BIODIVERSITY PROJECT GUIDE FOR COMPANIES

A WWF SEVEN-STEP APPROACH TO DESIGN AND ASSESS FOREST PROJECTS

" *Biodiversity is not just the backbone of our environment, it's also the backbone of our economy. Conserving and restoring nature is not just the right thing to do, it's also the smart thing to do.*

This guide walks you through the why, where, what, and how, to help you maximize your return on investment. "

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WWF FORESTS FORWARD GLOBAL LEAD

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COMPANY ACTION ON FOREST BIODIVERSITY »

A company-led initiative to conserve or recover forest biodiversity can deliver benefits for both nature and business.

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Forest biodiversity projects not only contribute to global and national sustainability goals, but also deliver tangible business benefits, including:

Operational benefits

Improved ecosystem services (e.g. water retention, pollination), reduced exposure to natural hazards (e.g. pests and diseases, floods, droughts, forest fires) and lower long-term costs.

Strategic benefits

Helping meet ESG and sustainability targets, reducing reputational, business and regulatory risks, and building stronger stakeholder trust.

Revenue opportunities

Through nature-based products and services, biodiversity credits and other innovative business models.

WWF recommends that companies integrate biodiversity action into multiple layers of their business:

Landscape-based actions

Collaborative place-based efforts that conserve or restore ecosystems and address shared local conservation needs.

Market-based actions

Development of products, new value chains and business opportunities that benefit biodiversity while tapping into new or growing markets.

Operational actions

Changes within the company's own practices that reduce biodiversity impact and improve resilience or efficiency.

Together, these actions support the transition toward a nature-positive business model that helps reverse nature loss while creating long-term value for both companies and society.

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Biodiversity conservation or recovery?

Biodiversity conservation focuses on protecting and maintaining existing ecosystems, species, and ecological processes, while biodiversity recovery focuses on actively restoring and regenerating ecosystems and species populations that have already been degraded, fragmented, or lost. Projects can combine both approaches by investing in conservation of what has remained, and in recovery of what needs to be restored.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

A different approach

Many sustainability initiatives already guide companies on biodiversity. Some focus on the company level, such as the Science Based Targets for Nature (SBTN) ↗ or the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD). ↗

Others provide project-level guidance, for example through certification or biodiversity credits (Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) ↗ and Plan Vivo (PV)). ↗

This guide takes a different approach. It offers a practical, step-by-step process to help companies design site-focused biodiversity conservation and recovery projects.

It shows what to consider at the project area level, how to engage stakeholders, and how to build credible, feasible projects. In case the project intends to pursue specific goals—such as certification or carbon credits—it is important to factor this in from the start, as it can shape project design.

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About this guide

This guide helps companies, investors and other value chain actors assess and design biodiversity conservation and recovery projects that are relevant to their operations, aligned with organizational priorities on business and sustainability as well as biodiversity requirements, and feasible in practice. By following the seven steps, you can identify high-impact opportunities—whether on the ground, in supply chains or through financial support—and translate them into well-scoped, credible projects supported by stakeholders.

The guide provides a flexible and modular structure that can be adapted to different contexts, priorities, and data availability by applying it in full or leaving out one or more steps. It covers the full process—from selecting a project location and carrying out scoping activities to preparing an implementation plan. The result is a project concept that is ready to be pitched for finance, aligned with science-based and stakeholder-supported goals, and further developed into a detailed plan for execution.

It can be used as a standalone tool to shape biodiversity action at the landscape level, or in combination with other corporate frameworks, targets, or commitments.

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Who this guide is for

This guide is developed for people working on **ESG, conservation, estate management, sourcing, or procurement within companies, particularly in sectors such as forestry and agrifood.** The guide is also relevant for investors and for companies interested in financing or investing in biodiversity projects.

📖 Examples of use

- **An agro-commodity** company facing land degradation and sourcing risks can use the guide to design recovery projects that restore ecosystems, strengthen its supply chains, and to generate biodiversity credits.

- **A timber company** applying the SBTN framework to assess impacts on degraded, high-biodiversity areas can use the guide to design recovery projects that address risks, and meet sustainability commitments.

- **A tech company** with offices in a forested region can use the guide seeking to support local environments and communities, can use the guide to design projects that strengthen stakeholder relations, ESG performance and reputation.

- **An investor or retailer** funding biodiversity recovery projects through external partners can use the guide to screen proposals and ensure investments deliver credible, lasting outcomes.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The seven steps in this guide are grouped into three practical phases:

PHASE I

PREPARATION

Step 1

Define motivation, objectives and desired outcomes

Step 2

Select project area

PHASE II

SCOPING

Step 3

Assess ecological and socio-economic context

Step 4

Select target species or group

Step 5

Define stakeholder engagement potential

Step 6

Assess project feasibility

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PHASE III

TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Step 7

How to put the project into practice

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DEFINE MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES ⪢

Defining your motives and objectives upfront will sharpen your project's focus, increase its chances of success, and help you build internal alignment and external support.

After Step 1, you will have:

⊘ Clarified your company's motives for a forest biodiversity project.

⊘ Defined your company's objectives for such a project.

⊘ Evaluated the scale of and budget for such a project.

PROCESS STAGES

A Identify your company's motives ⪢ **B** Define your desired objectives and outcomes ⪢ **C** Evaluate the scale of and budget for your biodiversity project

A Identify your company's motives

Discuss why your company is starting a biodiversity conservation or recovery project. Possible motives include:

→ Reducing nature-related risks (physical, regulatory, reputational, or market).

→ Meeting sustainability commitments or ESG strategies.

→ Creating new business opportunities aligned with nature-positive goals. (e.g. premium products, biodiversity credits).

B Define your desired objectives and outcomes

Agree on the outcomes your company aims to achieve. Examples include:

→ Biodiversity gains in forest landscapes.

→ Stronger, more resilient supply chains.

→ Positive impacts on local communities and stakeholders.

→ Greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions and/or carbon storage.

C Evaluate the scale and budget for your biodiversity project

Considerations include:

→ Do you aim for a smaller-scale biodiversity project that fits the available company budget?

→ Do you aim for a large-scale initiative with other partners and/or revenue-generating activities to attract investors?

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PHASE I: PREPARATION

IDENTIFY CANDIDATE PROJECT AREAS ⏩

In this step, you identify one or more candidate project areas to explore in more detail. If an area was already chosen beforehand, this step helps confirm, refine, or adjust that choice.

After Step 2, you will have:

✓ Selected, refined or adjusted the choice for the initial project area(s).

✓ Assessed, described and mapped the opportunities and risks across those areas.

