Wildlife Conservation Society

Connected Landscapes: Building a Resilient Sudano-Sahel Together with Pastoral Communities



Connected Landscapes 2025-2030 © Marcus Westberg/WCS

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Acronyms

ALGEST
Associations de gestion locale de la faune (Village hunting zone associations in CAR)

ANI
Africa Nature Investors Foundation

APN
African Parks Network

APT
Agro-Pastoral and Transhumance

CAR
Central African Republic

CBD
Convention on Biological Diversity

CBFP
Congo Basin Forest Partnership

CEBEVHIRA
(Economic Community of Cattle, Meat and Halieutic Resources); Communauté Économique du Bétail, de la Viande et des Ressources Halieutiques

CEEAC
Communauté Économique des États de l'Af-rique Centrale (ECCAS)

CEMAC
Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale

COMIFAC
Commission des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale

CRSAAC
Centre Régional de Santé Animale Afrique Central

DRC
Democratic Republic of the Congo

ECOWAS
Economic Community of West African States

EWS
Early Warning Systems

FAO
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FPIC
Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

GESI
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

GIZ
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

GRM
Grievance Redress Mechanism

HRBA
Human Rights-Based Approach

IGAD
Intergovernmental Authority on Development

ILODs
Instances locales de décision (Local decision-making bodies in Chad)

IOM
International Organization for Migration

IP & LCs
Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

IUCN
International Union for Conservation of Nature

IYRP
International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists

LUP
Land-Use Planning

MERL
Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning

NTFP
Non-Timber Forest Product

OECMs
Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures

OFAC
Observatoire des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (Central African Forest Observatory)

PAIRIAC
Program d'Appui à l'Intégration régionale et à l'Investissement en Afrique Centrale

PEA
Political Economy Analysis

PES
Payment for Ecosystem Services

PKH
Pastoralists Knowledge Hub

UN
United Nations

UNDRIP
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

USAID
United States Agency for International Development

WCS
Wildlife Conservation Society

SECTION 01

Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

Our vision is a resilient Sudano-Sahel where biodiversity thrives in connected landscapes, supporting peaceful, healthy, resilient pastoralist systems, sedentary communities, and coexistence with protected areas, in respect of pastoralist traditions and rights.

The Agropastoralism and Transhumance Strategy is grounded in a single purpose: that the long-term integrity of vast, complex savan-nah mosaic landscapes is inseparable from the rights, resilience, and active partnership of the pastoralist and farming communities who depend upon them.

Pastoralism is a multi-dimensional livelihood and cultural way of life for millions of people across Africa — yet it is one of the continent's most misunderstood and undervalued systems. Today, climate change, insecurity, and the rapid expansion of agriculture are placing the whole system under strain — squeezing pastoralists and intact rangelands alike. As traditional grazing lands close off, herders are pushed into protected areas, putting them in direct conflict with conservation managers.

The stakes are not abstract. The western black rhinoceros has been declared extinct in this region. The northern lion has suffered substantial range reductions. The savanna elephant has faced dramatic declines, with poaching driving local extinctions in parts of the Central African Republic and Chad. Livestock disease over the past decades is believed to be a main driver for the loss of hundreds of thousands of ungulates.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) manages 139,121 km² across four countries. Our teams are on the ground in Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Chad. Our role is to connect the many actors already working in this space — civil society on peaceful transhumance, European Union Borderlands consortium on conflict mediation, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières and others on livestock health — into a single landscape-scale system that secures both biodiversity and pastoral livelihoods. While pastoralist, humanitarian, and development sectors drive regional dialogue, WCS leverages its permanent field presence and technical mandates to transform these discussions into concrete field implementation — integrating conservation into One Health operations, transboundary security, and humanitarian corridors to ensure a viable future for the Sudano-Sahel's people and wildlife.

The Sudano-Sahel's rangelands are part of a continental system. The shared pressures facing the Sudano-Sahel require a continental perspective. Numerous initiatives have worked for decades on regional resilience; WCS's role is to contribute our specific expertise in wildlife and nature conservation to this collective effort. Our approach is grounded in the landscapes where we work but designed to deliver a proven framework. By demonstrating that conservation can complement traditional pastoral systems, we provide a model that other actors and governments can adopt across the wider system.

This strategy works through five interdependent pillars as a system. The corridor only works if communities trust the governance of the park. That trust depends on conflict resolution and livelihood alternatives. Both require a policy environment that recognizes pastoralist rights. Implementing this will require patience, flexibility, and a sustained investment in building trust.

