certification option for experienced coaches.

Guidance and Tools

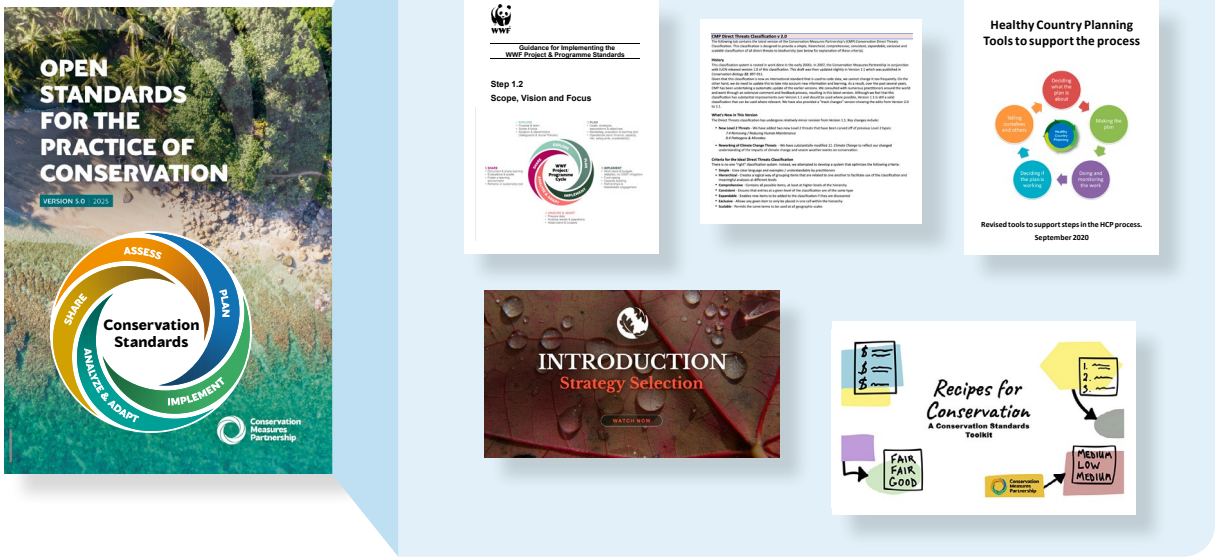
CMP member organizations and partners have developed a variety of guides and tools that provide step-by-step guidance or deeper detail on key topics. As shown in Figure 2, these resources help support the implementation of the CS higher-level principles and practices. They include materials, such as organization-specific how-to guides, classification systems developed across institutions (e.g., conservation threats and actions classifications), online and in-person courses, case studies, videos, and course curricula. These resources are available via the Conservation Standards website (see Training, Case Studies, and Resource Library menus), with most written guidance materials vetted and rated by a cross-institutional committee representing both CMP and CCNet. In addition to these materials, and as discussed earlier, there are a variety of decision-support resources outside the Conservation Standards traditional toolbox that teams may also wish to use.

PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON FOR USAID

FIGURE 2 **Relationship between the Conservation Standards and Associated Resources**

GENERAL HIGH-LEVEL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

SPECIFIC GUIDANCE AND TOOLS TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSERVATION STANDARDS PRINCIPLES



Supporting Technology

Supporting technology includes tools and systems that enhance a user's ability to implement the Conservation Standards. Some examples include decision-support systems, strategic planning software, project and task management tools, financial management software, wildlife and social system monitoring, and data storage systems. Many teams following the Conservation Standards have a set of core tools for brainstorming, research, documentation, calculation, collaboration, and sharing. When seeking new technologies, carefully consider your team's needs and resources to select those options (including simple tools, such as spreadsheets and pen and paper) that best fit your needs.

Miradi Software: Miradi Software is an example of supporting technology designed specifically to walk practitioners through key steps of the Conservation Standards. The software serves as a tool and relational database to visualize and document the conservation context, priority actions, expected results, associated goals and objectives, and progress towards results.

Through standard colors and shapes, Miradi helps create a visual language to facilitate communication among those familiar with the Conservation Standards. Additionally, Miradi provides various areas to document key discussions, evidence, and decisions, an important feature to support adaptive management, **evidence-based conservation**, and learning more broadly. Miradi also supports the Conservation Actions and Measures Library (CAML), a library of vetted templates and examples of theories of change and expected results associated with conservation actions. The Miradi website and YouTube channel offer a variety of training resources.

Some people conflate Miradi with the Conservation Standards, but it is important to note that it is the CS practices and principles that underpin effective conservation planning and implementation, and teams can use any tools they find useful for this. Although Miradi is a comprehensive tool that can support almost every CS step, it may not be appropriate in all contexts. Teams may prefer the familiarity or advantages of other tools or may be required by their organizations to use specific working and reporting platforms.

Spatial Technology: Spatial technology can play a critical role for teams applying the Conservation Standards. Geospatial methods encompass a wide range of tools that support mapping, analysis, and interpretation of spatial information. These technologies can support our understanding of biodiversity, species distribution, land use patterns and changes, habitat availability and connectivity, ecosystem processes, ecosystem service benefits, human wellbeing impacts, and climate change patterns. While geospatial technologies offer powerful tools for conservation, they also present challenges. High costs for specialized software, equipment, and skilled personnel can limit accessibility. Data quality and availability may vary across regions, leading to gaps in coverage that affect the accuracy of analyses. Additionally, geospatial methods (as well as Artificial Intelligence) require significant processing power and data storage.

Artificial Intelligence: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly advancing and reshaping numerous fields, including conservation. AI offers significant potential to reduce costs and increase efficiencies in planning and managing conservation projects, enhancing both the effectiveness and impact of these efforts. However, current AI models are typically trained on publicly available data from the internet, which are often incomplete, non-representative, or of varying quality and accuracy. When relying on AI for conservation, it's essential to critically evaluate the sources and reliability of the information with subject experts or the broader Conservation Standards community to ensure that your work is built upon trusted knowledge and best practices.

Recognizing the challenges with existing AI models, CMP aims to develop models that understand the concepts and terminology of the Conservation Standards and that are built from a curated set of trusted and representative resources. This will significantly improve the usefulness and quality of AI-generated information for our community. We will use the AI section in the CMP Workspace to track progress of these developments and share tips and guidance on available tools.

FINDING HELP

The **Conservation Standards Resource Library** hosts a variety of resources, many of which have been reviewed and rated by a cross-institutional panel of Conservation Standards community members (CMP-CCNet Guidance Review Committee). New resources are regularly reviewed and added to the library.

Facilitated and self-paced training options are available from Conservation Standards members. These training courses have been vetted by the Guidance Review Committee.

Many **cross-cutting themes** have **supplemental briefs** to help you find more detail specific to that theme. These materials go beyond the high-level principles shared in the Conservation Standards to offer a start to guidance and specific resources.

Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit provides a series of "recipes" for "lighter" CS approaches to different scenarios that teams typically encounter. The recipes link to Tipsheets that offer practical ideas and additional links to tools and templates (for lighter and more in-depth approaches).

The **CMP Workspace** is an internal collaborative workspace for Conservation Measures Partnership members. It includes documents, notes, and files associated with initiatives, retreats, and other CMP business. While it has products, most public-facing final products are available via the CS Resource Library.

The **Conservation Coaches Network website** can link you up with coaches, as well as more specific materials to support facilitating teams through various steps in the Conservation Standards.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS

There are several essential principles and considerations relevant to all CS steps. Annex 3 provides important details on these, while Box 3 provides a high-level summary. On the last consideration in Box 3, there are numerous debates as to the meaning of technical terms such as "goal," "objective," "strategy," "activity," "target," and "milestone."

While there is no universal, consistent understanding, the Conservation Standards maintain that it is very important that project team members and partners have a clear and common definition of terms. With this in mind, the technical terms in this document were carefully selected, bolded when first fully described, consistently used thereafter, and defined in the glossary. As the Conservation Standards evolve, we find some terms need updating to improve communication and adoption of key principles and steps. Table 1 includes some updates and clarifications on terminology in Version 5.0.

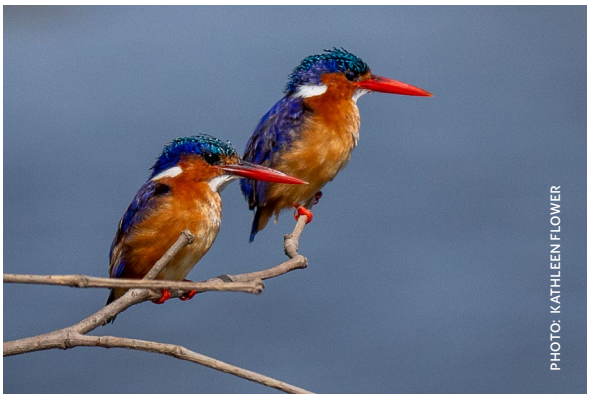


PHOTO: KATHLEEN FLOWER

BOX **3**

SUMMARY OF KEY PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS

When using the Conservation Standards, it is important to keep in mind the following (more detail in Annex 3):

PRINCIPLES

- Collaborate with partners
- Involve interested parties to the fullest extent and as early in the process as possible
- Implement conservation equitably
- Appropriately use and contribute to the evidence base
- Use adaptive management to manage uncertainty
- Document your decisions
- Foster a learning environment

CONSIDERATIONS

- These standards will change over time
- These standards represent the ideal
- These standards assume some priority setting has already taken place
- Few projects will start applying the Conservation Standards at the beginning of their planning efforts
- Each project is different and thus needs to customize their use of the Conservation Standards
- These standards apply to projects at any spatial, institutional, and/or temporal scale
- These standards focus on conservation as the main aim but can be adapted
- These standards can be implemented using a variety of tools and guidance from natural, social, and behavioral sciences
- These standards seek to clearly define and consistently use terminology

TABLE 1 **Major Terminology Shifts in Version 5.0**

PREVIOUS TERM	NEW TERM	RATIONALE FOR UPDATE
Target Desired future state/value	Focal value Target	Earlier versions of the CS have used "target" to refer to a factor in the system on which a team has chosen to focus. Much of the world (including global conventions) uses the term "target" to mean the quantitative or qualitative measurement of an indicator to be achieved as part of a SMART goal or objective. Many in the CS community have expressed concerns about the way we use "target." Given this situation, we feel our community should align our language with other sectors and global conventions. Note: There can be different types of focal values (e.g., biodiversity, climate, human wellbeing, cultural), and teams should use the terms that work best for their audiences.
Strategy	Action	CS 4.0 defined a "strategy" as a set of activities with a common focus and an "action" as a general term used to refer to the work of conservation teams, including strategies, activities, and tasks. This is inconsistent with how the development, business, and military sectors use these terms. Thus, we have reversed their use as part of the following hierarchy of intervention: strategy, action, activity, task.
Stakeholder	Interested party	The term "stakeholder" has colonial associations, which is why we are shifting to the more neutral term "interested party."

ASSESS

PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

ASSESS

This step in the Conservation Standards cycle involves specifying the basic parameters for your project and assessing your overall context. In particular, it involves determining the purpose of your team's planning process and identifying who will be part of your project team initially and who should be involved in other ways. It also involves articulating your project's geographic and/or thematic scope, your vision of what you hope to achieve, and the focal values you are prioritizing. Finally, it includes making sense of your project's context, including identifying threats, opportunities, and key constituencies interested in or impacted by the project.

1A. Define Purpose and Identify Project Team

Define Purpose of Conservation Standards Work

You can enter the Conservation Standards cycle at any point in the process.[5] Wherever you enter, you should start by being clear about why you are using the Conservation Standards and how you think they will support your team (e.g., develop a full strategic plan, reflect on effectiveness of work to date). This includes clarifying the specific decisions, decision makers, and people the CS process will impact positively and/or negatively. As part of this review, you may find it useful to revisit your organization's mission and current priorities to help clarify decisions already made, decision maker expectations, and assumptions about funding and other resources. If you are collaborating with partners, you should also compare your respective missions and priorities at the outset and identify where your needs and values are compatible, as well as where there may be tension or conflict. Likewise, if you expect to work with a specific donor, you may want to encourage the use of the Conservation Standards as the primary process, or at least crosswalk terms and steps to increase understanding.

As relevant, you should also draw on what you and others have learned from earlier iterations of your project and/or similar projects. This review will help you determine how much effort you should invest in this process and which steps are relatively more important than others. For example, if focal values and goals have already been identified and a threat assessment exists, then you may be able to review them and move on to developing your situation analysis and strategies.

Project Team

Your **project team** is the group of individuals who design and implement your work. Team members often include people from your organization, as well as key **partners** and **interested parties**. Interested parties include key partners and other individuals, groups, or institutions that have a vested interest in or can influence the project and/or that may be affected by project activities and have something to gain or lose. It is important to think about how to involve a variety of interested parties, as your plan and its acceptance depend heavily on who is included in the team. Teams typically have a project leader who is responsible for the overall coordination and moving the team forward. Some organizations also have a higher-level manager to whom the team reports. In general, it is important to be clear about all team member roles and responsibilities. It is helpful to formalize these and

5 As a reminder, Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit provides teams with a variety of ways to enter and adapt the Conservation Standards process, recognizing the different needs and resources of teams.

other team norms and functions through a team charter and/or partnership agreement(s). In the case of partnerships, teams should also carry out due diligence to identify and remedy any potential issues before entering into formal partnerships.

In forming your team, it is important to understand the skills and experience needed and recognize who would bring those skills and where you may have gaps that you need to fill. In addition to the technical or programmatic expertise, many teams need access to administrative, financial, and communications skills. The team composition may change as you move through the CS cycle and as your project needs change or evolve.

As you form your team, procedural equity is important to consider. This might involve reviewing existing power dynamics, seeking representation from relevant actors, and documenting your decision-making process. Different groups will likely have different expectations around decision making, so it is important to work together to clarify this early on.

You may also wish to identify one or more advisors to whom your team can turn to honest counsel. Ideally, these are influential people with the ability to positively affect your work. Once you understand the network of interested parties, it is helpful to revisit whether any of these individuals should be part of your project team and, if so, determine how they might overcome any barriers to participation (if relevant).

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Identification of purpose, decision makers, decision-making process, and decisions needed
- Identification and engagement of interested parties and support for their participation where barriers exist
- Selection of initial project team, including project leader, core members, and advisory members
- Identification of existing skills among team members and key gaps you should fill
- Designation of roles and responsibilities

PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

1B. Define Scope, Vision, and Focal Values

Scope

Before you think about what actions you will implement, you should have a good understanding of what you broadly hope to accomplish, as this will help determine your scope and be the foundation of all your planning work. A project's **scope** defines what the project intends to affect but does not necessarily limit where actions that affect the scope take place. There are three common options:

- **Place-based scopes** have a geographic focus and include efforts to conserve or manage ecoregions, ecosystems, priority areas, or protected areas. An example of a place-based scope is a national park, encompassing the different ecosystems and biodiversity contained within the park boundaries.
- **Focal value-based scopes** center on specific species or ecosystems. Species-based scopes may also include a part or all of the species' life history across relevant geographies. An example of a species-based scope is a global tiger program, focusing on tigers across multiple landscapes that offer the best chance of growing the population. Examples of an ecosystem-based scope include mangroves in Asia or global grasslands.
- **Thematic-based scopes** focus on efforts to address specific threats, opportunities, or enabling conditions. Examples of a thematic-based scope include a project focused on illegal logging that aims to reduce timber imported into the European Union or a climate program that seeks to decrease national CO_2 emissions from transportation, homes, food, and energy production.

In projects with a geographic footprint (and even those that focus on a theme), it is often helpful to develop a spatial map that includes key conservation management units, landscapes, ecological features, and/or sociopolitical boundaries. Doing so may help you identify the need to consider additional partners, focal values, and threats within the project area.

Regardless of the scope you define, addressing conservation challenges almost always necessitates understanding, changing, and/or amplifying human behavior at one or more levels (Box 4). You will need to think about the appropriate scale to achieve the desired impact (e.g., you may need to work across multiple protected area projects that contribute to an overall protected area network). You should also think about the temporal dimension of your work, which will influence how much you can achieve. In many cases, a one-year or five-year project is not going to significantly alter the viability of an ecosystem or species. But, it may influence human behaviors or policy changes that could ultimately affect ecosystem or species viability.

BOX 4

WHAT IS BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Conservation challenges are often behavioral challenges. To solve them, it is important to consider how human behaviors at all levels of a system can support, scale, or block progress to your conservation goals. **Behavior change** is the process of changing what people do – i.e., increasing, maintaining, or decreasing a current behavior, or adopting a new behavior. When seeking to change behavior, it is key to understand the unique social, cultural, political, and economic contexts and systems in which these behaviors occur. This includes understanding whether your goals align with the goals of key actors and interested parties, reflecting on your biases and power dynamics about "right" behaviors, and considering the potential to do harm instead of good. Behavior change activities should be transparent and inclusive and follow ethical guidelines for research, engagement, communication, and evaluation.

Given the dynamic roles humans play in conservation outcomes, it is common for teams to incorporate human wellbeing when developing their conservation projects. While addressing human wellbeing alongside conservation efforts is ideal, it often comes with different skill sets and resource needs. It is important to recognize this and clearly define what falls inside and outside the scope of the project.

Vision

In addition to defining the scope, it is also necessary to decide on a clear and common **vision** – a description of the desired state or ultimate condition that you are working to achieve. You can summarize your vision in a vision statement, which meets the criteria of being *relatively general, visionary, and brief* (see Annex 2 for descriptions of these criteria). A project's vision should also consider the context of your organization's mission and the needs and interests of other parties within your project scope.


PHOTO: KATHLEEN FLOWER

CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATION 1

SCOPE AND VISION

In defining your scope, consider if you are focusing on biodiversity conservation and need to take into account how climate change will affect your biodiversity focal values and/or if you are focusing on reducing the impact of climate change on humans by protecting and restoring ecosystems (i.e., ecosystem-based adaptation). You should also consider whether one of the primary aims of your project is to avoid, reduce, or sequester greenhouse gas emissions, using nature-based solutions.

These high-level decisions could influence your geographic scope. You should think beyond today and consider both how climate has changed and how it is likely to continue to change, including whether ecosystems or species ranges are likely to shift (latitudinally or altitudinally) or the distribution of species within an ecosystem is likely to change. It is also important to consider future human needs and responses to climate change.

Your vision should be forward looking, describing a future ecological state that takes into account projected climate conditions. Given these projections, you may need to define your future ecological state not only in terms of composition and abundance, but also in terms of ecosystem structure, function, and processes.

Focal Values

A **focal value** is what a project seeks to ultimately affect. It is often an element chosen to represent key aspects of the overall system. Types of focal values include biodiversity values (e.g., species, habitats, or ecosystems), climate values, cultural values, and human wellbeing values. In CS 5.0, we are substituting the term "focal value" for the previously used term "target."

Biodiversity Focal Values

Once your team is clear on your project scope, you should select a limited number of **biodiversity focal values** (also known as ecological focal values).[6] These focal values are specific, tangible entities that your project is working to conserve and that represent and encompass the ultimate aims of the project. They form the basis for setting goals, selecting actions, and measuring impact. The specificity of biodiversity focal values will vary with the scope or type of project:

- **For projects with a place- or focal value-based scope,** biodiversity focal values are ecological systems, habitats, and/or specific species chosen to represent and encompass the full suite of biodiversity within the scope. For a place-based scope, conservation of the chosen suite of focal values should, in theory, ensure the conservation of all ecosystems and species within the project scope. Most place-based projects can be reasonably well defined by eight or fewer well-chosen biodiversity focal values. Larger scale place-based projects may require either a few more focal values or coarser focal values (e.g., an assemblage of species, rather than a specific species). Projects may also focus on a single biodiversity focal value, such as an iconic flagship species (e.g., tigers) or an ecosystem (e.g., mangroves).

- **For projects with a thematic-based scope,** the main focus is on specific factors related to biodiversity focal values, such as a threat, contributing factor, or ecosystem service. Depending on the context, teams may identify the specific relevant ecosystem features or species they ultimately aim to influence, or they may only more generally identify "biodiversity" or "natural resources" as their biodiversity focal values.

The selection of biodiversity focal values typically requires input from experts across multiple knowledge systems. It is often useful to map the current geographic extent of a focal value, as well as its historic and/or anticipated future extent under different scenarios (Figure 4 in Step 1C provides an example). Moreover, if your biodiversity focal value is wide ranging, (e.g., a migratory species across its range or the full extent of an ecosystem type), it may be useful to divide it into spatially explicit sub-values (e.g., specific populations or life history components, such as breeding, migration, non-breeding). Spatial data catalogs may be available for your biodiversity focal values to facilitate this process.

In most cases, you should determine the current status of each biodiversity focal value. At the most basic level, this involves using the best available evidence (e.g., accessing the evidence libraries or consulting traditional ecological knowledge holders) to develop an overall assessment of the health or "viability" of each biodiversity focal value. More detailed status assessments involve specifying **key ecological attributes** of each biodiversity focal value, determining indicators for each attribute, outlining the acceptable range of variation for each indicator, and determining the current status of the indicator in reference to this range of variation. Many key attributes can be quantified using geospatial indicators (e.g., extent of a habitat, species distribution, connectivity). Geospatial repositories are often good places to find these data. A viability assessment sets the foundation for developing goals for your biodiversity focal values, monitoring focal value status, and understanding key threats to your focal values.

6 In CS 5.0, we are substituting the term "focal value" for the previously used term "target." This change is to be consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international fora which use "value" for the focal element of a protected area and "target" for the desired future measurement of a SMART goal or objective (e.g., the 30 x 30 target).

Human Wellbeing Focal Values

As conservation is inevitably a social undertaking, it is important to show both how humans may impact the outcome of a project and how your work directly affects humans.[7] As part of the process of identifying your focal values and developing your situation model, you should consider including **human wellbeing focal values**. At this point, your human wellbeing focal values typically encompass those components of human wellbeing affected by the status of biodiversity focal values and associated **ecosystem services** (Box 5). Examples include physical, mental, and spiritual health, livelihoods and material wellbeing, social relationships, cultural identity, and safety (Figure 3 shows these general relationships, including how biodiversity and human wellbeing focal values may affect one another). Identifying human wellbeing focal values is another place where geospatial approaches can be useful, helping your team visualize and better understand potential ecosystem services and other relevant factors that may impact your human wellbeing focal values.

BOX **5**

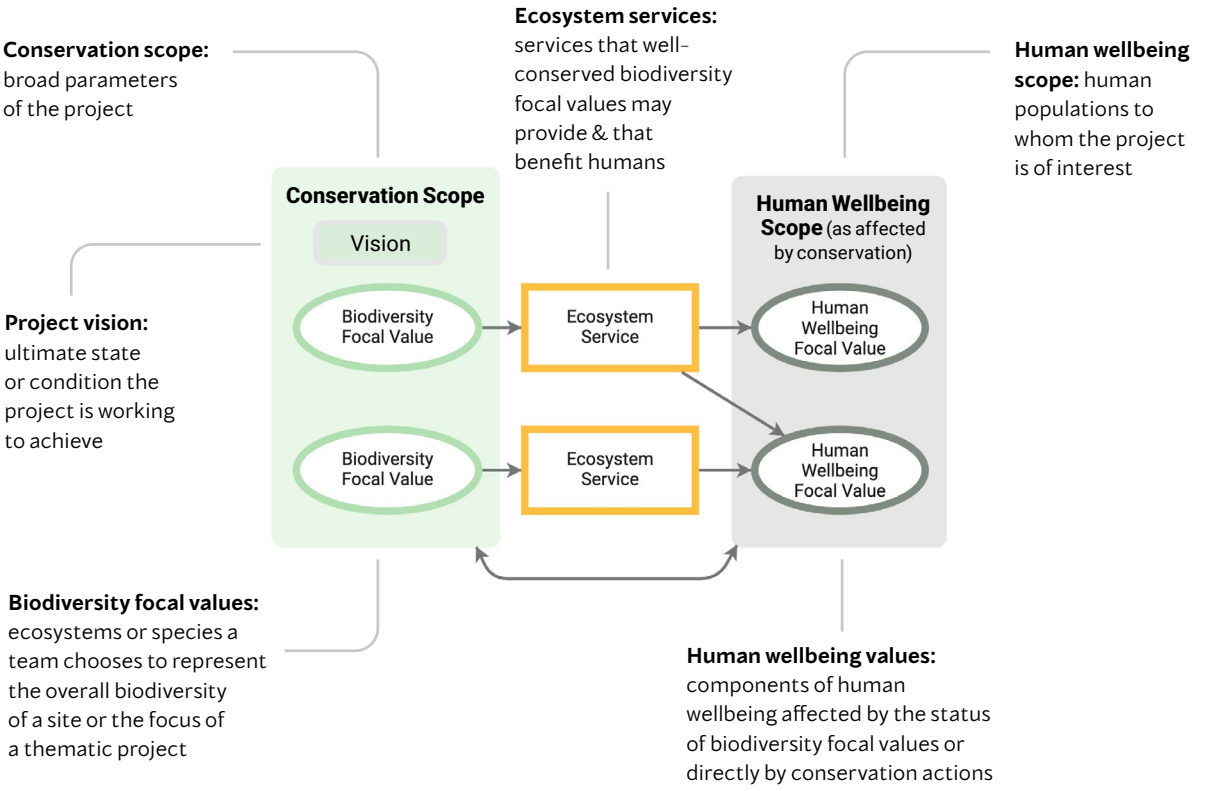
USING GLOBAL FRAMEWORKS TO HELP FRAME HUMAN WELLBEING LINKAGES

When selecting potential human wellbeing and biodiversity focal values, teams may want to review various global frameworks to better understand their project's relationship with and contribution to these global initiatives. Many of these frameworks address global challenges and work towards ensuring a more sustainable future by encouraging actions to improve human wellbeing, reduce environmental degradation, and create the conditions to optimize both. There are numerous frameworks that teams can reference, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, United Nations Environment Programme Navigating New Horizons, and IUCN's Cultural and Spiritual Significance of Nature, among others.

PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

7 See previous footnote.

FIGURE 3 **Generic Situation Model Extract Showing Scope, Vision, and Focal Values**



As you develop your strategies, you may also want to include human wellbeing focal values that benefit directly from your conservation actions. Conservation efforts often aim to balance biodiversity preservation with human wellbeing enhancement, working to ensure that conservation actions contribute to the long-term wellbeing of communities dependent on natural resources. Depending on the team's primary focus, human wellbeing focal values may be considered independently of, and at the same level as, biodiversity focal values. Note that human wellbeing focal values should always be selected in partnership with the interested parties who will be affected by the work. Regardless of whether your conservation team sets human wellbeing focal values, it is crucial to consider how your work will impact humans, both positively and negatively.


PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON FOR USAID

PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATION 2

FOCAL VALUES

When you consider the potential impacts of climate change later in the process, you will need to assess:

- whether relevant ecosystems, habitats, and species will remain in your project's geographic scope for the foreseeable future,
- how climate change might affect each biodiversity and human wellbeing focal value, and
- whether, in light of projected changes, your actions can still be effective at maintaining or improving the status of your focal values.

Once you have done this, we recommend revisiting your scope and focal values.

For projects whose primary aim is to avoid, reduce, or sequester greenhouse gases, your team should include as focal values the ecosystems you will conserve, manage, and/or restore to achieve this change in greenhouse gases.

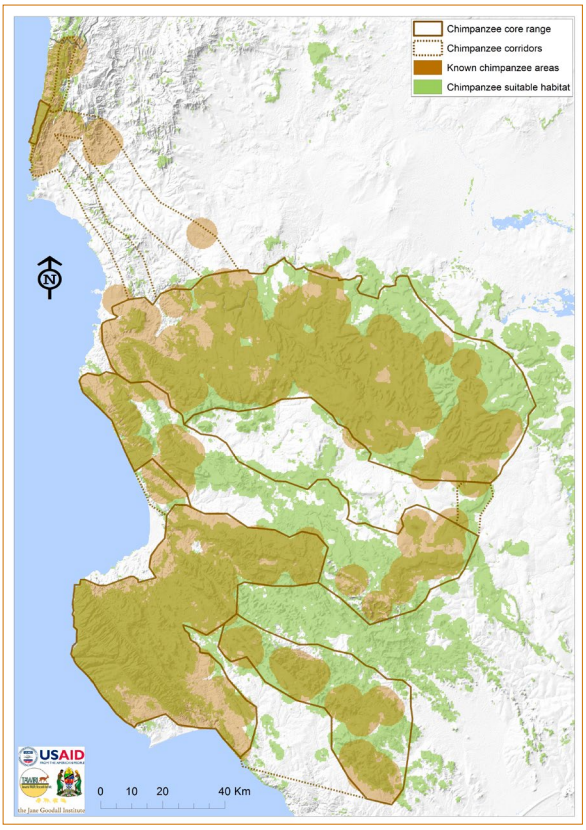
OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Brief description of the project scope, including a map, if appropriate
- Vision statement for the project
- Selection of focal values, including a brief explanation of why they were chosen, and if appropriate, a description and/or map showing each focal value's location
- Selection of human wellbeing focal values and identification of ecosystem services, as relevant
- Description of the viability status of each priority biodiversity focal value

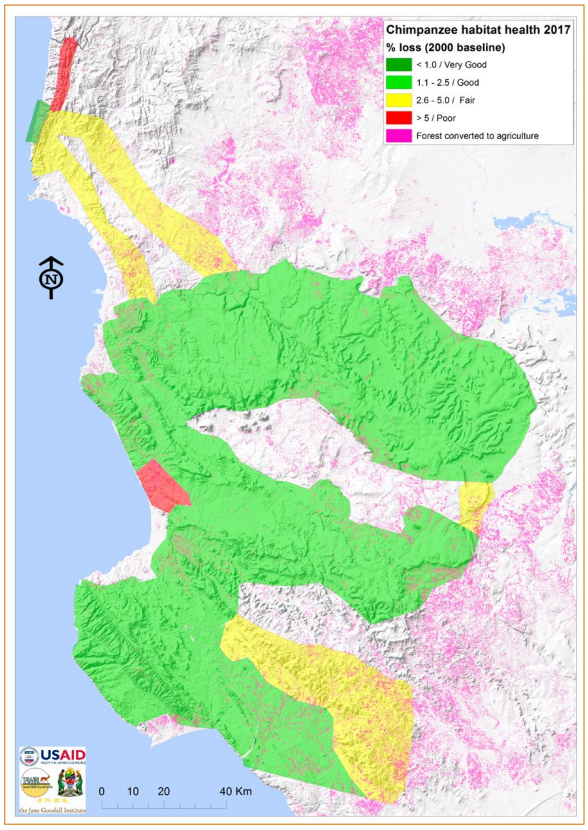
1C. Identify Critical Threats

Once you have settled on your priority biodiversity focal values, you need to use available evidence to identify the direct threats (often called **pressures**)[8] that influence them and the actors behind those threats. **Direct threats** are human actions (behaviors) that directly degrade one or more focal values (e.g., unsustainable fishing, oil drilling, dumping of industrial wastewater, or introduction of invasive species). Direct threats can also be natural phenomena altered by human activities (e.g., increase in extreme storms or increase in droughts due to climate change). See the IUCN-CMP Direct Threats Classification for more examples. Where possible, it can be helpful to map the spatial footprint of a threat. Doing so can help you better understand key threats, as well as the drivers behind them (see Figure 4 for an example from a chimpanzee project).

FIGURE 4 **Simplified Spatial Maps Depicting Chimpanzee Focal Values and Threats**



Chimpanzee habitat focal value



Agricultural conversion threat & habitat loss

Source: Adapted for Conservation Standards use by Lilian Pintea, Jane Goodall Institute

When identifying threats, it is important to specify the actors (e.g., specific companies, illegal fishers, poachers). Your team may want to lump or split some threats depending on whether the actors are the same (e.g., you may split "poaching" into "poaching by organized syndicates" and "poaching by villagers"). Being explicit about the actors can assist your team with your interested parties assessment and strategy development.

8 The synonym "pressure" may be helpful in cases where the term "threat" may not be well received by interested parties (e.g., ranchers or loggers) whose actions or professions might be identified as a "threat." It is also helpful to use adjectives such as "unsustainable" or "illegal" to clarify the nature of the threat (e.g., unsustainable ranching).

PHOTO: ASH BAKER

CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATION 3

ASSESSING CLIMATE THREATS AND THEIR EFFECTS

Climate change can present new threats to a focal value, exacerbate existing conventional (non-climate) threats (e.g., higher temperatures can exacerbate invasive species), and/or interact with conventional threats on the same biophysical factor (e.g., sea level rise and coastal development both reduce coastal wetland habitat connectivity). A **biophysical factor** is a biotic or abiotic factor that can help clarify how a direct threat affects a focal value. In this example, connectivity is the biophysical factor.

It is important to analyze the potential effects of climate on key species, ecosystems, and people, as well as the indirect effects of people's reactions to climate change on species and ecosystems (i.e., the effects of maladaptation, such as building sea walls as a response to sea level rise). To do this, identify specific projected changes in climate (climate threats, such as temperature increases, precipitation changes, extreme weather events, ocean acidification, and sea level rise) and how they will affect your focal values, either directly (e.g., higher temperatures and decreased precipitation increases susceptibility to extreme wildfires) or indirectly (e.g., droughts are becoming more frequent so people want to build dams to store water, which negatively impacts freshwater connectivity). Also, identify how climate threats interact with non-climate threats. A climate change vulnerability assessment can be a useful complementary tool, but keep in mind that it focuses solely on climate threats and not on how they interact with conventional threats.

It is important to understand the biophysical effects of climate threats because your focus is likely to be on influencing them, rather than reducing the climate threat. For example, a team cannot change increasing temperature, but after analyzing how it affects ecosystem composition, they could decide to plant drought-tolerant species.

In order to concentrate your actions and resources where they are most needed, it is important to prioritize the direct threats that affect your biodiversity focal values. In particular, you should try to determine your **critical threats** – the ones that are most important to address. You can use a number of threat rating and ranking tools to help you prioritize. Most tools consider the extent of the threat and the severity of its impacts on the biodiversity focal values. Taken together, these two criteria assess overall threat magnitude. Other frequently used criteria include permanence/irreversibility and urgency. Some common options for prioritizing threats include: an absolute rating of each threat as it affects different biodiversity focal values, a stress-based rating which assesses the effect of stresses (altered key ecological attributes) on focal values and the contribution of different threats to the **stresses**, and a relative ranking which compares different threats to one another. It is important to consider the entire suite of direct threats and not limit your analysis to the threats your team or organization has the expertise or resources to anticipate and address. Also keep in mind that if an aspect of human wellbeing is particularly important, your team may want to rate the threat to that human wellbeing element. You may need to consider how that threat might differ for human wellbeing versus biodiversity focal values.

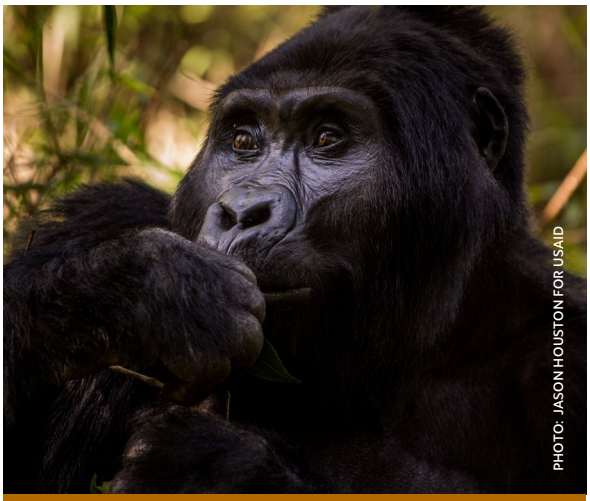


PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON FOR USAID

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Identification of direct threats and, if relevant, a map showing the spatial footprint for critical threats as they intersect focal values
- Identification of the biophysical effects of climate threats and interactions among climate and conventional threats
- Rating or ranking of direct threats to identify critical threats

1D. Assess the Conservation Situation

Situation Analysis

This sub-step builds on work you have already done related to your project context (scope, focal values, and direct threats). These are all elements of a **situation analysis** that helps your team and partners develop a common understanding of the relationships among the biological environment and the social, economic, political, and institutional systems (and associated actors) that affect your focal values. By understanding the context, behaviors, and key actors, you will be better equipped for designing actions that will achieve your conservation goals and objectives.

Depending upon the scale of the project and available resources, a situation analysis can be an in-depth, formal study or a less formal description based on input from those familiar with the context. In this sub-step, you should review available evidence, identifying the key **contributing factors** that drive direct threats and affect the viability of your biodiversity focal values. These include **indirect threats** (also known as root causes and **drivers**), **opportunities**, and biophysical factors. To the degree that it is feasible and useful, you should identify the actors behind key factors for clarity, and you should keep track of any knowledge gaps.

If your team will be doing more in-depth studies, some useful tools include market analyses, political economy analyses, and interested parties assessments. A market analysis can help identify how human behavior responds to economic incentives and how this behavior can adversely affect focal values. A political economy analysis can be a helpful and structured approach to examine power dynamics and economic and social forces that influence development. Likewise, an interested parties assessment can help clarify and differentiate the key actors, their roles, primary interests, level of influence, and opportunity for engagement. It is important to consider both influential parties and those that might be disadvantaged or marginalized. In particular, teams should consider how their process might influence the representation and engagement of different parties in decision making and how that might ultimately affect their wellbeing.

As you do your interested parties assessment, keep in mind which are likely to be important strategic partners for the project (Step 1A), whose behavior you want to affect, and/or whose voice you want to elevate. Whether you want to influence policy making, law enforcement, corporate practice, producer choices, or consumer decisions, all involve attitude and/or behavior change. Having a good understanding of the actors (including their motivations for, barriers to, and local context for behavior change) is crucial to developing a situation analysis and designing effective actions (Step 2A). Additionally, it is essential to ensure rights to obtain **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)**, so as to protect the rights of communities in any decision making that will impact their livelihoods, lands, or natural resources.

Situation Model

One way to synthesize and document threats, opportunities, and key actors identified in your situation analysis is to construct a **situation model** (also known as a conceptual model). A situation model is a diagram that visually portrays the relationships among the different **factors** in your situation analysis (see Figure 5 for a generic model and Figure 6 for an example based on a place-based project). A good model illustrates the main cause-and-effect relationships that exist within the project scope and the key actors involved. It should include the most important details, yet be as simple as possible. To this end, a situation model for a large-scale project may need to be at a coarser grain than a model for a small-scale project.

To make sure that your situation model generally represents your team's understanding of your context, it is good to build it together and base it, as much as possible, on existing evidence and diverse knowledge systems. It may also be useful to develop a spatial map of your situation. For both your situation model and spatial map, it is ideal to review them with key actors, interested parties, and partners to make sure that the products reflect a shared understanding of the situation.

FIGURE 5 **Generic Situation Model of Project Context**

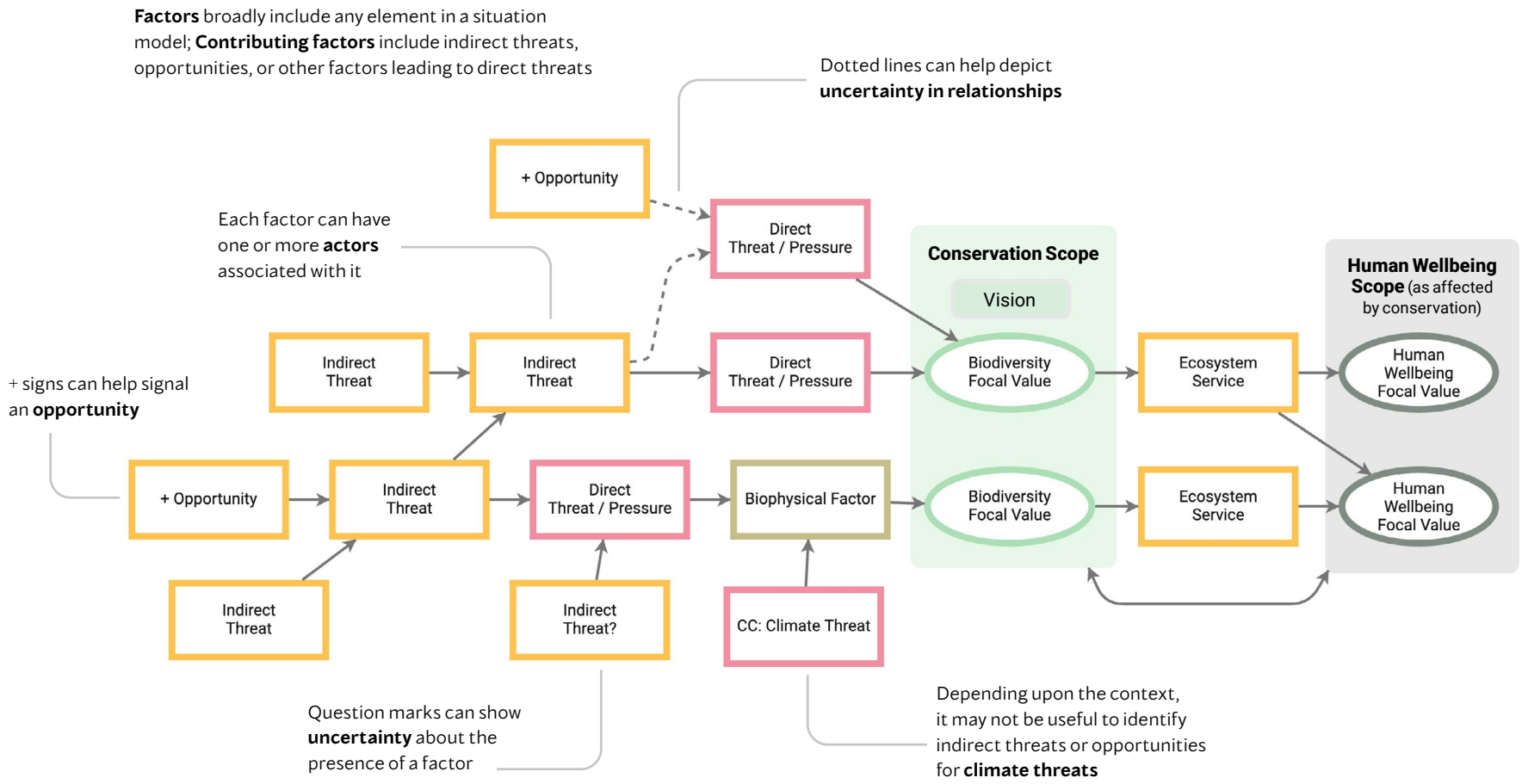
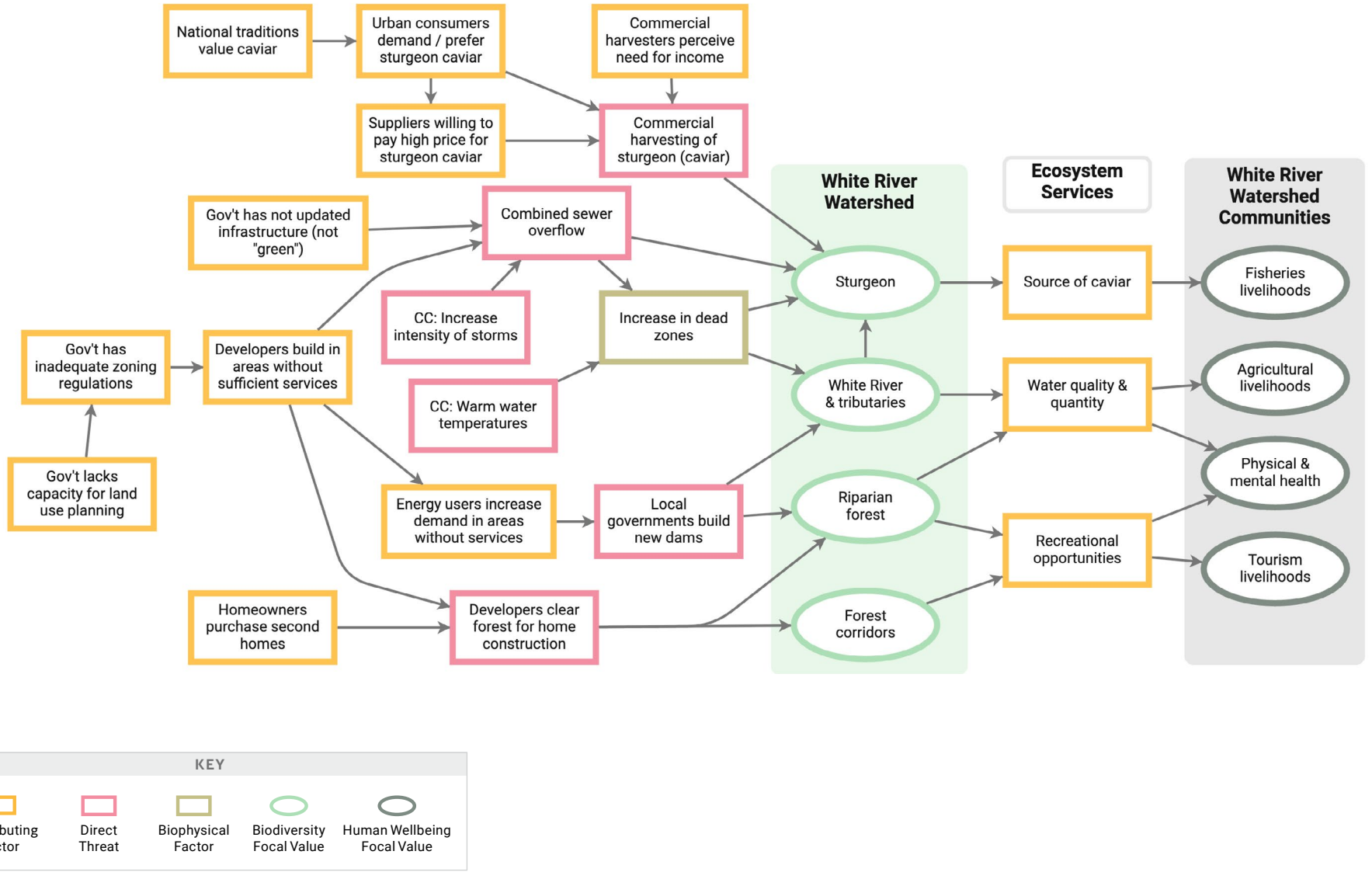


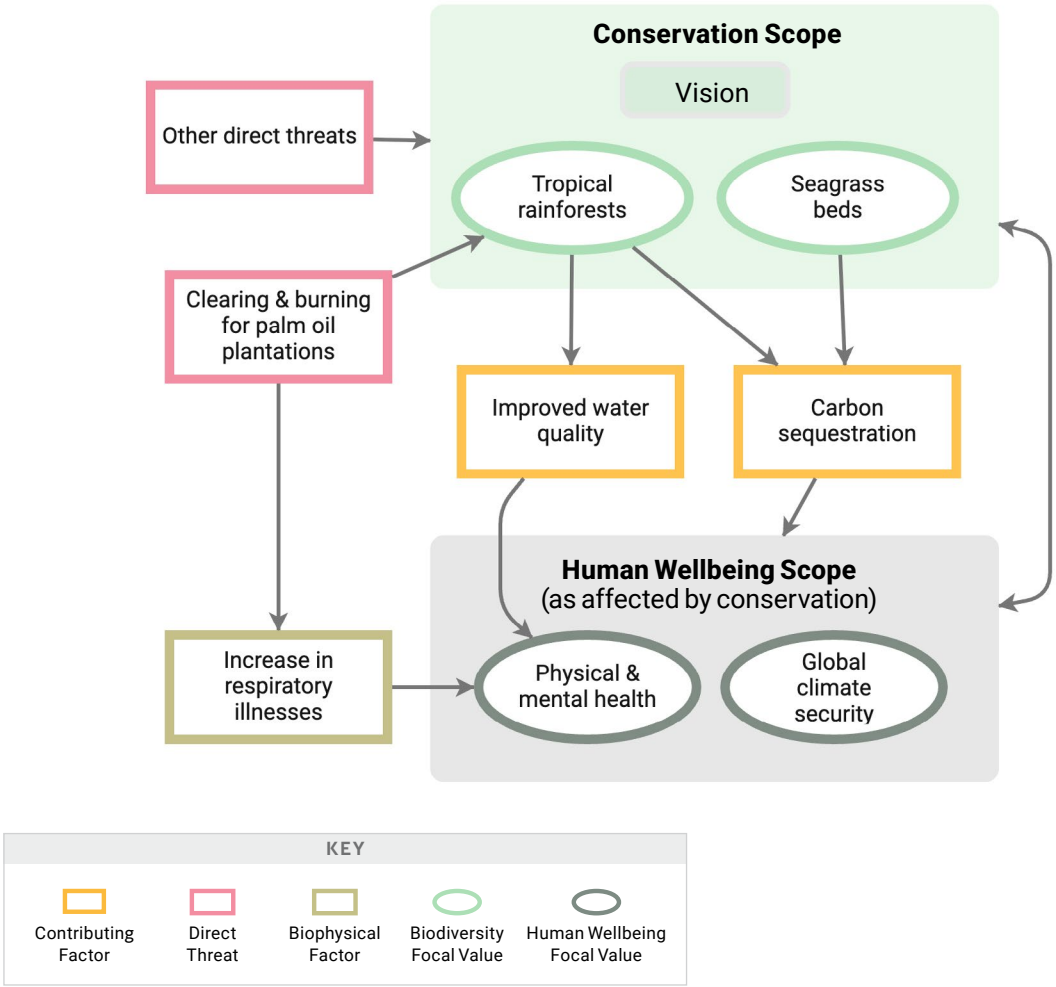
FIGURE 6 **Example Situation Model for Watershed Site**



As you develop your situation model, take note of the evidence for linkages you are creating. That evidence may come from various sources (e.g., published literature, research data, traditional knowledge, expert opinion, or input from interested parties). Likewise, the evidence may differ in strength of inference, from certain to unknown. Do not merely focus on what you already understand. Laying out these relationships and their evidentiary support will help your team identify and prioritize actions, as well as discover weak points in your situation model and/or results chains (Step 2A).

If your team includes human wellbeing focal values in your situation model, you should show how key factors in your situation model affect those focal values, either directly or through the status of biodiversity focal values and associated **ecosystem services**. Figure 7 shows an example of how a threat to biodiversity may also threaten human health, as well as how the status of a focal value and its ecosystem services can affect human wellbeing.