Introduction

The aim is to identify project areas where conservation or restoration can deliver the greatest benefits for biodiversity, for your company, and for local stakeholders.
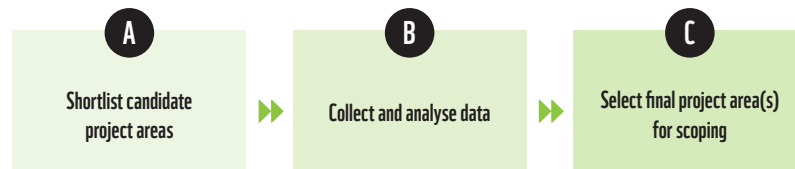
Relevant project areas may include places with remaining biodiversity value or degraded areas with strong recovery potential, such as Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) or other vulnerable areas. There may also be locations that are strategically important to your company, for instance where raw materials are sourced, where you have significant operations or retail activities, or where offices are located.

By considering both ecological importance and business relevance, you can identify project areas that maximize impact for biodiversity while strengthening the long-term resilience of your company.

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PROCESS STAGES

A Shortlist candidate project areas ▶▶ **B** Collect and analyse data ▶▶ **C** Select final project area(s) for scoping

(A) Shortlist candidate project areas

Start by identifying potential project areas from both a business and biodiversity perspective. Consider:

→ **Company motivation and objectives:** How does a project support your motives and desired outcomes? (see Step 1) ↗

→ **Level of influence:** Prioritize areas where your company has direct control or strong influence (e.g. concessions, plantations, or other managed lands) or, alternatively, where you can rely on established implementing partners to ensure credible and effective project delivery.

→ **Biodiversity footprint:** Where does your company have the greatest impact on ecosystems?

→ **High-biodiversity or high-risk areas:** Where does your company have the greatest impact on ecosystems?

→ **Business alignment:** Look for areas where biodiversity action also strengthens business value, such as securing supply, reducing risk, or protecting reputation.

> **TIP** *A detailed assessment of opportunities and risks across all operational and value-chain locations will help prioritize candidate areas.*
>
> *The WWF Biodiversity Risk Filter ↗ is a useful tool for this process, enabling companies and investors to identify where action matters most for both business resilience and biodiversity.*

(B) Collect and analyse data

Collect data and information: with support from an internal or external GIS specialist, where possible. This may include:

→ **Spatial data:** georeferenced maps showing current land cover, land-use changes, terrain, waterways and infrastructure.

→ **High-biodiversity or high-risk areas:** Overlay operational maps with conservation priority maps (e.g. KBAs) or risk maps (e.g. deforestation, water stress) to identify where action could make the most difference.

→ **Supporting data:** deforestation history, records of plant and animal species (e.g. transects, camera traps), population pressure, and relevant laws or regulations.

Describe and map: Assess the collected data and information to create a profile of each candidate area, showing current land cover/use, how it has changed over time, and the main pressures on biodiversity. Assess whether the candidate area is continuous or fragmented by using, for example, data on waterways and infrastructure. Mapping tools and GIS expertise can help make comparisons easier.

Quick scan with stakeholders: Engage local stakeholders, such as communities and authorities, to learn where conservation or recovery is most needed and where company involvement is welcome. Even short conversations can reveal priorities, land tenure, community perspectives, and potential conflicts related to land- use or land- rights in the area.

By the end of this step, you will be ready to move from a shortlist of candidate areas to a well-informed decision on the project area(s) to take forward.

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TIP

The aim is not to gather every possible dataset, but to generate decision-relevant insights that connect ecological characteristics and social factors with your company's priorities.

Desktop research is a good starting point and can later be complemented with field studies. In this stage it is helpful to make note of data gaps: which information is missing or not freely available?

C Select final project area(s) for scoping

At this stage, you move from a shortlist to a final selection of project area(s) for further scoping. Key criteria to consider:

→ **Biodiversity impact:** Where can conservation or recovery efforts deliver the greatest benefits?

→ **Stakeholder perspectives:** How do local stakeholders view a potential project? Are there opportunities, risks, or signs of support or resistance?

→ **Business perspective:** How does the area connect to company priorities, such as supply chain resilience, ESG commitments, or reputational risks? Is there a business model?

→ **Feasibility:** What is the level of complexity in terms of land tenure, governance, and implementation capacity?

→ **Company motivation:** Does the area fit the purpose and objectives your company set out in Step 1?

By weighing these factors together, your company can make a well-informed decision about which candidate area(s) to take forward for detailed scoping in the next steps.

TIP

Consider scoring each criterion for every candidate area. This makes the process more transparent and helps justify the final selection.

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PHASE II: SCOPING

ASSESS ECOLOGICAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND REGULATORY CONTEXT ⮞

This step helps you understand the ecological, socio-economic, and regulatory context of your project area, ensuring your plans are realistic and supported.

After Step 3, you will have:

⊘ Described the ecosystem characteristics of the project site and broader landscape

⊘ Identified your organization's impacts on biodiversity.

⊘ Analysed current land use and socio-economic dynamics.

⊘ Clarified relevant laws, policies, and land tenure arrangements.

⊘ Collected baseline information to support species assessments (Step 4) and stakeholder engagement (Step 5).

⊘ Assessed key threats, constraints, and opportunities for conservation or recovery

Introduction

Project areas can include forests, or mosaics of forests and other ecosystems such as wetlands or meadows. The specific land use and context of these areas will determine your conservation or recovery goals, the incentives available, and the design of your interventions.

Collect and analyse data

Collect data with support from an internal or external GIS specialist, where possible. This may include:

→ **Spatial data**: e.g. land cover and land use (current and historical), deforestation trends, ecosystem types, protected or priority areas, rivers and lakes, roads, settlements, soils, altitude and slope.

→ **Supporting management and tenure data**: e.g. current management practices, ownership and tenure arrangements, certification status.

→ **Supporting ecological data**: e.g. characteristics of ecosystem types, records of plant and animal species (e.g. camera trap data owned by the company or from literature).

→ **Supporting socio-economic and governance data**: e.g. population data, relevant laws, policies, and institutions, presence of projects or partnerships.

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Why context matters

Imagine a timber company planning a recovery project on degraded plantation land with remnants of peat swamp forest and wetlands nearby. Assessing the ecological context shows that effective restoration requires replanting native peat swamp tree species and preventing further wetland drainage.

Assessing the socio-economic and governance context reveals that local communities rely on non-timber forest products and that peatland use is regulated. These insights guide the project toward realistic, supported interventions, such as reconnecting forest patches to restore ecological corridors. Without this understanding, the company might select the wrong tree species, ignore community needs, or overlook legal requirements, leading to wasted investments and failed outcomes.

It shows what to consider at the project area level, how to engage stakeholders, and how to build credible, feasible projects.

PROCESS STAGES

| **A** Describe the ecosystem, management, and ownership context | ▸▸ | **B** Describe ecosystem condition and ecological context | ▸▸ | **C** Describe the socio-economic and governance context | ▸▸ | **D** Identify threats and constraints | ▸▸ | **E** Identify enabling conditions and opportunities |

A Describe the ecosystem, management, and ownership context

Briefly describe the project area in terms of ecosystem type, management regime, and ownership or tenure arrangements. This provides the baseline for understanding opportunities and constraints for conservation or recovery.