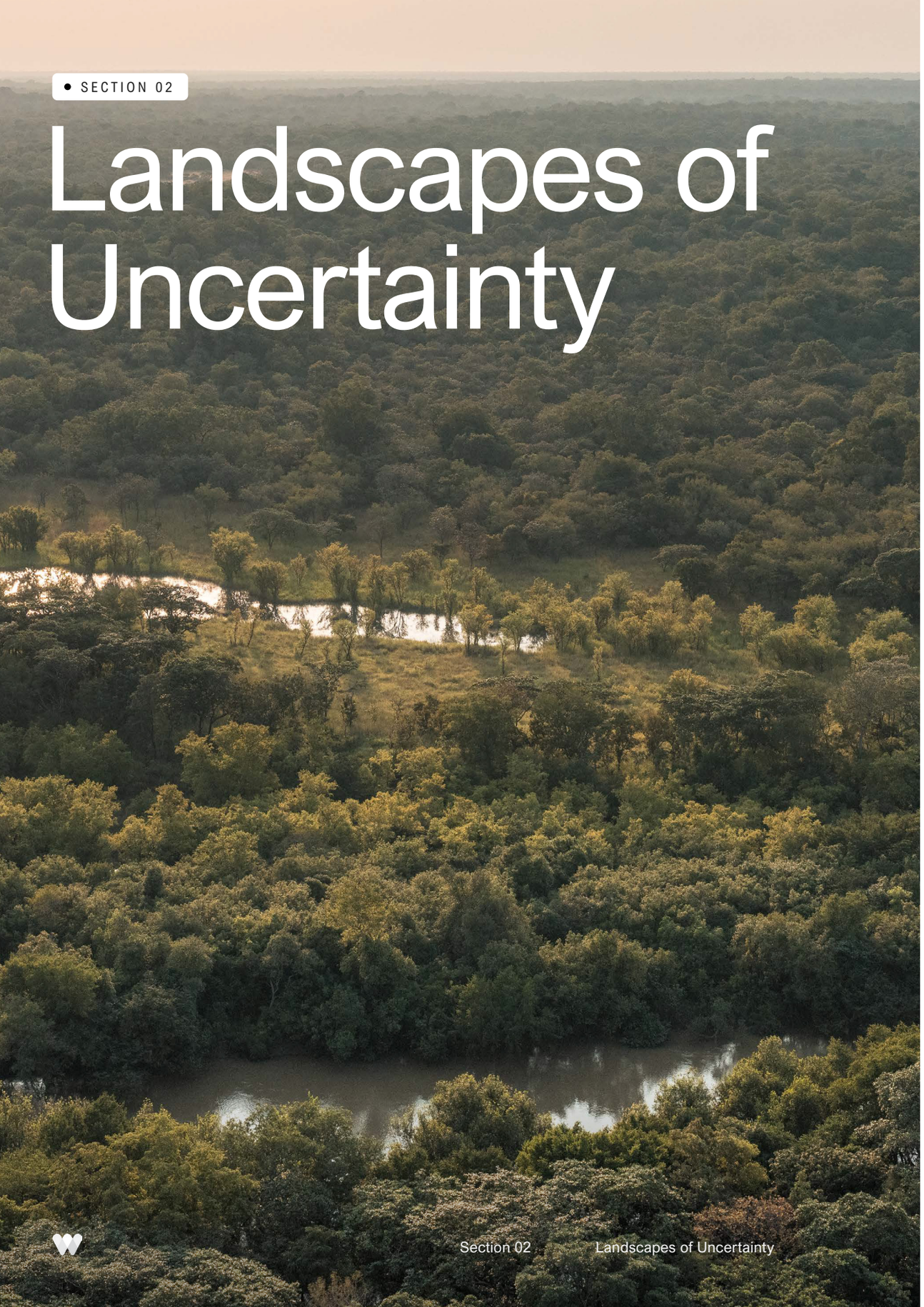
Our vision is a resilient Sudano-Sahel where biodiversity thrives in connected landscapes, supporting peaceful, healthy, resilient pasto-ralist systems, sedentary communities, and coexistence with protected areas, in respect of pastoralist traditions and rights.

This overarching framework guides the future development of site-level strategies that address the unique complexities of each landscape within the region. It focuses on agro-pastoralism, elite herders, as well as traditional transhumance, and outlines how we engage local partners and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IP & LCs)[1]. The framework includes stakeholder engagement and co-design, protected area integrity, human-wildlife coexistence, cultural respect, human rights and wellbeing, One Health, conflict mitigation, rangeland management, sustainable livelihoods, and climate change considerations.

Without a robust, interdisciplinary framework to manage these movements and economic investment expansion in the livestock sector, the region faces a series of irreversible tipping points. We risk the permanent defaunation of Africa's last great wildernesses and the extinction of keystone species that cannot be recovered. Simultaneously, the unchecked degradation of rangelands and the expansion of agriculture will lead to the permanent displacement of Indigenous and local communities, as the ecological foundations of their livelihoods vanish. Once the connectivity between these protected areas is severed, the resulting fragmentation will represent a terminal loss for both the Sudano-Sahel's biodiversity and its traditional pastoralist cultures.

Across this vast landscape which is home to northern lions, forest and savannah elephants, Kordofan giraffe, and hundreds of thousands of people, the question is no longer whether conservation and pastoralism can coexist. It is how.

[1] See Annex 1 for definitions of key concepts in the strategy.



SECTION 02

Landscapes of Uncertainty

The Sudano-Sahel is where the western black rhinoceros was declared extinct. It is where the northern lion has suffered substantial range reductions and continues to dwindle. It is where savanna elephant populations have faced dramatic declines, with habitat destruction and poaching driving local extinctions in parts of CAR, Nigeria, and Chad.

The communities who live in this landscape have done so alongside its wildlife for four centuries. Pastoralism and trans-humance in this region have a documented history stretching from the 1600s, originating in West Africa, moving eastward to Nigeria and Chad, southward into CAR and Cameroon, and now pressing toward the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Every movement was an adaptation. In the last 50 years, the landscape has changed faster than any adaptation can absorb.

Traditional pastoral lands have been captured, privatized, and sold to farmers and ranchers. Elite herders (neo-eleveurs), urban, political, and military figures are deploying large, often armed herds as a form of investment and have begun occupying the same shrinking territory. Climate change has made dry seasons longer and wet seasons more violent. And the protected areas meant to preserve what remained were drawn, in most cases, without the consent of the communities whose traditional lands they enclosed.

