



Risk Management and Quality Assurance

WWF Core Standard

Version 2.0 – December 2025

Owner: Senior Director, Accountability, WWF International

This Standard is subject to review on a regular basis and at least every 3 years.

VERSION HISTORY:

| Version | Title | Released |
|---------|--|---|
| V1.0 | WWF Network Standard, Risk and Quality Assurance | July 2020 (endorsed by WWF International Board). Designated as a Core Standard Sept 2020 |
| V2.0 | WWF Core Standard, Risk and Quality Assurance Updates made to references, links and job titles. Shortened to focus on principles and requirements rather than process details. Rephrased for consistency with other Core Standards. | September 2025 |

1. Purpose and Scope

Purpose

This WWF Core Standard (“Standard”) sets out the principles and minimum requirements for risk management (RM) and quality assurance (QA) across all WWF Offices, programmes, and projects. Effective risk management and quality assurance are essential to safeguarding people and nature, enabling WWF to achieve its strategic conservation objectives, and maintaining accountability and integrity across the Network.

Scope

This Standard applies to all WWF Offices and Staff, subject to local laws. WWF Offices may adapt the Standard to local contexts, ensuring alignment with the commitments and minimum expectations as set out in the Standard.

This Standard outlines the overarching expected approach to risk management. Other Standards support the management of risks that relate to their particular scope and are complementary to this Standard e.g. the ESSF provides an institutional mechanism to manage the environmental and social risks derived from place-based activities.

2. WWF risk management principles

WWF applies the principles below, which support a three lines approach for risk assurance:

i) Risk ownership by project leads and managers, ii) Oversight and support functions, iii) Independent internal or external assurance.

- **Risk Oversight:** Boards (National Organisation Boards and the International Board) oversee the risk strategy and review significant risks, risk management effectiveness, and the risk appetite.
- **Executive Responsibility:** Office Executive Management holds primary accountability for managing risks and reporting to their Boards.
- **Risk Ownership:** Every WWF staff member is responsible for managing risks in their respective areas, with the primary ownership of risks being clearly defined.
- **Risk Culture:** Leadership at all levels fosters a culture where risk management is proactively integrated into decision-making.
- **Integrated Risk Management:** Risk management should be embedded in WWF’s governance, strategies, operations, and processes.
- **Risk Appetite Alignment:** Risks are managed within WWF’s Network-wide Risk Appetite Statement.
- **Consistent Risk Identification:** Risks are identified, assessed, documented, and monitored at office, project, programme, and global levels.
- **Leading practice:** WWF’s Risk Management is aligned with the principles of globally accepted standards - ISO 31000:2018 Risk Management Standard and COSO ERM (Enterprise Risk Management) Standard.

3. Risk Appetite Statement

The Risk Appetite Statement provides clear, principle-based guidance on the level and types of risk the WWF Network is prepared to accept in pursuit of our mission to build a future in which people live in harmony with nature. It supports WWF's ability to be ambitious, bold, and impactful in the face of significant environmental and organisational challenges.

We recognise that transformational conservation requires us to take well-considered risks to achieve sustainable outcomes. Taking risks is not inherently negative—inaction, or excessive risk aversion, can also prevent us from achieving our mission. Our risk appetite enables us to pursue opportunities that can deliver positive, lasting change for people and nature, while ensuring that we operate responsibly, ethically, and in line with WWF's safeguarding, governance, and accountability standards.

The WWF Network will:

- Encourage innovation and bold action where the potential benefits justify the risks.
- Support proportionate and transparent risk-taking that is aligned with our strategy and values.
- Maintain strong risk management to ensure that risks are well understood, mitigated where possible, and clearly communicated across the Network.
- Set clear boundaries for risks that are categorically unacceptable and require immediate response.

This Standard defines the expected processes, controls and governance structures to apply the risk appetite in practice.

4. Core Risk Management Requirements

All WWF Offices must:

4.1 Establish and Manage Office Risk Registers

- o Maintain a risk register aligned to strategic objectives.
- o Review and update the register regularly.
- o Upload the risk register to shared Network systems where applicable.

4.2 Assess and Manage Project Risks

- o Integrate risk management into the project process and determine required levels of risk assessment¹
- o Develop project-specific mitigation measures for projects that have been assessed as medium or high-risk by the respective office.
- o Apply additional tools where required, including the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF), Health, Safety and Security (HSS), corporate partnership policies, and climate risk assessments.
- o Incorporate risk monitoring into regular project reviews.

¹ The WWF [Project and Programme Management Standards](#) provide guidance.

4.3 Assign Roles and Responsibilities

- Clearly define roles for risk management, including Boards, Executive Management, risk owners, and staff.
- Assign an individual or team within the office-to coordinate risk management and share good practices.

4.4 Adopt Common Language

- Apply WWF's harmonised risk definitions for **Likelihood and Impact Rating**²

4.5 Escalate Critical Risks

- Report significant risks to Office Board.
- Escalate critical risks (high after mitigation or deemed critical for the local context) and/ or risks outside of the Network Risk Appetite promptly, in accordance with WWF Network protocols.

5. Quality Assurance (QA) Principles

Quality Assurance (QA) ensures that WWF delivers impactful, high-quality conservation projects that comply with WWF's global standards³ and safeguard people, nature, and WWF's reputation.

Key QA principles:

- Promote local ownership and accountability.
- Use common WWF frameworks, standards, and tools.
- Ensure robust escalation for high-risk projects while keeping review layers to only those that are necessary
- Ensure transparent project documentation and reporting across the Network.
- Support continuous improvement through independent reviews and learning.

6. Core Quality Assurance Requirements

Every WWF Office **MUST**, at a minimum:

6.1 Establish Quality Assurance Procedures

- Develop and maintain QA procedures for the design, review, and approval of project plans (concepts and proposals) and the implementation and monitoring of these plans.
- These QA procedures must support implementation of WWF's Network Standards, including the Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF), Statements of Principles, due diligence and financial requirements, and enable primary donor conditions to be met.

² See the Risk Management Handbook for guidance.

³ The WWF [Project and Programme Management Standards](#) provide guidance.

6.2 Review Project Quality and Escalate where appropriate:

- o Conduct internal project reviews by relevant experts and senior managers, especially for high-risk projects e.g. engage specialists in legal, fiduciary, safeguards, brand, partnerships, health safety and security, conservation impact, and risk management.
- o Follow the required escalation criteria and approval procedures.

6.3 Share Key Project Information

- o Store all project documentation centrally within the office document/ knowledge management system.
- o Ensure that key project information, including risks and impact, is regularly updated and available for sharing and reporting purposes as per Network-wide requirements.

7. Responsibilities

- **WWF Office Leaders:** Accountable for full implementation and compliance with this Standard. Responsibility for coordination of risk management and quality assurance processes may be assigned to Risk/ QA focal points, who also share good practice with peers.
- **Conservation Project Managers:** Responsible for following risk management and Quality Assurance processes for their projects.
- **WWF International** will provide Risk and Quality Assurance tools and support, monitor compliance across the Network and may request information to support global oversight.

8. Guidance, Support and Other Relevant Standards

[Network Risk Management Hub](#), including guidance, Office Risk Register Template, Project Risk Register Template, Risk Management Framework, WWF Risk Taxonomy, Likelihood and Impact ratings

[WWF Project and Programme Management Standards](#)

[Project Guide, include Quality Assurance guidance](#)

[WWF Environmental and Social Safeguards and Statements of Principles](#)

[Insight CPM database](#)