FIGURE 7 **Example Situation Model Extract with Human Wellbeing Focal Values**



Note: This figure provides an alternative way to show the relationship between your biodiversity focal values and human wellbeing focal values that may resonate with different audiences. See CMP (2016) Incorporating Social Aspects and Human Wellbeing in Biodiversity Conservation Projects for further guidance. (Note this guidance will likely be updated over time)

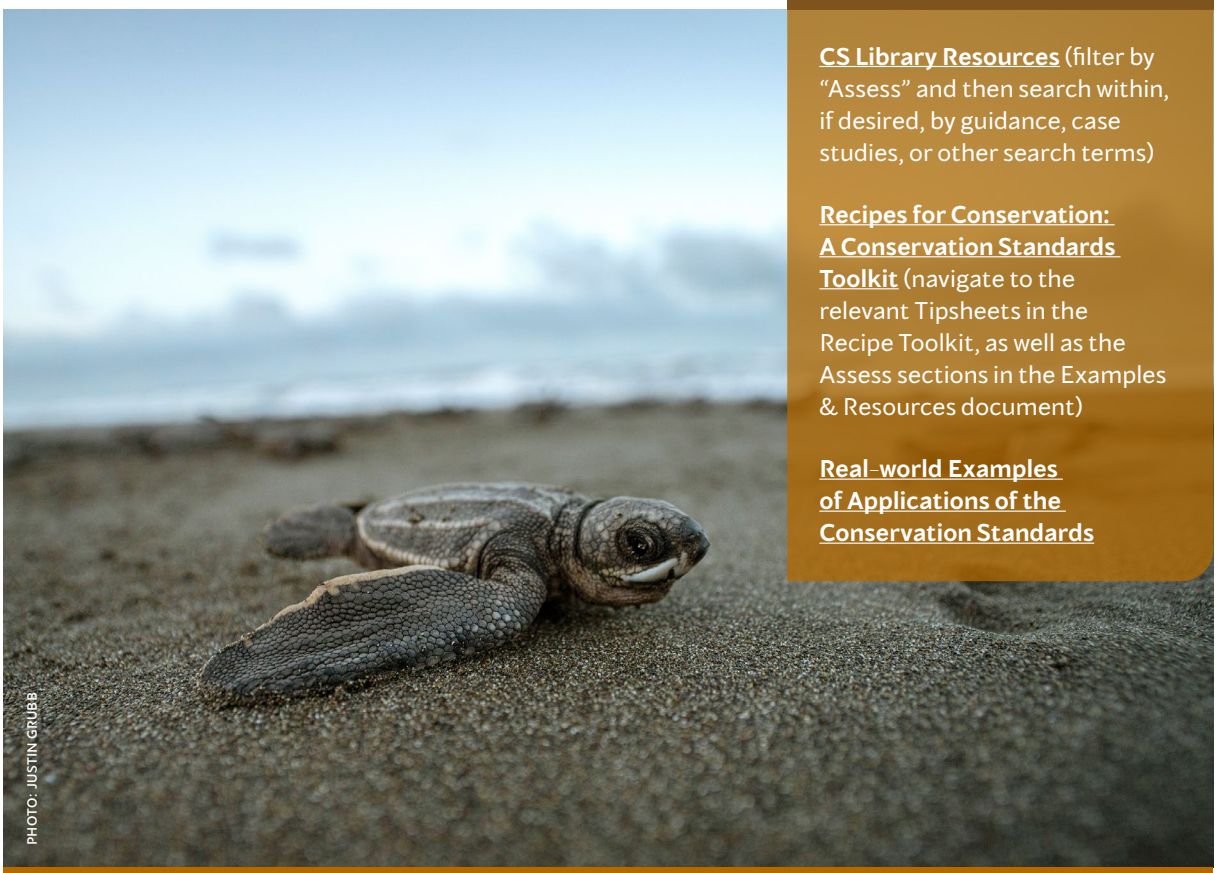


PHOTO: JUSTIN GRUBB

RESOURCES FOR ASSESS

CS Library Resources (filter by "Assess" and then search within, if desired, by guidance, case studies, or other search terms)

Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit (navigate to the relevant Tipsheets in the Recipe Toolkit, as well as the Assess sections in the Examples & Resources document)

Real-world Examples of Applications of the Conservation Standards

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Identification and analysis of indirect threats and opportunities
- Assessment of interested parties and their primary interests
- Situation analysis and/or model, narrative description, and/or other representation of key cause-and-effect relationships among factors affecting your project context

PLAN

PHOTO: CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT VIC

PLAN

This step in the Conservation Standards cycle focuses on developing key components of your overall **conservation plan**. Specifically, it involves using and building on your work in the Assess Step to define and develop your actions, theories of change, and associated goals and objectives (i.e., your **strategic plan**). It also involves clarifying specific **information needs** and indicators and how you will monitor these (**monitoring plan**) and laying out how you will operationalize your work, considering various institutional and contextual factors (**operational plan**). As shown in Figure 8, all this information contributes to your overall conservation plan. Step 3 Implement includes more information on the work plan element.

FIGURE 8 **Relationship among Different Plans**

Source: Adapted from Stewart 2016. Operationalising the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

As with many of the Conservation Standards steps and sub-steps, much of what you do in this step will be iterative. For example, although you develop an operational plan in Step 2C, you may need to think about sustainability, **risks**, and transition plans as you are choosing your actions in Step 2A. These elements may help your team and senior managers determine whether to continue with a specific action or even your overall project.

2A. Develop a Formal Strategic Plan: Goals, Actions, Assumptions, and Objectives

Goals

Developing a clear idea of what you would like to accomplish is an essential early step in putting together your strategic plan. **Goals** are linked to your project's focal values (conservation and/or human wellbeing) and represent the desired status of those focal values over the long term. They are formal statements of the ultimate **impacts** you hope to achieve. A good goal meets "SMART" criteria: *specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented,* and *time-limited* (see Annex 2 and Box 6). As with every step of your plan, your goals will be heavily influenced by the values of the team involved in their development. Be sure you are including a variety of perspectives from many interested parties.

Ideally, your project goals should fit within and contribute to broader program and/or organizational goals. Indeed, in some cases, what your project is expected to achieve may be specified by your organization and/or statutory requirements. These external obligations may ultimately influence your team's prioritization of actions. Where possible and relevant, your team also should consider the opportunity to align your goals (and objectives – discussed later) with broader national, regional, and/or international efforts (e.g., the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Sustainable Development Goals, Convention on Biodiversity, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and specify how your project intends to contribute to these wider efforts. You should not force this connection, but rather look for where there is overlap and potential for alignment.

If you did a viability assessment in Step 1B, you have already defined the elements of a good goal because you know the key attributes needed for a healthy focal value, you know by when you hope to achieve the desired status, and you know what you need to measure to assess its health. Developing a goal is just a matter of converting this viability information into a goal statement. As an example, a SMART goal for the forest corridor biodiversity focal value in Figure 6 might be: By 2035, the forest corridor linking the White River Watershed to Los Grillos is at least 5 km wide and remains unfragmented.

If a project has human wellbeing focal values, then goals should be set for these focal values. To do so, the team can define key attributes needed for a healthy human wellbeing focal value.

BOX 6

SETTING GOOD GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Good goals and objectives should meet the following SMART criteria:

Specific – Clearly defined so that all people involved in the project have the same understanding of what the terms in the goal or objective mean

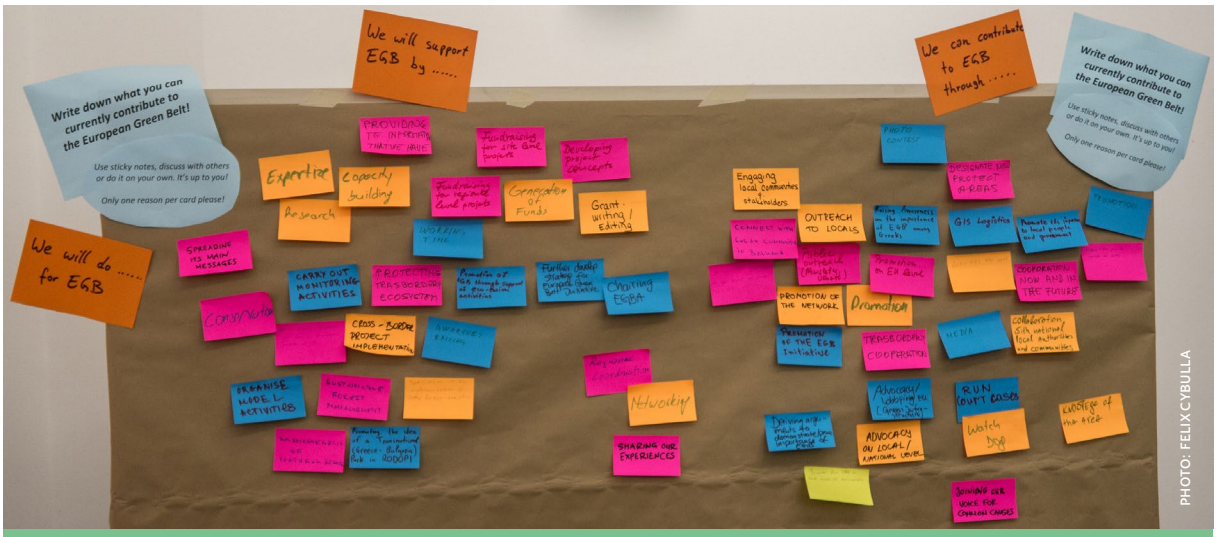
Measurable – Definable in relation to some standard scale (numbers, percentage, fractions, or all/nothing states)

Achievable – Practical and appropriate within the context of the project and in light of the political, social, and financial context (especially relevant to objectives; goals may be more aspirational)

Results-Oriented – Represents necessary changes in focal value condition, threat reduction, and/or other key expected results

Time-Limited– Achievable within a specific period of time, generally 1-10 years for an objective and 10-20 years for a goal

In a conservation project, these attributes are typically tied to the ecosystem services provided by a biodiversity focal value and/or expected results from conservation actions that directly benefit human wellbeing. It is good to keep in mind that there are many dimensions to human wellbeing, not all of which could be attributable to conservation work. For example, a conservation team would probably not have human wellbeing goals related to decreasing cholesterol levels, even though heart disease prevention is important for human health. It may, however, have human wellbeing goals related to access to food sources because the conserved biodiversity focal values are improving crop pollination services. In some cases, however, projects may have an equal focus on biodiversity and human wellbeing. Your team will need to be clear about the scope of your human wellbeing work and what human wellbeing goals make sense for your project. Likewise, it is important to understand when conservation and human wellbeing goals may be in conflict with one another and to be clear about what your project can and cannot achieve. Remember that all human wellbeing goals should be developed in partnership with the relevant groups identified in your interested parties assessment.



CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATION 4

SETTING GOALS

When using your viability assessment to set goals, you should review how projected changes in climate may affect each biodiversity focal value and ensure that your goals capture a desired future state that is climate informed and attainable. In setting your goals, consider whether you are trying to maintain or return to a historic ecological state, accept ecological change without intervention, or direct change towards a forward-looking ecological state. Even if your threat assessment indicates that a biodiversity focal value may be lost, it is best not to remove it until you have explored potential actions (later in the process). Keep in mind that you may need to revisit your goals as you go through the planning process.

For projects whose primary aim is to avoid, reduce, or sequester greenhouse gases (GHGs), your goals should describe which ecosystems and/or working lands and waters need to be conserved, managed, and/or restored to achieve this change in GHG emissions (e.g., By 2035, at least 100,000 hectares of peatland páramo in the Andes are restored to sequester carbon in soils).

Actions

Once you determine what you ultimately want to achieve (your goals), you should think about what you need to do (actions and activities). Good strategic planning involves determining where and how you will intervene, as well as where you will not. It also involves transparently and inclusively identifying whom you need to influence, who holds historical power, and whose voices need to be elevated.

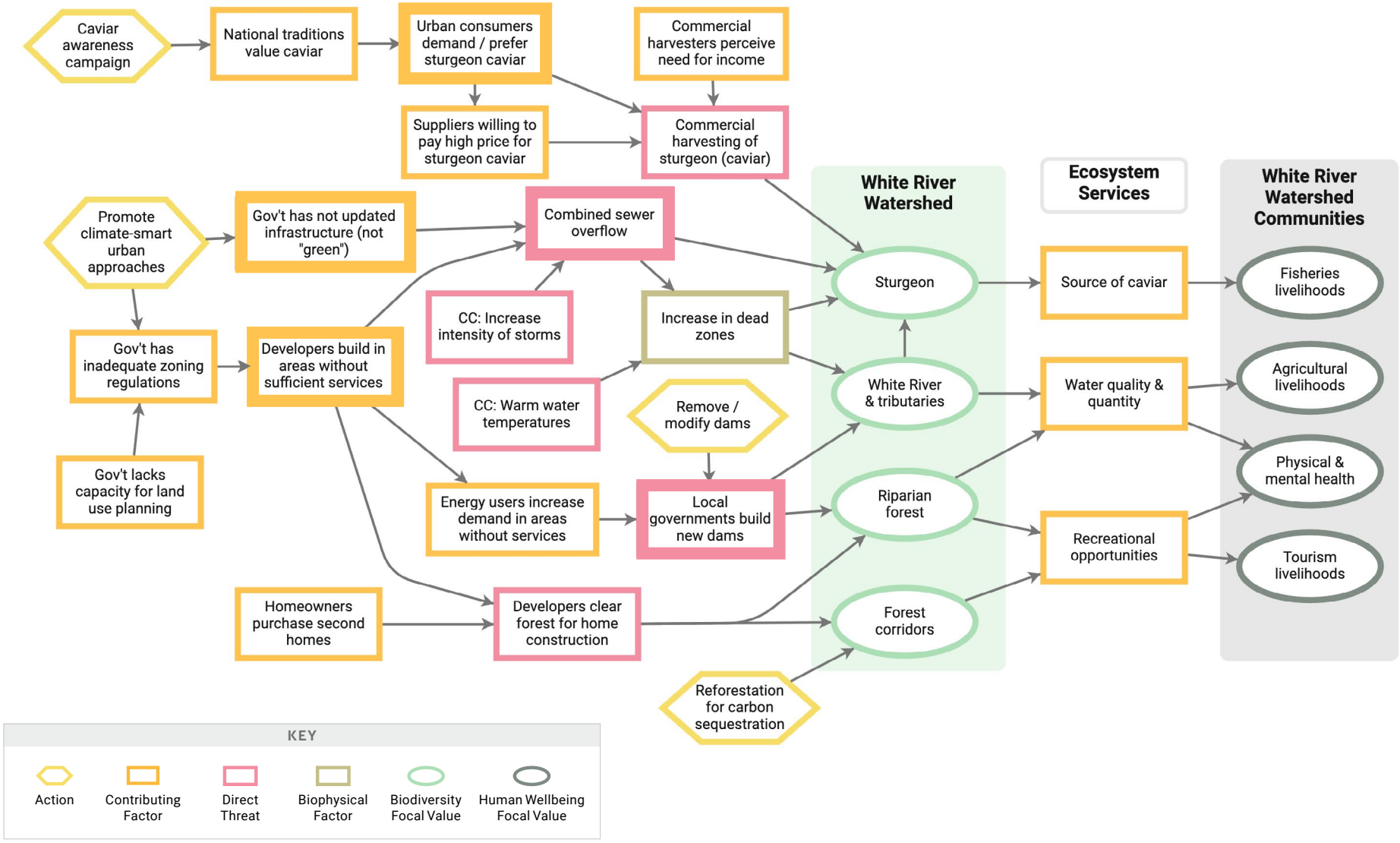
Selecting Key Intervention Points

When developing your actions, you will want to prioritize the factors you need to influence to improve the context outlined in your situation analysis and/or model – these are the **key intervention points**. To identify key intervention points, you need to evaluate all factors and, using available evidence (including traditional knowledge), identify which ones show good leverage opportunities and are likely to impact the focal value the most. Some considerations to evaluate leverage potential include contribution to threat abatement, ability to influence multiple factors in the model (including motivations for and barriers to behavior change), and urgency of addressing the factor (or its downstream factors).

In theory, any factor in a situation model offers an opportunity for intervention. In some cases, the obvious key intervention point is the direct threat itself (e.g., removing or managing invasive species) or the biodiversity focal value (e.g., restoration of an ecosystem). But in many other cases, you will get more leverage if you intervene on an indirect threat or opportunity that is part of a chain of factors affecting a direct threat (e.g., influencing policy or promoting good management practices). Your team's leverage on a factor may depend on your relationship with the actors involved in that behavior. Figure 9 shows an example of key intervention points and actions (depicted as hexagons) to address them.

PHOTO: ERIC RENSEL

FIGURE 9 **Example Situation Model with Key Intervention Points (Bolded Boxes) and Actions**



Deciding How and Where You Will Intervene

Your key intervention points help you determine where you need to consider conservation actions to influence your overall situation. The Conservation Standards define an **action** as a set of one or more **activities** with a common focus that work together to achieve specific goals and objectives by targeting these key intervention points, optimizing opportunities, and limiting constraints.[9] Actions should meet the following criteria: *linked, focused, feasible*, and *appropriate* (see Annex 2). Actions are implemented in the context of a **strategy**, which includes one or more actions and their associated expected results and goals and objectives.

There are many types of actions that can be used for different purposes, such as directly managing ecosystems or species, influencing human behaviors (Box 7), or creating **enabling conditions** that contribute to strategy effectiveness (see IUCN-CMP Conservation Actions Classification for a complete list of potential actions). Working off your situation analysis, you should generate a list of possible actions to influence your identified key intervention points. For those actions that you will take forward, it can be helpful to map them to ensure that you are taking action in the right places to influence your focal values and threats (Figure 10).

BOX **7**

BEHAVIOR CHANGE LEVERS

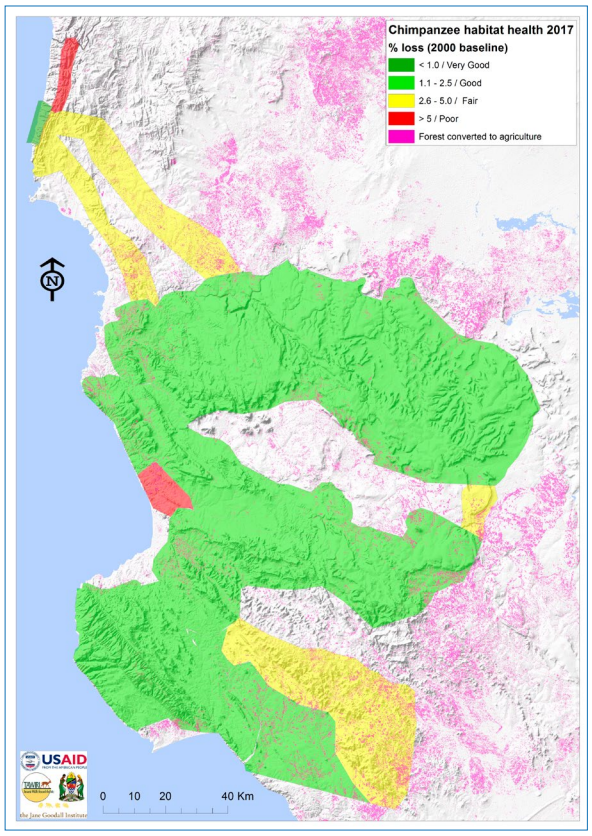
For human behavior change, we can use a set of behavioral levers (behavior-oriented strategies) based on established principles of behavioral and social science. These levers help describe the pathways linking actions to desired change in key actors' psycho-social states and ultimately in their behavior. These levers are most effective when used in combination to address the different motivations or barriers actors have at institutional, social, and individual levels. These levers include:

- Providing information and support (show/teach me)
- Changing incentives (e.g., material costs and benefits, time, and effort) (tempt/help me)
- Enacting rules and enforcement (make me)
- Using social influences and norms (norm me)
- Leveraging emotional appeals, key values, and interests (sway me)
- Designing the choice or decision context (nudge me)

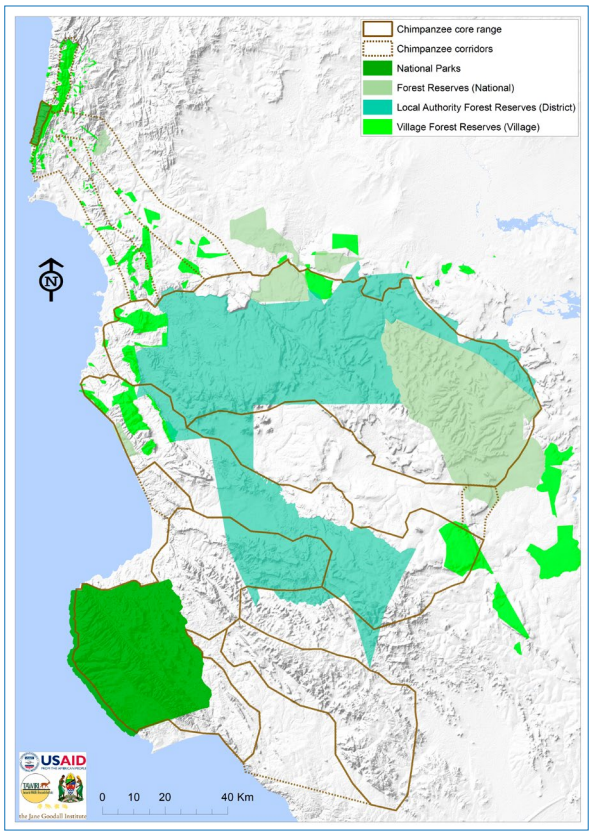
Knowing which type of lever and specific action to implement depends on understanding the interests, context, cognitive biases, barriers to, and motivations for each key actor's or interested party's behavior.

9 In CS 5.0, we have substituted the term "action" for the previously used term "strategy" to better fit how the rest of the world uses these terms. An action is now a component of a broader strategy.

FIGURE 10 **Simplified Spatial Maps Depicting Chimpanzee Protected Area Strategy**



Agricultural conversion threat & habitat loss



Candidate protected areas to limit future conversion

Source: Adapted for Conservation Standards use by Lilian Pintea, Jane Goodall Institute

It is good practice to test your actions to see how well they work before implementing them. If you determine there is strong evidence that an action will be effective in a project's context, you can then implement it at the appropriate scale. If the evidence is more mixed or not available, you may wish to conduct additional testing or pilot the action and use adaptive management to determine its effectiveness for your context. If you do move ahead with actions that lack sufficient evidence of effectiveness for your context, it is wise to consider the risks to your project of doing so and also make sure you closely monitor the action.

Finally, it is important that your project has appropriate environmental and **social safeguards** in place. This involves assessing approaches to avoid or mitigate potential adverse social and environmental effects of your actions, especially on interested parties with low influence and high interest. Throughout the project, your team will need to regularly consider the vulnerability, dignity, human rights, traditional knowledge, land and resource ownership, and cultural heritage and practices of affected groups. It is important to identify unintended consequences, feedback loops, and tradeoffs that can occur and that can affect people, biodiversity, and your project itself. While it is useful and prudent to review social and environmental safeguards throughout the project cycle, it is especially important in the strategy design phase, as strategies and actions may need adaptations or considerations to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential negative effects.


PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATION 5A

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES TO INCREASE RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Consider a diverse array of strategies that address both the complexity and uncertainty of ecological responses to climate change. This table shows how considering your work from earlier CS steps (especially viability assessment and threat rating) can help you identify strategies to increase the resilience of your focal values to climate change.

Type of intervention to increase climate resilience	Example strategy to increase climate resilience
Maintain or enhance the **viability** of a focal value and increase its capacity to adapt to climate change	Protect land to allow inland migration of tidal marsh as sea level rises, accepting change in the coastline
Protect **climate refugia** by protecting and/or restoring occurrences of the focal value that may be less exposed to changes in climate	Protect sections of a stream in which cold groundwater inputs continue to provide habitat for cold water fish species as other areas become warmer
Reduce the biophysical effect of a climate-related **threat** (e.g., increase in water temperature) by acting on a non-climate threat contributing to the same biophysical effect	Provide habitat for coldwater fish by protecting riparian vegetation that shades the stream as air temperature increases
Prevent human **mal adaptation** or actions that increase climate vulnerability	Work with Indigenous Peoples to reinstate natural fire regimes in areas where human actions have altered the frequency and intensity of fire

CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATION 5B

IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES FOR CLIMATE MITIGATION

Natural climate mitigation pathways can help countries meet their nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement. These climate mitigation pathways focus on conserving, managing, or restoring forests, wetlands (including mangroves and peatlands), and agricultural lands. The table below provides examples of strategies for some of these mitigation pathways.