The result: herders pushed into parks that were designed to exclude them, by a system that offers them no legitimate alternative.

Flexibility is a cornerstone adaptation for pastoralists and will likely need to become one for conservation agencies too, particularly during droughts when the only available water sources are inside protected areas.

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02.1

The Ecological Landscape

The Sudano-Sahel ecoregion forms a vast transitional landscape between the Sahara and the Guinean savannas, a mosaic of habitats from sparse, drought-adapted Acacia scrub to denser Sudanian woodlands and perennial grasslands, punctuated by seasonal wetlands.

Driven by the West African monsoon, the region pulses between distinct wet and prolonged dry seasons, shaping vegetation growth, wildlife movements, and the annual rhythm of transhumant herders moving their cattle south. As a biodiversity hotspot, the Sudano-Sahel plays a critical role in sustaining ecosystem services such as water regulation and resilience to climate variability.

Growing threats from agriculture, habitat fragmentation, human encroachment and the subsequent emergence of diseases by increasing contact between humans, domestic animals, and wildlife are pushing the landscape to an irreversible tipping point.

Preserving connectivity across this landscape is vital for maintaining its ecological integrity. These ecosystems sustain critical services, from water regulation to climate resilience. The wildlife, the pastoral livelihoods, and the 371,000 people who depend on these landscapes cannot thrive without that connectivity.



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Wildlife Status

The Sudano-Sahel is an important biodiversity hotspot, yet it has seen significant wildlife declines over the past three decades: The western black rhinoceros has been declared extinct, savanna elephant have faced dramatic declines across CAR, Nigeria, and Chad, and the northern lion remains in fragmented populations, dwindling through human-wildlife conflict, poaching, and habitat loss.

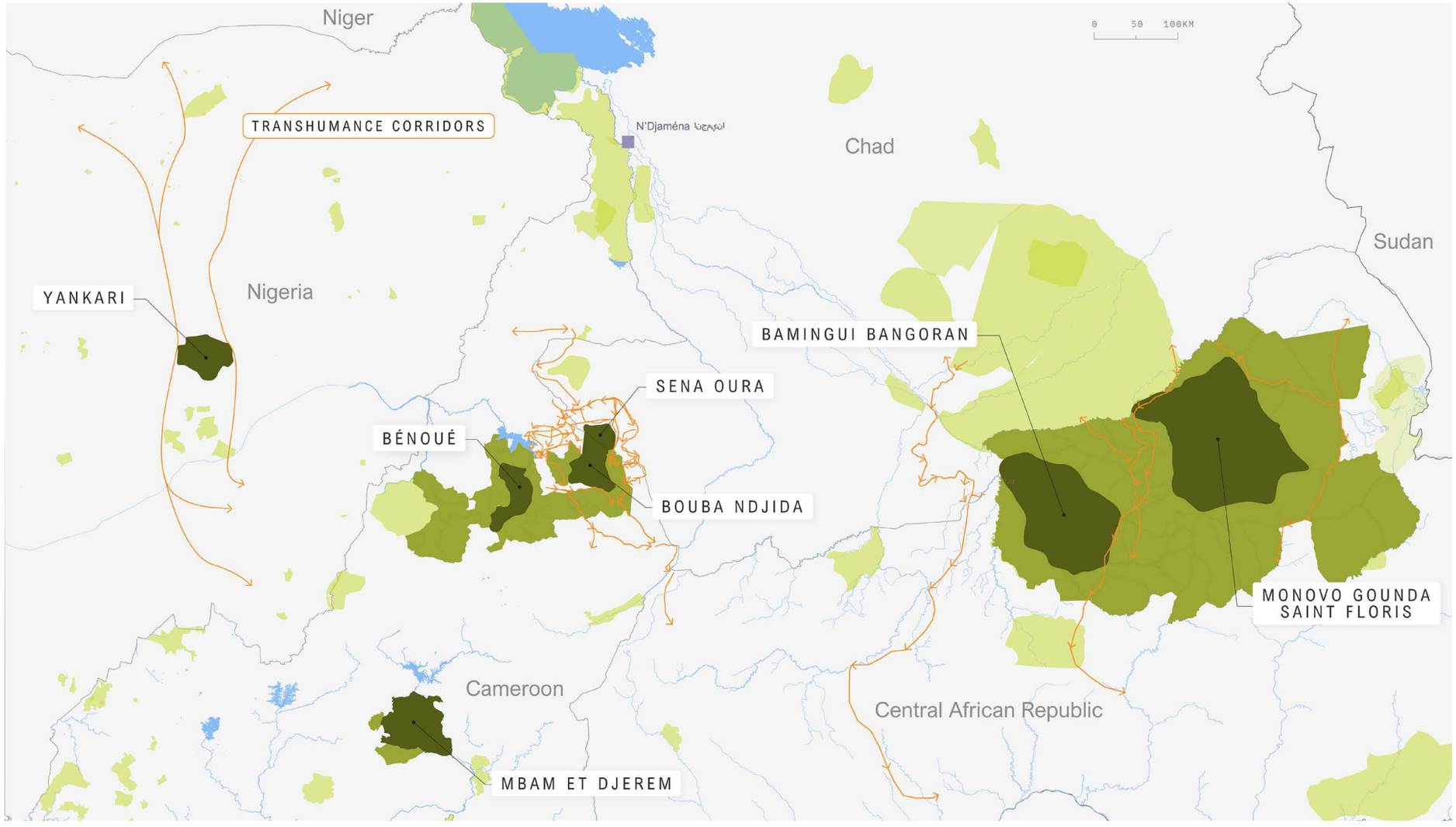
However, despite immense pressures, critical wildlife hotspots persist. Kordofan giraffe have seen slow population increases through targeted conservation and habitat restoration. African wild dog populations have shown recovery in areas with active anti-poaching and monitoring. Certain lion populations have stabilized. These results demonstrate that wildlife recovery is possible with sustained conservation action.

