



WORLD
LAND
TRUST

STRATEGIC PLAN

2021-2025



Foreword by WLT Patron Steve Backshall

For those of us who care about the planet, we have our work cut out in this crucial decade. Scientists tell us we only have until 2030 to prevent the worst of climate change. By the same year, world leaders have to make good on their pledges to end deforestation and cut greenhouse gas emissions, as well as fulfilling their promises to protect Life on Land, support Climate Action and many others under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

World Land Trust (WLT), the organisation I have been a Patron of since 2016, is a living example of what this action for the planet looks like in practice. For decades, they have followed a simple approach – save land alongside local Partners who own it, and everything else follows – to incredible effect, funding the direct protection of 2,222,247 acres of habitats (an area the size of Cyprus) as of the end of 2020 and connecting, through corridors and others, 20,000,000+ acres (an area the size of Scotland) in Africa, Asia, the Americas and beyond.

With Catherine Barnard as CEO since 2019, WLT's impact is building year on year. They are doing this on the back of surging interest to 'do something'; a tide of support I myself witness time and time again through my work with young people, in the face of ever-growing threats that I see first-hand whilst on expedition.



Year after year, more people are getting behind the solutions that WLT offers to the climate and biodiversity crises. They want WLT to do more, and that is precisely what WLT is planning. As you'll read in this strategy, the Trust has set a target to fund more than £12 million of Partner conservation projects every year by 2025.

This is an ambitious goal but at this critical time, it is a necessary one. It also lies within reach. When I think of the movement of supporters who already stand behind WLT – the new generations we are bringing to conservation through joint campaigns like Operation Ocelot – I know we will succeed.

After years of making nature and science programmes, people often ask me what is it that a person can do to make a difference. Looking at WLT's decades of impact the answer is clear: as small as we may feel individually, we make a difference by coming together and protecting land. That is why I'm a Patron of WLT, and that is why I will continue to support them as they strive to grow their conservation action around the world in the coming years.



