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AN INNOVATIVE CONCEPT FOR 21ST CENTURY CONSERVATION

By looking through the eyes of animals – and following them beyond borders – the Wildlife Conservation Society’s new Living Landscapes initiative will develop better ways for people and wildlife to share the earth’s living landscapes.

The mission...

The Living Landscapes Program is dedicated to developing wildlife-based strategies for the conservation of large, wild ecosystems that are integrated in wider landscapes of human influence.

Conservation of wildlands is our goal. Our approach explicitly places wildlife at the center of our conservation strategies, but recognizes that few places on earth remain free from human influence.

Consequently, we develop and test wildlife-based conservation strategies that take into account human impact, and we link monitoring of wildlife directly to assessing conservation progress. By pursuing a common set of strategies and approaches across a globally distributed set of sites, the program promotes inter-site research and learning and develops models of conservation management that are broadly applicable.

The difference...

In contrast to other efforts, the WCS Living Landscapes Program takes conservation beyond traditional borders. It sets program priorities by looking through the eyes of wildlife. And it is designed to develop and test practical, site-based approaches to conserving wildlife and wildlands.

Existing regional or global priority-setting strategies such as Global 200, Hotspots or Gap Analysis, remain vital to ensure that a representative sample of the world’s plants, animals and landscapes receive conservation attention. But while these strategies help us target scarce resources at the most globally important biological areas, they tell us little about how to manage each priority site. Nor do they define how large or small the site should be to ensure that ecologically viable populations of plants and animals persist within the site.

Key concepts:

• **Parks and reserves are not enough.** Conservation focused solely within the boundaries of national parks, or community forests, or trophy-hunting conservancies, often does not succeed because wildlife, ecological processes, and human resource uses tend to spill across these political borders.

• **Landscapes are shared by people and wildlife.** As people around the world continue to expand into wilderness areas, and as we successfully conserve healthy wildlife populations, the needs of people and the needs of wildlife will increasingly clash. Consequently we must find new and better land-use management practices and policies, to help people and wildlife share the same landscapes. Understanding how to prevent or minimize human-wildlife conflicts within and across land-use zones is essential to ensure the long-term survival of wildlife and wildlands.

• **The needs of wildlife define landscapes.** To set priorities for conservation it is better to use the ecological needs of wildlife, rather than political boundaries, to define the conservation landscape.

• **Conservation must be cost-effective.** Funding for biodiversity conservation is not growing as fast as human demand for resources and the speed that wildlife and wildlands are being lost. Consequently we need to set new priorities for conservation spending and develop more cost-effective tools.



What Are Living Landscapes?

Wildlife and people have always moved freely across borders. They create living landscapes that change with their changing needs for space and resources. As a result, conservation efforts that focus solely within national parks, community forests, or conservancies may not succeed.



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Beyond Parks and Reserves

The Wildlife Conservation Society believes that protected areas must remain at the core of all nations' biodiversity conservation plans. These areas typically contain a higher diversity and abundance of plants and animals than landscapes managed primarily for economic use. Yet, parks and reserves are always embedded in larger, human-dominated landscapes and are seldom sacrosanct. Regardless of how large or small a protected area may be, the plants and animals it contains are often threatened either directly or indirectly by human resource use activities.

Management of parks and reserves cannot, therefore, occur in isolation from the surrounding human-dominated landscape, but must take into account where and how human activities conflict with biodiversity conservation, and where conservation adversely impacts human welfare. As human populations continue to expand over the next 50 years, the incentive for over-exploiting natural resources within and outside of protected areas will likely increase and the need for biodiversity conservation tools that reflect human-wildlife conflict will become even more important. The WCS Living Landscapes Program seeks to develop these tools.

The Importance of Wildlands

WCS believes that conservation of wildlands is important because they are the only truly natural environments left on earth, and as such are the last bastions of ecological and evolutionary processes that remain largely unfettered by the influence of humans. Wildlands are extraordinary places because they still support richly diverse and abundant assemblages of plants and animals that are often particularly susceptible to and intolerant of human behavior, and typically no longer exist in areas dominated by humans.