Protected areas such as Bouba Ndjidda, alongside Chinko, Zakouma, and Idongo, anchor these recovery efforts as some of the last hotspots for rewilding the entire region. Bouba remains one of the last strongholds for the Derby eland (Taurotragus derbianus), the world's largest antelope. Idongo-Ngassa is next in line, holding much of the wildlife needed to rewild the broader northern CAR landscape.

These refuges, nestled within expansive and intact landscapes, remain essential for the large-scale ecological connectivity required in these dynamic ecosystems. The potential for recovery exists. It requires the right conditions.

• 02.2

Where We Work



LOCATION

- Capital
- Tanshumance Corridor
- Water Body

CATEGORY

- Anchor Park
- Multiple-use Area
- Partner-managed Landscape
- International Border

Data source: AP | Cameroon, RCA, Chad: WCS and WDPA

Coordinate system: Geographic | WGS 84

Production date: March 25, 2026

Map code: WCS-PY-A 4-02503-2026

The boundaries and names used on this map are not exempt from possible errors and do not in any way imply the official approval or acceptance of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

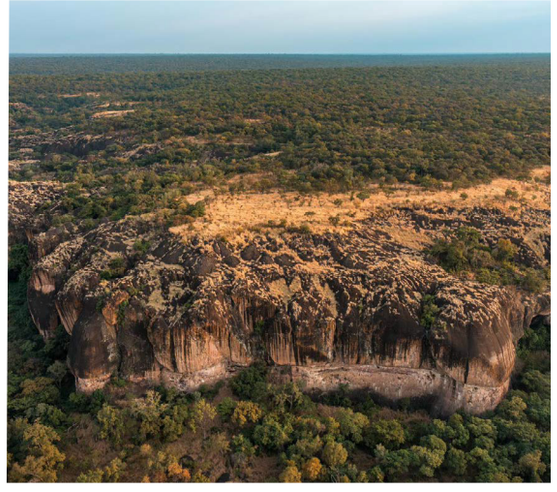
WCS's strategy covers four landscapes in Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, and Chad (see Figure 1). The total area under WCS management is 139,121 km², roughly five times the size of Rwanda, bigger than England, and home to approximately 371,000 people.

This strategy centers on the Bamingui-Manovo and Benoue-Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura landscapes as primary priorities, with secondary focus on Yankari Game Reserve and Mbam Djerem National Park.

As transhumant populations move further south, the framework also provides critical technical guidance for WCS programs in DRC and the Republic of Congo.

Some transhumants passing through WCS landscapes also pass through neighboring landscapes managed by APN, Noé, AWF, and ANI at other times of year. Others come from Sudan, other parts of Chad, and further afield. Engaging these conservation partners through new platforms and collaborations is an explicit part of the strategy.

Core Landscapes



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Bamingui-Manovo

- 114,722 KM²

Bamingui-Bangoran and Manovo Gounda Saint Floris National Parks, the future Idongo-Ngassa Special Reserve, and the vast Northern CAR Corridor, together forming the largest landscape under WCS management. It is where the northern lion holds on in fragments. Fully delegated management gives WCS operational control, but insecurity from armed groups and displacement shapes daily reality. Transhumants have moved into this landscape over the past 50 years, and the woody savanna mosaic connecting its parks are the critical arteries for both wildlife movement and pastoral livelihoods.

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CAMEROON | CHAD

Bénoué-Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura

- 25,257 KM² across multiple PAs

A transboundary complex spanning two countries: Benoue and Bouba Ndjidda National Parks in Cameroon, Sena Oura National Park in Chad, and the hunting concessions and protected zones that connect them. This is the landscape where the strategy's transboundary architecture is most visible: the same transhumants cross these parks seasonally. Pastoral corridor development is already underway. The pressure of elite herding is most acute here, where increasing number of investors here place unprecedented demands on critical rangelands and agricultural expansion alters historic grazing pathways outside of the protected areas.

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NIGERIA

Yankari

- 2,244 KM²

One of the last viable populations of savanna elephants in West Africa. A single reserve surrounded by expanding agriculture and growing human populations. Co-management with the Bauchi State government gives WCS a direct governance role. The strategy here focuses on securing the park while building community partnerships that extend conservation influence beyond its boundaries.

© WCS



CAMEROON

Mbam et Djerem

- 4,165 KM²

At the southern edge of the Sudano-Sahel, where the savanna gives way to forest. Home to forest elephants, the only landscape in the strategy where this critically endangered species is present. Transhumant pressure is growing as herders move further south. Mbam et Djerem provides critical lessons for WCS programs in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo, where transhumant movements are now arriving at the forest frontier.