Steve Backshall,
WLT Patron

Part 1: Context and strategic ambition

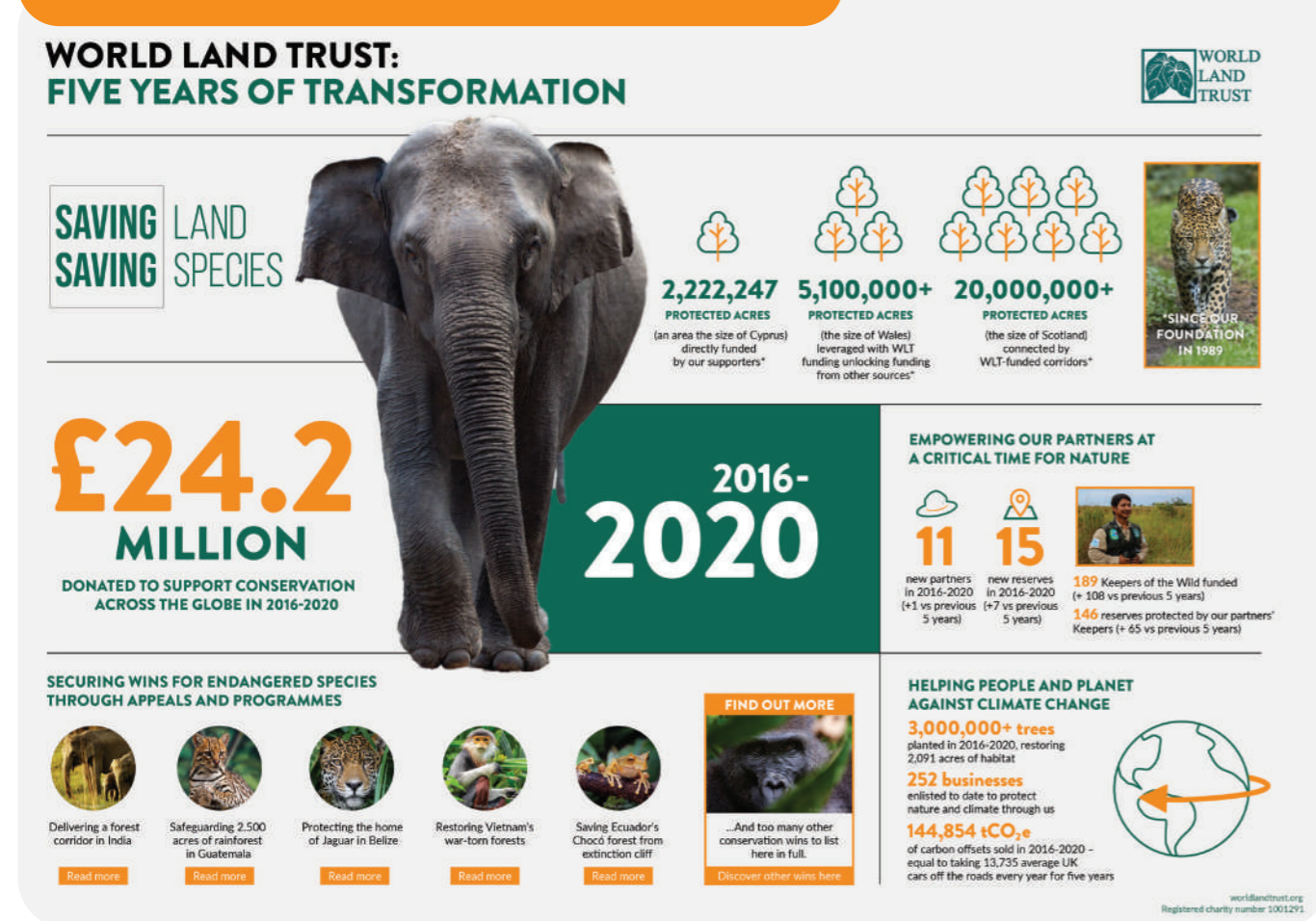
Introduction

The world is facing interlinked biodiversity and climate crises and a sixth mass extinction event, with one million species threatened with extinction. The most immediate threats to biodiversity are the direct impacts of climate change and the ongoing loss and degradation of natural habitat, with more than half of the world's land now covered by agriculture, forestry and built-up areas.

World Land Trust (WLT) works directly to tackle these threats on the ground by bringing land into conservation in partnership with local conservation organisations and groups who are best placed to

ensure its ongoing management and protection. This simple approach has underpinned WLT's work for the last 30 years, and over this period WLT has directly brought nearly 900,000 hectares (2.2 million acres) of land into long-term protection and a total area with co-funders of more than 2 million hectares (5.1 million acres). Over the same 30-year period the threats to and urgency for biodiversity conservation have grown, with accelerating rates of habitat loss and species declines, leading to more ambitious global initiatives for protected areas, including aiming to protect 30% of the Earth by 2030 and half of the Earth by 2050.

Key achievements resulting from the WLT 2015-2020 Strategy



The changing context for our work

WLT has limited resources and we will always use our donors' money as strategically as possible to make the biggest impact for biodiversity conservation.

We know that local conservation ownership protects habitats, protects the carbon that those habitats store and the species that depend upon them. We therefore aim to scale up our own impact and align with others to protect even more land, more habitats, more carbon, more species and support local people over the five years of this strategy.

We believe that WLT will have the greatest impact by:

- Continuing to deliver tangible and long-lasting conservation actions to save habitats and species, through increasing our support for our Partners, and inspiring others by demonstrating what is possible.
- Empowering people to help protect nature by making it easy to donate and take positive action.
- Working in partnership with supporters and local organisations and communities.

These factors are all interlinked, as illustrated below.

VISION: Protect the world's most threatened habitats and species for the future

MISSION: Helping people across the world protect and restore their land to safeguard biodiversity and the climate



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Vision and Mission

Organisational culture

Our values define us and shape WLT's culture. They guide how we behave and how we make decisions. They are the essence of how we do things.

