



POLICY BRIEF

The role of forests in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework • NOVEMBER 2022

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Summary

The new global biodiversity framework, to be agreed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), aims to halt and reverse the loss of nature by 2030. To truly deliver a nature-positive future, the framework must reflect the importance of forests. Complementing [WWF's overall recommendations](#), this briefing outlines what a "forest-proof" global biodiversity framework needs to deliver.

Forests are key for [people, biodiversity and climate](#):

- Around 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihood, including 70 million Indigenous peoples
- Forests are home to more than half of all terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects. Forests contain 60,000 tree species, 80% of amphibian species, 75% of birds and 68% of mammals
- Forests are crucial for limiting global warming to 1.5°C. Forests store more carbon than all the Earth's exploitable oil, gas and coal combined. Between 2001 and 2019 forests absorbed 7.6 gigatonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere every year, or about 18% of all human-caused carbon emissions

Every year, [10 million hectares of forest are lost](#). Halting deforestation, conserving, restoring and sustainably managing forests has never been more urgent.

As forest-specific targets that existed under the [Aichi Targets](#) will be replaced by broader metrics on terrestrial ecosystems under the emerging global biodiversity framework, it is important that negotiators do not lose sight of the importance of forests. Forest-relevant targets and indicators under the new global biodiversity framework should align with, complement and set the right conditions to achieve existing 2030 forest commitments and goals such as under the [Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests](#) and Land Use, the [UN Strategic Plan for Forests](#), and the [Bonn Challenge](#).

In order to have a "forest-proof" global biodiversity framework, it must include targets that:

1. Ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of forests.
2. Address the drivers of deforestation, forest degradation and forest biodiversity loss.
3. Strengthen the role of forests in stabilizing the climate by recognizing the strong link between biodiversity and climate, both to address the drivers of climate change and to embrace nature-based solutions as an opportunity to combat climate change.
4. Eliminate and repurpose environmentally harmful subsidies and incentives, including those that drive deforestation and forest degradation.
5. Include and align with existing [2030 forest indicators](#), monitor forest quality as well as quantity by adopting the [Forest Specialist Index](#) as a complementary indicator and task the Ad hoc Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) to develop a headline indicator for deforestation- and conversion-free supply chains.

The following specific asks on the targets are extracted from [WWF's Position Paper for the COP 15](#).

1. Ensure the conservation and restoration of forests

Target 3 of the global biodiversity framework aims to conserve 30% of the Earth's land, fresh waters and seas by 2030. [WWF supports this "30 x 30" target](#). Conserving forests is especially important for biodiversity and the climate.

Today, around 21% of the global forest area is under legal protection. This includes 38% of tropical primary forest, which is especially high in biodiversity and carbon. Particularly significant for biodiversity and the climate are the customary territories of Indigenous peoples and local communities. Indigenous territories contain an estimated 36% of the world's remaining intact forest landscapes and 80% of biodiversity, while around 90% of Indigenous and community lands are carbon sinks.

Under Target 3, parties should:

- Ensure that 30% of the earth is conserved, including land areas, freshwater, and marine and coastal areas, through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) by 2030
- Fully respect and uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities over their land and waters, including their right to give or withhold their free, prior and informed consent
- Ensure all protected areas and OECMs are effectively managed and equitably governed
- Focus on the right places, particularly Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), and ensure ecological representativeness and connectivity

Reversing biodiversity loss requires ambitious **restoration actions**, especially in forest ecosystems (target 2). [Aichi Target 15](#) included a goal to restore at least 15% of degraded ecosystems but it has not been possible to track progress due to a lack of agreement on the definition of "degradation" in the CBD, which made it impossible to establish a baseline. In the absence of an internationally agreed definition, WWF is calling for ambitious global numerical objectives (hectares, kilometres) that consider the specific characteristics and values of each ecosystem (terrestrial, inland water and marine).

