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Reflections on the CBD Post-2020 Framework

WCS Recommendations for the Open-Ended Working Group

Introduction to WCS

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that has been working across the globe for more than 120 years to save wildlife and wild places. We have conservation programs on the ground in more than 60 countries across Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas that work in partnership with governments, indigenous peoples and local communities, the private sector, and other stakeholders on science-based conservation efforts.

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Summary recommendations to Parties:

1. Establish a shared 2030 Mission to identify, retain and restore the ecosystems needed to meet global biodiversity conservation and sustainable development goals.
2. Develop an outcome-focused target, with biome-specific sub-targets, on ecological integrity and functioning that is measurable but allows flexibility for implementation.
3. Develop a target for area-based measures that prioritizes identification and conservation of critical areas for biodiversity, and focuses on biodiversity outcomes.
4. Collectively commit to protecting or conserving at least 30% of the terrestrial and marine area of the planet through appropriate, effective area-based measures by 2030.
5. Set shared goals on resource mobilization that reflect increased ambition of conservation targets, and account for all relevant financial flows and subsidies.

Wildlife Conservation Society

Recommendations to Parties

The scope, structure and negotiation of a post-2020 framework

WCS supports building on existing frameworks and commitments, such as the Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals, where possible. However, 'building on existing frameworks' is an exercise in identifying and aligning the elements and objectives. **WCS recommends that Parties align the post-2020 framework with existing commitments, without limiting the CBD post-2020 framework's ambition or scope.**

For conservation targets, two options are proposed by Co-Chairs: 1) a branching structure where targets have dedicated sub-targets, and 2) a "layered approach" where targets are grouped into outcomes, actions, and enabling conditions. **WCS is supportive of either structure, but believes that a "layered approach" for targets that focuses on articulating and achieving outcomes, while providing flexibility for approaches at the national level, may be the most effective.**

Research has shown that SMART targets have yielded more successful implementation by Parties,[1] and any negotiations of text for the framework should prioritize these characteristics. **WCS recommends that all targets meet SMART criteria wherever possible, and urge Parties to assess proposed targets against these criteria before adoption at CoP15.**

The thematic consultations proposed by Co-Chairs do not address every element of the Aichi Targets, and some important targets and issues have not received enough attention. **WCS recommends that this meeting address all of the elements of the Aichi targets and issues highlighted by Parties in written submissions, particularly the objectives in Aichi Targets 5 (on habitat degradation and loss) and Aichi Target 10 (on coral reefs and other vulnerable ecosystems), in planning future negotiations.**

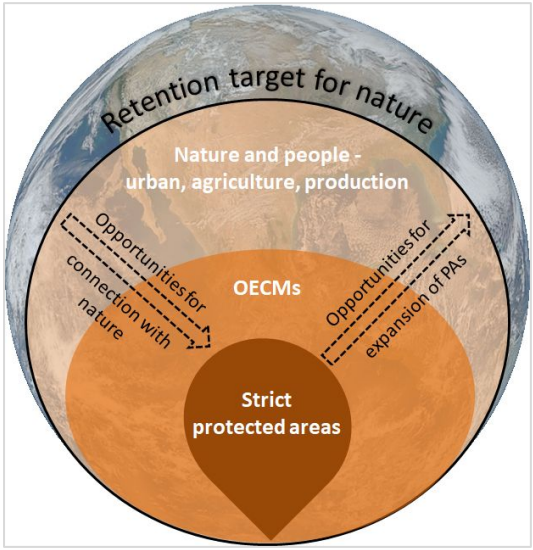
The post-2020 framework must be a global framework, in line with Rio Principle 7, the uneven distribution of biodiversity, and the reality that ecological processes do not lie within political boundaries. **We urge Parties to set goals or targets that can be applied at appropriate scales, and recognize the need for international cooperation.** This idea extends to consideration of the impacts taken by national governments and other stakeholders in other countries (including investment, trade and aid policies) and areas beyond national jurisdiction.