Values summary statement

WLT will always approach every situation in a **positive** way to find and communicate solutions, operating and communicating with **honesty**, remaining **focused** on our mission, and working in a **supportive** way with our staff, Partners and supporters.

What these values mean in practice is shown in Appendix 1, and an accompanying document lists examples of expected behaviours that exemplify our values.

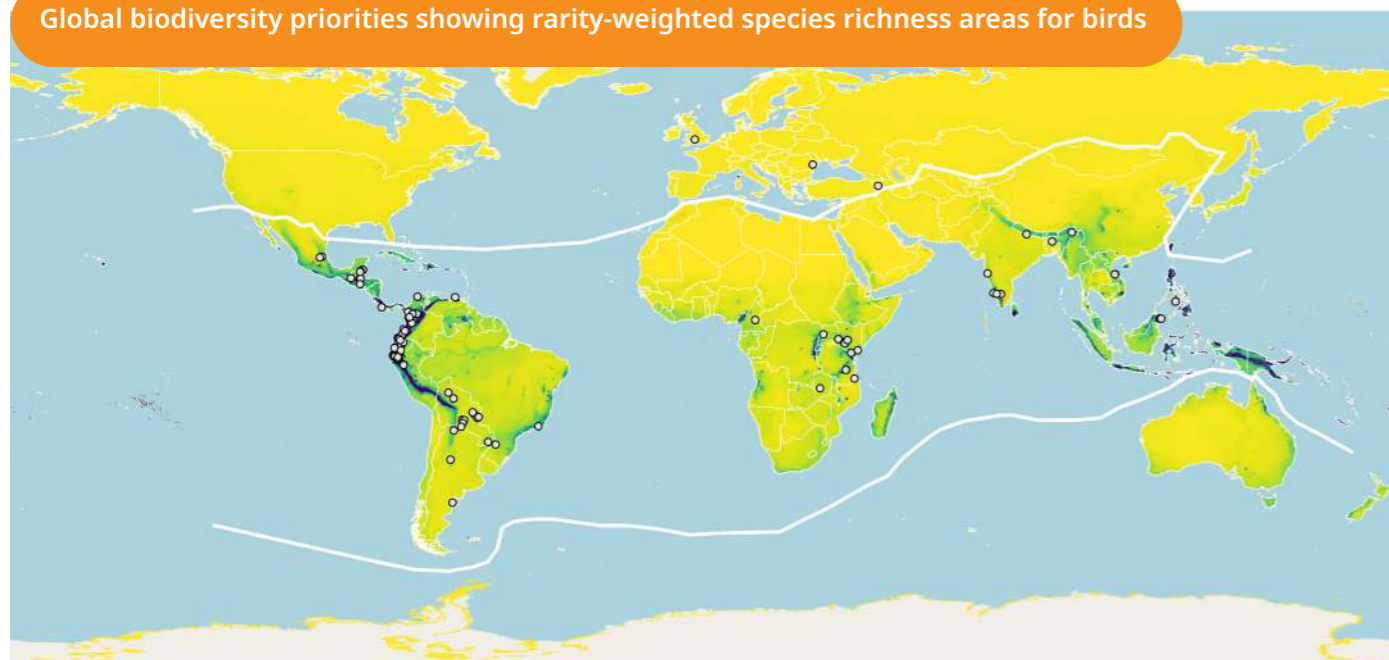
Our approach to nature conservation

WLT's core purpose is nature conservation. All our other activities support our conservation strategy, as outlined below.

Where we will work

We will continue to prioritise support for countries that contain the highest levels of biodiversity, but which have the fewest resources and highest levels of environmental threat. They will largely consist of countries in the Global South (see figure below) where WLT already focuses most of its resources.

Global biodiversity priorities showing rarity-weighted species richness areas for birds



Global South bounding lines to indicate priority regions and weighted-endemism priorities (for birds) ranging from cool (blue) to hot (red) where WLT will work. Existing WLT project sites are shown as white circles, indicating high overlap with weighted-endemism areas.

