



POLICY BRIEF

CBD COP17 • OCTOBER 2026

ITEM 17C: THE NEED TO INCLUDE A FIFTH PROGRAMME ELEMENT ON ECOLOGICAL CONNECTIVITY

under CBD's Programme of Work on Protected Areas

Key Messages

WWF urges Parties to adopt the revised Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), including the Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity, as set out in paragraph 11 and Annex II of [CBD/SBSTTA/REC/28/5](#) Scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: strategic review of and update to the programme of work on protected areas.

Paragraph 11 currently contains two bracketed options: to decide to establish a dedicated Fifth Programme Element, or to endorse connectivity as a cross-cutting complementary activity; WWF recommends the first option. WWF does not support the adoption of paragraphs 12 and 13, which would substitute for, and weaken, Paragraph 11.

Ecological connectivity is a core commitment under the GBF required by Target 3, referenced in Goal A and Targets 2 and 12, and critical to Targets 1, 4 and 14. However implementation lags: only 8.5% of the world's terrestrial and inland waters are both protected and connected, against 17.6% protected overall, and fewer than half of Parties address connectivity in their national targets.

A dedicated Fifth Element would help close this gap, supporting Parties to strengthen, connect and scale existing efforts through a coherent framework for planning, governance, cooperation and monitoring in an effective and equitable way without creating new obligations under the CBD or any other agreement.

SBSTTA-28 forwarded the proposal of including a Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity to COP-17 in brackets. With national momentum already building through NBSAPs, COP17 can adopt a coherent implementation framework for ecological connectivity.

1. BACKGROUND

In 2025, the CBD invited submissions on the strategic review and update of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA), to better align it with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Among the ideas put forward, and included in [CBD/SBSTTA/28/INF/7](#), is a proposal to add a **Fifth Programme Element dedicated to ecological connectivity, organized around four goals: plan, enable, connect, and measure.**

At CBD's SBSTTA-28 the Recommendation [28/5](#) was adopted, putting forward a revised PoWPA to COP17. However, three relevant paragraphs remain bracketed and unresolved:

- Paragraph 11: whether to establish the Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity outright, or only to endorse connectivity as a lesser cross-cutting complementary activity.
- Paragraph 12: whether to invite Parties to reinforce connectivity in implementing the PoWPA, in line with the complementary activities in the current annex.
- Paragraph 13: whether to keep the door open at COP18 for further guidance on connectivity, informed by the forthcoming IPBES methodological assessment on spatial planning and connectivity.

All three go forward to CBD's COP17 in brackets, for Parties to resolve during the negotiations to take place in Armenia the second half of October 2026.

2. THE ASK

The Fifth Element on ecological connectivity offers a practical opportunity to build on country progress through an implementation framework: it brings planning, governance, cooperation and monitoring together in one coherent structure that Parties can adapt to their own contexts, while providing a basis for the CBD Secretariat to facilitate and support implementation and cooperation among Parties.

What we are asking from Parties

- **Recognize** the progress already being made by countries on ecological connectivity as a strategic condition for achieving Target 3 and the wider ambitions of the GBF, not as an add-on. We expect Parties to articulate this recognition concretely by adopting Paragraph 11 and Annex II at COP17.
- **Support** the adoption of Paragraph 11 of Recommendation [28/5](#): a decision to establish the Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity within the revised PoWPA. Paragraph 11 currently contains two bracketed options: to decide to establish a dedicated Programme Element, or to merely endorse connectivity as a cross-cutting complementary activity. We recommend the first option, and do not support adoption of Paragraphs 12 and 13, which would substitute for, and provide a weaker alternative to, Paragraph 11. Paragraph 11 offers a concrete opportunity to build on existing efforts and translate GBF commitments into a more coherent implementation framework. A dedicated Programme Element would bring together in a framework the planning, governance, cooperation and monitoring needs to maintain and restore ecological connectivity across protected and conserved area systems, landscapes and seascapes, providing a more comprehensive framework rather than addressing connectivity only as a cross-cutting activity. The issue is not whether connectivity is already part of the GBF — it is. The opportunity is to strengthen how it works in practice. The Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity provides a practical way to do so, without creating new commitments beyond those already agreed by Parties.
- **Foster** Parties that support Paragraph 11 to coordinate with other like-minded ones ahead of and during COP17 (Yerevan, Armenia, October 2026), and hold this position firmly through the contact groups where the text will be discussed and negotiated line by line.