Ecosystem type: Describe the current ecosystem, whether natural or managed. Note details such as:

→ Climate zone (e.g. tropical, temperate, boreal).

→ Dominant vegetation or tree species

→ Humidity level (e.g. wet, moist, dry).

→ Other relevant characteristics (e.g. evergreen/deciduous, primary/secondary)

> **TIP**
> *Use georeferenced data layers where possible and include photos to illustrate key features.*

Management regime: If the area has been managed, describe the nature and intensity of current and past activities. Examples include:

→ **Harvesting:** thinning, selective logging, clear cutting.

→ **Regeneration:** natural regeneration, assisted natural regeneration, planting (mono- or mixed-species).

→ **Spatial and temporal patterns:** rotation lengths, stand sizes, or compartment structures.

→ **Conservation measures:** set-aside areas under FSC certification.

Ownership and management structure: Summarize who owns and manages the land, and any implications for project design. Ownership and tenure arrangements are critical, since conflicts over land or resources can undermine project success. They also influence restoration options, financing opportunities, and potential partners. Key questions to consider:

→ Are conservation activities planned on land directly owned or managed by your organization, where you have full control?

→ If the land is managed by others within your supply chain, what agreements are needed to ensure lasting results?

→ If the area lies outside your land or supply chain, is it worthwhile to engage through partnerships with external actors (e.g. NGOs, local communities, governments)?

→ Is the mandate or tenure arrangement clear or unclear?

→ Are rights shared among multiple parties, such as smallholders with customary claims?

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B Describe ecosystem condition and ecological context

Assess the ecological integrity of the project area: This assessment indicates the capacity of the ecosystem to host different species and trophic levels, due to e.g. density, canopy closure, gaps, age/diameter distribution, main tree species present.
Key questions to consider:

→ Is the ecosystem degraded, and in what way? (e.g. logged and replanted multiple times, now functioning as a monoculture).

→ Are non-native tree species present?

→ Are there invasive animal, tree, or plant species?

TIP

Existing sources such as certification audit reports or High Conservation Value (HCV) assessments can help establish baselines and define indicators or targets for habitat status and improvement.

Status of biodiversity: Summarize the biodiversity status in the project area and wider landscape, including:

- $\rightarrow$ Presence of threatened species and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List categories (see also Section 4.1).

- $\rightarrow$ Important biodiversity-rich habitats, especially those supporting narrowly adapted or threatened species (e.g. old-growth forests, small wetlands, refugia).

- $\rightarrow$ Levels of ecosystem connectivity (including biodiversity corridors) or fragmentation across the landscape.

TIP

National forest acts, FSC standards, or national HCV interpretations often define important habitat types. Specific sites may also be classified as KBAs using the KBA standard and guidelines.

Describe the broader landscape context: Consider how the project area fit into the broader landscape, as this influences which activities are feasible and the potential for long-term biodiversity recovery (see box below).

TIP

Present the landscape context spatially. Indicate whether the site is within or near an HCV area, KBA, protected area, biodiversity hotspot, or part of larger tracts of managed natural forest or plantations.

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Why landscape context matters

Imagine a company restoring a small forest patch. If the patch is isolated in an agricultural landscape, recovery may only improve habitat within the site unless partnerships are built to connect it to other forests. If the same patch lies next to a larger protected area, it could serve as a vital corridor to strengthen biodiversity across the region. Understanding the wider landscape is essential to set realistic goals and avoid missing opportunities for long-term recovery.

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C ## Describe the socio-economic and governance context

Examine the socio-economic dynamics and the policy and regulatory environment, both at the project site and across the wider landscape. Focus on factors that may influence the potential for biodiversity conservation or recovery, such as:

→ Who has access to and uses natural resources?

→ How dependent are local communities on ecosystem services?

→ What cultural values or traditional knowledge are linked to the landscape?

→ Which local and national regulations apply to biodiversity conservation or recovery activities?

→ Are there existing government commitments, frameworks, or strategies?

D ## Identify threats and constraints

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In this stage, identify the threats to biodiversity that are driving loss or degradation in the project area and the wider landscape. These include direct pressures such as land-use change, overharvesting, or invasive species, as well as the actors and drivers behind them.

At the same time, analyse the constraints that could limit or complicate the implementation of a conservation or recovery project. These are governance, institutional, or social factors that make it harder to address threats effectively, even if the technical solutions are clear.

TIP *Where possible, map the spatial extent of threats to visualize patterns and priorities for action. Make use of this guide's accompanying Template to map threats, and the actors and drivers behind them*

Examples

Threats to biodiversity:

Unsustainable logging or encroachment

Overharvesting or collection of key resources

Habitat loss, fragmentation, and reduced connectivity

Conversion to other land uses (e.g. agriculture, infrastructure)

Spread of exotic or invasive species

Insufficient natural regeneration

Disruption of natural disturbance regimes (e.g. fire, flooding)

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Constraints to implementation:

Weak or poorly enforced environmental legislation

Corruption or lack of transparency

Unclear land tenure and ownership

High levels of human–wildlife conflict

E Identify enabling conditions and opportunities

Explore the opportunities and conditions that could help mitigate threats and support project success. These include opportunities that strengthen ecosystem integrity, create incentives for conservation or recovery, or build partnerships.

> **TIP**
>
> *Use the key questions in the Annex↗ to guide your analysis of enabling conditions and opportunities.*

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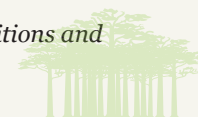
PHASE II: SCOPING

SELECT TARGET SPECIES OR GROUP ⏩

In this step, you select target species or groups that represent wider biodiversity, making your project easier to design, monitor, and link to business goals.

After Step 4, you will have:

✓ Gained a clear understanding of species or species groups important for conservation or recovery.

✓ Identified and selected suitable target species or groups, aligned where relevant with national WWF strategies or the global WWF priority species list.

Introduction

Focusing on one or more target species or species groups can make biodiversity projects more practical and effective.

Target species act as proxies for wider biodiversity, helping you design and monitor interventions while also benefiting other species and ecosystem functions. Depending on your goals, you might focus on a single species (e.g. a keystone or endangered species) or on a group (e.g. pollinators, native trees, or large mammals).

Monitoring a target species makes tracking manageable and directly linked to project objectives. Measuring short-term indicators (e.g. animal droppings) and long-term trends (e.g. population size) helps assess whether interventions are effective. Target species monitoring can also feed into corporate sustainability reporting and global frameworks like the SBTN↗or the TNFD↗ To add value, design your system so that project data can serve these broader purposes.

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Collect and analyse data

Collect data on plant and animal species present in and around the project area.