However, we will also support projects in countries that fall outside these criteria, provided there are significant conservation opportunities that can only be achieved with WLT funds, and where there are additional strategic benefits in supporting activities in these areas (for example, new fundraising opportunities or engaging in novel conservation approaches).

To maximise our impact, we will target most of our support to areas of the world where biodiversity is concentrated and under the greatest threat of extinction based on weighted endemism (also known as rarity-weighted species richness) criteria for mammals, birds and amphibians.

- This prioritises WLT's conservation efforts into areas of the world with the highest numbers of species with the smallest geographical ranges, which are either already threatened with extinction or are likely to become threatened with extinction with further loss of habitat in these areas. This encompasses many of WLT's existing projects, as well as identifying other priority areas for future support.
- This approach incorporates the principles of irreplaceability (areas with species that occur nowhere else) and vulnerability (areas under high threat), as well as a reactive strategy in prioritising threatened and at-risk areas before they are lost.
- Due to the small geographical ranges of species in weighted endemism areas, these areas can be effectively supported by targeted **land purchases**, as well as **leases** and **declarations**, as small reserves can hold important populations of such range-restricted species.

We will also directly support areas of the world that fall outside rarity-weighted species richness areas, provided that such projects are large enough to be of a relevant scale to the wider-ranging species that these areas encompass.

- Projects in these areas embrace a proactive conservation strategy, protecting large areas of intact natural systems before they become threatened.
- Such areas are most likely to be supported by **legal declarations** due to the lower unit costs of this land acquisition method, but may also involve land purchase and other acquisition methods for strategic connecting areas that support biodiversity conservation over a larger area.

We will continue to rely on Partner organisations for selecting areas that contribute to projects at a local scale, in recognition that they are best placed to assess and propose these sites and ensure their ongoing protection. Criteria for site selection will include the area of the acquisition, species diversity, the uniqueness of the species or populations, the level of threat, and the site's added strategic value. Criteria for assessing added strategic value include:

- Sites that contribute to the formation or expansion of corridors between existing protected areas.
- Sites that fill in gaps or block access to, or development of, a wider area.
- Sites that add climate resilience to reserves through expanding the altitudinal range or connectivity of reserves, providing an opportunity for communities, species and populations to shift and respond to a changing climate.

Conservation criteria for project selection will form part of WLT's assessments of each project, including the ability to raise funds and whether there are larger strategic benefits for WLT's involvement.

We will quantify the contribution of areas brought into conservation protection to global biodiversity targets, including the 30x30 Initiative (to protect at least 30% of the world on land and sea by 2030) and other global biodiversity targets that are agreed during the CBD COP15 meeting.

Who we will work with?

Locally based in-country Conservation Partners (Partners) will remain central to how WLT achieves its conservation impact, and we will continue to take on new Partners and support existing Partners with new projects.

Conservation Partners will normally be based in countries where conservation activities are being undertaken and will be largely run by national staff to ensure that WLT helps build conservation capacity in the countries we are supporting.

Conservation Partners will typically be conservation non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a record of bringing land into protection. However, we may also support other organisations, including those with a focus in other areas (for example, development NGOs and Indigenous organisations) or for-profit organisations (such as eco-tourism companies), provided these can deliver a cost-effective means for bringing land into conservation and are unable to secure other funding for these activities.

We will support new organisations and projects in Central and South America as opportunities

arise, with a priority on new Conservation Partners from countries with limited or no current Partners that work in priority conservation areas. We will proactively seek new Conservation Partners in Africa and Asia, as well as other identified priority regions that are currently under-represented among the areas we support.