© Evelyne Malfliet

Protected Areas Supported

Country	Key Protected Areas	PA size	WCS Mandate (or Partner)	# People in Landscape
Nigeria	Yankari Game Reserve	2,244 km²	Co-Management	45,000
	Gashaka Gumti NP	6,400 km²	Africa Nature Investors Foundation (ANI)	100,000
Cameroon	Mbam et Djerem NP	4,165 km²	Technical Assistance	50,000
	Benoue NP[2]	1,800 km²	Technical Assistance	56,000
	Bouba Ndjidda NP[3]	2,200 km²	Technical Assistance	
	Other BNB PAs	13,255 km²	Technical Assistance	75,000
	Faro National Park + UTO Faro	3,300 km² 4,028 km²	African Wildlife Foundation	N/A
CAR	Bamingui-Bangoran NP	10,941 km²	Fully Delegated	110,000 (estimated)
	Manovo Gounda Saint Floris NP	19,530 km²	Fully Delegated	
	Idongo-Ngassa Special Reserve (in process)	2,527 km²	WCS-Community partnership (TBD)	
	Northern CAR Corridor	81,724 km²	Fully Delegated	
	Chinko Nature Reserve	24,335 km²	African Parks Network (APN)	N/A
	Andre Felix NP	951 km²	APN	N/A
Chad	Sena Oura NP	735 km²	Technical Assistance	35,000
	Aouk NP	7,400 km²	APN	N/A
	Zakouma NP	3,000 km²	APN	N/A
	Siniaka Minia NP	4,260 km²	APN	N/A
	Binder-Léré Protected Area Complex (+ Zah Soo NP)	1,350 km²	Noe	N/A
WCS Total		139,121 km²		371,000

Table 1 WCS-supported protected areas included in this Strategy, and the general human population size (permanent and seasonal). Additional landscapes connected to our landscapes with similar pastoral dynamics are included to outline synergies.

[2] The Benoue UTO (technical operation unit) is 10,034km2
[3] The Bouba Ndjidda UTO is 7222km2

02.3

The People in the Landscape

Importance of pastoralism as lifestyles and livelihoods

For millions of people across the Sudano-Sahel, pastoralism is a cornerstone of the Sudano-Sahel's socio-economic fabric.

It provides vital food security, primarily meat and milk, for pastoralist communities and often contributes to national and regional food supplies. It is deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of many communities, shaping their social structures, traditions, and values. Cattle hold significant cultural value, representing wealth, status, and play a crucial role in social ceremonies and transactions. Thus, any loss of animals is deeply felt by households.



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Rangelands in the Sudano-Sahel ecosystem provide grazing land for livestock and supporting diverse ecosystems. Thus, sedentary and mobile people with livestock-based livelihoods are deeply intertwined with the region's unique ecosystems, contributing to biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management when livestock numbers are compatible.

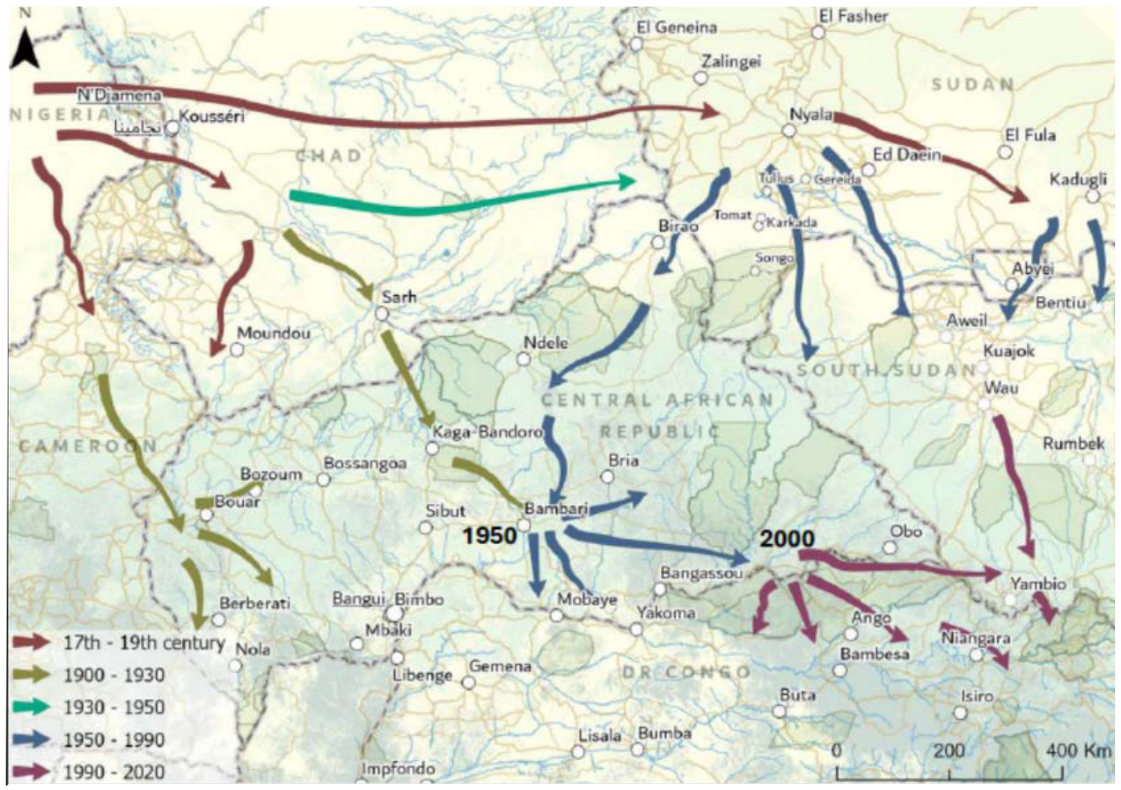


Figure 3 Map of historical pastoralist movements from West Africa to South Sudan and DRC from 1600s to 2020. Source: APN

When practiced sustainably, pastoralism can promote biodiversity and maintain healthy ecosystems by preventing overgrazing and allowing vegetation to regenerate. In protected areas where herbivore populations have been decimated, cattle can play a temporary functional ecological role as PAs are rewilded. However, overstocking and poorly managed grazing can lead to habitat degradation and biodiversity loss.