Setting conservation targets is a critical exercise, but represents only one portion of the post-2020 framework. **WCS recommends that Parties use this meeting to set an accelerated timeline for negotiations on resource mobilization, implementation/review, and other aspects of a post-2020 framework.**

The 2030 Mission and an "apex target"

The 2030 Mission should focus on halting the decline of, or effectively restoring, of all aspects of biodiversity (genetic composition, species populations, ecosystem extent and quality) to achieve our goals on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Noting that significant proportions of species' ranges and most evolutionary processes, ecological functions etc. will always remain beyond the boundaries of area-based measures (protected areas, OECMs, etc.), the 2030 Mission must also speak to areas that are managed for sustainable use.

To meet the aforementioned criteria**, WCS recommends that Parties establish a shared 2030 Mission to identify, retain and restore the ecosystems needed to meet the global biodiversity conservation and sustainable development goals.** An analysis to identify the nature we need must account for the capacity of some areas to serve more than one function, and would look for synergies with efforts on climate change. We provide the following suggested wording to start from: ***"By 2030, all essential components of nature are identified and effectively conserved or managed to ensure their contribution to the long-term integrity of the biosphere and the services needed for humanity."***



Identifying and conserving the nature that must be retained at all costs for biodiversity and humanity, through both strict protection and careful management, will lay the foundation for achieving conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits. The underlying principles and structure of a retention target are outlined in peer reviewed research,[2] and additional research is forthcoming that will elaborate on this concept.

A high-level ecosystem goal on ecological integrity

Ecological integrity, or ecosystem completeness and functionality in relation to its natural state, is a foundational principle of international environmental law and policy, starting in Rio Principle 7, and continuing through the CBD (Aichi Target 10), the UNFCCC (the Paris Agreement) and other national and international policies. Ecosystem integrity can be evaluated on the basis of the presence of ecologically functional populations of native species and the quality and extent of habitat. Spatial analyses of anthropogenic disturbance and/or evaluation of other ecological indicators can be used, particularly where species data is incomplete.

Ecological integrity exists along a gradient of anthropogenic disturbance. Global datasets can identify the terrestrial or marine areas with the lowest levels of disturbance, which can be thought of as the highest levels of ecological integrity. This type of assessment is possible at the global and ecoregional scales.[3, 4, 5, 6] These high integrity ecosystems are critical for biodiversity, and provide exceptional ecosystem services.[7, 8]

Assessments to identify and evaluate areas of high ecological integrity often set a threshold at which ecosystem processes, and therefore ecological integrity, begins to degrade. This means that areas with longer histories of habitat conversion or sustainable use of natural habitats may find that areas with *relatively* high integrity are overlooked.

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It is important that, in any post-2020 framework: 1) measurements of ecological integrity are context-specific, including for ecosystem type (both terrestrial and marine); and 2) this concept is used to identify and prioritize areas of relatively high integrity for both conservation and restoration.

Aichi Targets 5 and 10 address ecological integrity. However, these targets also suffer from ambiguity or complexity that has led to relatively poor implementation.[9] **Parties should consider the implementation of Aichi Targets 5 and 10 through thematic consultations or other intersessional work, in order to develop a high-level outcome target on ecological integrity for the post-2020 framework.** We propose the following language: ***"By 2030, the value of ecosystem integrity is prioritized, and, at a minimum, 2020 levels of ecological intactness are maintained or enhanced across all ecosystems, with a particular emphasis on maintaining the most intact areas."***

Measurement of ecological integrity varies widely according to ecosystem type and context. The highest integrity forests, coral reefs, grasslands, etc. must all be retained to capture the full range of biodiversity, but will need to be evaluated differently. To reflect this reality, and the importance of different ecosystem types for biodiversity, **WCS recommends outcome-focused, biome-specific sub-targets on ecological integrity and that are measurable enough to guide conservation actions but are flexible in nature.** For example, a potential sub-target on ecological integrity of coral reef ecosystems could be: ***"By 2030, Parties have established and implemented, or supported the establishment and implementation of, plans to demonstrably maintain the function and integrity of the planet's most irreplaceable, intact and functional coral reefs by retaining at least X%* live coral cover and at least 500kg/ha reef fish biomass.***

Improving area-based conservation targets

WCS works with governments, indigenous peoples, local communities, and other stakeholders in more than 470 sites around the world where we have helped to establish and/or manage protected areas, conserved areas that meet the definition of Other Effective Area-Based Measures (OECMs) and other areas managed by indigenous communities or for sustainable use. We know that area-based measures can play a critical role in conserving both species and ecosystems – but only when they are established based on sound science and consultation, are adequately resourced, and are effectively managed with all local stakeholders.