Example Mitigation Pathway	How Mitigation Pathway Affects GHG Emissions	Example Climate Mitigation Strategy
Restore mangroves	Sequesters GHGs	Breach water control structures to restore hydrology and increase mangrove cover
Avoid forest conversion	Avoids GHG emissions	Strengthen law enforcement to prevent conversion of forest to illegal gold mining
Manage forests	Reduces emissions	Strengthen guidelines for natural forest management in government forest concessions

Assumptions & Theories of Change

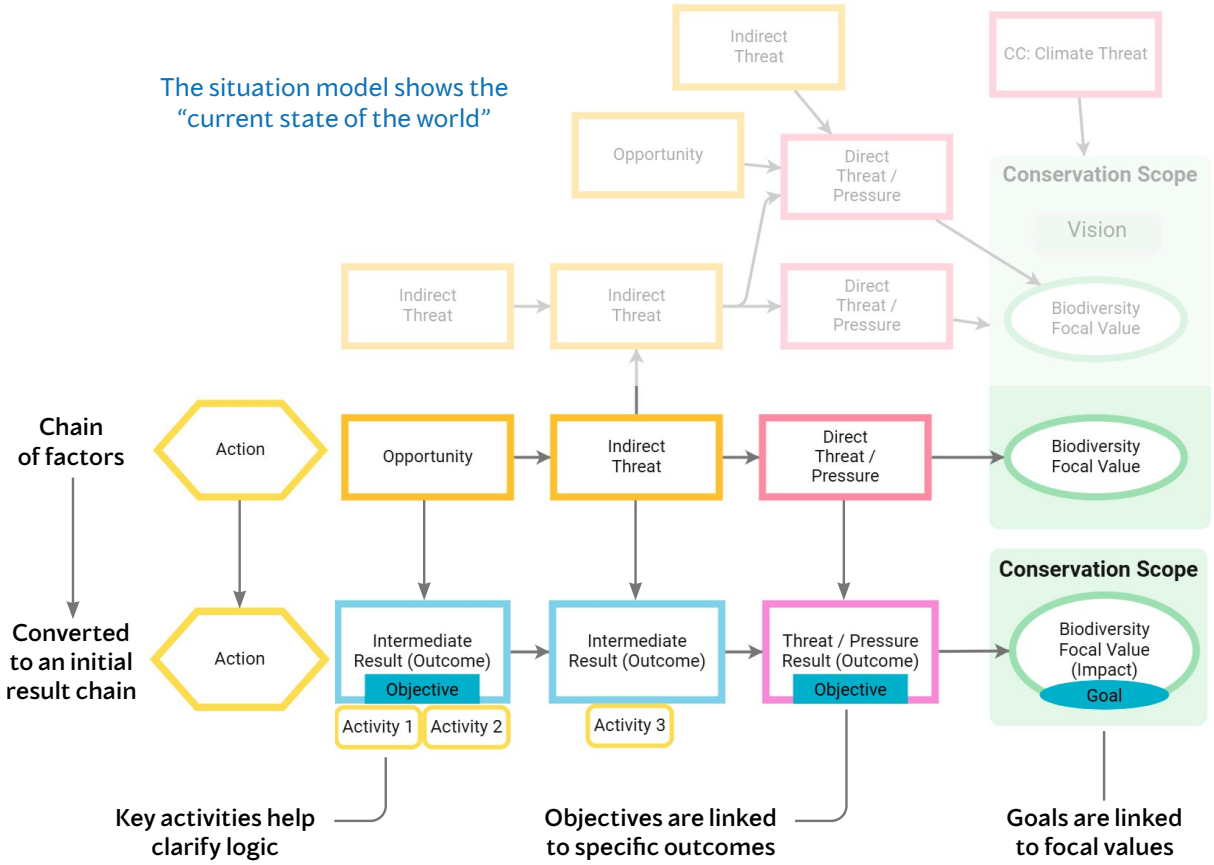
Once your team has selected your actions, you should clarify the causal **assumptions** about how you think each action will help you achieve **intermediate results** and longer-term biodiversity and human wellbeing goals. These assumptions, as well as assumptions about other factors that need to be in place for your action to succeed, represent your **theory of change**. Your theory of change can be expressed in text, diagrammatic (i.e., **results chain**), or other forms.[10]

If you portray your situation analysis in a situation model, you can use that as the basis for developing your results chains (Figure 11 shows a generic example, while Figure 12 shows an example based off of Figure 9). Doing so helps you explicitly show how your action is intended to affect the current state (portrayed in your situation model) to achieve the desired state (portrayed in your results chain). While the results and assumptions in your theories of change should be based on existing evidence, some assumptions may lack evidence. As such, your team may have uncertainty about whether your expected results can be achieved and if there are potential risks of undesirable outcomes. It is important to identify and prioritize these evidence gaps for attention (e.g., the dotted line in Figure 12 indicates an uncertainty in the team's assumptions).

10 While some people think that results chains are the same as **logical frameworks** (logframes) or logic models, they differ in important ways. Logframes provide a simple way of organizing goals and objectives, but, unlike results chains, they do not explicitly link actions, objectives, and goals. Logic models are more similar to results chains, but results chains have the flexibility to show more detail, branching, and the direct relationship between one result and another.

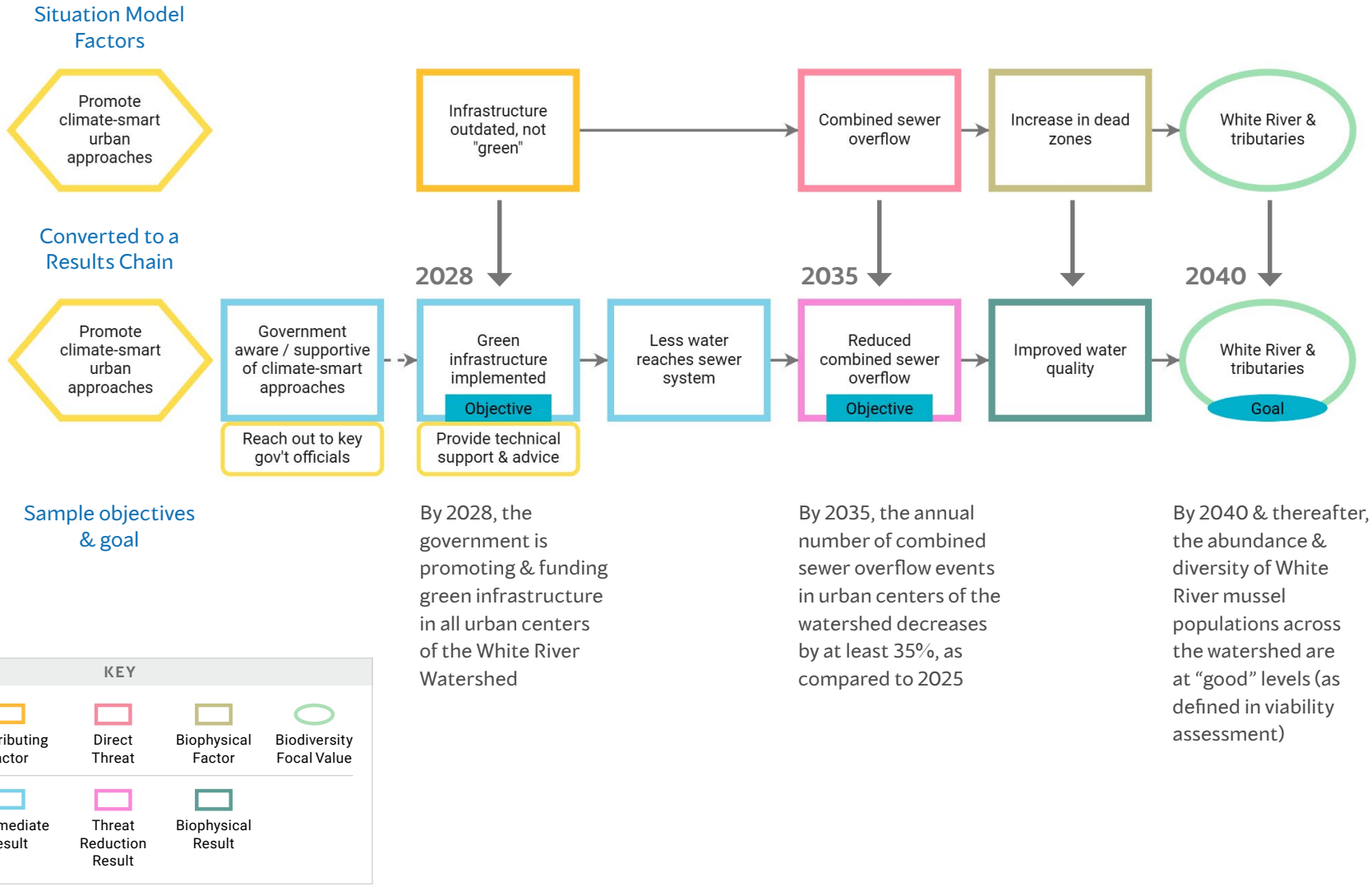
Often, your results chains (and, more broadly, your theories of change) will include key **activities** needed to implement your action successfully. Adding these activities can help clarify how you expect to achieve one or more specific results. It is also useful to make sure your results contain information about key psychological and social states (**psycho-social states**), including actors' beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and context for their behavior. This will help clarify why you think specific activities will lead to behavioral outcomes. This is a good point to consider your team's ability to make accurate assumptions about the actors involved, their behavior, and the power dynamics or barriers they may face in changing the situation.

FIGURE 11 **Generic Situation Model Factors with Associated Results Chain**



Result chains show the anticipated results – the "desired state of the world"

FIGURE 12 **Example Results Chain for Promoting Climate-Smart Urban Approaches in Watershed Site**



If your team identified human wellbeing focal values in your situation model, you should also use your theory of change to show how you believe your project's actions will improve human wellbeing (Figure 13 provides an example that shows how ecosystem services might contribute to human wellbeing). Keep in mind that conservation teams also often work on important social issues that have benefits and address interests beyond biodiversity (e.g., building capacity for good governance or promoting sustainable livelihoods). In such cases, the conservation action provides social benefits in service of conservation. It is useful to clarify when your conservation actions are contributing to human wellbeing focal values via ecosystem services and when they are contributing more directly via conservation actions. Figure 14 shows these relationships generically, while Figure 15 illustrates a specific example where an eco-certification action could contribute to human wellbeing both directly via increased logger incomes (which is also a necessary result for conservation) and via ecosystem services.

FIGURE 13 **Example Results Chain Extract with Ecosystem Services and Human Wellbeing Focal Values**

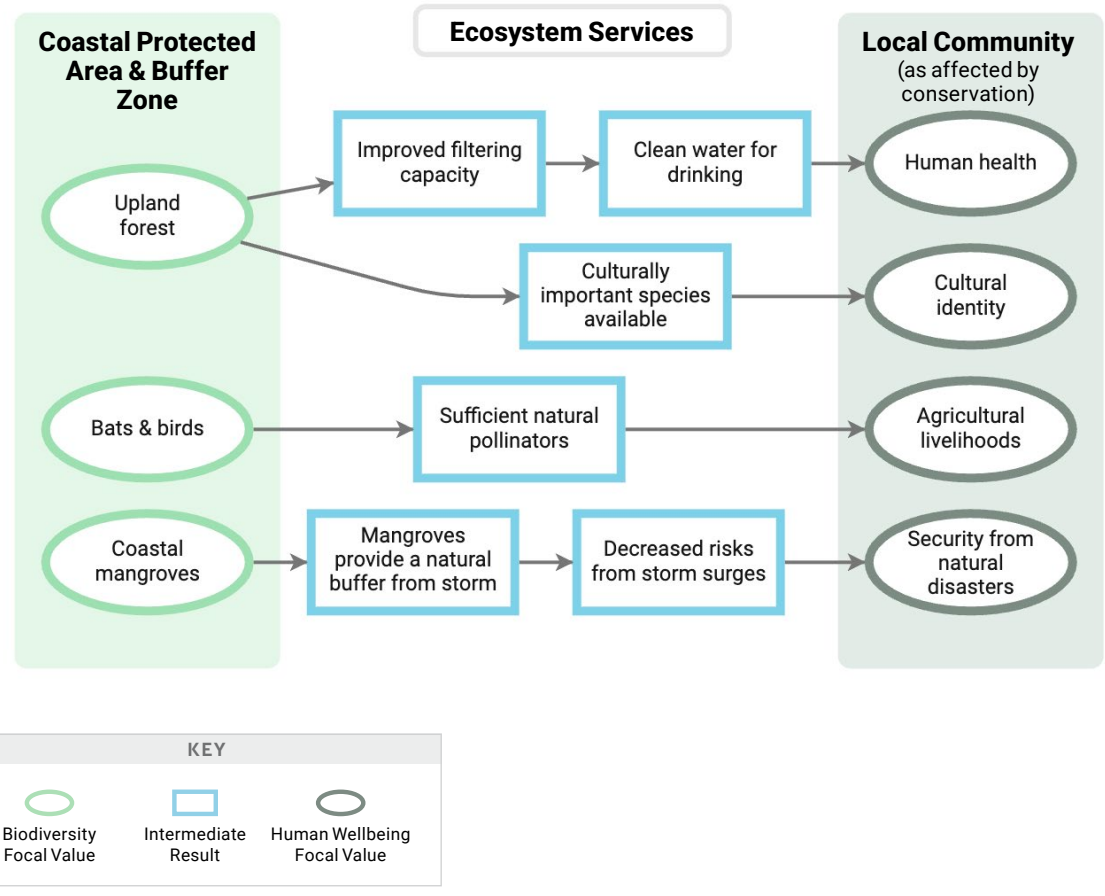


FIGURE 14 **High-level Relationships of How Conservation Actions Can Contribute to Human Wellbeing**

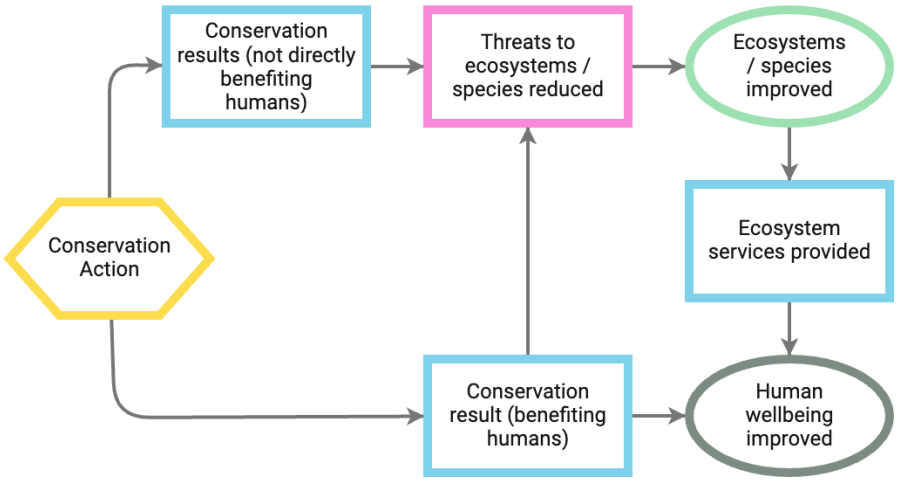
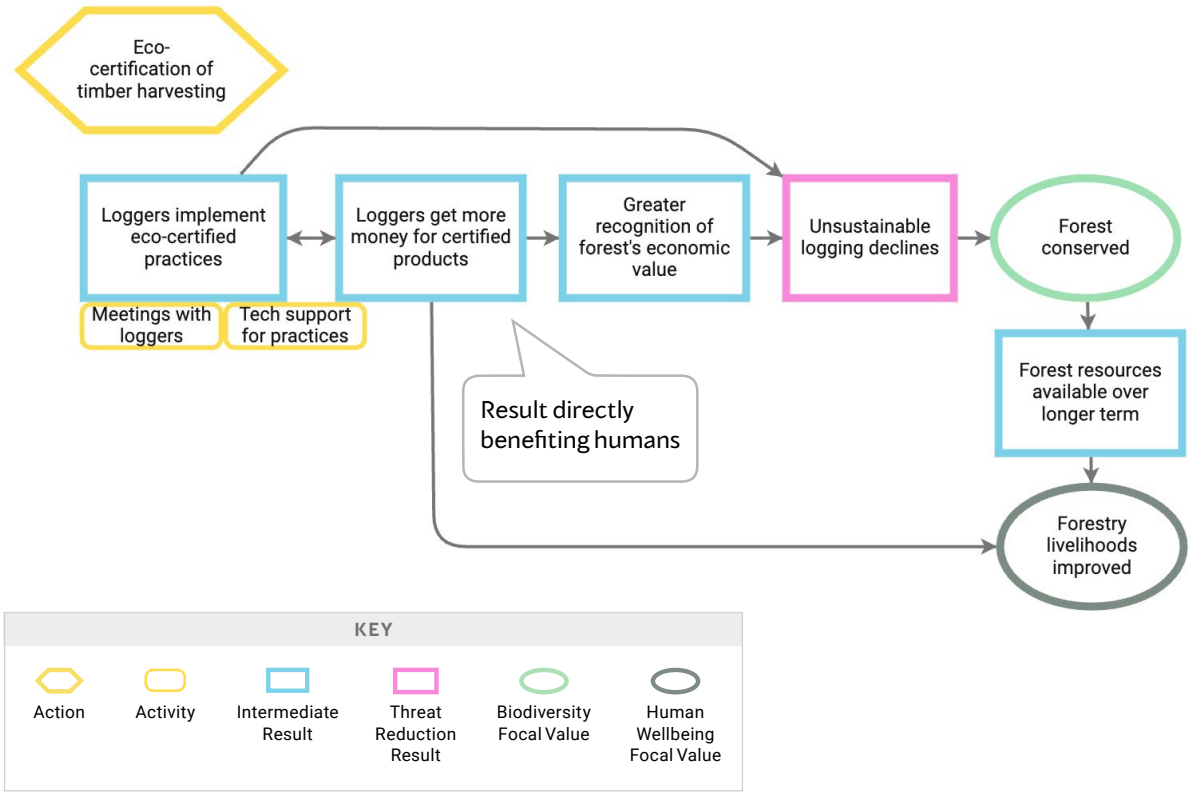
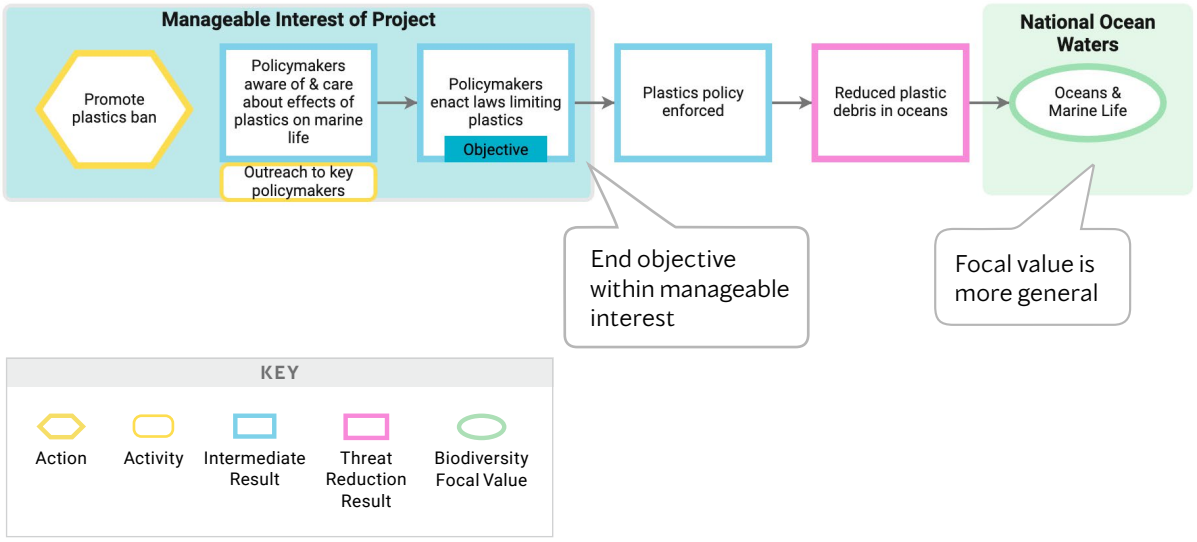


FIGURE 15 **Example of Conservation Action Directly Benefiting Humans**



Results chains can be used to show the **outcomes** of the project's specific work, as well as longer-term outcomes that may be beyond the manageable interests and/or timeframe of the project. Some projects may hope to achieve improvements in their focal values, while others may only intend to get as far as a threat reduction result (e.g., reduced plastic debris in oceans, Figure 16) or even an intermediate result (e.g., policymakers enact laws limiting plastics). In these latter cases, the ultimate threat reduction and/or conservation result may be more implicit than explicit.

FIGURE 16 **Example of a Project with a Manageable Interest Not Directly Tied to Biodiversity**



Objectives

Objectives are formal statements of the outcomes (or intermediate results in your results chains) that you believe are necessary to attain your goals. Objectives specify the degree of change that your team assumes is necessary to achieve in the short and medium term. Your objectives should be clear about the actors and the desired behaviors. Good objectives (and goals) meet "SMART" criteria: *specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented,* and *time-limited* (See Annex 2).

As shown in Figure 12, your objectives are tied to the results that are necessary for your theory of change to hold. It is generally good practice to have an objective for the direct threat (unless this is outside your manageable interest, as illustrated in Figure 16). This direct threat objective (and its target value) should be informed by the goal you set for your biodiversity focal value. It will be important to work through each objective to define what is appropriate and to ensure that the criteria for good objectives are met. You may need to use an iterative approach, revisiting and refining your objectives (and/or your actions and associated theories of change) as more information becomes available. Box 8 includes some additional considerations for setting objectives.

The goals and objectives specified in your theories of change represent what you need to accomplish. Together, with your theory of change, they clarify your assumptions about how your actions will help you reach those accomplishments and how you will gauge the progress of your project.

Strategic Plan – Pulling It All Together

You should capture and document your scope, situation analysis, and actions (including theories of change, goals, and objectives) formally in your strategic plan (refer back to Figure 8). Establishing a structured, technology-based system to link your actions to your results, goals, and objectives will enhance tracking and accountability. Depending on your needs and the level of detail required, this system could range from a simple table to something more comprehensive, such as a database, with folder hierarchies to organize and store documents. A clear system will help you keep all relevant data and documentation organized, accessible, and easily updated.

BOX **8**

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IN SETTING OBJECTIVES

Some important considerations in objective setting (beyond SMART criteria) include:

- Use existing information to develop your objectives. Where available, it is helpful to understand current or baseline conditions to determine how much change is needed.
- Where appropriate and available, use theoretical models, expert input, and other available evidence to set the numeric value in your objectives (and goals).
- Clarify how much change you need to achieve to see conservation results. Ideally, you should challenge yourself to work backwards from your goal and/or intermediate results to determine how much of each preceding objective you need to keep the chain progressing.
- Given that multiple actions may contribute to a single result, when setting an objective for that result, consider the cumulative effect of these different actions.


PHOTO: JUSTIN GRUBB

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Goals for each biodiversity focal value and, if appropriate, human wellbeing focal value
- Identification of key intervention points and draft actions
- Prioritization of draft actions
- Theories of change that clarify assumptions about how actions and associated activities lead to expected results
- Objectives for key intermediate results
- Finalized strategic plan

2B. Develop a Formal Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan

This sub-step includes outlining monitoring, evaluation, and learning protocols to develop a comprehensive **monitoring plan**. Your monitoring plan will help you track progress towards stated goals and objectives, evaluate progress along and key assumptions associated with your theory of change, and address information needs related to uncertainties identified earlier (e.g., in your situation analysis, action selection, or theories of change). The monitoring plan will also be helpful in identifying the resources needed for implementation, developing a timeline for data collection and analysis, and reflecting on potential risks. The level of rigor and the type of monitoring you do will depend upon your confidence in your key assumptions (i.e., the degree of evidence to support your assumptions), the consequences of being wrong, the stage of your project, and available resources.

Audiences and Information Needs

To start developing your monitoring plan, you should specify your **audiences** and their **information needs**. Effective **monitoring** uses the minimum amount of financial and human resources to provide you with the information needed to address key uncertainties and/or determine if your project is on track and achieving stated objectives.

As a first step, you should determine for whom you are doing the monitoring, what they need to know for decision making, when they need the information, and what level of rigor is required to meet their needs. For example, one audience might be your project's funders who need to know you are spending their money appropriately. Another audience might be interested parties

PHOTO: ERICA COCHRANE

(including Indigenous Peoples and local communities) who want to know whether their concerns and interests are being addressed. A key audience for monitoring is always your own project team. Monitoring is essential to help your team track the implementation of actions and achievement of goals and objectives, test assumptions in your theories of change, reduce uncertainties, learn from information collected, and improve current and future programming. Table 2 lists some common audiences and their general information needs.

By focusing your monitoring efforts squarely on the core assumptions you have made (illustrated in your situation model and results chains) and the key uncertainties you have identified, you are more likely to collect only the information that will be useful for addressing specific information needs (e.g., status of threats, achievement of results, areas of uncertainty).

If your monitoring is designed to help understand why actions are working or not, make sure to monitor not just specific results, objectives, or goals, but also key factors that may contribute to or detract from your ability to achieve your desired results. This could include monitoring barriers and enabling conditions beyond your control, as well as changes to behavior and related psycho-social states for key actors. When prioritizing information needs, it is useful to think about the risks to your project of not having this information, how you will use the information for management decisions, and whether it is feasible to address the information needs within the confines of your project's resources and timeline.