→ Local information sources (organizations, universities, news articles)

→ Locally collected data: camera traps, transects, observations

→ National biodiversity atlases or protected area databases

→ Global data sources from IUCN Red List or BirdLife International

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PROCESS STAGES

A	B	C	D
Select target species or groups	Assess the target species or group in the project area	Check monitoring feasibility	Assess risks of unintended side effects

A Select target species or groups

Choose one or more species or groups that can guide your project and act as a proxy for broader biodiversity. **Suitable candidates include species that are:**

→ Threatened or endangered (IUCN Red List ↗).

→ Locally rare or important.

→ Ecologically significant (e.g. pollinators, predators).

→ Culturally or visually appealing, helping to raise awareness and support.

You may also select **'surrogate species'** that represent broader conservation goals, e.g:

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Umbrella species: protecting them safeguards many others sharing their habitat.

Keystone species: species with a disproportionate impact on ecosystem health.

Indicator species: species that reflect the condition of the wider ecosystem.

Flagship species: charismatic species that mobilize public and financial support.

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Other factors to consider:

→ Does the project area fall within the species' natural range and provide the right conditions?

→ How quickly is the species likely to recover?

→ How does it interact with other species (predators, prey, competitors)?

→ Does it have cultural or traditional value?

→ Does the species have direct or indirect relevance for business success, for example by stabilizing production systems or maintaining ecosystem services important for supply chains?

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B Assess the target species or group in the project area

After selection, take a closer look at how the species lives in the project area and what threats or opportunities exist. Focus on population size, habitat needs (food, shelter, breeding or nesting sites), and movement or life cycle (breeding periods, migration, seasonal presence). Also, consider the population in the surrounding landscape.

This assessment will show which actions are most relevant, such as improving habitat quality, restoring food sources, or strengthening protection.

Questions to consider:

→ Is there enough suitable habitat, and can degraded areas be restored or connected?

→ Is the population large enough to sustain itself? Are nesting or breeding sites present? Does the species rely on long-standing management practices (e.g. grazing)?

→ Are food sources available year-round?

→ Are there risks from hunting, poaching, or conflict with people?

→ Are other invasive species or pests competing with or harming the target species?

→ Are there migration needs, genetic concerns, or natural processes (e.g. fire, flooding) that matter for this species?

C Check monitoring feasibility

Monitoring helps measure project impact, but not all species are easy or affordable to track. When selecting a species or species group, consider factors such as:

→ **Detectability**: whether the species can be monitored reliably (e.g. sightings, camera traps, sound recordings/bio-acoustics, environmental DNA (eDNA), calls, tracks, nests, droppings). Is it only visible in certain seasons?

→ **Seasonality**: whether the species is visible or detectable only during certain periods.

→ **Population data**: whether population size can be estimated (even roughly), or whether simpler proxies are available (e.g. amount of dead wood as a proxy for beetle habitat).

→ **Cultural** or **traditional value**: whether the species holds importance for local communities.

→ **Recovery potential**: the likelihood of the species responding to conservation or restoration measures.

Monitoring should go beyond biodiversity alone. It should also capture how conservation outcomes relate to business interests and stakeholders. For example:

→ Are positive impacts occurring close to sourcing areas, or in places that protect water supply or reduce risks downstream?

→ Does the species contribute to stabilizing production in managed landscapes?

→ How is the project affecting relations with communities? Does it help build trust, reduce conflict, or create win-win outcomes?

Also check whether you (or partners) have the tools, expertise, and budget to monitor effectively. Setting realistic expectations early will help with planning and communication.

D Assess risks of unintended side effects

Even well-designed projects may have negative impacts. Identifying risks early helps you put safeguards in place. To understand possible unintended impacts, consider the following questions:

→ Could increasing populations lead to more hunting, poaching, or conflict with people?

→ Could larger populations cause crop damage, livestock losses, or safety risks?

→ Could generalist species benefit at the expense of specialist species?

When to involve specialists

Some technical aspects may go beyond the expertise of a company team. In such cases, consider collaborating with a specialist, such as a local WWF office or conservation NGO. Specialists can help with:

→ Choosing the most suitable surrogate or indicator species.

→ Designing monitoring methods (e.g. eDNA, acoustic monitoring, advanced population modelling).

→ Assessing complex ecological interactions (predator–prey dynamics, genetic diversity, natural disturbance regimes).

→ Identifying risks of unintended ecological effects.

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PHASE II: SCOPING

DEFINE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT POTENTIAL

Stakeholder engagement is key to lasting results. This step helps you map out who is involved, what they need, and how to work with them.

After Step 5, you will have:

✓ Identified stakeholders

✓ A better understanding of their interests and needs

✓ Assessed the relationships, power dynamics and influence

✓ First ideas of an engagement approach

Introduction

A large portion of the world's forests is managed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs). Efforts to conserve and recover forest biodiversity must therefore actively involve the people who live in and around the project area. This is not only their right, it also reduces risks of conflict and improves conservation results. Projects that respect local rights, knowledge, and practices generally achieve better results for both nature and people.

TIP

Consider involving local experts such as representatives of Indigenous organizations, social scientists or anthropologists to better understand community perspectives and strengthen outcomes.

Where to find more guidance

Several frameworks provide useful guidance on stakeholder consultation. Examples include the FSC Ecosystem Services Procedure (FSC-PRO-30-006), PV Nature's stakeholder engagement requirements ↗, and the Stakeholder Engagement Guidance from SBTN ↗.

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PROCESS STAGES

A Identify stakeholders ▶▶ **B** Understand stakeholder interests, needs and expectations ▶▶ **C** Assess relationships, power dynamics and influence

Managing stakeholder expectations

Engaging stakeholders early is essential for credible and inclusive projects, but it can also raise expectations, so be clear about what – and what is not – guaranteed:

→ Clarify your purpose; Explain that the project is under exploration and outcomes depend on feasibility, financing, and company priorities.

→ Be transparent about uncertainty; note that not all proposed projects move forward, and timelines may shift.

→ Emphasize mutual value; show how stakeholder input informs broader strategies and strengthens future opportunities, even if this project is not implemented.

→ Avoid overpromising; commit only to benefits that are certain.

→ Follow up; even if the project does not proceed, communicate openly to maintain trust and relationships.

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A Identify stakeholders

Start by listing all people and groups who may affect or be affected by the project. Typical categories include:

→ **Primary stakeholders:** directly impacted, such as local farmers, communities, Indigenous Peoples, harvesters, landowners or companies with rights to use resources.

→ **Secondary stakeholders:** indirectly involved, for example government agencies, investors, or supply chain actors.

→ **Interest groups**: not directly affected but interested in outcomes, such as NGOs, research institutions, or advocacy groups.

📖 Examples of relevant stakeholders include:

IPLCs with legal or customary use rights in the project area.

Other companies with extraction, use or management rights in the area.

People affected by human-wildlife conflict.

People benefiting from ecosystem services, such as clean water supply, ecotourism or related business opportunities.

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B Understand stakeholder interests and needs

Next, assess the interests of stakeholders you may need to engage with. For each group, ask:

→ What are their main interests, needs, and/or concerns ?