Additionally, we suggest the following actions beyond government engagement:

- **Champion** ecological connectivity within national, regional and international biodiversity agendas, so it is treated as a priority beyond the CBD process itself.
- **Cooperate** with other governments, Indigenous Peoples and local communities (respecting and upholding their rights over their lands and territories), civil society, scientists and relevant international organizations to advance practical action on ecological connectivity, including through existing platforms such as the [Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity](#) and the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration.

Paragraphs 12 and 13 can provide useful complementary approaches, but adopting any of them could weaken adoption of Paragraph 11. Paragraph 12 gives Parties an immediate mandate to act only on the annex's connectivity-related activities. Paragraph 13 provides a pathway to include ecological connectivity but delays the decision to COP-18 once the IPBES assessment is available. If either of these two paragraphs are maintained not to complement, but to substitute Paragraph 11, Parties would be left with the same fragmented approach to ecological connectivity.

This is an issue of implementation architecture, not new commitments. Adopting a Fifth Element of the PoWPA on connectivity does not create a new commitment beyond the existing GBF. Rather, it provides a structured way to implement commitments already established under Goal A and Targets 2, 3 and 12, while supporting the implementation of Targets 1, 4 and 14.

3. WHY IT MATTERS

Ecological connectivity allows species to complete their life cycles, track shifting climatic conditions, and maintain the gene flow that underpins long-term population resilience; without it, even effectively managed protected and conserved areas become isolated fragments, increasingly vulnerable to local extinction. Strengthening ecological connectivity can deliver tangible conservation outcomes for species that depend on connected land- and seascapes, such as big cats and other wide-ranging terrestrial mammals, river dolphins and migratory fish in freshwater systems, and migratory marine mammals and marine turtles in the coastal and marine environments. Maintaining and restoring ecological networks and corridors helps sustain movement and ecological processes that are essential for long-term species persistence and adaptation.

Ecological connectivity is already part of the GBF: Goal A commits Parties to maintaining, enhancing or restoring the “integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems,”; Target 2 requires restoration that enhances “ecological integrity and connectivity,”; Target 3 requires protected and conserved area (PCA) systems to be “well-connected,”; and Target 12 calls for increased “connectivity of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces” in urban areas. Recommendation [28/5](#) itself recognizes connectivity as a foundational condition for Target 3 and a contributor to Goal A. The gap is not the commitment; it is the framework to deliver it.

48% of national targets aligned with Target 3 cover its connectivity and other qualitative elements; the global progress report found these consistently under-addressed relative to area coverage.	17.6% of the world's terrestrial and inland waters are protected or conserved (Protected Planet Report, 2024)	ONLY 8.5% of that same land area is both protected AND connected: the most under-delivered component of Target 3.
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The CBD's own global review of collective progress ([CBD/SBSTTA/28/2/Add.3](#)) confirms the pattern extends well beyond Target 3. For Target 2, only 41% of National Targets reference connectivity, and 53% for Target 12. Part of this is that the GBF’s monitoring framework does not contain any headline indicator for ecological connectivity. tThere is no requirement to measure or report progress on connectivity, so the gap is neither systematically tracked nor visible in global stock takes.

This is not only a CBD conversation. The 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (Campo Grande, Brazil, March 2026), convened under the theme “Connecting Nature to Sustain Life” and adopted the Pantanal Declaration on promoting connectivity for migratory wildlife. CMS has also agreed a definition of ecological connectivity, adopted the Campo Grande resolution

urging Parties to identify and strengthen ecological networks and corridors, and established in COP14 in Samarkand the [Global Partnership on Ecological Connectivity \(GPEC\)](#) as a platform for coordinated action.