TABLE 2 **Common Monitoring Audiences and Their Information Needs**

AUDIENCE	TYPICAL INFORMATION NEEDS/INTERESTS
Project team and partners	Is your team implementing the activities as expected? Is your team achieving its objectives in the expected timeframes, and are assumptions valid? What is working, what is not, and why? How can your team improve your strategies?
Donors	Is your team implementing the activities as expected? Is the project achieving objectives in the expected time frames? Are the assumptions behind this project valid?
Interested parties	Is your team implementing the activities as expected? How will the project affect them?
Conservation community	What worked, what did not, and why? What may be generalizable from the project to other contexts?
Academics and students	What worked, what did not, and why?
Auditors and certifying entities	Is the project complying with laws and regulations? Is it following best practices?

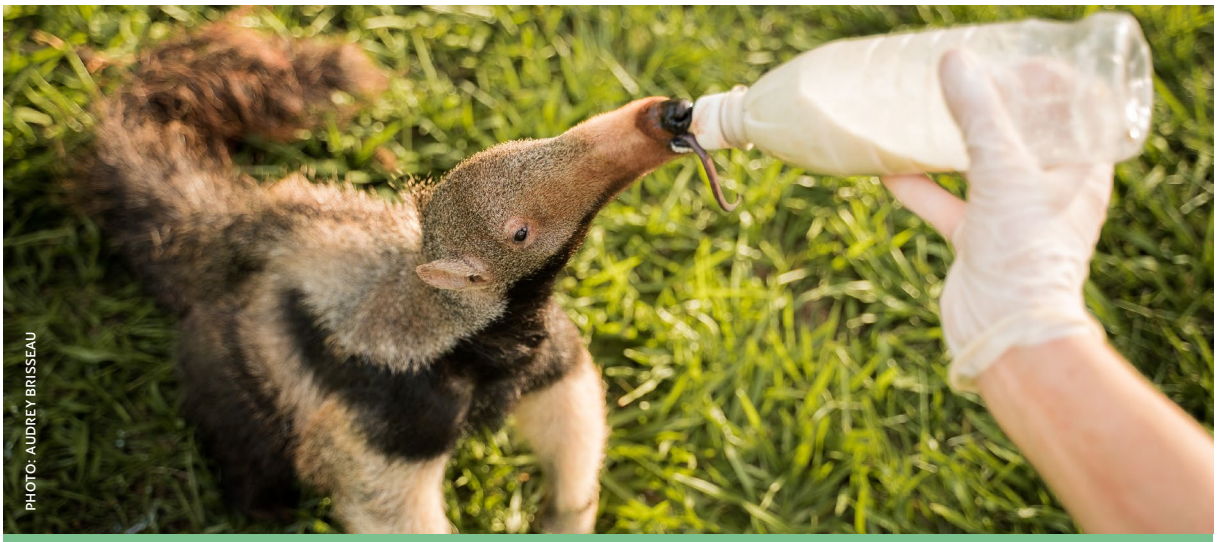


PHOTO: AUDREY BRISSEAU

CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATION 6

MONITORING CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECTS AND STRATEGIES

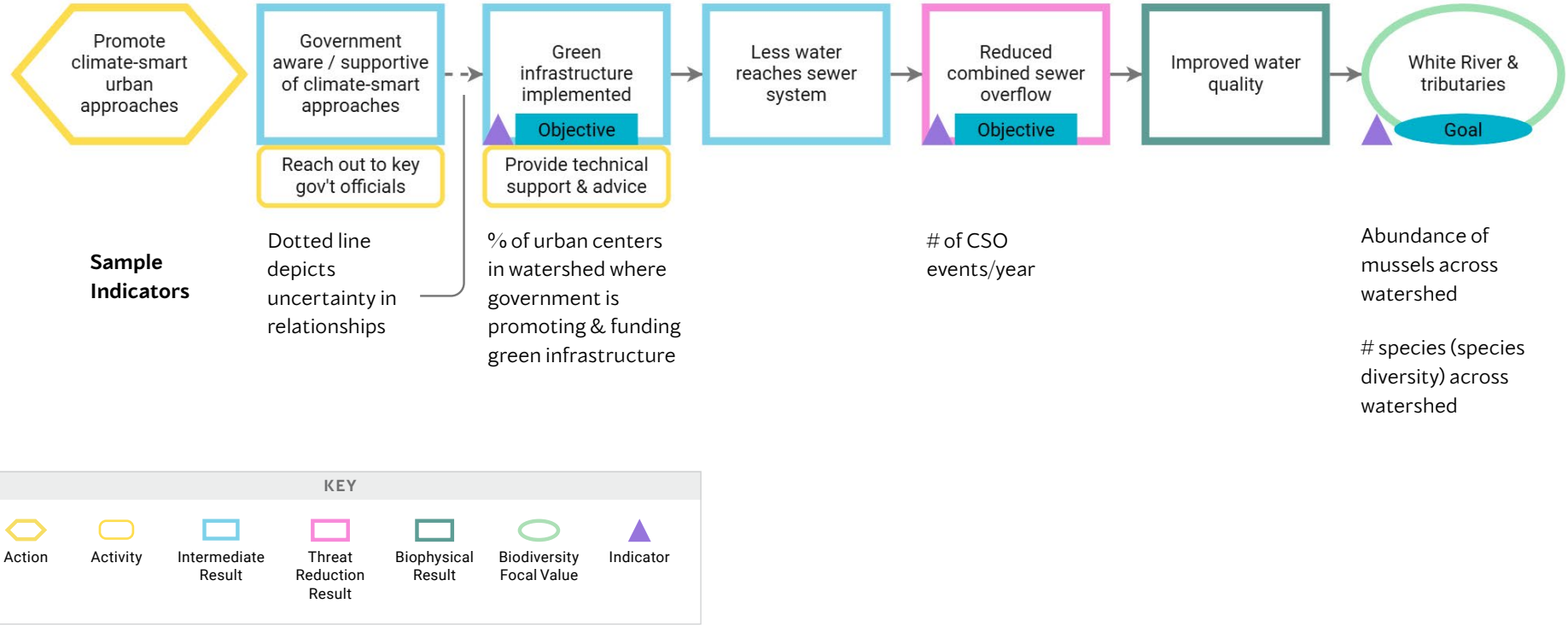
While adaptive management is always important, it is particularly critical when dealing with the variability and uncertainty around climate impacts. To monitor climate and/or the reaction of particular species and ecosystems to climate change, you may need to use special monitoring approaches (e.g., using specific indicators for soil moisture, storm frequency, and storm intensity). It is important to identify threshold levels for specific indicators (e.g., the threshold between "good" and "fair" in your viability assessment) to use as triggers to consider adding, modifying, or removing strategies or to reconsider a focal value.

Indicators

With your audiences and information needs identified, the next step is to define the specific **indicator** data and other information you should collect to address your information needs. Good indicators meet the criteria of being *measurable, precise, consistent*, and *sensitive* and should be tied to key factors, results, or assumptions in your situation model or theory of change (see Annex 2). Note that some indicators may be qualitative, while others may be quantitative. Likewise, as discussed below, there are a variety of methods to measure any single indicator. Where relevant, indicators also should be informed by the perspectives and values for biodiversity held by Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Through your situation model, theories of change, and goals and objectives, you have clarified your focus and prioritized your information needs. These could include: addressing gaps in your situation model, testing assumptions in your situation model and results chains, and demonstrating progress towards achieving stated objectives. These inputs will help you narrow down a nearly infinite set of potential indicators to a more manageable list and provide you with a solid framework for focused data collection, analysis, **evaluation**, and learning. Figure 17 provides an example of how theories of change and associated SMART objectives can help you focus your indicators. You should aim to collect the minimum data required to meet your critical information needs. As you monitor progress along your theory of change, keep in mind that there may be important factors that are outside your team's control but that could have an important influence on the success of your action (e.g., political situation or market forces). In these cases, you may want to monitor these factors with a limited set of indicators to help you interpret whether you are achieving your expected results (and why or why not).

FIGURE 17 **Conservation-Friendly Zoning Results Chain with Potential Indicators**

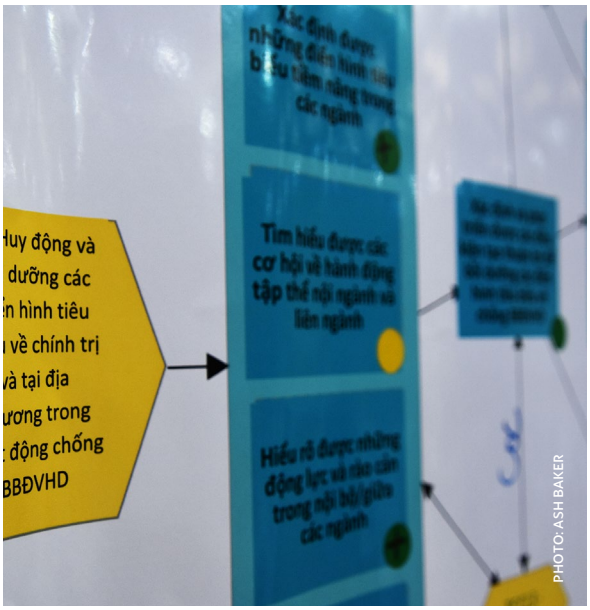


Methods

As you develop your indicators and identify key information needs, you will need to think about how you will measure them (i.e., the **methods** you will use). Examples of methods could range from conducting wildlife survey transects to downloading satellite imagery on land use patterns to conducting key informant interviews to understand interested party attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors. Methods should meet the criteria of *accurate, reliable, cost-effective, feasible,* and *appropriate* (see Annex 2). Where possible, monitoring methods should be participatory, non-extractive, and address privacy and data sovereignty concerns.

When choosing a method, your team will see that there is sometimes a tradeoff between a method's cost and its accuracy and reliability. The key is to select the most cost-effective method that will ensure your data are accurate and reliable enough to meet your management needs. Depending on your needs, you may not have to collect primary data, but instead could take advantage of existing data. For example, one method for getting data about a given fish population would be to download harvest records posted by a government agency on the internet. In some instances, however, primary data collection will be required.

It is helpful to document the specific protocols you use to implement your methods. Doing so will help in data interpretation, as well as future monitoring of the same indicators to detect patterns over time. Ideally, your team should test and adjust indicators and methods before using them. For example, you should pilot survey instruments to ensure they give you the data you need and are not subject to misinterpretation. Likewise, collecting baseline data early on could help you test your methods. If you cannot establish baselines within the first few months of a project, then most likely you need to review the methods or the indicators.



Monitoring Plan – Pulling It All Together

Your audiences, information needs, indicators, and methods are all part of your monitoring plan. Your plan should also specify roughly when, where, and by whom data will be collected (see Table 3 for an example monitoring plan). As you develop your monitoring plan, consider how the data collection process may impact interested parties and how that information will be stored (addressing any privacy or data sovereignty concerns). As part of your work planning and budgeting (Step 3), your team should include time and financial resources to support **monitoring activities** and data management.

Finally, and in preparation for Steps 3 (Implement) and 4 (Analyze & Adapt), your team should consider protocols for how you will manage and access data and how you anticipate analyzing and using data to meet the information needs of your key audiences. Incorporating information on your indicators, methods, and supporting data into a structured system that links your actions to your results, goals, and objectives will facilitate your team's ability to synthesize across all of this information. Additionally, thinking ahead to Step 5 (Share), it's also useful for your team to begin planning for the creation of public data repositories with clear data collection and management protocols so that others can understand, use, and reproduce them.

TABLE 3 **Extract of a Monitoring Plan for Promoting Climate-Smart Urban Approaches**

ITEM	INDICATORS / VARIABLES	MONITORING ACTIVITY	WHO	TIMEFRAME
OBJ CLIMATE-1. By 2028, the government is promoting & funding green infrastructure in all urban centers of the White River Watershed	% of urban centers in watershed where government is promoting & funding green infrastructure	Review provincial gov't records Consult with local officials in urban centers	LS	Q4, 2027 Q4, 2028
OBJ CLIMATE-2. By 2035, the number of combined sewer overflow events in urban centers of the watershed decreases by at least 35%, as compared to 2025	# of CSO events/year	Consult sewage map (with event duration monitoring data)	LS	Annually, starting in 2028 (baseline 2025)
GOAL. By 2040 & thereafter, the abundance & diversity of White River mussel populations across the watershed are at "good" levels (as defined in viability assessment)	Abundance of mussels across watershed # species (species diversity) across watershed	Download data from research institute, focusing on discharge points & downstream	AM, JB	2025-2040 (baseline 2025) Every five years
UNCERTAINTY. Will government awareness or support of green infrastructure lead to active promotion & funding? Are there any major barriers to this behavior that we have not considered? Are they significant enough to prevent this behavior?	Evidence of government awareness of/evolving support towards green infrastructure Identification of major barriers to support Feedback from conversations with relevant gov't officials	Consult with gov't officials Research on experiences in other areas	LS, AM, JB	2026

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Audiences and their information needs and preferred communication modes clearly defined
- Indicators and methods identified
- Finalized monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan

2C. Develop an Operational Plan

Conservation projects are ultimately implemented by people and institutions. Even the best strategic plans and monitoring plans are of little utility if you cannot put them into operation. With this in mind, this sub-step involves developing an operational plan for your project. Key components of an **operational plan** include analyses of:

- **Human capacity, skills, and other non-financial resources** required to implement your project and what you need to do to develop those resources, including cultivating partnerships. You can use your theories of change and activities to develop high-level time estimates and to identify the skills required to implement your actions and the associated monitoring activities. It is also useful to refer back to your early work on identifying your team and the key skills and skill gaps within your team.

- **Funding** required to implement your project and an accounting of your current and potential sources of these funds. To identify the funding needed, your team should develop broad estimates using your analyses of human capacity, skills, and other resources. Be sure you include any major equipment expenses (e.g., vehicles). Again, your theories of change will provide a good framework for making those high-level estimates.

- **Risk factors** of concern for your project and how they can be addressed. A risk factor is an uncertain event or condition which, if it occurs, has a negative effect on at least one project element (e.g., time, cost, scope, or quality). Risks can be subdivided into programmatic risks that affect your situation (e.g., political instability, drought) and operational risks that affect your ability to implement the project (e.g., change in organizational leadership, limited capacity of partners). A risk assessment should rate both the probability of the risk factor occurring and the impact or severity of the risk factor if it does occur. The purpose of a risk assessment is to identify issues that could negatively impact the project's ability to implement key actions effectively and/or achieve conservation goals, including any impacts on rights holders and other interested parties. A risk assessment also identifies additional actions necessary to mitigate or avoid those risks. As such, a risk assessment is an important input for action selection (Step 2A). A risk assessment template (defined by your organization, if relevant) is useful to document and rate your risks, prioritize your efforts, and re-rate the risks as your project evolves.

- **Social safeguards** your team has in place to protect individuals and communities from adverse impacts. These safeguards aim to ensure that the rights, wellbeing, and interests of vulnerable or marginalized groups are respected and protected. Some examples of social safeguard mechanisms include free prior and informed consent (FPIC) for Indigenous communities, grievance redress mechanisms, and training for staff on ethical practices;

- **Transition strategy** to clarify how long your project will last and how you will ensure the sustainability of your project's achievements beyond your team's involvement. While we include this element under the operational plan sub-step, it is important to consider sustainability and transition options at the start of your project. Doing so helps ensure that associated actions are included in your work plan and can be adapted as your project evolves. Ignoring these factors can lead to unrealistic expectations among the project team and interested parties, which can become increasingly difficult to manage over time.

The first two components of an operational plan technically form the basis for a (high-level) work plan and budget, both of which are covered more thoroughly under Step 3. The level of detail and formality of your operational plan will vary, depending on the size and complexity of your project. Small projects may only briefly touch on each of these topics, whereas large, complex ones might have an extensive and formal treatment of each.

At the conclusion of the Plan Step, you will now have most of the products of a conservation plan (Figure 8). Depending on your needs, you may want to compile this information into a formal plan. Or, if you are using software like Miradi, you can maintain this information in the software and produce the relevant plans and documentation as needed. This creates a "living" plan that can be updated easily as your project evolves. It also enables ongoing linkage of data, such as budgets, with other organizational systems.

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Assessment of human, financial, and other resources
- Risk assessment and mitigation actions
- Social safeguards
- Estimate of project lifespan and transition strategy

RESOURCES FOR PLAN

CS Library Resources (filter by "Plan" and then search within, if desired, by guidance, case studies, or other search terms)

Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit (navigate to the relevant Tipsheets in the Recipe Toolkit, as well as the Plan sections in the Examples & Resources document)

Real-world Examples of Applications of the Conservation Standards

PHOTO: SARA ESTLANDER

IMPLEMENT

PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON FOR USAID

IMPLEMENT

In this important step, your team will use project management principles to put into action the planning work you did in Steps 1 and 2. Step 3 involves developing and implementing specific work plans (Figure 8), while ensuring sufficient resources (people, equipment, and funding), skills, knowledge, and partners. All of this work should be done within the context of the implementing team's organizational policies and procedures and decision-making processes for approving work plans and budgets. As you move into implementation, don't aim for perfection or wait for all the pieces to be in place. Work plans (and strategic plans) evolve over time.

3A. Revisit Team Structure and Process

Likewise, even teams evolve over time. Sometimes, those implementing a project have not been involved in all steps of the planning process. The Implement Step is a good point to revisit your team and supporting staff (e.g., finance, fundraising, and communications) to ensure you have the right mix of staff and partners to support implementation and/or provide expertise missing from the current team.

The monitoring plan developed in Step 2 should have identified the key audiences and their information needs, but as you build your work plan, think about any additional people or groups that can influence the successful implementation of your project. It is important to build communications activities into your work plan. You even may wish to develop a dedicated communications strategy to stay on top of communications throughout your project's lifecycle.

At this step, you should revisit or create a team charter or other partnership agreements (see Step 1) to establish roles and responsibilities for different organizations and individuals. If you have not already done so, now is an important time to carry out due diligence on potential partners. As you revisit your team structure, make sure you have a clear project lead who will coordinate and keep the team focused and moving forward. Consider developing team norms to ensure all team members are in agreement about the work and how it will be conducted. Your team norms should cover procedural equity so that all team members and interested parties are treated equitably. This concept should be incorporated in how the team functions, as well as how the work is implemented.

If your project is likely to continue over many years, you will want to consider how the team will deal with succession planning. For example, you should be documenting your decisions and progress, so that you can more easily bring new team members on board.

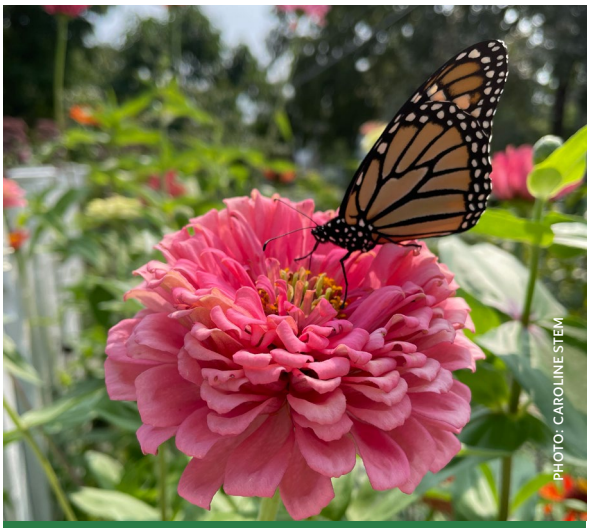


PHOTO: CAROLINE STEM

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Updated team charter and other partnership agreements, as relevant
- Updated communications strategy stating how you will keep interested parties engaged as to your progress

3B. Develop a Detailed, Short-term Work Plan and Timeline

In the previous steps of the Conservation Standards cycle, your team developed your strategic plan, monitoring plan, and operational plan (Figure 8). In this step, you need to turn these general plans into more specific ones and then implement them on an ongoing basis.

The first part of this step is, with your project team and partners, to work from your strategic plan (in particular, the goals, objectives, and theories of change) and your operational plan to develop a more specific short-term **work plan** covering the next few months or, at most, year. While elements of a work plan often vary by team or organization, any work plan should include at least the following:

- The **specific activities and tasks** required to implement the actions laid out in your strategic plan. In addition to the programmatic activities, make sure your work plan includes what you need to do to:
  - coordinate your project (e.g., organizing/attending weekly meetings, developing partnerships, engaging interested parties, finalizing an FPIC process);
  - monitor progress and/or key uncertainties;
  - implement your operational plan (e.g., communications, fundraising, conflict resolution activities);
  - review and update assessments (e.g., situation analysis, risk assessment, interested parties assessment);
  - analyze progress and adapt; and
  - share project updates with interested parties.
- **Who will be responsible and who will be accountable** for completing each activity and task, keeping in mind any barriers, power dynamics, or social biases that may influence an individual's ability to fulfill the role. In complex and/or collaborative projects, it is particularly helpful to name the role and the person/organization to clarify expectations and establish accountability. In doing so, it can be helpful to use standard categories, such as RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) or MOCHA (Manager, Owner, Consultant, Helper, Approver).
- **When each activity will be undertaken** and the sequence of associated linked activities and tasks. Consider the timeframe stated in your goals and objectives when deciding how soon you need to implement activities in your work plan.
- **Where the activity will happen**, in those cases where some activities are relevant only to specific areas.

Your organization or team charter might have guidance for the timeframe to be covered by your work plan, but generally, you should develop detailed work plans for the next 3–12 months, with higher-level information for the longer term. As time moves on, you can take your higher-level estimates and refine them into more specific estimates to reflect the timeframe for your goals and objectives.

Your detailed work plan will provide you with the basis for developing a project timeline or calendar. It is important to develop your timeline so that all project team members budget their time according to the project needs. Your work plan will also help you identify which team members might have time and which are overbooked. If any team members are over-allocated, it is essential to address this by redistributing (within your team or to a partner), delaying, and/or cutting back on certain activities.

As your project moves along, you should revisit the project assumptions in your theories of change and update your work plan regularly, again focusing on the more detailed activities for the next few months. Figure 18 shows an example of a table with people assigned to work on the project's actions and monitoring activities.

More generally, it is important to make sure your team has a system for documenting your work planning and tracking implementation (e.g., work planning software, spreadsheet, project calendar). Whichever work planning tool you use should allow you to easily adapt your work plan to changing circumstances.

Also, you may need to share your implementation progress outside of your team and should choose a system that will allow you to easily develop relevant reports for key audiences (e.g., funders, the project team, partners). Automated dashboards can be very effective in showing implementation progress.

FIGURE 18 **Work Plan Extract for a Marine Site, Showing Assignment of People and Work Units**

ACTIONS & ACTIVITIES	JAN	FEB	MAR	Q1
CAMPAIGN TO STOP SHARK FIN SOUP	**7**	**3.5**	**24**	**34.5**
SHARK 1. Plan campaign with CAI	7	1.5	1	9.5
AT: Anna Thomas	5	1	1	7
EM: Elena Martin	2	0.5	-	2.5
SHARK 2. Implement outreach campaign	-	-	15	15
AT: Anna Thomas	-	-	10	10
EM: Elena Martin	-	-	5	5
SHARK M1. Review campaign records	-	-	2	2
AT: Anna Thomas	-	-	2	2
SHARK M2. Train & support local observers	-	2	5	7
AT: Anna Thomas	-	2	5	7
SHARK M3. Download / analyze FAO records	-	-	1	1
EM: Elena Martin	-	-	1	1
POLICY TO MANDATE RAT BARRIERS ON VISITING BOATS	**4**	**2**	**1**	**7**

KEY

- Action
- Activity
- Monitoring Activity

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Work plan detailing the activities, tasks, and responsibilities associated with your strategic, monitoring, and operational plans
- Project timeline or calendar

3C. Develop and Refine Your Project Budget

Your work plan is a critical input for developing a project budget. You should now have a clear decision of the actions, activities, and tasks you need to undertake and so will be in a good position to determine the time and financial resources you need to successfully implement your strategic plan. As a starting point, you should use your initial analysis of funding required that you developed in your operational plan (Step 2C). This, along with your strategic plan and your work plan, will help you develop a more refined estimate of costs for specific activities and the broader actions and strategies into which those feed.


PHOTO: ERIC RENSEL

It is important to work closely with the finance or accounting staff in your organization (if relevant) to develop your project budget. For many projects, your most expensive resource needs will be staff time. In addition, you should consider what other major expenses (e.g., equipment, travel costs, goods and services) are needed. It is helpful to look across your activities to make sure you have considered non-staff costs associated with them. You will also want to consider the related functions or additional resources the project might require, ranging from monitoring, management, and safeguards expenses to administrative or logistical support and capacity development. In developing your project budget, you should also ensure you have considered any costs associated with accessibility and volunteer activities (e.g., transportation, meals).

When you are working on a project with multiple organizations, agencies, and/or countries, budgeting can look very different. In such situations, your approach to budgeting may be shaped by the requirements of the funder or other overseeing entity. Which budgeting system you use will also depend on the context of your project. For simpler projects, a spreadsheet may be sufficient. For more complex projects, tools like Miradi provide features to link your strategic plan and work plan to your budget. With tools like this, you can easily identify any tasks or items in your work plan that lack funding, ensuring a clearer view of key financial gaps in your project.

Figure 19 shows the work plan from Figure 18, now expanded to include the expenses necessary to implement the project's actions and monitoring activities. Non-staff expenses are combined with the cost of time for the assigned people to create the total budget for each item. In this example, staff and expenses roll up to show the costs for an activity, all activity costs associated with an action, and all actions within each of the project's strategies. The project budget also outlines other expenses, including equipment and general operating costs not directly associated with implementing a specific action or activity.