WCS respects the self-identification of Indigenous Peoples, including the Mbororo-Fulani (Peul) and Wodaabe-Fulani (Peul) groups in our program areas. The term “Local Communities” refers to the diverse ethnic groups, primarily farmers or sedentary agropastoralists holding some livestock, living adjacent to protected areas. Full definitions are in Annex 1.

Pastoralism in the Sudano-Sahel

The Sudano-Sahel is not home to a single pastoral community. It is home to at least four distinct segments, each with different histories, economic logics, and relationships to the land. The strategy succeeds or fails on whether it recognizes this stratification — because the engagement approach for each is fundamentally different.

Agropastoralists	Settled communities who cultivate crops and keep limited livestock close to home (Morris 2017). They have a strong local base, move little, and live in, and immediately adjacent to, our protected areas. These are the communities with the deepest, most continuous stake in the landscape — and the most to gain from co-designed governance.
Transhumants	Semi-nomadic pastoralists whose regular, cyclical movements cross climatic zones and often national borders (IOM 2019; Moritz 2010). Originating in West Africa, transhumant groups moved eastward over centuries to Nigeria and Chad; in the past 50 years they have moved south into Sena Oura and Bamingui-Manovo; in the past 20, further south into the Democratic Republic of Congo, reaching the northern edges of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. They are the most mobile and often the most politically marginalized. Securing corridors and formal recognition for transhumant movement is central to the strategy.



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Neo-eleveurs (Elite herders)	Large herds owned by economic, political, or military elites as secondary investments (Ajala 2019; GIZ 2024; WCS 2026). Investors engage family members or hire herders — often armed — for livestock purchased through cotton profits, civil service earnings, and other enterprises. The practice requires vast pasture, drives overgrazing, and marginalizes traditional pastoralists, who are frequently absorbed as hired help. Because of the political connections of owners, their herds enter protected areas with impunity. This is the most disruptive segment and the one that most often escapes the interventions from traditional community conservation. It requires a political economy response, not a livelihoods response.
Fringe pastoralism	The extreme manifestation (UN 2017) — heavy arms, kidnapping, extreme violence. This is not pastoralism. It is organized criminality using pastoral systems as cover. It requires a security-first response and must be clearly named as distinct from the three pastoral segments above, so that legitimate communities are not criminalized by association.

WHY THE DISTINCTION MATTERS

Treating these four groups as a single “pastoralist community” has been one of the most consequential errors of conservation practice in the region — it has driven both the criminalization of legitimate transhumants and the under-recognition of elite herding (neo-elevage) as an investor-driven phenomenon. The strategy’s five pillars are designed to engage each segment through the mechanism appropriate to it: agropastoralists through co-designed governance and livelihoods; transhumants through corridor recognition (land use planning) and rights-based mobility; elite herders through policy, political economy analysis, and enforcement; fringe actors through security coordination.

SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL REALITIES

Socio-ecological realities within mobile pastoral communities are heavily stratified by gender and age. While men act as primary negotiators, transhumant women hold independent capital and possess specific, highly refined ecological and zootechnical knowledge. Despite this, they remain structurally invisible in public governance. Concurrently, young men bear the primary burden of field labor and herd movement. Facing intensifying resource constraints and a changing landscape, these youth experience increasing economic discouragement, frequently causing them to temporarily exit the pastoral system to build independent livelihoods. Understanding these distinct household vulnerabilities is essential; failing to engage women and youth directly undermines the baseline stability of the traditional transhumant landscape.

02.4

Operating Reality
Five Converging Forces

This is a landscape of uncertainty shaped by five converging forces. No single one can be addressed in isolation.