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The Program's Focus: Wildlife

In the past, attempts to conserve biodiversity within landscapes that span land-use boundaries have typically focused on watershed management or ecosystem management. Unfortunately these concepts are ecologically nebulous, as there is no simple way to define where an ecosystem ends or whether watersheds are ecologically relevant management units. More importantly, neither concept leads easily to a clear understanding of what the targets of conservation investments should be within these landscapes. Without knowing what we are trying to save we have no measurable outcomes of our conservation actions. We are left not knowing what we are conserving, how we will know if we have been successful, and whether or not our spending was worthwhile.

Focusing on wildlife species requires us to be specific about their population and habitat requirements and better understand how and where wildlife and human needs may conflict. This helps us to explicitly define the size and shape of the landscape needed to ensure the long-term persistence of wildlife populations and the underlying ecological processes upon which they depend. Using the status of wildlife populations as a proxy for landscape health, quality and/or integrity, allows us to be specific about where and why conservation investments are needed, what such investments are designed to achieve, and how the success or failure of these interventions will be measured. Focusing on wildlife makes the landscape to be managed geographically unambiguous and ecologically meaningful, and makes the targets for, and outcomes of, conservation investments explicit and measurable.

Key Participants

One of the primary goals of the Living Landscapes Program is to identify and engage key stakeholders in the conservation process. One way this is achieved is through a participatory and iterative threats analysis process. Stakeholders are invited to contribute data, evaluate the quality and gaps in the data, and identify a set of threats to be addressed. Participants then suggest institutions and actions to address each threat. Through this process stakeholders themselves identify problems and actions best suited to address them, identify areas for institutional strengthening or coordination and in the process strengthen their involvement and faith in conservation. As a result, a wide variety of conservation partners including local community groups, governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as private sector entities such as timber and oil companies, are working together within the Living Landscapes Program

Enhancing our Effectiveness

The Living Landscapes Program is currently working within an expanding number of core landscape conservation areas, where the full range of approaches is being implemented. The program is also evolving into a network hub for associated projects that are adopting those approaches that most meet their needs. Overall, the program seeks design input and feedback from all WCS site-based projects, and shares expertise and lessons in return. By so doing, the Landscape Approach will permeate throughout WCS and improve our on-the-ground conservation effectiveness.



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The Time Is Now

Growing human demand for goods and services is placing increasing pressure on natural resources and threatens the long-term survival of many wild animals and the wild places where they live. Yet donor support for traditional biodiversity conservation may not increase fast enough to stop these wildlife and wildlands from disappearing. Thus, we need to develop new tools for biodiversity conservation that are smarter and cheaper. In the past, conservation strategies were developed to fit within protected areas, or community lands, or private holdings. But we know that wildlife, ecological processes, and human resource uses often spill across these political borders. The Living Landscapes Program is a new initiative to help develop cost-effective conservation tools that avoid or resolve clashes with human land-uses, within landscapes defined by the needs of wildlife.



A Critical Tool for Communication

Too often when conservation NGOs and development agencies embark on a new initiative, little thought is given to systematically capturing, through the life of the program, the ideas that evolved, the successes and failures, and the lessons learned. Annual reports are primarily accounting documents, and mid-term and final evaluations typically fail to capture the subtle but often important factors that lead to successful implementation. Moreover, these reporting instruments are not designed to obtain timely feedback from partners and donors and thus cannot typically be used to make mid-course corrections and adaptively manage program implementation.

The WCS Living Landscapes Bulletin series is designed to fill that gap in project monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management. Unlike annual reports and formal evaluations, the Bulletin's primary beneficiary is the project itself. With staff and projects spread across four continents, communication on a regular basis among and between sites is critical. The Bulletin will constitute an ongoing, "3-ring binder" evaluation that will help the WCS Living Landscapes Program staff to articulate, on a regular basis, their evolving conceptual model of the project, the implementation approaches being tested, and the results of pilot activities. Moreover, by presenting the information in a

way that is readily understandable to practitioners and donors not directly involved in program implementation, program staff can seek timely input from a much broader community of interest.

Who is the Bulletin for?

The Bulletin is an adaptive management tool for WCS Living Landscapes Program staff, an action-research learning tool for conservation practitioners and donors, and an evolving, transparent record of Program progress for other WCS staff, donors, and the broader conservation community.

Upcoming Bulletins:

- *The Landscape Species Approach*
- *What is a Landscape Species?*
- *Selecting Landscape Species*
- *Managing Wildlife Use*
- *NGO/Private Sector Partnerships*

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