Area-based conservation targets, such as Aichi Target 11, have played an important role in the designation of protected areas, OECMs or other conserved areas in several countries. However, there are still serious challenges to realizing the full conservation potential of these sites,[1, 10, 11] and progress on the more qualitative elements, such as ecological representation, connectivity, and effective and equitable management are less clear or have been limited.[12, 13, 14]

Fortunately, we have new tools to refine our targets. For example, the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) Standard has made it possible for the post-2020 framework to be more explicit about prioritizing the qualitative aspect of protected areas. We must also create or improve tools and methodologies to assess and improve equitable and effective management of area-based measures. **WCS recommends that any area-based target prioritize identification and conservation of critical areas for biodiversity, including KBAs, highly intact ecosystems, etc., and focus on biodiversity outcomes.**

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* We are currently refining this proposal for a threshold with our scientists, but it will be higher than 10%.

Finally, Parties should think in terms of a hierarchy of conservation actions. To retain ecological integrity, to achieve the high level goal described in the previous section, area-based measures must prioritize those ecosystems that have the highest integrity. To maintain ecological integrity, area-based measures will also need to conserve a greater portion of our planet. **We therefore recommend that Parties commit to effectively protecting or conserving *at least* 30% of the terrestrial and marine area through area-based measures (meeting the above criteria) by 2030.**

Resource mobilization and finance in the post-2020 framework

Despite admirable commitments, financial and technical resources mobilized thus far have been insufficient to achieve the objectives of the CBD -- particularly as they are outweighed by harmful subsidies and financial flows that are detrimental to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.[15, 16] For example, numerous studies have found significant deficits in resourcing protected areas, with direct impacts on their management effectiveness.[17, 18]

Ideally, the post-2020 framework will have holistic goals or targets on biodiversity finance and resource flows. **We recommend goals on resource mobilization that reflect increased ambition, accounts for all relevant financial flows and subsidies, and stimulates new mechanisms and commitments specifically addressing updated conservation goals**. This means that existing targets on resource mobilization (Aichi Target 20 and subsequent targets elaborating on it), should be considered alongside any consideration of targets related to harmful subsidies and incentives (Aichi Target 3).

Recognizing that bilateral and multilateral spending may be easier to change than all global financial flows, **we urge Parties to ensure foreign aid and investment funding mechanisms meet a 50% threshold for spending on climate and environment portfolios.** Such a high target will contribute to environmental, social and economic benefits, including (but not limited to): climate adaptation and mitigation, sustainable agriculture, green transport and clean energy, disaster risk reduction, food and water security, livelihoods and economic development, and so much more.

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5 Venter, O. et al. 2016 "Sixteen years of change in the global terrestrial human footprint and implications for biodiversity conservation."
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7 Watson, J.E.M. et al. 2018. "The exceptional value of intact forest ecosystems."
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11 Jones, K.R. et al. 2018. "One-third of global protected land is under intense human pressure."
12 Visconti, P. et al. 2019. "Protected area targets post-2020."
13 Bacon, E. et al. 2019. "Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 in the like-minded megadiverse countries."
14 Geldmann J. et al. 2018. "A global analysis of management capacity and ecological outcomes in terrestrial protected areas."
15 OECD. Biodiversity: "Finance and the Economic and Business Case for Action."
16 Centre d'analyse stratégique. 2012. "Public incentives that harm biodiversity that harm biodiversity: Summary."
17 Gill, D.A. et al. 2016. "Capacity shortfalls hinder the performance of marine protected areas globally."
18 Coad, L. et al. 2019. "Widespread shortfalls in protected area resourcing undermine efforts to conserve biodiversity"