Under Target 2, parties should:

- Set numerical objectives for terrestrial ecosystems – 1.6 billion hectares is estimated to be the 30% of degraded terrestrial ecosystems - to be brought under restoration by 2030, with the ambition to reverse biodiversity loss, enhance ecological integrity and connectivity within and among ecosystems, and increase the area of natural ecosystems by 2030. Inland water must have a separate objective from terrestrial ecosystems - 350 million hectares of inland water and coastal ecosystems is estimated to be 30% of degraded and lost wetlands
- Ensure that restoration is carried out in a way that respects equitable and rights-based governance

To do this, parties must:

- Increase ambition beyond the 1 billion hectares of [existing commitments](#) made through other international initiatives, with a view to becoming nature positive by 2030. Adopt the right metrics to ensure rapid implementation in all ecosystems, including forests
- Include indicators to measure increased forest integrity, connectivity, natural areas, and equitable and right-based governance
- Recognize and support the role of Indigenous peoples and local communities and women's practices in restoration
- Promote forest landscape restoration at the national level as a strategic pathway to implement national biodiversity strategies and action plans

Forest landscape restoration

Forest and landscape restoration is [defined](#) as “the process of regaining ecological functionality and enhancing human wellbeing across deforested or degraded forest landscapes.” Under the Bonn Challenge and its associated regional initiatives, countries have committed to bring 350 million hectares of degraded and deforested landscapes into restoration by 2030. To date, more than 70 pledgers from more than 60 countries have begun restoring [210 million hectares of degraded and deforested lands](#). The latest [Forest Declaration Assessment](#) estimated that over the last two decades (2000-2020), forest cover has increased by around 130 million hectares, with 36 countries gaining more forest cover than they lost. However, these gains were offset by more than 230 million hectares of forest cover loss, leading to a global net loss of 100 million hectares in 20 years. The [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#) calls for scaled up forest restoration actions, resulting in native and diverse forests, improved forest ecosystem services and recovered biodiversity. Crucially, however, more ambitious actions to halt deforestation and conversion are needed in parallel.

It is important to promote restoration activities that benefit biodiversity and improve ecological representation and connectivity. The [forest landscape restoration principles](#) focus on landscape integrity (a mosaic of ecosystems), stakeholder participation, and restoring ecological functions for multiple benefits using context-specific approaches. In contrast to pure ecological restoration, the forest landscape restoration [approach](#) gives equal priority to human livelihoods and biodiversity conservation, contributing to both Goal A (Ecosystems, species and genetic diversity) and Goal B (Nature’s contributions to people) of the global biodiversity framework.

2. Address the drivers of deforestation, degradation and forest-biodiversity loss

On average, [forest vertebrate populations declined by 79%](#) between 1970 and 2018. The biggest three threats to forest wildlife are habitat loss and habitat fragmentation (mainly due to agricultural expansion, forestry and infrastructure), overexploitation (hunting), and climate change. The new global biodiversity framework must include targets that address these threats and, importantly, the drivers behind them.

To address habitat loss and fragmentation, parties should:

- Articulate a 2030 outcome of halving the global footprint of production and consumption (**Goal B**)
- Identify and transform key productive sectors, ensuring that all areas under agriculture and **forestry are managed sustainably** by 2030 (**Target 10**)
- Transform food systems by applying agroecological principles (**Target 10**), ensuring everybody has access to and adopts culturally appropriate sustainable and healthy diets (**Target 16**), and restoring, maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity basis of food production, notably soil biodiversity and pollinators (**Target 11**) Ensure that all infrastructure, mining or other extractive activities associated with forest and ecosystems degradation and deforestation/conversion are developed through inclusive and participatory spatial planning and/or other effective management processes (**Target 1**) Set the right level of ambition for the private sector, ensuring that businesses avoid negative impacts, halve their footprint on biodiversity, and become nature-positive by 2030 (**Target 15**)
- Require businesses to **immediately eliminate deforestation and conversion from their supply chains**; regularly monitor, assess, and fully and transparently disclose their dependencies and impacts on biodiversity across their operations, value chains and portfolios; and set science-based biodiversity-related targets (**Target 15**)

Sustainable management of forests

[Sustainable management of forests](#) (SMF) or [responsible forestry](#) (RF) can be a key enabler to reduce and avoid forest degradation and deforestation, and with it, biodiversity loss. Under RF, forest health and diversity are maintained and enhanced, while delivering products and services for current and future generations. SMF/RF must therefore respect social and cultural needs and satisfy the values of indigenous peoples and local communities. For SMF/RF to be effective, sound legal, policy and institutional frameworks that enable the conservation, protection and restoration of forests need to be in place. [Credible certification schemes](#), such as the [Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#), are important tools to promote better forest management and trade of forest products and can contribute to delivering SFM/RF.