→ Do their activities contribute to biodiversity loss, or do they play a role in enhancing biodiversity?

→ How can they contribute to the design of the project?

→ What are their expectations?

TIP *Make further use of the Template↗ in which you mapped the actors that play a role in threatening biodiversity loss in the area in section 3.4.*
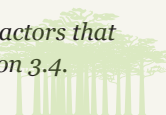
Pay attention to those directly affected often with recognized rights over land, resources or decisions. Projects are more effective and less risky when local people agree explicitly with the intended objectives and interventions of your project. From the start, it is therefore important to:

→ Build trust and seek active support. Make sure that communities feel heard and respected.

→ Ensure that communities see tangible benefits from the project: create win-win outcomes.

Gender and youth

Women and youth are often underrepresented in conservation projects, yet they may rely heavily on biodiversity for their livelihoods. Including them in decision-making and benefit-sharing is fair, increases trust, and improves long-term outcomes.

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Creating win-win outcomes

Win–win outcomes are solutions that benefit local people, biodiversity, and the company simultaneously. They build trust, reduce risks, and strengthen the long-term success of a project. Examples include:

Economic incentives: Secure and fair contracts, payments for ecosystem services, or support for alternatives that reduce pressure on wildlife.

Capacity building: Training, technical support, or new livelihood opportunities that improve incomes while encouraging conservation-friendly practices.

Recognition and inclusion: Involving communities in decisions, recognizing their rights and contributions and ensuring they share in project benefits.

TIP

→ *Check for public or non-public environmental or social assessments (e.g. from government, NGOs/development partners, certification schemes, or donor-funded projects).*

→ *Collect site-specific data where needed, e.g. maps of customary territories when community rights are not formally recognized, and e.g. interviews, community meetings, or livelihood analyses to gather stakeholder information.*
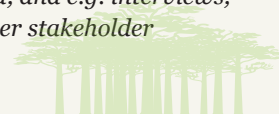
(C) Assess relationships, power dynamics and influence

Finally, examine how stakeholders relate to each other and to your project to help identify opportunities for support as well as risks of conflict or lack of support that could undermine the project. This reduces risks, builds reputation, and increases long-term impact. Key questions:

→ Who holds power or makes decisions in the landscape? Where are shared interests or synergies?

→ Are there existing conflicts or alliances in the landscape? Who might support or oppose your project?

→ Who has the capacity and willingness to sustain activities and results over time?

TIP

Tools such as a power/interest matrix or a simple stakeholder map can help. For further reading, visit this link. ↗
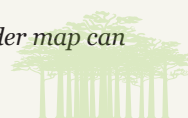
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PHASE II: SCOPING

ASSESS PROJECT FEASIBILITY ⏩

This step brings together findings from earlier steps to test if your project is realistic, aligned with company priorities, and capable of delivering measurable biodiversity results.

After Step 6, you will have:

✓ Specified objectives and desired outcomes of the biodiversity project.

✓ Aligned these objectives with your company's operations, business priorities, and relevant sustainability frameworks.

✓ Understood the design, threats, risks, and opportunities of the project.

✓ Assessed whether the project is feasible.

Introduction

This step concludes the Scoping Phase. Based on findings from Steps 1–5, you now bring everything together: your company's motives and objectives, project area(s), ecological and socio-economic context, target species, and stakeholder perspectives.
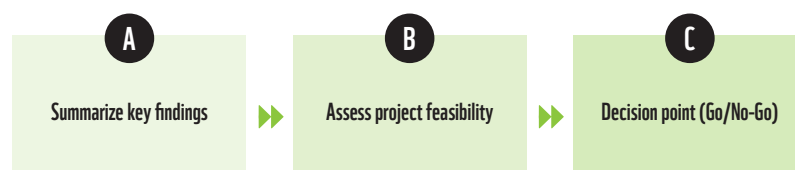
The goal is to decide whether a biodiversity project is viable in the selected area, and whether to proceed with a detailed implementation plan and explore financing options.

Collect and analyse data

The Excel checklist **downloadable** here↗ can support this step.

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PROCESS STAGES

A Summarize key findings ▶▶ **B** Assess project feasibility ▶▶ **C** Decision point (Go/No-Go)

A ## Summarize key findings

Bring together the results from earlier steps, focusing on insights that support decision-making.

Summarize your motivation, objectives, and desired outcomes

Restate your objectives and desired outcomes, based on earlier steps. Make sure they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound SMART *(see Box below)*. Examples:

→ Maintain or increase the population size of species X in area Y by Z% between 2025 and 2030.

→ Improve connectivity for species X between areas Y and Z by Z% between 2025 and 2035.

Also check alignment with your business:

→ Do the objectives fit your company's operations and sustainability strategy?

→ Can the project deliver business value (e.g. restore degraded land, secure supply, generate credits)?

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SMART objectives are:

Specific: Clear and well-defined.

Measurable: Can be tracked with data.

Achievable: Realistic given the context and resources.

Relevant: Linked to biodiversity needs and company priorities.

Time-bound: Linked to a specific timeframe.

Summarize the ecosystem context, pressures, and opportunities

→ What is the condition of the project area? Can it host and support species?

→ How is it connected to the wider landscape?

→ What is the local biodiversity status (e.g. threatened species, ecosystem services)?

→ What are the main pressures (e.g. land-use change, deforestation, overharvesting, infrastructure)?

→ What risks and opportunities arise from ecological integrity, biodiversity status, management regime, and ownership?

→ Can threats be reduced, and are there realistic opportunities to strengthen habitats and ecosystem integrity?

Conclude: Can the main risks be managed, and are biodiversity gains achievable?

Summarize the target species selection and monitoring feasibility

→ Is a target species or group identified?

→ What are the main threats and opportunities for it?

→ What actions are needed for conservation or recovery? (e.g. removing invasive species or planting trees for nesting sites)

→ How feasible is monitoring (tools, expertise, budget)?

→ Are the risks manageable, and can enabling conditions help ensure success?

Conclude: Can the effects on target species be effectively monitored?

Summarize governance and socio-economic context

→ What socio-economic or policy risks could affect the project?

→ What enabling conditions (policies, incentives, partnerships) could help?

→ How do broader policy or market trends affect feasibility?

Conclude: Are risks manageable, and can enabling conditions be used to support success?

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Summarize stakeholder engagement potential

→ How do stakeholders view the project: supportive or resistant? Is awareness-raising needed?

→ Are the needs and concerns of communities, women, and youth clear?

→ Can concerns be addressed?

→ Is there potential for win–win solutions that benefit both communities and biodiversity?

Conclude: Is there sufficient stakeholder support and opportunity for win–win outcomes?

Summarize the level of complexity for implementation

→ Who owns or manages the land, and how does this affect project options?

→ How much influence does your company have?

→ Are there political, governance, or tenure sensitivities?

→ Are there capable partners to sustain outcomes long-term?