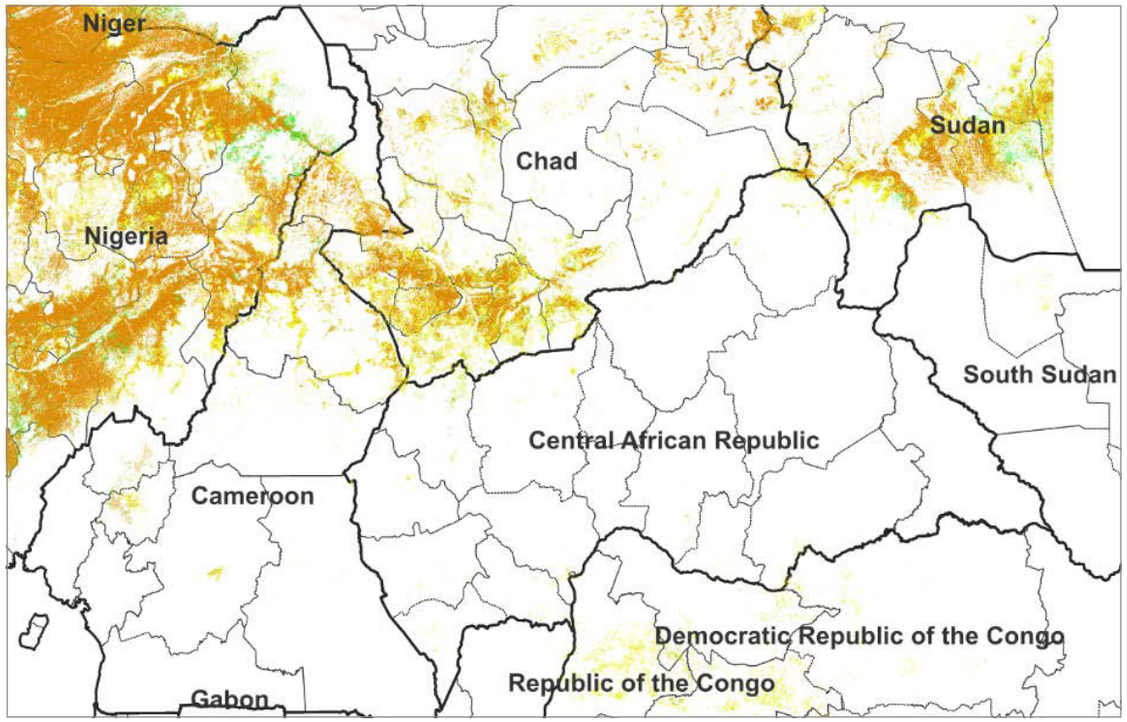


Figure 4

Loss of rangelands due to agricultural expansion in WCS's Sudano-Sahel region from 2000-2022. These have profound impacts on pastoral ways of life and protected areas which hold significant grazing resources.

FORCE 01

Agricultural expansion and land capture

Major agricultural expansion has occurred over recent decades in Nigeria and Cameroon, and to a lesser extent in Chad, driven by growing farming populations, government policies, and international investment in cash crops such as cotton. Pastoralist lands, communal rangelands and historical seasonal pastures, are being captured, privatized, and sold, pushing pastoralists to seek land inside protected areas.

The lack of secure year-round land tenure for mobile pastoral-ists is a major source of both inter-communal and park-people conflict. Mobile communities are heavily marginalized: their land tenure is at risk when they are not physically present, and government policies designate rangelands as publicly owned. Sedentary farming communities also face land losses from urbanization, cash cropping, and corruption in the allocation of titles.

Ranching is expanding in Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, driven by increasing demand for meat and growing investment in livestock production. Fencing restricts pastoralist mobility and disrupts traditional grazing patterns, increasing pressure on remaining open grazing land.

FORCE 02

Elite herding

Elite herding (neo-elevage) is a modern disruption that has changed the equation. Characterized by absentee-owned herds (large livestock holdings owned by economic, political, or military elites as a secondary investment), it is driven in part by the absence of formal banking systems, which makes cattle a primary store of value. Recent studies (GIZ 2024, WCS 2026) documents how ownership and husbandry are intertwined: investors engage family members or employ herders, often armed and acting under the protection of powerful patrons, to manage livestock purchased through profits from cotton, civil service earnings, other enterprises, and ill-gotten gains. Elite herd expansion frequently maps onto sensitive historic regional fault lines, and herders themselves are frequently poor pastoralists or Indigenous community members with few alternatives.

This practice requires vast areas of pasture, leads to overgrazing and resource depletion, and marginalizes traditional pastoral-ists who lack the resources to compete. Despite this, elite herding is often tolerated. Disenfranchized pastoralists become hired help, maintaining their traditional lifestyles through other people's cattle.

Elite herding causes major conflict with conservationists, as herders who care for cattle of elites often act with impunity and enter parks (often heavily armed) with little consequence given the political and social connections of the livestock owners.

FORCE 03

Insecurity

Insecurity across the four countries is complex and multifaceted. Shared drivers include political instability with ethnic tensions and armed rebel groups, climate-driven resource scarcity intensifying conflicts over land and water, mineral wealth attracting local and international actors, the spread of jihadism, and porous borders facilitating weapons and criminal networks.

The consequences for conservation work are direct: displacement of people internally and across borders (particularly at sites in Cameroon and CAR), social trauma and gender-based violence, increased poaching from armed actors, and general regional instability that destabilizes governance and hampers both conservation and development.

FORCE 04

Climate change and disease risk

Climate change is having a fundamental impact on farmers and pastoralists across the ecoregion. Changing rainfall patterns have led to severe flooding in Chad and water insecurity elsewhere. The variability in water and rangelands, coupled with insecurity, forces pastoralists into difficult choices. Often it is safer and more productive to take livestock into protected areas. Where lands around parks are surrounded by sedentary farmers, grazing in parks becomes the only option.

Land conversion, new habitat edges, wildlife trade, and agricultural intensification are driving infectious disease emergence. When contact rates between humans, domestic animals, and wildlife increase, so does pathogen transmission risk. Ecosystem degradation creates complex health feedback loops: increased prevalence of endemic diseases, vector-borne and waterborne infections, nutritional challenges, and broader climate-linked health effects. Pathogen transmission between livestock and wildlife populations can have devastating consequences at the population level.

FORCE 05

Disease Emergence

Land conversion, the creation of new habitat edges, wildlife trade and consumption, and agricultural intensification are all drivers of infectious disease emergence. When contact rates between humans, their domestic animals, and free-ranging wildlife are increased, so too is the risk of pathogen transmission between them. Ecosystem degradation also has complex health consequences for communities, creating feedback loops and significantly affecting other health aspects beyond emerging infectious diseases. For communities, these impacts can include increased prevalence of endemic epizootic diseases; increased prevalence of vector-borne and waterborne diseases; nutritional challenges; and broader health effects linked to climate change. Pathogen transmission between livestock and wildlife populations can also have devastating population-level consequences.