A unique opportunity: [Anchoring deforestation- and conversion-free supply chains under Target 15](#)

The number one cause of biodiversity decline is the destruction and degradation of natural habitats, including forests, grasslands, savannahs, peatlands and wetlands. Behind this lies an unsustainable model of production and consumption. One of the most internationally recognized and advanced opportunities to address unsustainable production and consumption is to eliminate deforestation and conversion of all natural ecosystems from supply chains. Recent years have seen numerous commitments and initiatives from governments, the private sector and civil society to end deforestation and ensure deforestation- and conversion-free (DCF) supply chains, however actions have to drastically speed up. Target 15 offers a unique opportunity to anchor global commitments on DCF supply chains within an internationally binding treaty. This (draft) target aims to spur government actions, including policies, regulations and sanctions, that require businesses and financial institutions to disclose impacts on biodiversity along their supply and value chains and follow a rights-based approach. A strong government mandate on DCF supply chains within the framework of the CBD would demonstrate true political leadership, increase accountability and transparency, provide clarity and level the playing field for private sector actions.

To address the overexploitation of forest biodiversity, parties should:

- Ensure forest and ecosystem management practices prevent overexploitation of native wild species and minimize impacts on non-target species (**Target 5**), and apply ecosystem approaches (**Target 10**)
- Effectively manage human-wildlife interactions to minimize conflict for the benefit of both humans and wildlife (**Target 4**)
- Take urgent action to address both demand for and supply of illegal wildlife products (**Target 5**)
- **Tackle illegal logging and timber trade** by retaining language proposed in **Target 5 Alt.1**:
“Eliminate all harvesting, trade and use of wild terrestrial freshwater and marine species that is illegal, unsustainable or unsafe, while safeguarding the customary sustainable use by indigenous peoples and local communities.”

Illegal Logging & illegal timber trade

Both illegal logging and the international trade in illicitly harvested timber have a serious economic, social and environmental impact. Illegally logged timber has an estimated [value of up to USD 151 billion annually](#). Illegal logging contributes to deforestation, habitat loss, species extinction and climate change. [Robust legal and policy instruments](#) such as moratoria, strengthened enforcement capacity, smart conservation policies, and improved transparency and accountability are effective and needed in protecting forests. This would include the recognition of the land and tenure rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, their governance institutions and processes, and secure the full and equitable participation of forest-dependent communities in policy- and decision-making as well as an appropriate and adequate application of the right to a [free prior and informed consent \(FPIC\)](#).

3. Recognize and ensure the strong link between biodiversity and climate, to address the drivers of climate change and to embrace equitable and rights-based nature-based solutions as an opportunity to combat climate change

Forests and ecosystems offer some of the best [nature-based solutions](#) to climate change. Conserving, restoring and sustainably managing forest and other natural ecosystems contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation, while simultaneously addressing societal challenges, improving human well-being, enhancing ecosystem services and benefiting biodiversity. Nature-based solutions complement ecosystem-based approaches, which can help to improve resilience and minimize the impacts of climate change on biodiversity. It is important that nature-based solutions are implemented with strong biodiversity and social safeguards to ensure they deliver benefits for nature and people, and include local solutions by indigenous peoples and local communities.

While nature-based solutions have received widespread support within the sphere of climate action, the concept is yet to be fully endorsed by the biodiversity community and the CBD. Including nature-based solutions in the global biodiversity framework will strengthen their application and alignment with ecosystem-based approaches, unlock significant funding to support conservation objectives, and strengthen the linkages between the CBD and the other Rio Conventions.

Under Target 8, parties should:

- Retain text on minimizing the impacts of climate change
Include both nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches
- Clearly mention that nature-based solutions should be equitable and rights-based

4. Eliminate and repurpose environmentally harmful subsidies and incentives, especially those that drive deforestation, conversion and forest/ecosystem-degradation.

Annually, the world spends at least [US\\$1.8 trillion](#) – equivalent to 2% of global GDP – on subsidies that are driving the destruction of ecosystems, including forests, and species extinction. This includes around US\$520 billion in the agricultural sector, with a large proportion directed toward commodities responsible for driving forest loss. Harmful forestry-related subsidies and the value of illegally harvested wood have been estimated at US\$155 billion per year, contributing to unsustainable forest management, biodiversity loss, monoculture plantation and a decline in soil fertility, among other impacts.