Conclude: Are the risks manageable, and can enabling conditions help ensure success?

B Assess project feasibility

Based on the information you summarized, decide if a biodiversity conservation or recovery project is feasible in the selected area. Pay specific attention to threats, risks and opportunities as described in the earlier sections.


Mitigation measures

For each threat or risk, you can identify one or more measures to reduce or manage it. Rank these measures by how much impact they are likely to have. Also note measures that could enhance opportunities.

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TIP

Use a simple matrix to organize your findings. This helps you compare risks and opportunities and decide whether the project is ready to move forward.
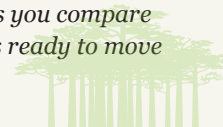
Feasibility matrix (example template)

Topic	Summarize key outcomes in bullet points. *Identify missing information gaps*	Key opportunities (and actors involved)	Potential threats/ risks (and actors involved)	Can potential risks be mitigated?	Preliminary conclusion	Scoring (1-5) Preliminary conclusion
a. Motivation, objectives and desired outcomes						
b. Ecosystem context, pressures and opportunities						
c. Target species selection and monitoring feasibility						
d. Governance and socio-economic context						
e. Stakeholder engagement potential						
f. Level of complexity for implementation						
Total scoring						Min = 6 Max = 30 No-Go = <15 Go = >16

C Decision point (Go/No-Go)

Decide whether the project is feasible.

→ **Go:** Move forward with implementation planning and financing (Step 7).

→ **No-Go:** Reconsider the design or return to Step 2 to explore other project areas.

PHASE III: TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

HOW TO PUT THE PROJECT INTO PRACTICE ⏩

This step prepares your project for implementation, helps secure resources, and ensures it is ready to deliver impact.
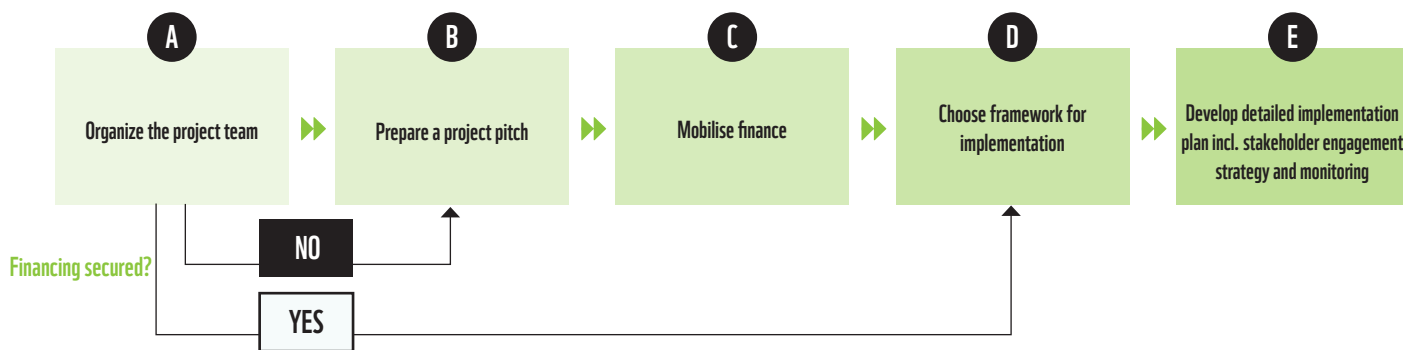
After Step 7, you will have:

✓ Identified financing pathways.

✓ Developed a project pitch (if needed).

✓ Chosen frameworks for implementation (if relevant).

✓ Prepared a detailed implementation plan, including an engagement strategy and monitoring plan.

Introduction

The earlier steps provided a strong concept. Step 7 turns that concept into practice by organizing your team, mobilising finance, choosing frameworks, and developing detailed plans for implementation, engagement, and monitoring.

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PROCESS STAGES

A	B	C	D	E
Organize the project team	Prepare a project pitch	Mobilise finance	Choose framework for implementation	Develop detailed implementation plan incl. stakeholder engagement strategy and monitoring

Financing secured?

NO

YES

Ⓐ Organize the project team

Set up the team, assign responsibilities, and establish decision-making processes:

→ Ensure the right expertise is represented; if no all expertise is available in-house, bring in external partners.

→ Assign clear roles and responsibilities within the team.

→ Clarify decision-making processes and establish communication and reporting lines.

→ Ensure your team's capacity (time, resources) and continuity.

Ⓑ Prepare a project pitch

If finance is not yet secured, create a concise pitch deck or proposal. Include:

→ A clear vision; an inspirational narrative of what you want to achieve.

→ Highlight opportunities and co-benefits; link biodiversity to other impacts (climate, communities, supply chains) to tap into broader finance opportunities.

→ Proposed actions, including target stakeholders and partners.

→ Add indicative budget and business model. How impact will be measured?

→ Why your company, and why now?

> **TIP** *Use the Template ↗ to prepare your pitch.*

Ⓒ Mobilise finance

Once you have a solid project pitch, the next step is to secure financing. A strong pitch should highlight the opportunities for biodiversity and communities, demonstrate the expected impacts, and show how the project reduces risks. Use this to start conversations with investors and funders, and make sure you understand their requirements. There are many financing pathways to explore, for example:

→ **Corporate and supply chain finance:** internal ESG budgets, or co-financing from companies seeking sustainable sourcing.

→ **Public and philanthropic funding:** multilateral funds, bilateral aid, or foundations that focus on biodiversity.

→ **Carbon and biodiversity credit markets**: restoration projects can generate credits that provide additional revenue streams (e.g. PV Climate, PV Nature).

→ **Blended finance and impact investors:** development banks, specialized funds (e.g. Nature+ Accelerator Fund, &Green Fund), or other investors combining financial returns with conservation impact.

→ **Market and policy incentives**: certification schemes or other standards that improve market access and can attract buyers willing to pay a premium (e.g. Fairtrade, Organic, Rainforest Alliance, International Organization for Standardization, ISO).

TIP

The Finance Resources for Biodiversity (FIRE↗) Database lists more than 300 financing opportunities worldwide, both public and private. The FMO publication (see Annex) "Nature-positive funds: an introduction for Investors" gives an overview of funds in its annex.

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Biodiversity credits - part of the puzzle

Biodiversity credits are an emerging option alongside carbon credits. They can help close the finance gap by bringing in extra funds, but they are only one piece of the puzzle. To be responsible and effective projects must uphold human rights, involve local stewards, and ensure benefits flow to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. More info: WWF on Biodiversity Credits↗

Ⓓ Choose frameworks for implementation

Before moving into implementation, decide whether your project should align with existing standards or frameworks. These can add credibility, open access to financing, and strengthen market opportunities. They also help ensure your project meets investor and disclosure requirements from the start. Examples of relevant frameworks include:

→ PV Nature↗: a standard that includes requirements for biodiversity projects, such as strong stakeholder consultation and community involvement.