Taking on new Conservation Partners in Africa and Asia will be challenging due to the legal context surrounding land ownership in countries from these continents and the occasionally more limited capacity of smaller conservation NGOs from these locations. To address this, we will:

- Focus on supporting community conservation areas, legal designations, improved management activities and other approaches that can bring land into effective conservation in these areas.
- Be prepared to take calculated risks for highly-promising new organisations that may have short histories of implementing projects, limited financial and organisational records, and/or low administrative capacity. We will initially provide 'pilot funding grants' to such small NGOs to support initial land acquisitions and, if successful, provide support for organisational development and capacity building to help them scale their conservation impact.

Ongoing support for Conservation Partners will be reviewed in the context of whether there are further areas of land that need to be brought under conservation protection; and we will phase out support for long-running projects by working with Conservation Partners to ensure that ongoing protection of these reserves is embedded in their core work programmes.

We will continue to collaborate with our Operational Partners to ensure we can fund shared projects, coordinate wider initiatives and jointly support the capacity development and sustainability of Conservation Partners. These Operational Partners are mainly other international conservation NGOs at present, but this may be broadened to include other organisations such as development NGOs where these support delivery of our mission.

We will seek to collaborate with a wider network of funding organisations, as part of an "alliance" of like-minded international conservation organisations, in order to (a) participate in high-profile conservation initiatives that are larger than WLT can support on its own, (b) identify wider opportunities involving multiple projects and Partner organisations to achieve landscape-scale conservation initiatives, and (c) provide a forum for exchanging information, sharing opportunities and providing coordinated support to Conservation Partners.

How we work

WLT never owns land purchased with our support and does not directly undertake conservation activities as we believe that local Partners and communities are best placed to understand, implement and take full ownership of conservation activities.

Consequently, providing technical and financial support to Conservation Partners remains fundamental to how we work, with WLT providing funds for land acquisition, reserve management and protection activities, the long-term sustainability of projects, and the capacity and growth of Partner organisations.

Levels of support for these activities vary by Partner and project, ranging from Partners receiving one-off support for a single land acquisition, to Partners receiving support across all four funding areas over multiple years.

Determining the type and levels of support depends upon the land acquisition opportunities, protection requirements, availability of long-term funding mechanisms and the capacity levels of Partner organisations. However, we will, in general, seek to support a Partner journey that initially supports small promising organisations (where WLT funds a large proportion of the Conservation Partner's activities for a limited number of projects), to Partners becoming organisations with higher levels of capacity and multiple projects that are able to secure increased funding from other sources.

To support the above activities, we will:

- Continue to prioritise most Conservation Partner funding (at least 70% of total Partner disbursements) to core conservation and protection activities. The majority of this funding will be directed to land acquisitions (at least 55% of total Partner disbursements) with remaining funding allocated for reserve management and restoration activities.
- Increase funding for Conservation Partner organisational development (up to a maximum of 20% of our funding), ensuring that we can evaluate and monitor capacity development among Partners, and prioritise funding for Partner development and income generation opportunities to Partners whose long-term viability is most at risk.

Bringing new areas of land into conservation through land acquisitions will remain central to WLT's conservation programmes.

Land purchases will remain an important land acquisition method and will be focused on priority weighted endemism areas and strategic connecting areas where smaller land acquisitions are of high value for the species these areas contain or connect.

However, the overall trend for increasing land prices places a constraint on the areas that WLT can protect through this approach alone, unless this is matched by corresponding increases in resources.

Other land acquisition methods, in particular the **legal declaration of protected areas**, have become increasingly important for bringing land into conservation (amounting to more than 83% of WLT's land area over the past 30 years). To date, targeted declarations we have supported appear as effective as land purchases at protecting areas (when assessed by rates of forest loss). Consequently, we will look to expand WLT's support for these initiatives in order to bring larger areas of land into protection in the most cost-effective way.

The type and legal status of declaration areas will vary by country and project, ranging from local or regional/municipal levels of recognition to national level declarations (including national parks), and we will follow the recommendations of our Partners on the correct mechanism to ensure optimum levels of protection and ongoing management.

