



Big Cats, Big Impact for Rangelands:

A vital link to land
health, water security,
and pastoral livelihoods



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Why Cats*?

1. **Umbrella species;** Protecting big cats helps safeguard vast rangeland and grassland-ecosystems covering ~50% of Earth's land surface.
2. **Indicator Species;** Indicators of ecosystem integrity, connectivity and healthy herbivore populations.
3. **Keystone Species;** Predation of large herbivores and competition with other carnivores increases ecosystem complexity and resilience.
4. **Cultural Keystone Species;** Deeply embedded in culture at all levels, including Indigenous and traditional cultures.
5. **Flagship Species;** Wild cats are well-known, charismatic species that can serve as conservation ambassadors, catalysing investment in biodiversity, nature-based solutions and sustainable rangeland management.

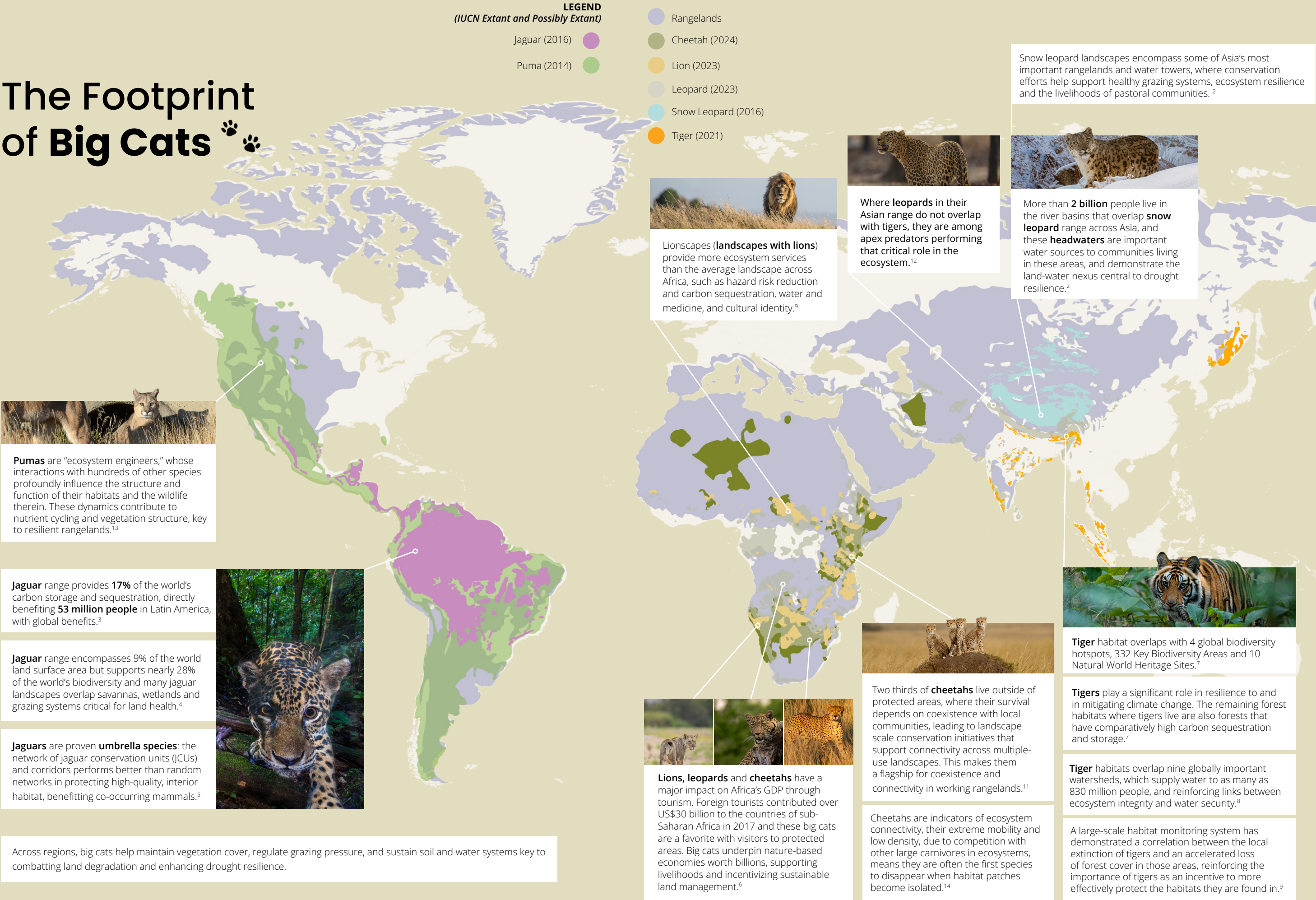
* Here we use the term "big cat" to include all large cat species; lion, leopard, tiger, jaguar, snow leopard, mainland and sunda clouded leopard, cheetah and puma. Some organizations refer to big cats to include only the Panthera genus which are the first five listed species.