At the same time, there is a huge finance gap when it comes to halting and reversing deforestation by 2030, [a global commitment](#) made by 145 countries, representing over 90% of the global forests, at the UNFCCC COP 26 in Glasgow. Existing finance covers [less than 1 per cent of the estimated total](#) need to protect, restore, and enhance forests on a global scale, and needs to increase by up to 200 times to meet the 2030 commitment to halt and reverse forest loss. Those estimates are likely to be higher since they do not cover halting conversion.

Eliminating and repurposing harmful incentives can contribute to scaling up finance for biodiversity, including for forests. There are opportunities to redirect subsidies toward forest-friendly activities - that at the same time contribute to a [just rural transition](#) - while ending environmentally harmful subsidies will also reduce the resources that would otherwise be required in future to counteract and repair the damage.

Global alliances, including leading voices from the [public and private sector](#), are calling for subsidies to be reformed and repurposed toward a [just rural transition](#) and an equitable, nature-positive and net-zero economy. In addition, the G7 in 2022 [committed](#) to “redirect or eliminate incentives including subsidies harmful to biodiversity by 2030 at the latest, taking initial steps without delay.”

The current draft Target 18 of the global biodiversity framework aims to redirect, repurpose, reform or eliminate incentives harmful for biodiversity. **Under Target 18, parties should:**

- Reflect the urgency of the situation by including an intermediary deadline of identifying all harmful incentives by 2025 at the latest, then fully eliminating or repurposing them by 2030
- Refer to **all** incentives harmful to biodiversity
- Upscale biodiversity-positive incentives
- Define that harmful incentives should be addressed in a just and equitable way

5. Include and align with existing 2030 forest indicators and monitor forest quality as well as quantity by adopting the Forest Specialists Index

The proposed goals and targets of the draft global biodiversity framework do not and will not differentiate between specific ecosystems but are expected to refer to “terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas”. While this cross-sectoral approach may make sense from a biological perspective, it lacks concrete, ecosystem-specific political mandates for action. This can be addressed by referencing indicators that have been previously approved by other Conventions, UN bodies or international partnerships.

When it comes to forests, the global biodiversity framework should encourage and reinforce the use of the [Global Core Set of Forest-related Indicators](#) and other indicators as identified for the [Forest Declaration](#) and the [UN Global Forest Goals](#). Forest indicators should especially encourage conservation of stable and intact forests, given their value for biodiversity and climate.

With most forest metrics focusing on quantity, it is crucial that indicators also report on forest quality, as hectares are an insufficient proxy for biodiversity. WWF is asking parties to include the [Living Planet Forest Specialists Index](#) (Forest Specialist Index) in the monitoring framework of the global biodiversity framework. The Forest Specialists Index uses the [Living Planet Index](#) (LPI) methodology to track changes in abundance of populations of species that are dependent on forests. The 2022 update shows an average 79% decline in monitored populations between 1970 and 2018. With the addition of 120 species and 1,100 populations to the data set, improving representation of Neotropical species in particular, the picture of decline in forest specialists is much worse than when the index was [first published](#) in 2019. The Forest Specialist Index has been peer reviewed ([Green et al, 2020](#)) and is an application of the LPI which was adopted by the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) as an indicator of progress towards its 2011-2020 targets. The LPI, currently in the list of draft headline indicators, can play an important role in monitoring progress towards Goal A. Since it is based on the LPI, the Forest Specialist Index is ready to be used and complementary to the Living Planet Index.

Under the monitoring framework, parties should:

- Include the Forest Specialists Index as a **complementary indicator** for all forest-relevant area-based targets, especially Goal A, Targets 1, 2, and 3, as it can highlight progress toward enhancing the integrity and restoration of forest ecosystems.
- Task the AHTEG to develop the most appropriate **headline indicator** for target 15 to monitor whether supply chains are deforestation- and conversion- free. WWF suggests: *“Extent of natural vegetation in terrestrial ecosystems (forest, savannahs and grasslands, wetlands, woodlands, mangroves, peatlands, saltmarshes), converted due to soft commodity production - ha per year.”*
- Include forest indicators which are encouraging conservation of stable and intact forests, given their value for biodiversity and climate



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For more information

Hermine Kleymann
Head of Policy – Forest Practice

WWF International
hkleymann@wwfint.org