Unlike land purchase or leases, where the land typically ends up owned and managed by Partners, declarations may require ongoing reserve management to be undertaken by other stakeholders, including local communities, and state

or national authorities. WLT is not responsible for this ongoing reserve management, but in supporting declaration projects we will ensure, and potentially support, the requirement for there to be credible reserve management activities and funding for this.

Restoration of habitats is of growing interest to the public and WLT supporters, and in line with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration we will expand our support for restoration activities in line with growth in WLT income.

As well as continuing to support active reforestation projects, we will also look for opportunities to support natural forest regeneration projects (which are potentially more cost-effective) and to support the restoration of non-forest ecosystems, such as wetlands and grasslands.

We will maintain our support for **reserve management activities** associated with land acquisitions. However, we will focus on ensuring that new projects have long-term protection plans from the outset. Where necessary, we will build this into funding targets, as well as providing guidance and funding for mechanisms that support reserve management into the future.

To counter these increased initial support costs, we will transition reserve management costs away from long-term projects where there is little evidence of the need for ongoing support or the effectiveness of this support – but if necessary, we will provide sustainability funding to Partners to ensure these long-term costs can be found.

WLT will actively pursue and seek to test new approaches for conservation, accepting a calculated risk in this work. We are not fixed to any rigid methods for bringing land into protection. We will

work with Conservation Partners to review and support novel ideas and initiatives that they bring to us, as well as identifying new areas and activities to share with Partners. Success in supporting new approaches will ultimately remain governed by the initiatives that Partners request support for.

As well as being open to new approaches for delivering conservation, we will also proactively seek new opportunities for funding conservation. We will work to expand funding through carbon and other payment for ecosystem services (PES) mechanisms – and we will also work to secure support from the growing interest in investment approaches for conservation funding.

In all aspects of our work, we will move to become more evidence-based in our approach by evaluating successes and failures and reporting progress against defined indicators, and improving the efficiency of our procedures to focus more time and effort into areas of greatest impact.

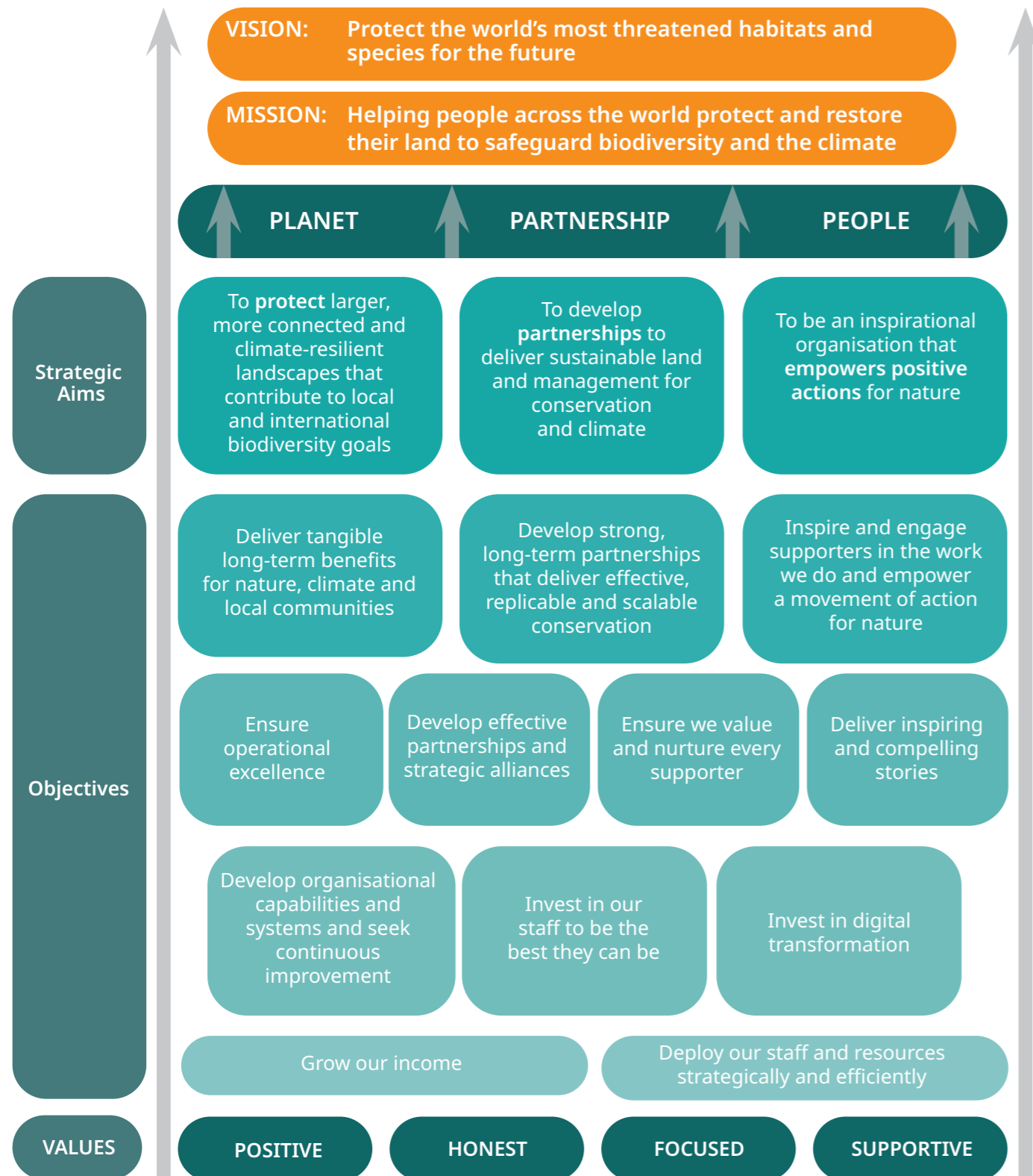
What impact do we want to have by 2025?