→ FSC Guidance↗ on Ecosystem Services: developed for forest managers and project developers, including a module on biodiversity conservation.

→ Other global frameworks, such as the Science Based Targets for Nature (SBTN)↗ or the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)↗, which help companies align with science-based goals and disclosure expectations.

TIP

Map requirements early. Identify which frameworks are most relevant for your project and integrate them into your implementation plan. This will help you meet investor expectations, improve credibility, and prepare for growing corporate reporting obligations on biodiversity.

(E) Develop a detailed implementation plan

Create a plan with targets, milestones, and verified baselines. Such a plan should also include a stakeholder engagement strategy as well as a monitoring plan.

Stakeholder engagement strategy

Strong stakeholder engagement reduces social risks, builds trust, and improves the long-term success of biodiversity projects. Projects that involve stakeholders from the start are more credible, face fewer delays, and are more attractive to investors and markets.

Engagement can take different forms:

→ **Informing:** sharing clear information to avoid misunderstandings.

→ **Consulting:** seeking feedback to spot risks early.

→ **Involving:** giving stakeholders a role in activities or planning.

→ **Collaborating:** building partnerships that add expertise or resources.

→ **Empowering:** ensuring local people share in decisions and benefits.

📖 Examples for companies

- Partner with NGOs to access biodiversity expertise and credibility.

- Engage scientific experts to align with the latest standards.

- Work with local authorities to secure policy support and reduce compliance risks.

- Integrate community priorities into project design to build long-term buy-in.

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A stakeholder engagement strategy can:

→ Identify key stakeholder groups and their interests.

→ Define how each group will be engaged (e.g. informing, consulting, collaborating).

→ Clarify roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes.

→ Outline benefit-sharing arrangements that ensure fairness and long-term support.

→ Include a process for regular communication and conflict resolution if issues arise.

Monitoring plan

A monitoring plan helps you track whether the project is delivering its intended results. This can include monitoring on target species, improved ecosystem services or other expected impacts. The goal is not to monitor everything. Focus on information that supports project management, informs decision-making, and demonstrates results. As the target species indicator may not evolve quickly enough to inform yearly decision making, it is useful to also monitor intermediate activities and outputs (e.g. number of trees planted, or adoption of new practices). These provide earlier signals of progress and help guide annual decisions.

TIP

Use the Template↗ to inform the development of your Monitoring Plan.

Select monitoring approaches that are:

→ **Accurate:** provide reliable data.

→ **Repeatable:** can be applied consistently over time.

→ **Cost-effective:** balance accuracy with available resources.

→ **Feasible:** within reach given available tools and skills.

→ **Context-appropriate:** suited to the environmental and cultural setting (for example, GPS monitors may not work under dense forest canopy).

Well-designed monitoring can:

→ Provide credible evidence of impact for investors.

→ Feed into corporate sustainability frameworks (e.g. SBTN, TNFD).

→ Strengthen company reputation and stakeholder trust.

→ Show improved supply chain resilience.

Monitoring a target species in practice

A forestry company selects a threatened bird species as an indicator to monitor progress in biodiversity recovery. Monitoring combines drone surveys to locate nesting sites with acoustic recorders to track bird calls. To strengthen the approach, the company partners with local NGOs and universities, which provide technical expertise, equipment, and community involvement.

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Forests Forward is a signature WWF programme for corporte action in support of nature, climate and people.

Through engaging with Forests Forward, WWF can help companies:

→ Unlock finance for projects through WWF's links to investors and impact funds.

→ Gain access to WWF's technical expertise and global networks and perspectives.

→ Strengthen credibility and global reach.

→ Invest in high-quality WWF biodiversity conservation and recovery projects.

Forests Forward provides tools, guidance and research to help transform the forest sector. Explore more guides for companies or **contact the Forests Forward team**: **forestsforward.panda.org**↗
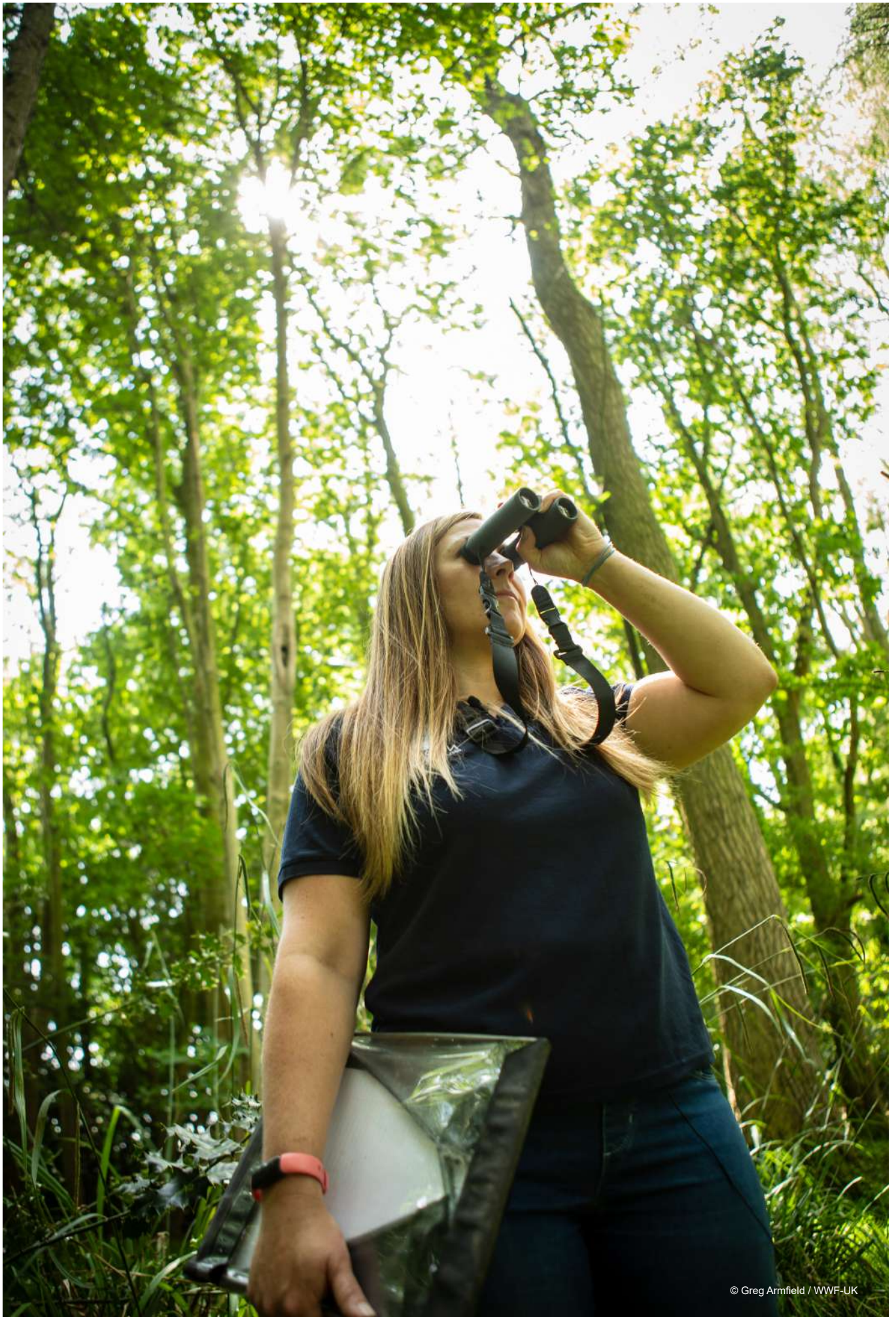
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GLOSSARY