FIGURE 19 **Work Plan Extract Example, Expanded to Include Expense Details and Other Costs**

	WORK UNITS				PROJECT (NON-STAFF) EXPENSES				BUDGET TOTAL
ACTIONS & ACTIVITIES	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL	TOTAL
CAMPAIGN TO STOP SHARK FIN SOUP	**36.5**	**14**	**9**	**52.5**	**5,000**	**1,250**	**1,250**	**8,100**	**13,625**
SHARK 1. Plan campaign with CAI	11.5	-	-	11.5	5,000	-	-	5,000	5,925
AT: Anna Thomas	8	-	-	8	-	-	-	-	400
EM: Elena Martin	3.5	-	-	3.5	-	-	-	-	525
Travel expenses for meeting	-	-	-	-	5,000	-	-	5,000	5,000
SHARK 2. Implement outreach campaign	**15**	**5**	-	**20**	-	-	-	-	**1,700**
AT: Anna Thomas	10	3	-	13	-	-		-	650
EM: Elena Martin	-5	2	-	7	-	-	-	-	1,050
SHARK M1. Review campaign records	**2**	**4**	**4**	**10**	-	-	-	-	**500**
AT: Anna Thomas	2	4	4	10	-	-	-	-	500
SHARK M2. Train & support local observers	-	**4**	**4**	**8**	-	1,250	1,250	2,500	**4,750**
EM: Elena Martin	-	4	4	8		-	-	-	2,250
Travel costs to sites to collect data	-	-	-	-	-	1,250	1,250	2,500	2,500
SHARK M3. Download / analyze FAO records	**1**	**1**	**1**	**3**	-	-	-	**600**	**750**
AT: Anna Thomas	1	1	1	3	-	-	-	-	150
Report purchase	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	600	600
OTHER COSTS	-	-	-	-	**55,000**	**25,000**	**20,000**	**100,000**	**100,000**
EQUIPMENT	-	-	-	-	**20,000**	**5,000**	-	**25,000**	**25,000**
Computers	-	-	-	-	-	5,000	-	5,000	5,000
Wheelchair-accesible vehicle	-	-	-	-	20,000	-	-	20,000	20,000
OPERATING COSTS	-	-	-	-	**35,000**	**20,000**	**20,000**	**75,000**	**75,000**
Overhead	-	-	-	-	35,000	20,000	20,000	75,000	75,000

KEY

Action | Activity | Monitoring Activity

Once you have developed your project budget, you will likely need to identify potential funding sources and submit proposals. The information collated in your strategic plan and work plan should be used to develop robust funding proposals. Most projects require several years of financial resources, so fundraising is often an ongoing process as you move through different iterations of the project cycle. Indeed, it can be useful to develop a fundraising strategy and where relevant, clarify with your partners whether fundraising is done jointly or separately by each partner.

In addition to using the strategic plan to inform funding proposals, you can incorporate ongoing results and lessons learned into your proposals and reports to show donors the progress, learning, and adaptation taking place. This provides an opportunity to help donors understand the value of supporting teams that use a Conservation Standards approach – from the strategic decision making that informs the design and planning (including clear approaches to measure progress and impact) to the critical thinking and reflection that go into the monitoring, analysis, and adaptation. Moreover, many funders request specific elements, such as theories of change, in proposals. Using a CS approach puts your team in a good position to meet these funder requirements.

Ideally, you would seek and acquire funding for your highest priority actions from the start. In reality, you may need to adjust to opportunities and constraints and may find that your initial funding focuses on some medium- or lower-priority actions. That's fine, as long as you do not lose sight of your high-priority actions, and you work to implement them as soon as feasible.

This is a good point to reflect on whether it is probable you will be able to meet your project goals and objectives in the anticipated timeframe and with the likely staff and financial resources. You may need to make some important decisions about your project, including whether you need to eliminate, postpone, or scale back any of your actions, activities, or tasks - or potentially pass them off to a capable partner. You should also reflect on the adaptations you might need to make and determine whether your overall project can still be effective and if it makes sense to continue forward.

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Project budget
- List of potential funding sources
- Funding proposals developed and submitted

PHOTO: NEEMA OBIERO / INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

3D. Implement Your Plans

Implementing your project involves putting your strategic, monitoring, and operational plans into action and ideally, according to schedule and within budget. To start, it is beneficial to have an initial meeting for the project team (especially if there are new people). This is an opportunity for team building and to ensure all team members are familiar with the project design, team charter, budget allocations, donor contractual conditions, internal policies, and other relevant details. It is also a good time to review how internal decisions are made and how the project will address conflicts that may arise. Your communications strategy can help your team have a clear understanding of how everyone will communicate about the project internally and how you will report outcomes and progress to the public.

You should aim to directly engage team members responsible for implementing your project from the start and repeat these team meetings at regular intervals. Doing so helps your team to routinely monitor progress, plan upcoming priorities, stay connected, solve problems together, and support one another. These meetings should also serve as a space to implement Steps 4 (Analyze and Adapt) and 5 (Share) on a regular basis.

To monitor your implementation (e.g., progress on activities, finances, risk management, and social safeguards), it can be useful to use progress tracking tools. Creating short, regular progress reports about implementation will allow more detailed reflections in the later steps, as well as assist with reporting to donors and supporters. At least annually, it is important to look at your progress in the context of your theory of change (Step 4B provides more detail). Figures 20 and 21 provide different formats for reporting progress on actions that may resonate with different audiences.

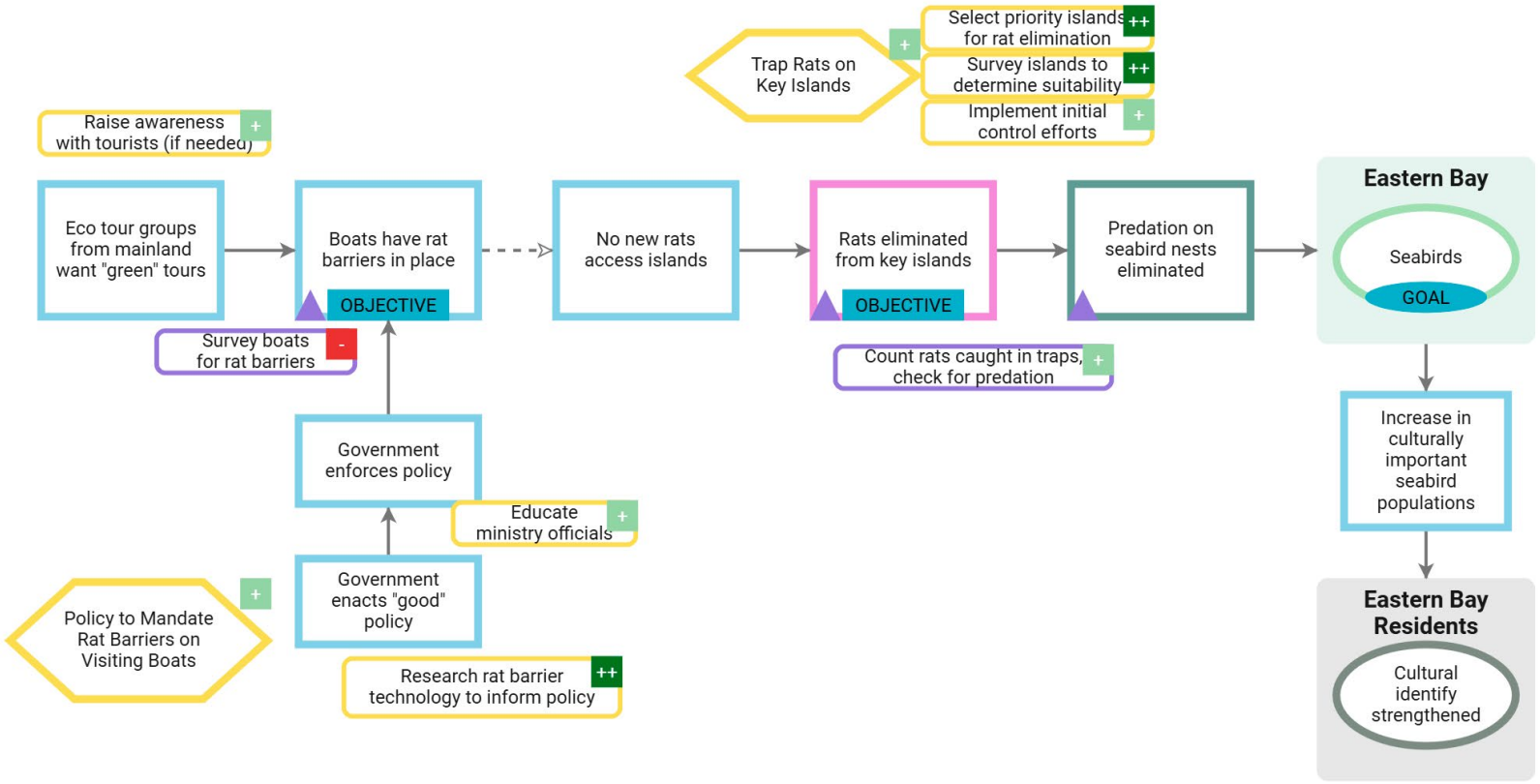
FIGURE 20 **Example of Progress Reporting in Table Format**

ACTIONS & ACTIVITIES	PROGRESS	PROGRESS DETAIL
CAMPAIGN TO STOP SHARK FIN SOUP	On Track	-
SHARK 1. Plan campaign with CAI	Completed	Campaign planning now completed
SHARK 2. Implement outreach campaign	On Track	Now starting up but needs push
SHARK M1. Review campaign records	Minor Issues	Still having difficulty setting up reliable data collection process
SHARK M2. Train & support local observers	Scheduled	-
SHARK M3. Download / analyze FAO records	Minor Issues	Last quarter's data not yet collected
RAT ELIMINATION	Major Issues	Trapping strategy moving forward but not clear if rat barriers are preventing re-introduction
2A. TRAP RATS IN KEY ISLANDS	On Track	-
2B. POLICY TO MANDATE RAT BARRIER ON VISITING BOATS	On Track	-
RAT 1-1. Research rat barrier technology to inform policy	Completed	Research rat barrier technology to inform policy
RAT 1-2. Educate ministry officials	On Track	Companies are not responding to our phone calls
RAT 1-3. Raise awareness with tourists (if needed)	On Track	Work just gearing up

KEY

Action Activity Monitoring Activity

FIGURE 21 **Example Activity Progress Report in Results Chains Diagram**



As your team collects monitoring data (related to implementation, results, and other information needs), it is important to ensure you have systems to support data collection, storage, and access for future analyses. This is a good time to again consider data ownership and sovereignty, privacy, and accessibility by interested parties. In terms of accessibility, a simple paper - or desktop-based system may be adequate for very small projects. For more complex projects, you may need to work with multiple departments within your organization and/or with partners to standardize monitoring data flows, ensure the data systems you use will integrate with existing systems, and identify any needed adjustments. As a reminder, you will want to include time and resources in your work plan and budget for setting up these systems. Prior to moving to Step 4 (Analyze & Adapt), it is useful to ensure your data are collated, complete, and accurate and that they can be easily accessed and manipulated. Figure 22 shows an example of monitoring data for a few indicators from the Rat Elimination strategy.

FIGURE 22 **Example of Monitoring Data**

ITEM	DETAILS	MEASUREMENT DATA	MEASUREMENT VALUE	TREND	SOURCE
2. RAT ELIMINATION	Monitoring by university researchers shows that the rats are currently attacking nesting seabirds on key islands	-	-	-	-
RAT 1. BOATS HAVE RAT BARRIERS IN PLACE	By June 2026, all tour boats visiting the Eastern Bay Islands have state-of-the-art rat barriers in place	-	-	-	-
Rat 1. Percentage of tour boats with rat barriers in place	Percent of all tour boats that visit the islands that have state-of-the-art rat barriers	2026-06-30	70	Not Specified	Rough Guess
RAT 2. RATS ELIMINATED FROM KEY ISANDS	By June 2029, rats have been completely eliminated from all breeding islands	-	-	-	-
Rat 2a. Number of rats caught in traps	The total number of rats caught in traps set out for one week for each island - we assume that we need three weeks of having no rats to be certain we have eliminated the population	2026-06-30	Dozens	Mild Decrease	Rapid Assessment
E. HEALTHY NESTING SEABIRD POPULATION	By 2035, there are at least 750 breeding pairs of ruby-crested puffins on the islands of Eastern Bay	-	-	-	-
E1. Number of breeding pairs of ruby-crested puffins		2026-06-30	210	Strong Decrease	Intensive Assessment
		2016-03-31	1200	Flat	Intensive Assessment

PHOTO: CLEMENT KOJOPP

RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENT

CS Library Resources (filter by "Implement" and then search within, if desired, by guidance, case studies, or other search terms)

Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit (navigate to the relevant Tipsheets in the Recipe Toolkit, as well as the Implement sections in the Examples & Resources document)

Real-world Examples of Applications of the Conservation Standards

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Implementation of strategic, monitoring, and operational plans (as outlined in your work plan), keeping in mind your project budget and schedule
- Systems for storing and accessing data
- Monitoring data captured in systems
- Implementation progress reports to your organization, funders, and other interested parties

ANALYZE & ADAPT

PHOTO: CARTER CROUCH / INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

ANALYZE & ADAPT

This step of the Conservation Standards involves managing data as they come in and regularly analyzing them to convert them into useful information and knowledge. In particular, you need to analyze your project's results, core assumptions, key uncertainties, feedback from interested parties, any grievances raised, and relevant operational and financial data, and then adapt your work plan as necessary. The monitoring system you set up in Step 2 (Plan) will support you in your analyses. If your team is entering the Conservation Standards cycle at the Analyze & Adapt Step, the data and lessons you gather can inform your work going forward, overlapping with or feeding directly into other steps in the cycle.

The depth of analysis at this stage can range from very simple and fast to time intensive and complex. As with the selection of monitoring methods, you should make sure that the depth of your analysis matches the level of evidence required by your situation and your audiences' information needs. Moreover, as with all steps in the Conservation Standards, it's important to foster a learning environment to ensure teams are comfortable reflecting and recognizing failures, in addition to successes.

4A. Prepare Your Data for Analysis

Analysis is a process of transforming raw data into information that can inform decisions. Analysis should not happen at only one point in the life of the project. To continuously understand what is happening with your project and to be able to change things in a timely fashion, it is essential to capture and analyze your monitoring data as part of routine project work, using the data management systems that you put in place in Step 3.

Preparing your data for analysis is really a continuum between Steps 3 and 4. Your team should regularly record, store, process, and back up all your data, including programmatic, operational, and financial data. This work will be much easier if you systematically check, clean, and code your raw data as you collect them and keep an organized account of their associated metadata. It may also be useful to create a system that includes a centralized repository and to provide clear guidance on where and how to find data. In general, it is good to understand how your organization and partners are storing and managing data and to use compatible software and a unified data schema. This is especially important in the case of joint monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Getting these systems in place early in your project will make ongoing data collection and analysis more efficient.

Ideally, your systems should manage and present your data to easily meet the key information needs laid out in your strategic plan. As you move to Step 4B, consider how to visualize your data so that all interested parties can interpret the information to make adaptive management decisions. If relevant, you can use specialized software to collect, process, analyze, and visualize your data and develop integrated reports and dashboards.

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Key project data recorded, stored, processed, and backed up on a routine basis
- Visualizations of key data for decision making

4B. Analyze and Reflect on Results

An important aspect of good conservation practice is regularly and systematically assessing whether your team is implementing the high-priority work identified in your strategic plan and if you are on track to achieve your stated goals and objectives. This information, compiled through your monitoring data and other sources, provides the foundation for making appropriate adaptive management decisions to keep you on track.

Your monitoring data should help you fill knowledge gaps, review progress on implementation, determine whether you have achieved your expected intermediate results, assess whether you are on track to achieve long-term success, and document any significant unintended consequences of your work. In addition to your monitoring data, your team should consider other available information, including project evaluations, recent external analyses, and perspectives from interested parties. Analyzing your monitoring data and other information sources can help you determine whether the core assumptions you laid out in the planning steps (especially in your situation analysis and theories of change) hold true in reality. This knowledge can help your team understand why certain actions have succeeded or failed. By testing and reflecting on your core assumptions, you are in a better position to adapt your project accordingly. You also gain knowledge and experience that can contribute to a broader evidence base to help inform other conservation efforts.

To ensure your team is using your plan and monitoring data to learn and adapt, you should regularly review and reflect on your project. Some teams refer to the analysis as a **pause-and-reflect** or reflect-and-adapt process. These exercises may occur at different times (e.g., quarterly, every six months, annually), in different settings (e.g., formal workshop, intentional conversations with a small group), and at different scales (e.g., project, program, portfolio). You may also hold these discussions in response to third-party evaluations or **audits**. Your team might find social science tools and approaches helpful to analyze the psychological, social, and behavioral parts of your theory of change.


PHOTO: JAVIERA CONSTANZO

Consider these guiding questions in your analysis:

- Has the context changed? If so, how does it impact your team's work?
- Did your team do what you set out to do? If not, why not?
- Are you achieving what you expected to achieve? Why or why not?
- Has your team seen changes in human behavior, beliefs, attitudes, or intentions? Are these a result of your work or changes in the context?
- Are there unexpected negative results derived from your work?
- Are there additional information needs, uncertainties, or risks your team needs to consider?
- What decisions do you need to make based on this analysis?

There are many ways to facilitate and document your analysis. Figure 23 provides an extract of table formats that track progress towards implementation and results and allow easy documentation of changes needed or decisions made. Figure 24 is an example of a results chain with implementation and results tracking. The details of progress can be found in the progress notes, as demonstrated for the monitoring action SHARK M1. Review campaign records.

FIGURE 23 Example Tables with Implementation and Results Progress

Implementation progress

Action	Action Status	Why did you choose this rating? Use the rating for your activities and results to inform your rating.	What changes, if any, are needed to better implement this action?
Campaign to Stop Shark Fin Soup	On Track	Work is moving forward as expected for this action	A committee will discuss implications of the National Park Protection Policy delay and how it may impact this action

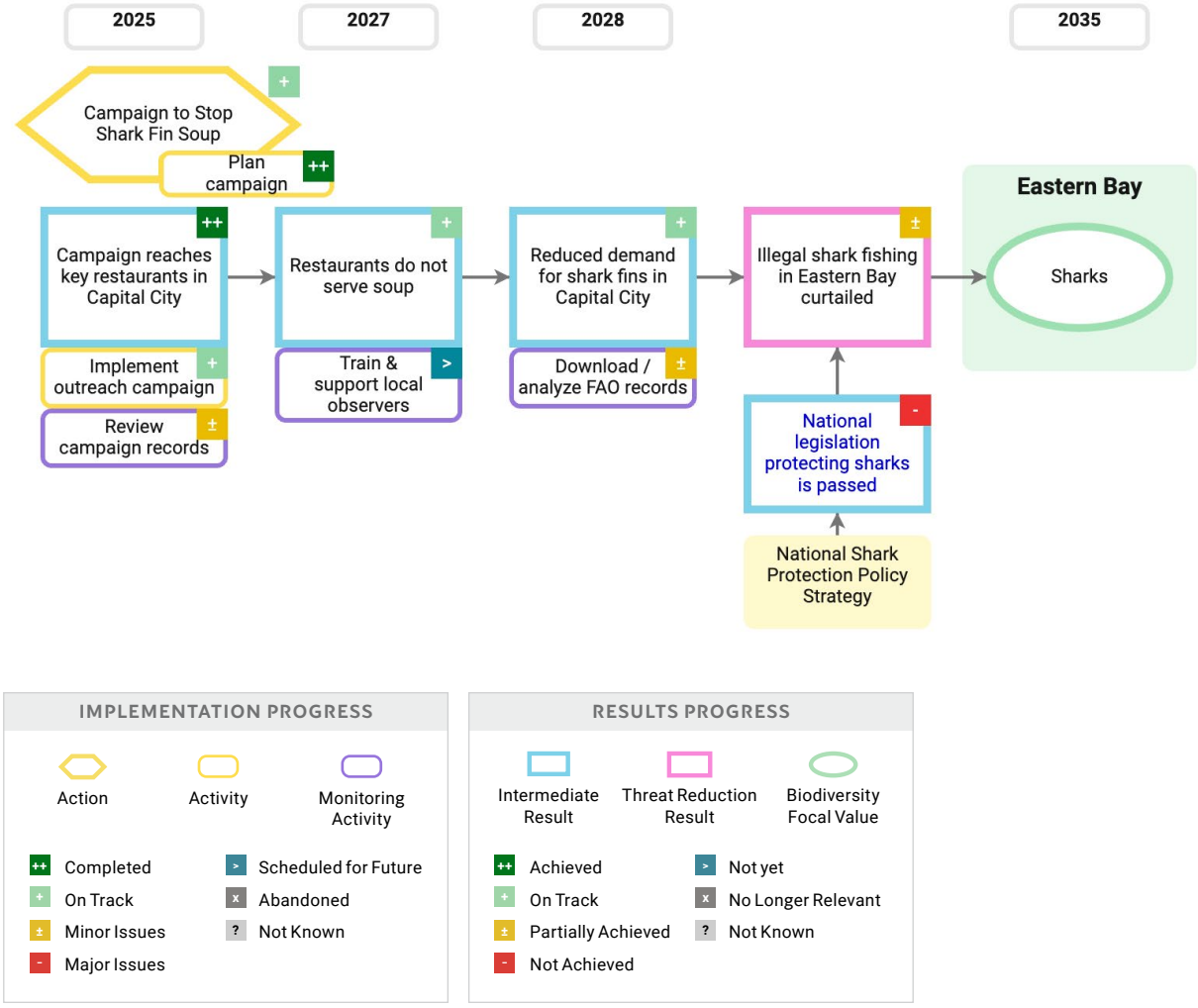
Result	Activity	Type of Activity	Activity Status	Why did you choose this rating? Include any challenges, success stories, and/or lessons.	What changes, if any, are needed to better implement this activity?
Campaign reaches key restaurants in Capital City	Implement outreach campaign	Program	On Track	We have identified the key messages and started disseminating materials	No changes - continue outreach to key audiences
Restaurants do not serve soup	Review campaign records	Monitoring	Scheduled	Monitoring activity planned for 2026	Consider hosting monitoring trainings sooner if resources allow

Results progress

Action	Result	Objective *if applicable*	Indicator *if applicable*	*Use indicator data and other evidence, including intentional conversation, to inform your discussion and rating* Result Status	Why did you choose this rating? Include any challenges, success stories, and/or lessons.	What changes, if any, are needed to achieve progress toward this result?
Campaign to Stop Shark Fin Soup	Campaign reaches key restaurants in Capital City	By 2025, more than 50% of the seafood restaurants in Capital City are active participants in the "Stop Shark Fin Soup" campaign	% of restaurants in campaign	Achieved	77% of seafood restaurants in Capital City are participating in the campaign	Consider scaling activities to suburbs of Capital City to widen the campaign's reach
	Restaurants do not serve soup	N/A	N/A	On Track	We've visited many restaurants and have confirmed that they no longer serve shark fin soup, but we're having a hard time monitoring this across the city	Train and support local observers

PHOTO: RACHEL NEUGARTEN

FIGURE 24 **Example Results Chain–Based Theory of Change with Implementation and Results Progress**



In addition to programmatic analyses, it is also important to consider whether the operational processes supporting your project are functioning properly. You may have a project that uses the perfect actions to address the threats and opportunities affecting your focal values, but your team may not be operating as efficiently as possible or does not have the administrative or financial support it needs to do its job well. To improve your understanding of what is truly happening, collaboration among all members of your team in these analyses is vital. Your operational analysis might explore the extent to which:

- You have sufficient resources (e.g., financial, human, administrative, political) to carry out your project;
- You have the right skills among your team members to implement your project well;
- You have the physical infrastructure and equipment (e.g., office space, vehicles, computers) you need to do your job;
- You have functioning social safeguards in place; and/or
- Your project team operates smoothly and equitably (e.g., communications, delegation of responsibilities).

For learning and effective communication, it is important to involve the right people in the analyses and/or to share preliminary analyses with them. As a general rule, analyses should involve members of the project team, as they will have the deepest understanding of the project and overall situation. Depending on the context and where appropriate, team members may be conducting the analyses themselves, or they could help review and interpret analyses. However, teams should take care not to influence the findings unjustifiably. While team involvement is important, input from interested parties, outside experts, or those with other perspectives is also valuable and can help provide a balanced interpretation of monitoring results.

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Analyses of project results and assumptions
- Analyses of operational and financial data
- Record of discussions and decisions

PHOTO: GERNANT MAGNIN

4C. Adapt Your Plans and Budgets

Collecting and analyzing data as part of routine monitoring activities allow you to determine how effective your interventions are and what adjustments are needed to reach your goals and objectives more efficiently. As the final part of this step, you should use what you learned during the analyses and discussions to modify (as needed) and optimize your portfolio of strategies and to periodically realign the allocation of resources (people and funds). This is the essence of good conservation practice and adaptive management.