Our Theory of Change (*page 3*) describes what needs to happen for our Vision to be realised, while our Strategy Map illustrates what we will do to deliver our Mission, move towards our Vision, and the impact we want to have by 2025.

We have identified three **Strategic Aims**, which deliver our Mission and lead us towards achieving our Vision. Three **Themes** – Planet, Partnership and People – demonstrate how the Aims are interrelated, and how our Mission relies on addressing all three.

Underlying these Aims we have identified twelve **Objectives** which are the critical steps we believe we need to deliver to achieve our Aims. They do not cover everything we do. Nonetheless, our logic follows that if we deliver these Objectives, we achieve our Aims and therefore our Mission. Everything we do is underpinned by our Values (Appendix 1).

Strategy Map



Underpinning the delivery of these Objectives, we will monitor and report on nine key **performance indicators and targets** in our Annual Report as set out below, and provide internal assessment of our progress against a wider range of indicators:

- Priority land saved: 1 million hectares
- Priority habitats connected: 2 million hectares
- Forests protected: forests maintained within WLT-supported reserves
- Biodiversity maintained: key indicator species persist within WLT-supported reserves
- Active Partners: increasing number of active Conservation Partners
- New donors: increasing number of new donors
- Income: increasing income by at least 15% year-on-year
- Investing in growth: percentage spent on WLT growth and future income
- Funding to Partners: increasing support to Conservation Partners

How will we organise ourselves to deliver this plan?

Investing in supporter engagement and income generation, alongside investment in WLT's staff and its organisational governance, structure and processes, are key to delivering our conservation impact.

Growing income for our nature conservation work

To enable WLT to deliver the conservation impacts we have outlined, we need to **increase our income**. To do this we will need to raise our brand awareness significantly and continue to increase our investment in communications and fundraising.

WLT's funding levels continue to increase, with individuals and businesses becoming increasingly aware of – and engaged with – the crises facing nature. However, as outlined, we need to scale up our work, increasing our investment in effective marketing and storytelling to inspire and engage supporters. It's crucial that we continue to be able to robustly demonstrate to donors the tangible and immediate impact of their support.