Beyond the Big Cats

Conserving big cats means conserving so much more;

- Big cats help maintain functional rangelands that support food systems, water cycles, and livelihoods
- Their presence signals landscapes with ecosystem integrity and healthy herbivore populations
- Big cats are excellent indicators of functional connectivity, and these corridors often overlap with pastoral rangelands and grasslands
- Big cat landscapes provide water, carbon storage, and drought resilience
- Big cat conservation drives coexistence approaches with pastoralists and communities
- Big cats mobilize finance and political attention for large-scale land restoration.

The Footprint of Big Cats 🐾



Cat-scapes; A world without cats?

At the landscape-scale...

When cats are present	When cats are absent
Indicates high ecological integrity; that there is sufficient prey, sufficient biodiversity to support wild cat populations, i.e. more fully functioning ecosystems protecting carbon, biodiversity and water resources. Predators influence the abundance and behaviour of prey species. This can help reduce pressure on sensitive habitats and contribute to maintaining vegetation structure.	Influence of a large predator lost, resulting in a substantial reduction in ecosystem complexity, habitat degradation, loss of ecological integrity, and requiring extremely expensive reintroductions for recovery, if possible. Missing predators may result in overpopulation of “grazers”, “browsers” and other species performing regulatory services, altering ecosystem dynamics and placing greater pressure on vegetation. Degraded vegetation cover, degraded carbon sequestration and storage potential, etc.
Full complement of wild cats (i.e., large + medium + small wild cat species) act as ecosystem and biodiversity regulators; key to healthy and resilient landscapes.	Less incentive for governments, communities and land managers to protect and conserve landscapes, further accelerating deforestation and degradation.
Because cat species are highly charismatic, they are a major tourism draw (i.e. increased ecotourism revenue = financially performing asset, benefits to local communities and ecosystems).	Less attractive ecosystem that provides fewer rewarding wildlife sightings for visitors, therefore lowering tourism revenue (i.e. underperforming asset).
Increased economic and cultural benefits to people from the value afforded to big cats and their landscapes.	Rapid loss of habitat integrity and connectivity due to loss of incentive and funds to protect landscapes.



Big Cats, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Global Biodiversity Framework

Efforts to conserve big cats contribute to multiple UNCCD priorities, the CBD’s Global Biodiversity Framework Targets and other multilateral agreements. Even the basic steps needed to conserve big cats (examples below) are aligned or partially aligned with the UNCCD priorities and lead to outcomes with broader conservation benefits. Overall, focusing on big cat conservation has significant benefits for biodiversity, people and climate.

<u>Big cat conservation actions</u>	<u>UNCCD priorities</u>	<u>Outcomes</u>
Protect and restore habitats	Land degradation neutrality	Improved vegetation, soil and biodiversity
Protect mountain and rangeland watersheds	Water security and drought response	Healthy headwaters and downstream water supplies
Support coexistence	Pastoral livelihoods	Reduced conflict, resilient production systems
Champion community stewardship of nature	Inclusive land governance	Locally-led and sustainable land management
Maintain connectivity	Landscape-scale restoration	Functional ecosystems
Promote Nature-based Solutions	Climate & drought resilience	Carbon storage, water regulation
Mobilize finance	Rangeland investment agenda	Scaled restoration impact

**All marked as “partial” due to fitting against separate targets rather than entire goals*

Sources:

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