All the planning that you did earlier was not meant to be a one-time event, never to be revisited or used again. Instead, in order to learn and improve your work over time, your team should revisit and make needed adjustments to your strategic plan (including situation model and theories of change), monitoring plan, operational plan, work plan, and budget. Learning and ideas for improvement may come from internal discussions with your team, findings from formal evaluations or audits, feedback from interested parties familiar with your work, and/or research findings relevant to your context. In some cases, plans might be "officially" updated every 5-10 years. However, it is good conservation practice to make interim adaptations, as appropriate, every 6-12 months and then incorporate these changes officially at the appropriate time.

As you make changes, you should document the rationale and/or evidence behind these decisions so that others will understand what you learned and why you made these changes. Documentation is an important input to Step 5 (Share). There are many ways to document your adaptations including narratives, change logs, and updates to diagrams. Whatever approach you choose, be sure that it's agile enough to support you in adapting your project efficiently.

However, also take note that making adaptations may not be as simple as analyzing and reflecting on data and identifying and documenting decisions. It is important to understand what enables adaptation in your context and how feasible it is to make your proposed changes. Be sure to consider at what scale changes need to be made, who will be responsible for pursuing these changes, and, if relevant, which messages and evidence key audiences will need to approve changes. Finally, keep in mind that you may learn that some of what you are doing is working well and no adjustments are needed. The important thing is to leave time for reflection and analysis so that you can understand where you do need to adapt.

PHOTO: CAROLINE STEM

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Revised project documents, such as your strategic plan (including situation model and theories of change), monitoring plan, operational plan, work plan, and budget
- Documentation of evidence, discussions, lessons learned, potential risks or uncertainties, and decisions

PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON FOR USAID

RESOURCES FOR ANALYSE & ADAPT

CS Library Resources (filter by "Analyze & Adapt" and then search within, if desired, by guidance, case studies, or other search terms)

Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit (navigate to the relevant Tipsheets in the Recipe Toolkit, as well as the Analyze & Adapt sections in the Examples & Resources document)

Real-world Examples of Applications of the Conservation Standards

SHARE

PHOTO: JASON HOUSTON FOR USAID

SHARE

This step in the Conservation Standards cycle involves sharing lessons and formal products with key internal and external audiences. It also involves giving and receiving feedback and promoting a learning culture. Encouraging learning within your project team, as well as with partners and interested parties, is crucial. The insights gained through reflection will be valuable for each step in your next project cycle and will provide learning opportunities for everyone involved. It is also important to promote learning at an institutional level and, more generally, across the conservation community. With this in mind, the Conservation Standards include practices that your project team and organization could adopt to help foster learning and sharing.

5A. Document What You Learn

As you go through the process described in the Conservation Standards, you should document the knowledge your team has gained on a routine basis and contribute that knowledge to the appropriate evidence base. To a large degree, you will have already generated many results and lessons in Step 4, based on the information and evidence needs you identified throughout the cycle. Here, you should make sure that you document those lessons (and track unanswered information needs) in a manner that suits your team so that they are available in the future to your team, your organization, and the conservation community as a whole.

You can capture these results and knowledge in many ways (e.g., informal or internal documentation, reports to funders or interested parties, handwritten log). This documentation is often challenging to do in the face of daily work pressures and deadlines. As such, choose the methodology that is easiest for your team to maintain over time and also try to ensure that your team or organization provides both time and incentives to do this work. One simple option for your team is to use online documents and spreadsheets to store a running list of lessons learned that all project team members can access and edit over time (Figure 23).

If you document the evidence you generated and your lessons learned, you will be able to better remember from year to year what you have done, what worked, what didn't work, and what you plan to do in the future (Refer back to Step 4A for reminders on data management). This will help your current project team over the long term and will ensure that new project staff have a record of what you did and what you learned. Importantly, it will also help the team avoid repeating past mistakes. If you use project management software like Miradi, you can record comments to ensure that knowledge becomes part of the project's historical record.

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Documentation of key results and knowledge

5B. Share What You Learn

The Conservation Standards are iterative, and you should consider this Share Step throughout the cycle. Documenting and sharing what you have learned will help practitioners working under similar conditions or using similar approaches benefit from your experience, avoid the types of problems you have encountered, and ultimately, more effectively achieve their conservation goals.

Before deciding how to share what you've learned, your team should determine which audiences should be aware of your lessons. At a minimum, think about what you need to share with your team, interested parties, donors or funders, and the broader conservation community. To effectively reach these and other key audiences, you need a clear communications and dissemination strategy. You should already have this strategy in place, based on your work in earlier parts of the cycle (Steps 2-4). As a reminder, your communications strategy should clarify what evidence and which lessons you wish to communicate to priority audiences (based on their interests), the best format to reach each key audience, and the means for developing and distributing your communications products. When sharing lessons, you should provide clear management recommendations (based on your analyses) to the right people and necessary details to help support your recommendations and interpret results.

For internal audiences (e.g., project team and partners), you can use informal communication, such as email, meetings, or project chat channels to regularly share lessons and foster a learning environment.

How and what you share with interested parties will depend on the needs, interests, and requests of those audiences. You may plan an informal discussion, a sharing workshop, invite feedback virtually, or join the interested party at one of their existing events. It's also important to consider privacy when sharing information broadly, as interested parties may have different comfort levels with what is shared. It is wise to consider how sharing or not sharing may impact local needs and/or the relationships you have built. You should also ensure information is shared with accessibility in mind across your audiences.

For sharing lessons and information with the broader conservation community, there is a range of alternatives, including contributing to evidence libraries (e.g., the Conservation Actions and Measures Library), publishing in scientific journals, authoring gray literature, posting lessons on your website or in email lists, sharing learning via social media, teaching a course or guest lecturing, and telling your stories at workshops and conferences. Consider using technology like StoryMaps, dashboards, and other spatial tools to visualize your information in a compelling way. More generally, to exchange knowledge and lessons and gather insights from others' experiences, it can be very helpful to join a **community of practice** or email list.

PHOTO: CAROLINE STEM

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Refinement, as needed, of key audiences and their information needs and preferred communication modes
- Regular communication to project team members, partners, and interested parties
- Contribution to evidence base
- Development and distribution of appropriate communication products

5C. Foster a Learning Environment

Good conservation practice involves fostering a performance and learning culture within your project team, across your organization and partners, and among conservation practitioners around the world. A performance and learning culture at these levels is important to ensure that all parties learn and benefit from your team's experience. Although this is listed as the last step, it really is something you and your organization need to cultivate throughout the cycle (as an overarching principle and a key concept to Close the Loop). To most effectively apply the Conservation Standards, you need to work in an environment that promotes transparent, evidence-based conservation and adaptive management. This means that you, your team, and your organization should be regularly reflecting, seeking feedback, and providing feedback. That feedback could be formal or informal and might come from your team members or other staff members. Alternatively, it might come from external mechanisms, such as evaluations, which assess a project against its own stated goals and objectives, and audits, which assess a project against a set of process standards (e.g., the Conservation Standards). In creating a learning environment, it is important to be open to outside opinions that can give you fresh and insightful perspectives.

Fostering a learning environment is not easy. It requires leaders and donors who understand the need to reallocate scarce resources from immediate action to the long-term work of evidence-based conservation and adaptive management. It often involves enabling practitioners to take chances and question the conventional wisdom related to specific conservation tools and actions. It entails providing teams with the institutional security that innovation and questioning assumptions are valued in their organizations. And it requires a commitment to share both successes and failures with other practitioners around the world and to create true communities of practice. With this in mind, the Conservation Standards community itself benefits from sharing with one another our own experiences, challenges, and successes in applying the Conservation Standards within our organizations and agencies. Doing so helps us learn how to better institutionalize, improve, and adapt the Conservation Standards themselves.

PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

OUTPUTS FOR THIS STEP INCLUDE:

- Regular feedback shared formally or informally
- Audits, as appropriate, to assess adherence to good conservation practice
- Demonstrated commitment from leaders and staff to create a safe environment for learning and innovation
- A commitment to share successes and failures with practitioners around the world

PHOTO: KATHLEEN FLOWER

RESOURCES FOR SHARE

CS Library Resources (filter by "Share" and then search within, if desired, by guidance, case studies, or other search terms)

Recipes for Conservation: A Conservation Standards Toolkit (navigate to the relevant Tipsheets in the Recipe Toolkit, as well as the Analyze & Adapt sections in the Examples & Resources document)

Real-world Examples of Applications of the Conservation Standards

CLOSE THE LOOP

In this document, we present the Conservation Standards as a cycle where teams might enter at the step that is most appropriate for their situation. A project team starting up a new project might go through Steps 1 (Assess) and 2 (Plan) fairly quickly (perhaps over a 4–5 day workshop) to sketch out the basic strategic plan for their project. They may then circle back and fill in the details over the next few months for these steps, while they are also beginning the implementation work in Step 3 (Implement). The team might then conduct its first analyses in Step 4 (Analyze & Adapt) after 6–12 months and use this work to develop internal and external communication products in Step 5 (Share). Many teams, however, may enter the cycle at a later stage (e.g., Step 4, where they want to understand whether what they have been doing is working). Over time, they may go back to earlier steps and revisit decisions and assumptions and make them more explicit.

As is the nature of cycles, you have the opportunity to run through the Conservation Standards cycle, or parts of it, multiple times. Moving through some or all of the cycle naturally illuminates factors that were unknown in earlier steps. This new knowledge can feed directly into relevant areas, strengthening various elements of your overall conservation plan and your on-the-ground implementation. For example, you might revisit and adjust your vision and focal values, identify new factors or relationships that should be incorporated into your situation model, update audiences or information needs, and adjust strategic, monitoring, and/or operational plans.

The intent behind this cycle is not to put you and your project team in an endless loop of work. Rather, it is to remind you that evidence-based conservation and adaptive management are dynamic processes that require you to constantly learn and improve over time.

Closing the loop is about iteratively going through the steps in the project cycle to improve your efforts and further develop your thinking, products, and processes over time – both for your team's needs, as well as those of the broader conservation community. It is the essence of transforming ordinary management into true evidence-based conservation and adaptive management.

PHOTO: JUSTIN GRUBB

RESOURCES FOR CLOSE THE LOOP

Real-world Examples of Applications of the Conservation Standards

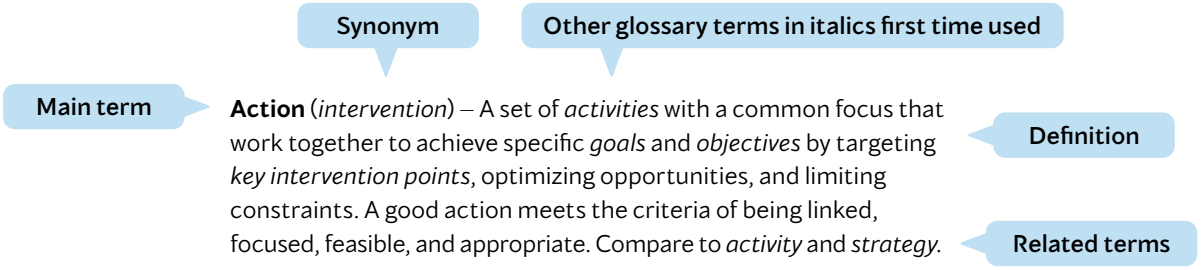
ANNEXES

PHOTO: FELIX CYBULLA

ANNEX 1. GLOSSARY

There is an endless debate among planners as to the meaning of technical terms such as *goals, objectives, targets, milestones, impacts, outcomes, results*, and *outputs*. It seems that each organization, agency, project, and individual have their own preferred set of terms. There is no right answer – the most important thing is that the members of your project team and the people with whom you work have a clear and common understanding of whichever terms you choose to use. Nevertheless, there are advantages to having a standard glossary. To this end, technical terms in this document were carefully selected, bolded when first used, consistently used thereafter, and defined in this glossary.

Guide to Glossary Entries



Key Changes in Version 5.0

There are a couple of notable changes in terminology in CS 5.0. These include:

- **Switching the use of the terms *target* and *value*** – As outlined in WCPA 2024, there is linguistic confusion here that people have been struggling to clean up for years. Terms are needed that describe both:
  - **Concept A:** a factor in the system that a project team seeks to ultimately affect
  - **Concept B:** the quantitative or qualitative measurement of an indicator to be achieved as part of a SMART goal or objective

  CMP's CS 4.0 and earlier use *target* to refer to Concept A and *desired future values* to refer to Concept B. In contrast, global fora, such as the CBD and WCPA, use *target* to refer to Concept B and *value* to refer to Concept A. Recognizing that we cannot shift these global conventions, we are adopting their use of these words, using *focal value* as the replacement for what CS 4.0 called a *target*.
- **Changing the use of the terms *action* and *strategy*** – CS 4.0 defines a *strategy* as a set of *activities* with a common focus and an *action* as a general term used to refer to the work of conservation teams, including strategies, activities, and tasks. This is inconsistent with how the development, business, and military sectors use these terms. As such, we have adapted our use of terms to follow the hierarchy of intervention: *strategy, action, activity, task*.
- **Replacing the term *stakeholder* with *interested party*** – The term *stakeholder* has colonial associations, which is why we are shifting to the more neutral term *interested party.*

While these changes come at a cost in terms of both having to update our guidance and materials and in potential user confusion, we are recommending them to ensure that our use of terms is consistent with the rest of the world. We fully anticipate that there will be a transition period in which both the CS 4.0 and CS 5.0 senses of these terms will be used.

Definitions

Action (*intervention*) – A set of *activities* with a common focus that work together to achieve specific *goals* and *objectives* by targeting *key intervention points*, optimizing opportunities, and limiting constraints. A good action meets the criteria of being linked, focused, feasible, and appropriate. Compare to *activity* and *strategy*.

Note: In CS 5.0, we are substituting the term "action" for the previously used term "strategy" to better fit how the rest of the world uses these terms. A *strategy* is now composed of one or more *actions* and their associated *activities*, *results* and *objectives*, and *focal values* and *goals*.

Activity – A set of *tasks* undertaken by project staff and/or *partners* to help implement an *action*.

Adaptive management – The incorporation of deliberate learning into professional practice to reduce uncertainty in decision making. Specifically, it is the integration of design, management, and *monitoring* to enable practitioners to systematically and efficiently test key *assumptions*, evaluate the *results*, adjust management decisions, and generate learning. The Conservation Standards explicitly bring adaptive management principles into *conservation practice*.

Assumption (*claim, hypothesis*) – A general term used to explicitly describe what a project team believes to be true, such as the presence of a factor in a system or an assumed causal relationship between two or more *factors* in a *situation assessment* or a *theory of change*.

Audit – An assessment of a *project* or *program* in relation to an external set of criteria, such as generally accepted accounting principles, sustainable harvest principles, or the standards outlined in this document. Compare with *evaluation*.

Behavior change – The process of changing the actions people take or do, increasing, maintaining, or decreasing a current behavior, or adopting a new behavior.


PHOTO: JUSTIN GRUBB

Biophysical factor – A biotic or abiotic condition of a natural system that can help clarify the mechanism of how a *direct threat* affects a *focal value*. For example, inappropriate logging practices (a *threat*) cause loss of stream shading (a biophysical factor), which raises stream water temperature (another biophysical factor), which then leads to lower salmon reproductive rates (a biophysical factor/*stress*) which affects a salmon population (the *focal value*). Compare to *stress*, which is one type of biophysical factor.

Biodiversity focal value (*ecological focal value*) – A species, habitat, or ecosystem on which a project has chosen to focus. A site-based project's chosen biodiversity focal values should collectively represent the biodiversity of concern at the site. One type of *focal value*.

Conservation plan (*project plan, program plan*) – The overall plan for a *project* or *program*. A complete conservation plan includes a *strategic plan, monitoring plan, operational plan,* and *work plan*.

Community of practice – A group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

Conservation practice – A process that involves a defined team agreeing on desired *outcomes* for a given situation and then taking action through one or more *strategies* designed to achieve these outcomes. The Conservation Standards provide a common framework and set of "better practices" that explicitly incorporate principles of collaboration, *evidence-informed conservation*, and *adaptive management*. More broadly, a discipline that encompasses the collective people, institutions, and body of knowledge of the global conservation community.

Conservation value – See *focal value*. Note that this term includes not just *biodiversity focal values*, but also other types of focal values for conservation projects.

Contributing factor (*indirect driver*) – An *indirect threat, opportunity,* or other *factor* in a *situation analysis* that leads to one or more *direct threats.*

Critical threat – A *direct threat* prioritized as being important to address.

Direct threat (*pressure, direct driver*) – A human action that directly degrades one or more *focal values* (e.g., illegal logging or unsustainable fishing). It can also be a natural phenomenon altered by human activities (e.g., increase in extreme storm events due to climate change). Often tied to one or more actors. Compare with *indirect threat*. See discussion under *pressure* as to why use of direct threat can be problematic with some actors.

Diversity – In a social context, the variety of identities, experiences, and perspectives present in an organization, *project*, or *program*. See later section for a more detailed definition.

Driver – A synonym for some *factors* in a *situation analysis*; direct drivers are generally equivalent to *direct threats* whereas indirect drivers are equivalent to *contributing factors*.

Ecosystem service – Services that intact, functioning ecosystems, habitats, and species provide that can benefit people.

Enabling condition – A factor that facilitates the effectiveness of a *strategy*. Typically depicted as a *contributing factor* in a *situation model* or a supporting *result* in a *theory of change*. Often an external factor that can be beyond the control of the *project team,* such as a legislative policy or consumer preference for sustainable products.

Equitable conservation – Conservation work that intentionally and holistically incorporates the principles of *diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ).*

Equity – Ensuring fair treatment, access, and opportunities for all individuals, while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have historically disadvantaged certain groups. See later section for a more detailed definition.

Evaluation – Narrowly, an assessment of a project in relation to its own previously stated *goals* and *objectives* and/or external performance criteria. More broadly, an assessment of data to answer specific questions about a project's context and *strategies* (see *monitoring*). Compare with *audit*.

Evidence – Relevant data, information, knowledge, and wisdom used to answer questions, test *assumptions*, and inform decisions.

Evidence-informed conservation practice – The explicit and systematic generation and use of *evidence* to guide decision making in planning, implementing, and learning.

Factor – A generic term for an element of a *situation analysis*, including *focal values, biophysical factors, direct threats,* and *contributing factors.*

Focal value (*value, conservation value*) – What a project seeks to ultimately affect. Often, an element chosen to represent key aspects of the overall system. Types of *focal values* include *biodiversity values* (e.g., species, habitats, or ecosystems), climate values, cultural values, and *human wellbeing values*. Compare with *goal*, which articulates the desired future state of a focal value.

> **Note:** In CS 5.0, we are substituting the term "focal value" for the previously used term "target." This change is to be consistent with global fora which use *value* for the focal element of a protected area and target for the desired future measurement of a SMART *goal* or *objective* (e.g., the 30 x 30 target).

Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) – This principle refers to the idea that before an action can take place that would affect a person or community positively or negatively, the person or community must give approval for the activity to move forward ("consent"). See later section for a more detailed definition.


PHOTO: WILL BEALE

Goal – A formal statement detailing a project's desired *impact*, such as the desired future status of a *focal value*. A good goal meets the criteria of being specific, measurable, achievable, results oriented, and time limited (SMART). Compare to *vision* and *objective*.

Human wellbeing focal value – Those components of human wellbeing on which a project has chosen to focus. In the context of a conservation project, they are often the components of human wellbeing that are linked to the status of *biodiversity focal values* and/or *results* from project *strategies*. Human wellbeing focal values in a project should collectively represent the array of human wellbeing needs dependent on the biodiversity focal values and/or project strategies. One type of *focal value.*

Impact (*ultimate outcome*) – The desired future state of a *focal value*. A *goal* is a formal statement of the desired impact.

Inclusion – The practice of creating environments where all individuals feel welcomed, valued, respected, and able to contribute fully. See later section for a more detailed definition.

Indicator – A measurable entity related to a specific *information need*, such as the status of a *focal value*, change in a *direct threat,* progress toward a *goal* or *objective*, or association between one or more variables. A good indicator meets the criteria of being measurable, precise, consistent, and sensitive.

Indirect threat (*indirect driver, root cause*) – A *contributing factor* identified in an analysis of the project situation that is a *driver* of one or more *direct threats*. Often an entry point for conservation *actions*. Compare with *direct threat*.

Information need (*knowledge gap*) – Something that people ideally should know about a project, often expressed as a question.

Interested party (*stakeholder*) – Any individual, group, or institution that has a vested interest in or can influence a project and/or that potentially will be affected by the project and has something to gain or lose if conditions change or stay the same. Interested parties are all those who need to be considered in achieving project *goals* and whose participation and support are crucial to its success. See later section for a more detailed definition. Compare with *rights holder.*

> **Note:** The term "stakeholder" has colonial associations, prompting us to shift to the more neutral term "interested party."

Intermediate result (*intermediate outcome*) – A factor in a *theory of change* en route to accomplishing a *goal* ("intermediate" refers to its position in a logical sequence of a theory of change).

Intervention – Narrowly, a synonym for *action*. More broadly, a term used to refer to a collection of actions (i.e., a *strategy*).

Justice – Making fair and ethical decisions about the distribution of opportunities and resources through interpersonal and institutional engagement. See later section for a more detailed definition.

Key ecological attribute (*key attribute, KEA*) – An aspect of a species, habitat, or ecosystem value's biology or ecology that, if present, defines a healthy *biodiversity focal value* and, if missing or altered, would lead to the outright loss or extreme degradation of that value over time. Analogous key attributes can be developed for other types of *focal values.*

Key intervention point – *Factor* within a *situation analysis* where a team is likely to effectively influence the situation.

Logical framework (*logframe, results framework*) – A matrix that results from a logical framework analysis that is used to display a project's *actions, goals, objectives,* and *indicators* in tabular form, showing the logic of the project.

Method – A specific technique used to collect data to measure an *indicator.* A good method meets the criteria of being accurate, reliable, cost-effective, feasible, and appropriate.

Milestone – An interim desired future state (*target*) for an *indicator* or a rating that a *project team* intends to achieve by a specified date, such as progress toward meeting a *goal* or *objective.* A milestone is typically a lesser amount of the target specified in the goal or objective and is to be achieved in a shorter period of time. Compare to *target.*

Monitoring – The periodic collection and assessment of data to answer specific questions about a project's context and *strategies*. Some people term this assessment of data as the "*evaluation*" component of monitoring & evaluation (M&E) or monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL).

Monitoring activity – A set of specific *tasks* that need to be completed as part of implementing a *monitoring plan*. Compare to *activity.*

Monitoring plan – Part of a *conservation plan* that describes a project's *information needs, indicators,* and *methods* to collect *evidence* to fill these needs throughout the cycle.

Objective – A formal statement detailing a desired *intermediate result* of a project, such as reducing a *critical threat.* A good objective meets the criteria of being specific, measurable, achievable, results oriented, and time limited (SMART). If the project is well conceptualized and designed, the realization of a project's objectives should lead to the fulfillment of the project's *goals* and ultimately its *vision*. Compare to *vision* and *goal.*

Operational plan – Part of a *conservation plan* that describes how a project will address its high-level funding and capacity requirements, *risks, social safeguards,* and long-term sustainability.

Opportunity – A *contributing factor* identified in an analysis of the project situation that potentially has a positive effect on one or more *focal values*, either directly or indirectly. Often an entry point for conservation *actions* – for example, demand for sustainably harvested timber. In some senses, the opposite of a *threat*.

Outcome (*result*) – The desired future state of a *factor* in a *theory of change*. Some practitioners distinguish between intermediate outcomes (*intermediate results* and their associated shorter-term *objectives*) and ultimate outcomes (*impacts* described by a project's *goals*).

Output – The immediate product or deliverable of an *activity* or *task,* which is within the control of the implementing organization.

Partner –The individuals, groups, or institutions actively participating in and supporting the implementation of a *project* or *program.*

Pause and reflect (*reflect and adapt, after-action review*) – As part of *adaptive management,* a process in which a *project team* analyzes *actions* and *results* to date and uses the information to adapt *strategies* and operations, as needed.

Practitioner – People involved in designing, managing, and monitoring conservation *projects* and *programs*.

Pressure (*direct threat, direct driver*) – This term is particularly useful in situations in which the *interested parties* in a project may respond negatively to having their actions being labeled as "*threats*."

Program (*initiative*) – A set of related *projects* or *strategies* designed to achieve a specific purpose. A program can be thought of as both a larger-scale project and a functional unit for managing, funding, or learning from a group of related component projects. In the interest of simplicity, this document generally uses the term "project" to represent both projects and programs since these standards of practice are designed to apply equally well to both. Compare with *project.*

Project – A set of *strategies* undertaken by a defined group of practitioners – including managers, researchers, community members, or other *interested parties* – to achieve defined *goals* and *objectives*. Compare with *program*.

Project team – A core group of practitioners who are responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring a *project*. This group can include managers, researchers, operations staff, and other key implementers or *interested parties.*

Psycho-social (psychological and social) states – The beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and other cognitive states that underlie why people behave in a certain way.

Result (*outcome*) – The desired future state of a factor in a *theory of change.* Most commonly a shorthand for *intermediate result* but could include the desired condition of a *focal value*.

Results chain (*theory of change diagram, strategy pathway*) – A visual diagram of the *theory of change* for a *strategy* that shows the causal sequence linking one or more project *actions* to their expected *intermediate results* and one or more *focal values.* Often used to show key *assumptions*.

Rights holder – An individual or group who has legal or customary ownership and/or use of lands and waters and/or natural resources within an area. All rights holders are also *interested parties* in a project affecting the area, but not all interested parties are rights holders.