A core part of our messaging during this strategy period will be focused on enabling an increasingly wide community of WLT supporters to seize opportunities to take meaningful action and feel part of a movement for positive change. We will provide solutions and be positive about our work, and provide a mechanism to demonstrate the impact of collective action. We will continue to offer a range of tangible supporter programmes, including targeted appeals, Buy an Acre, Plant a Tree, Action Fund, ranger support and regular giver scheme (WLT Friends), as well as our Carbon Balanced and verified carbon offset schemes.

WLT has been built on relationships and has nurtured a community of Partners and supporters that have afforded us the successes we have achieved over the past three decades. We must continue to build this community and ensure that we maintain our values. We will invest more in developing a strong stewardship programme throughout all areas of fundraising. It is important that we understand our donors' experience and journey with us, and we will strive to ensure that they feel informed, consulted and, above all, valued. Effective stewardship of our donors is critical to our long-term success.

To do this we will invest in team capacity and knowledge throughout this strategy period, as well as improving systems and processes that will enable us to fully understand and meet our donors' needs. We will significantly increase our investment in digital innovation, allowing us to remain contemporary and relevant with our communications and fundraising activities, and we will seek to review and adopt innovations that help delivery of our mission at the earliest opportunity.

Investment in organisational capabilities and people

To deliver our ambitions we need to ensure that we organise ourselves in the right way, investing in our people and digital delivery systems and processes to provide agile, effective, efficient and robust mechanisms and processes that enable WLT to grow and develop.

WLT employs relatively few people (30 full-time employees in 2020-21), but is supported by a much wider community of individuals, from Trustees and ambassadors to NGO Partners and members of the public. We see all of them as critical to our success. Recruiting, developing and retaining high-performing and motivated people, who have appropriate authority to fulfil their roles, is key to achieving our mission. Our People Strategy will be integral to our Organisational Strategy, from the board of Trustees to our newest staff colleagues, so that together we can all contribute our skills and experience to achieve WLT's vision and mission.

Investing in our people also means that WLT needs to invest significantly more in our digital systems and processes. Technology plays a pivotal role in enabling people to achieve their goals and for WLT to realise its ambitions. Although we have already begun investing in this area, we recognise that the pace and change in technology means we need to remain agile and ensure that development of new or existing systems are fit for purpose.

The effective implementation of technology systems will allow us to engage and meet the expectations of our supporters, maximise efficiency for our Conservation Partners, meet external regulatory requirements, manage our risk and reputation and, consequently, achieve greater conservation impact. Many of our systems and platforms require review and development – delivering this will require collaboration between departments. We will develop and implement an overarching digital strategy which will ensure that all the ambitions, objectives and targets within this plan are achieved.

A critical part of investing in ourselves will include an increased focus on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) to ensure that – at all levels – WLT better reflects the diversity of our supporters and beneficiaries. We will ensure that everyone who engages with, or works at, WLT experiences a supportive culture in which they feel they belong and are valued. We further recognise that racism is a widespread issue in the charity sector and, as part of our broader work on EDI, we will aspire to be an organisation that is anti-racist and takes steps to remove internal structural barriers that perpetuate racism or other discriminatory behaviours. During the first year of this strategy, we will benchmark WLT and produce an EDI strategy with measurable targets to be delivered by 2025.

Summary

We know that local conservation ownership protects habitats, protects the carbon that those habitats store and the species that depend on them. We therefore aim to scale up our own impact and align with others to protect even more land, more habitats, more carbon, more species and support local people over the five years of this strategy.

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The years 2021-2025 will be critical in the development of WLT as we increase investment in ourselves and aim to develop into a larger, more agile and resilient organisation, at the forefront of delivering high conservation impact during these vital years. We believe that we are well placed to harness the creativity and strengths of everyone involved with WLT to deliver the ambitions of this strategy and, in doing so, contribute to protecting the world's most threatened habitats and species for the future.



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