eDNA	Environmental DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)
ENABLE	Excelling Protected Area Management Effectiveness for Biodiversity Conservation through a Landscape-Based Approach
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
FIAT	Forest Integrity Assessment Tool
FMU	Forest Management Unit
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GIS	Geographic Information System
HCV	High Conservation Value
IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and local communities
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
KM-GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
NBSAPs	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PV	Plan Vivo
RSPO	Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil
SBTN	Science-Based Targets for Nature
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound
SPARE	Spatial-based Natural Forest Planning and Governance for Robust Ecosystems
TNFD	Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures

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ANNEX: QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR ANALYSIS OF ENABLING CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES ⏩

- Are there existing government commitments or strategies on biodiversity conservation and/or recovery, e.g. as part of international processes or agreements? Examples are the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF); National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs); including country-level HCV areas, KBAs, BirdLife Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas, Ramsar sites, UNESCO sites, Intact Forest Landscapes, Protected Planet, Management of Invasive Species, Conservation Covenants.

- If in place, to what extent are these commitments implemented, monitored, and reported upon?

- Are the Forest Management Units (FMUs) within the project area, or around it, certified? (see e.g. FSC Connect, RSPO).

- Are biodiversity-rich habitats and/or KBAs defined and mapped?

- Have HCV screenings or assessments been carried out at the landscape or project site level? (see Forest Integrity Assessment Tool (FIAT) and HCV Network website).

- Are there regional landscape plans that integrate biodiversity considerations? (e.g. "Excelling Protected Area Management Effectiveness for Biodiversity Conservation through Landscape-Based Approach" (ENABLE) and "Spatial-based Natural Forest Planning and Governance for Robust Ecosystems" (SPARE) in Indonesia; check with local/regional government and NGOs).

- Are specific initiatives/measures in place in the landscape to address key threats (e.g. overexploitation, human–wildlife conflict, invasive species)? Check with local/regional government and NGOs.

- Are there financial or policy incentives that support biodiversity conservation and/or recovery? Check with local/regional government and NGOs.

- Does your project area overlap with other existing initiatives or projects? Check with local/regional government and NGOs.

- Are there relevant supply chain policies (e.g. certifications, standards, codes of conduct, or market exclusion mechanisms) that promote biodiversity protection? See e.g. FSC Connect, RSPO, Fairtrade, Organic, Rainforest Alliance and ISO).

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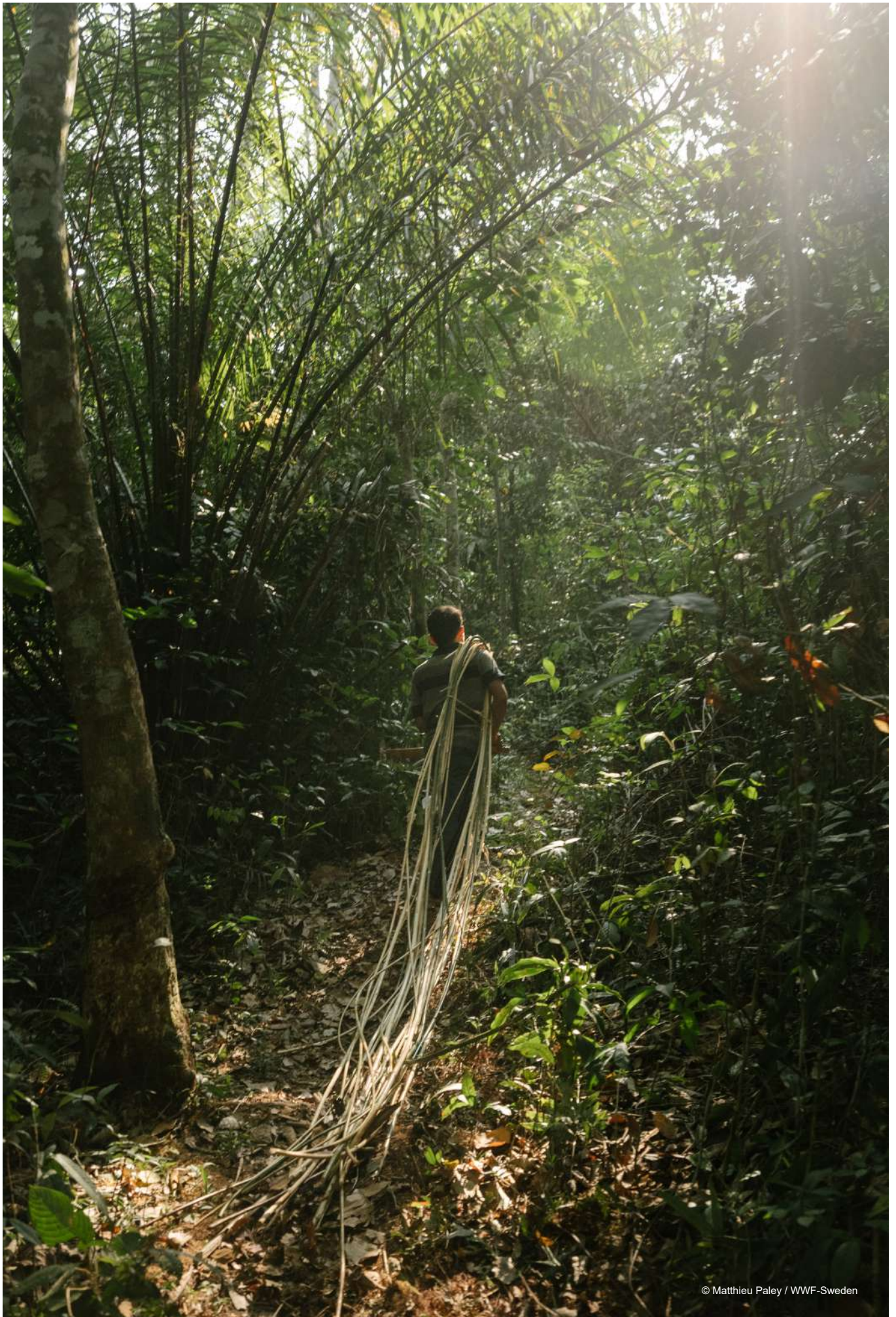
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