4. WHERE CONNECTIVITY ALREADY APPEARS, AND WHY THAT ISN'T ENOUGH

Connectivity is not absent from the draft PoWPA. The GBF names connectivity explicitly in Goal A and in Targets 2, 3 and 12, and the draft PoWPA carries connectivity-relevant activities across a wider set of targets, including some where the target text itself does not use the term. These existing references provide an important foundation, while a dedicated Programme Element could help bring greater coherence to planning, funding, governance and monitoring.

While only Targets 2, 3 and 12 (together with Goal A) use the term “connectivity” in the GBF text itself; for Targets 1, 4, 8, 10, and 14 the link is substantive rather than textual, which is precisely why it depends on the PoWPA to be made operational.

A dedicated Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity would build on and connect these existing references, giving Parties one coherent place to plan, resource, govern and monitor connectivity across all of them in an interconnected way, rather than addressing it target by target.

5. THE PROPOSAL: FOUR GOALS, ONE FRAMEWORK

As reflected in the annex to Recommendation [28/5](#), the Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity would integrate well-connected PCA systems into wider landscapes and seascapes. It uses an understanding of ecological connectivity consistent with the definition CMS Parties have already adopted: the largely unimpeded movement of species and habitats, and the ecological processes that sustain them, covering both the spatial configuration of ecological networks and their real-world effectiveness.

- **5.1 Plan:** integrate ecological networks, corridors and steppingstones into spatial planning, ecosystem restoration and climate-adaptation processes, including planning and design of PCA systems.
- **5.2 Enable:** create the conditions for inclusive, equitable and effective governance of PCA systems, recognizing that connectivity usually crosses jurisdictions and requires cooperation among governments, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, resource users and other stakeholders.
- **5.3 Connect:** strengthen national, transboundary and cross-sectoral cooperation to share knowledge and scale up connectivity across PCA systems, including voluntary synergies with other relevant agreements, pursued in accordance with their respective mandates and without duplication.
- **5.4 Measure:** develop standards, indicators and monitoring and evaluation frameworks for ecological connectivity, so Parties can assess gaps, track effectiveness and report progress over time, addressing the low data-availability scores seen across connectivity-relevant targets today.

6. RELATION TO OTHER CONVENTIONS

Supporting the Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity does not mean endorsing CMS, joining it, or accepting any obligation under it or any other Convention. As reflected in SBSTTA Recommendation [28/5](#), it sits entirely within the CBD's own mandate and legal framework and is adopted by CBD Parties alone. Any reference to cooperation with CMS or other multilateral environmental agreements is framed as voluntary synergy, pursued in line with each Convention's own mandate and without duplication, and creates no new obligation. It does not affect any Party's sovereign

decision on whether to participate in CMS or any other Convention, and implementation remains subject to national circumstances, legislation and priorities.

7. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Does this add a new commitment or reporting burden to parties?

A: No, it gives Parties a structured framework to advance GBF goals and targets (Goal A and Targets 1, 2, 3, 4, 12 and 14). Nothing in the proposal changes the scope of what Parties agreed to at COP15 in 2022 and subsequent COPs.

Q: Does it commit countries to other Convention positions or obligations?

A: No, the Fifth Programme Element on ecological connectivity operates entirely under CBD's own mandate. Cooperation with other conventions would be voluntary and consistent with their respective mandates, creating no obligation regardless of whether a Party is a member of CMS.

Q: What happens if paragraph 11 is not adopted?

A: Connectivity would continue to rely on the scattered, mostly partial or limited references already in the Programme of Work, without dedicated visibility, cross-target coherence or a standard framework to monitor progress leaving the same 8.5% implementation gap unaddressed.

8. KEY DOCUMENTS

- [Statement from 13 institutions](#) supporting the 5th Element on Connectivity, submitted to CBD's SBSTTA-28.
- [Recommendation CBD/SBSTTA/REC/28/5](#) on strategic review of and update to the PoWPA.

For more information

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