Risk – The possibility that an event will occur that will adversely affect one or more *interested parties* and/or a project's achievement of its *goals* and *objectives.* It is often expressed in terms of a combination of the likelihood of the event's occurrence and the severity of its consequences.

Root cause – A type of *factor* in a *situation analysis*; root causes are generally equivalent to *contributing factors.*

Scope – The broad geographic and/or thematic focus of a project. Scope defines what the project intends to affect but does not necessarily limit where *actions* that affect the scope take place.

Situation analysis (*situation assessment*) – A process that helps a *project team* and *partners* create a common understanding of the project's context – including the relationships among the biological environment and the social, economic, political, and institutional systems and associated actors that affect the *focal values* to be conserved.

Situation model (*conceptual model*) – A visual diagram of a *situation analysis*. A situation model represents relationships among key *factors* identified in a situation analysis, which affect one or more of the project's *focal values.* A good model should link the project's focal values to *threats, opportunities,* and *key intervention points.*

Social safeguards – Measures or policies designed to protect individuals and communities from adverse impacts, particularly in the context of conservation and development projects, policies, or social programs. These safeguards aim to ensure that the rights, wellbeing, and interests of vulnerable or marginalized groups are respected and protected.

Stakeholder – See *interested party.*

Strategic plan – Part of a *conservation plan* that describes a project's *scope,* situation, and *strategies,* as well as how its *actions* will achieve its *objectives* and *goals.*

Strategy – One or more *actions* and their associated *activities, results* and *objectives,* and *focal values* and *goals.* Often represented in a *theory of change* diagram.

> **Note:** In CS 5.0, we have substituted the term "action" for the previously used term "strategy" to better fit how the rest of the world uses these terms. An action is now a component of a broader strategy.

Stress – An impaired aspect of a *biodiversity focal value* that results directly or indirectly from human activities. For example, low population size or birth rates (for a species) or reduced water flows or increased sedimentation (for a river ecosystem). Generally equivalent to a degraded *key ecological attribute*; is one type of *biophysical factor.*

Target – The desired future measurement or rating category for an *indicator* that a project team intends to achieve. Often the quantitatively or qualitatively measurable element of a SMART *goal* or *objective.*

Note: In CS 5.0, we have changed the use of the term "target" from its previous definition as "a factor in the system that a *project team* ultimately cares about." This change is to be consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international fora which use "value" for the focal element of a protected area and "target" for the desired future measurement of a SMART *goal* or *objective* (e.g., the 30 x 30 target).

Target audience – A specific group of individuals a project is seeking to influence or inform. A target audience may be those causing or contributing to *direct threats* (e.g., illegal fishers, commercial farmers, policy makers) and/or they may be those supporting or contributing to a project (e.g., partners, donors, general public).

Task – Specific work required to implement an *activity, monitoring activity*, or other components of a *work plan*.

Theory of change – A series of causally linked *assumptions* about how a team thinks its *actions* will help it achieve both *intermediate results* and ultimate *impacts*. A theory of change can be expressed in text, diagrammatic (e.g., *results chains*), or other forms.

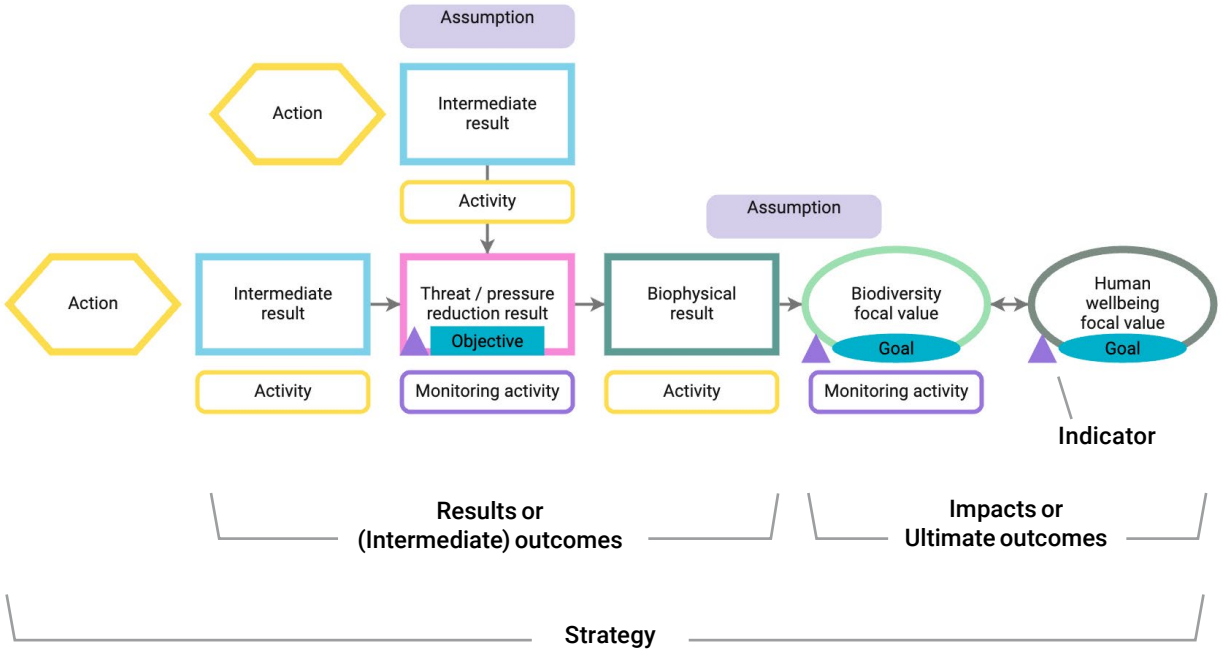
Threat – See *direct threat, indirect threat*, and *pressure*.

Value – See *focal value.*

Vision – A description of the desired state or ultimate condition (associated with the project *scope*) that a project is working to achieve. A good vision meets the criteria of being relatively general, visionary, and brief.

Work plan – Part of a *conservation plan* that describes the implementation of *strategic, monitoring*, and *operational plans.* Work plans typically list *activities* and *tasks*, as well as responsible individuals and timing of each activity or task. They often link to budgets, showing the money and resources required to implement the work plan.

Visual Key to Theory of Change Diagrams



Detailed Information on Terms Related to Equitable Conservation

Diversity – In a social context, the variety of identities, experiences, and perspectives present in an organization, project, or program. These include, but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, Native or Indigenous origin, age, culture, religion, socio-economic status, appearance, language and accent, education, geography, nationality, lived experience, job function, personality type, and thinking style. Diversity may also be used to refer to the variety of groups or organizations involved in conservation work (e.g., volunteers, elders, community representatives).

Equity – Ensuring fair treatment, access, and opportunities for all individuals, while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have historically disadvantaged certain groups. Equity recognizes that different people have different needs and may require different resources to achieve equal outcomes. Equity focuses on creating a level playing field, acknowledging that not everyone starts from the same place and that adjustments may be needed to achieve fairness. Equity is a prerequisite for reaching equality in practice.

Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) – This principle refers to the idea that before an action can take place that would affect a person or community positively or negatively, the person or community must give approval for the activity to move forward ("consent"). However, the person or community must have full information regarding the activity; otherwise, the consent would be meaningless, as it would not be based on adequate information about the proposed activity and its potential impact ("informed"). The person or community must also provide the consent before the activity begins ("prior"). And it is also critical that the person or community not feel any pressure or coercion to agree to the activity ("free").

Inclusion – The practice of creating environments where all individuals feel welcomed, valued, respected, and able to contribute fully. Inclusive conservation acknowledges and supports the rights, needs, visions, voices, and leadership of diverse identity groups (especially local and Indigenous groups) in the protection and management of nature. It involves actively inviting and involving diverse individuals in all aspects of an organization or community. While diversity is about representation, inclusion is about creating a culture where diverse individuals feel welcome and their contributions are valued. It's the "how" of making diversity work.

Interested party – Any individual, group, or institution that has a vested interest in or can influence a project and/or that potentially will be affected by project activities and has something to gain or lose if conditions change or stay the same. Interested parties are all those who need to be considered in achieving project goals and whose participation and support are crucial to its success. The term "interested" denotes parties that may affect or be affected by the project's work in the system. It does not mean the party is actively engaged or even aware of the work. Interests may be financial, moral, legal, personal, or community-based, and may be direct or indirect. While influence is one aspect of interest, we include a broader definition to mitigate the potential for neglecting those who have strong interests but have no power or influence.

Justice – Making fair and ethical decisions about the distribution of opportunities and resources through interpersonal and institutional engagement. Justice goes beyond equity by seeking to address and dismantle systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices. It involves changing structures, policies, and practices that perpetuate disparities and advocating for sustained social change. Justice is about long-term change – ensuring that the conditions and systems that created inequality are transformed. It involves the "why" and "what next" in addressing root causes of inequity. In conservation, a justice approach involves treating interested parties equitably and inclusively, so that they feel safe and secure to participate. Justice also means increasing diverse representation in the planning and implementation of conservation projects and programs.

Social safeguards – Measures or policies designed to protect individuals and communities from adverse impacts, particularly in the context of conservation and development projects, policies, or social programs. These safeguards aim to ensure that the rights, wellbeing, and interests of vulnerable or marginalized groups are respected and protected.

ANNEX 2. DEFINITIONS OF AND CRITERIA FOR KEY TERMS

Descriptions of Criteria for Key Terms

Vision Statement: A general statement of the desired state or ultimate condition (associated with the project scope) that a project is working to achieve

- ***Relatively General*** – *Broadly defined to encompass all project activities*
- ***Visionary*** – *Inspirational in outlining the desired change in the state of the focal values towards which the project is working*
- ***Brief*** – *Simple and succinct so that all project participants can remember it*

Goal: A formal statement detailing a project's desired impact, such as the desired future status of a focal value

Objective: A formal statement detailing a desired intermediate result of a project, such as reducing a critical threatt

Good goals and objectives should meet the following SMART criteria:

- ***Specific*** – *Clearly defined so that all people involved in the project have the same understanding of what the terms in the goal or objective mean*
- ***Measurable*** – *Definable in relation to some standard scale (numbers, percentage, fractions, or all/nothing states)*
- ***Achievable*** – *Practical and appropriate within the context of the project, and in light of the political, social, and financial context (especially relevant to objectives, goals may be more aspirational)*
- ***Results-Oriented*** – *Represents necessary changes in focal value condition, threat reduction, and/or other key expected results*
- ***Time-Limited*** – *Achievable within a specific period of time, generally 1-10 years for an objective and 10-20 years for a goal*

Action: A set of activities with a common focus that work together to achieve specific goals and objectives by targeting key intervention points, optimizing opportunities, and limiting constraints

- ***Linked*** – *Directly affects one or more critical factors in a situation analysis (or model)*
- ***Focused*** – *Outlines specific courses of action that need to be carried out*
- ***Feasible*** – *Accomplishable in light of the project's resources and constraints*
- ***Appropriate*** – *Acceptable and fitting within site-specific cultural, social, and biological norms (includes attention to social and environmental safeguards)*

Indicator: A measurable entity related to a specific information need, such as the status of a focal value, change in a threat, progress towards a goal or objective, or association between one or more variables

- ***Measurable*** – *Able to be recorded and analyzed in quantitative or qualitative terms*
- ***Precise*** – *Defined the same way by all people*
- ***Consistent*** – *Not changing over time so that it always measures the same thing*
- ***Sensitive*** – *Changes proportionately in response to the actual changes in the condition being measured*

Method: A specific technique used to collect data to measure an indicator

- ***Accurate*** – *The data collection method has little or no margin of error*
- ***Reliable*** – *The results are consistently repeatable - each time that the method is used, it produces the same result*
- ***Cost-Effective*** – *The method does not cost too much in relation to the data it produces and the available resources*
- ***Feasible*** – *The method can be implemented by people on the project team*
- ***Appropriate*** – *Acceptable and fitting within site-specific cultural, social, and biological norms*

ANNEX 3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS

There are some essential principles that apply to all steps in the Conservation Standards. Instead of listing them for each step, we describe them here.

General Principles

- **Collaborate with partners** – One conservation organization is unlikely to have sufficient expertise or internal resources to do all the necessary work of a given project. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that the work started in a project continues after the initial project ends. Thus, you should identify and collaborate with key partners to implement your project by developing formal or informal relationships with these partners and/or by having individuals from partner organizations serve on your project team. The Conservation Standards explicitly provide a common, transparent framework that enables effective information sharing and collaboration across a wide range of partners.

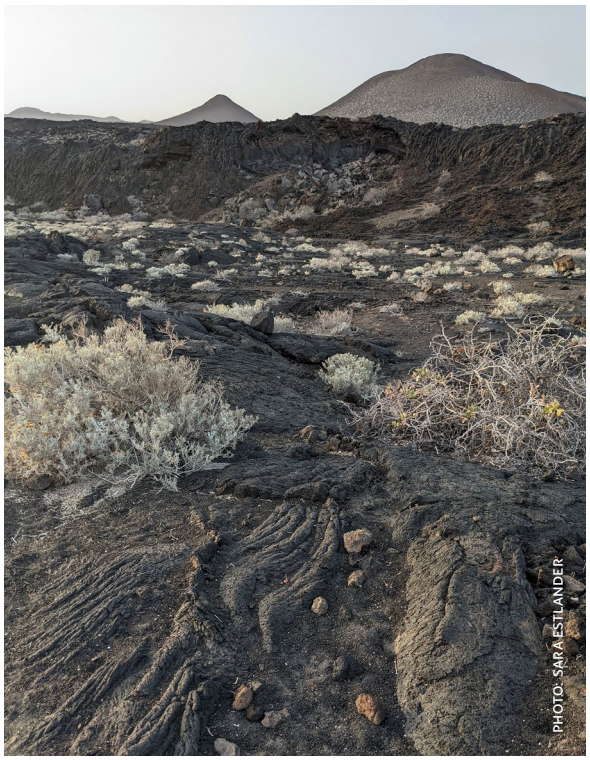


PHOTO: SARA ESTLANDER

- **Involve interested parties to the full extent feasible and as early in the process as possible** – It is similarly important to define and, at every step, involve interested parties. Interested parties include any individual, group, or institution that has a vested interest in or can influence a project and/or that potentially will be affected by the project and has something to gain or lose if conditions change or stay the same. Interested parties' roles might change over the course of the project. Project teams should communicate with and engage appropriate interested parties in project design, implementation, and decision making to ensure representation of and buy-in from key groups (see Step 1D for more details on interested parties assessments).

- **Implement conservation equitably** – In order to secure the future of our planet, we need everyone to have a voice and an opportunity to take action. Research shows that diversity promotes innovation, and CMP recognizes that to support the conservation community most effectively, we must also promote equitable conservation. The CS incorporate high-level considerations for practitioners to ensure planning and implementation are inclusive of interested parties affected by the project. Holistic conservation efforts ensure more just and durable outcomes. These principles are not intended to be comprehensive, and it will be important for your team to take an adaptive management approach to understand what works and what doesn't in complex socio-economic situations.

- **Appropriately use and contribute to the evidence base** – Wherever appropriate, you should make use of all available local and global evidence to answer key questions about your project's situation and actions. This evidence could range from local Indigenous knowledge about the breeding grounds for a specific species to a global

systematic review about the effectiveness of a proposed conservation action. As you learn more about your project, you should also contribute your evidence back to the broader community so that others can benefit from your experiences (see CMP's guidance on Defining and Using Evidence in Conservation Practice for more detail).

- **Use adaptive management to manage uncertainty** – Ideally you want to base your situation analysis and actions on available evidence. However, in many cases, you may have to urgently take action without having complete information. In these cases, it is important to state the assumptions you are making and then systematically (but efficiently) collect and assess the information needed to test them so that you can adapt and learn.

- **Document your decisions** – A key principle of both evidence-based conservation and adaptive management is to appropriately document the rationale and evidence supporting your decisions at each step. Not only does this documentation help you analyze why things worked or did not, but it also provides the basis for others (including future team members) to understand, vet, and provide input on the logic of your choices. Documenting decisions and providing evidence to sustain your assumptions also add transparency and accountability to your work. However, you do not want to spend so much time documenting every last detail that your team gets overwhelmed. As a general principle, focus on the least amount of documentation that will help your team appropriately evaluate and learn from your work, as well as share with others.

- **Foster a learning environment** – Another key principle of both evidence-based conservation and adaptive management is to learn from your results so you can improve over time. To this end, it is critical to embrace learning, recognize and admit mistakes, identify successes, and work to understand why some actions succeeded, while others did not. A project and an organizational culture that values learning will help foster a safe learning environment. Creating this culture will likely require work and commitment from both lower and higher levels of each partner organization involved in the project.

Considerations

As you review and implement the Conservation Standards, keep in mind the following considerations:

- **These standards will change over time** – These standards are not written to be the last word on how to do effective conservation. Instead, they are meant to capture the prevailing wisdom on what it takes to do conservation well under a variety of conditions. As such, CMP, with input from the broader community, periodically refines the Conservation Standards as they are applied and tested in the field and as our knowledge increases about what works and what does not. To participate in future updates, please email us at CMPinfo@conservationmeasures.org.

- **These standards represent the "ideal"** – The Conservation Standards are meant to provide a comprehensive view of what comprises good practice in project design, management, and monitoring. It is important to acknowledge that it may not be feasible – for a variety of reasons – to address every component of the Conservation Standards. What is important, however, is that you use a systematic and logical process for applying them. For example, you should not identify your indicators (Step 2B) before you clarify what you want to conserve (Step 1B). Likewise, if you are not able to address a particular component, you should be clear about how this will influence the rest of your work.

- **These standards assume some priority setting has already taken place** – The choice of where to work or the broader themes to address is often a higher-level decision taken outside of the conservation planning process. These standards thus assume that you and/or your organization have undertaken some priority-setting exercise to define (at least roughly) where, or on what issue, your team will work. Learning achieved during the application of the Conservation Standards can inform future priority-setting exercises.

- **Few projects will start applying the Conservation Standards at the beginning of their planning efforts** – If you are just beginning to think about initiating a new project, the Conservation Standards can help you be comprehensive in your approach from the start. However, many projects that will benefit from the Conservation Standards are already underway. You can apply these standards to your project at the point that makes sense for your context and then, if appropriate, apply them retroactively to help identify gaps you need to address to improve your project.

- **Each project is different and thus needs to customize their use of the Conservation Standards** – The Conservation Standards are written in general terms to provide teams the flexibility they need to adapt and modify them to their conditions. As such, the steps described in this document generally apply to all conservation projects, but each team should go into a level of detail commensurate with the levels of complexity and investment in its project. Also, some project teams may find that certain steps don't work for them and may need to adapt these steps.

- **These standards apply to projects at any spatial, institutional, and/or temporal scale** –Projects can range from the management of small-scale sites to large-scale ecoregions, landscapes, or corridors. They also may involve simultaneous management of small-scale sites to achieve large-scale impact. Projects can take place over time scales ranging from weeks to decades. Likewise, they may be more thematic in nature, including, for example, policy-based threat reduction or species-focused initiatives. These standards are relevant for all of these situations. Likewise, they can be used to design funding programs and clarify the relationship between programmatic goals and individual grants. However, they may need some adaptation, for example, when used for organization-level strategic planning that focuses on large, less-well-defined goals.

- **These standards focus on conservation as the main aim but can be adapted** - These standards were developed by and for organizations and agencies whose ultimate aim is biodiversity or natural resource conservation. However, many teams are also working to contribute to human wellbeing, and in some cases, human wellbeing is an equal or higher aim. The Conservation Standards are neutral about a team's primary aim. This is a management decision teams should clarify in the initial steps of the process. However, several Conservation Standards processes and tools can support explicit discussions about potential tradeoffs and consequences of prioritizing different aims throughout the project cycle.

- **These standards can be implemented using a variety of tools and guidance from natural, social, and behavioral sciences** – The Conservation Standards are meant to represent the state of the art in the conservation community's collective knowledge of the process for designing, managing, and monitoring conservation projects, while promoting a learning culture. The Conservation Standards do refer to specific tools that have proven useful in implementing this approach. However, teams may wish to supplement typical Conservation Standards tools with other context-appropriate tools.

- **These standards seek to clearly define and consistently use terminology** – There are endless debates among planners as to the relative meaning of technical terms such as goals, objectives, strategies, activities, targets, milestones, outputs, and results. Every office, project, and even individual have their own preferred set of terms. There is no right answer. The Conservation Standards, however, maintain that it is very important that the members of your project team and the people with whom you work have a clear and common definition of the terms you use. With this in mind, the technical terms in this document were carefully selected, bolded when first described, consistently used thereafter, and defined in the glossary at the end. The selection of specific terms for a given concept and the definitions for these terms are based on current usage of words by professionals from various disciplines working in planning, monitoring, and evaluation. As the Conservation Standards evolve, we may find some terms that need updating to improve communication and adoption of key principles and steps (see Table 1 for updates for this current version)

ANNEX 4. SUMMARY OF STANDARDS OF PRACTICE AND OUTPUTS

Numbers denote steps and sub-steps, and diamond bullets (◇) denote outputs. Not all standards or outputs are appropriate under all conditions or for all projects, so you should adapt as needed.

1. Assess

1A. Define Purpose & Identify Project Team

- ◇ Identification of purpose, decision makers, decision-making process, and decisions needed
- ◇ Identification and engagement of interested parties and support for their participation where barriers exist
- ◇ Selection of initial project team, including project leader, core members, and advisory members
- ◇ Identification of existing skills among team members and key gaps you should fill
- ◇ Designation of roles and responsibilities

1B. Define Scope, Vision, & Focal Values

- ◇ Brief description of the project scope, including a map, if appropriate
- ◇ Vision statement for the project
- ◇ Selection of biodiversity focal values, including a brief explanation of why they were chosen, and if appropriate, a description and/or map showing each focal value's location
- ◇ Selection of human wellbeing focal values and identification of ecosystem services, as relevant
- ◇ Description of the viability status of each priority biodiversity focal value

1C. Identify Critical Threats

- ◇ Identification of direct threats and, if relevant, a map showing the spatial footprint for critical threats as they intersect focal values
- ◇ Identification of the biophysical effects of climate threats and interactions among climate and conventional threats
- ◇ Rating or ranking of direct threats to identify critical threats

1D. Assess the Conservation Situation

- ◇ Identification and analysis of indirect threats and opportunities
- ◇ Assessment of interested parties and their primary interests
- ◇ Situation analysis and/or model, narrative description, and/or other representation of key cause-and-effect relationships among factors affecting your project context

2. Plan

2A. Develop a Formal Strategic Plan: Goals, Actions, Assumptions, & Objectives

- ◇ Goals for each biodiversity focal value and, if appropriate, human wellbeing focal value
- ◇ Identification of key intervention points and draft actions
- ◇ Prioritization of draft actions
- ◇ Theories of change that clarify assumptions about how actions and associated activities lead to expected results
- ◇ Objectives for key intermediate results
- ◇ Finalized strategic plan

2B. Develop a Formal Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning Plan

- Audiences and their information needs and preferred communication modes clearly defined
- Indicators and methods identified
- Finalized monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan

2C. Develop an Operational Plan

- Assessment of human, financial, and other resources
- Risk assessment and mitigation actions
- Social safeguards
- Estimate of project lifespan and transition strategy

3. Implement

3A. Revisit Team Structure and Process

- Updated team charter and other partnership agreements, as relevant
- Updated communications strategy stating how you will keep interested parties engaged as to your progress

3B. Develop a Detailed, Short-term Work Plan and Timeline

- Work plan detailing the activities, tasks, and responsibilities associated with your strategic, monitoring, and operational plans
- Project timeline or calendar

3C. Develop and Refine Your Project Budget

- Project budget
- List of potential funding sources
- Funding proposals developed and submitted

3D. Implement Your Plans

- Implementation of strategic, monitoring, and operational plans (as outlined in your work plan), keeping in mind your project budget and schedule
- Systems for storing and accessing data
- Monitoring data captured in systems
- Implementation progress reports to your organization, funders, and other interested parties

4. Analyze & Adapt

4A. Prepare Your Data for Analysis

- Key project data recorded, stored, processed, and backed up on a routine basis
- Visualizations of key data for decision making

4B. Analyze & Reflect on Results

- Analyses of project results and assumptions
- Analyses of operational and financial data
- Record of discussions and decisions

4C. Adapt Your Plans and Budgets

- Revised project documents, such as your strategic plan (including situation model and theories of change), monitoring plan, operational plan, work plan, and budget
- Documentation of evidence, discussions, lessons learned, potential risks or uncertainties, and decisions

5. Share

5A. Document What You Learn

- Documentation of key results and knowledge

5B. Share What You Learn

- Refinement, as needed, of key audiences and their information needs and preferred communication modes
- Regular communication to project team members, partners, and interested parties
- Contribution to evidence base
- Development and distribution of appropriate communication products

5C. Foster a Learning Environment

- Regular feedback shared formally or informally
- Audits, as appropriate, to assess adherence to good conservation practice
- Demonstrated commitment from leaders and staff to create a safe environment for learning and innovation
- A commitment to share successes and failures with practitioners around the world

Close the Loop

The Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (developed and maintained by the Conservation Measures Partnership) bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology to help make conservation efforts more effective.

CMP Members (2024–2025):

www.conservationmeasures.org

Conservation Measures Partnership