SECTION 03

Our Vision and Approach

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03.1

Vision and Values

Our vision is a resilient Sudano-Sahel where biodiversity thrives in connected landscapes, supporting peaceful, healthy, resilient pastoralist systems, sedentary communities, and coexistence with protected areas, in respect of pastoralist traditions and rights.

Values

WCS's mission is to save wildlife and wild places, and our strategy to engage with various forms of pastoralism will achieve this through a set of core values:

Respect	Centering human rights and social justice by recognizing and supporting different communities, genders and age groups as equal partners; their rights to self-determination; and their fundamental rights even in the face of climatic and economic change
Collaboration	Fostering partnerships and co-design with sedentary and mobile communities, government agencies, and other organizations to achieve shared goals and reduce conflict
Innovation	Encouraging creative and adaptive approaches in protected area management to address the challenges facing pastoralist communities in a changing climate and socio-political landscape
Sustainability and Resilience	Developing systems outside anchor parks that lead to long-term solutions and reduce vulnerabilities
Flexibility and Adaptation	Ensuring stakeholders remain open to changes in annual operations based on uncertain environmental and social contexts
Security	Developing security strategies to reduce risk and promote working environments that protect the safety and physical and mental health of staff and partners

These core values highlight a departure from longstanding combative relationships in the region between conservation agencies and pastoralists, where the latter are viewed as criminals by authorities and subordinate and/or marginalized by mainstream society. WCS will be working with partners and government agencies to change mindsets, minimize bias, develop strong human rights-based approaches that recognize and respect IPs rights to land and to maintain their way of life, and build partnerships with pastoralist peoples.[4]

[4] See Annex 1 for more details on pastoralism and Indigenous Peoples.

Approach

Protect the anchors

National parks function as the ecological anchors of the landscape — the cores where integrity is non-negotiable and where wildlife populations can stabilize and recover. These are Bamingui, Manovo, Benoue, Bouba Ndjidda, Sena Oura, Yankari, and Mbam et Djerem.

Scale into the multiple-use mosaic

Anchor parks alone cannot sustain wildlife or resolve the pasto-ralism question. We extend protection and co-management into the corridors, hunting concessions, Category V/VI reserves, and rangelands that surround them — the ~44%. This is where coexistence is brokered.

Sustain through partnership and policy

The outer ring — neighboring landscapes (APN, Noé, AWF, ANI), regional policy frameworks (Ndjamena Declaration, ECCAS), and cross-border coordination — is what keeps the anchor-to-multiple-use model durable over time.



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SECTION 04

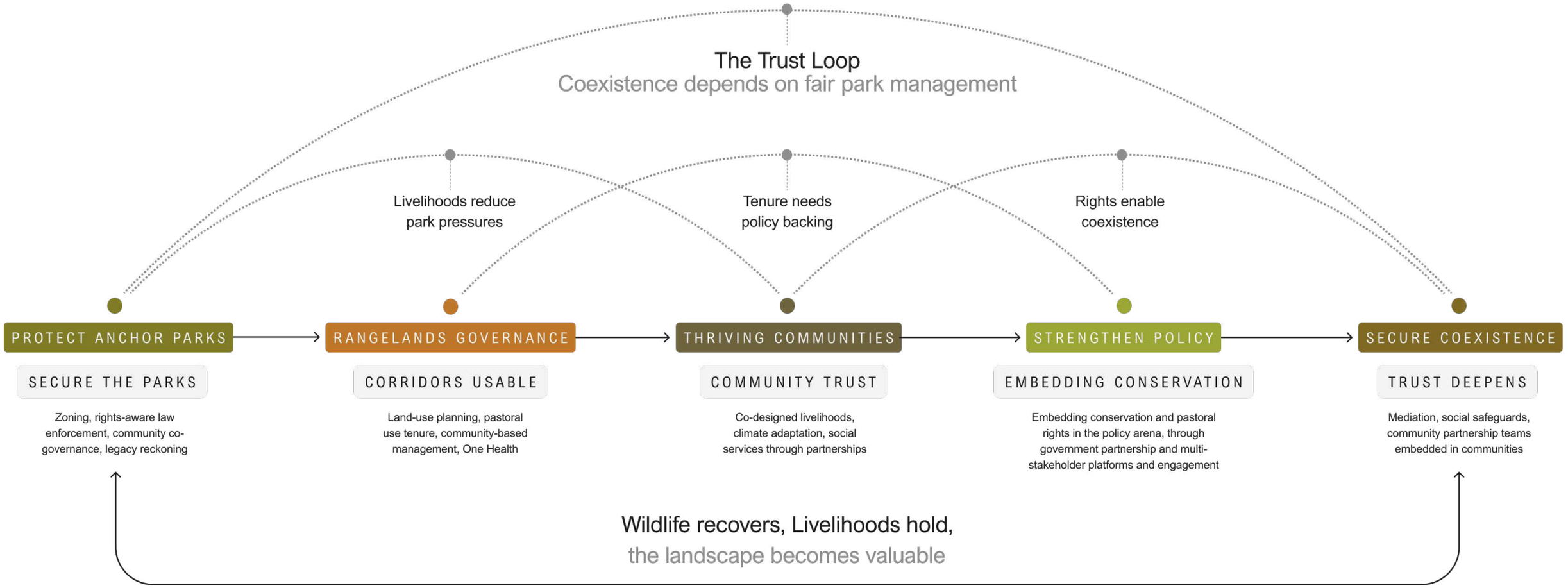
The Pillars: How We Deliver

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The Pillars:
How We Deliver

While the region benefits from stakeholders with specialized site-based management, pastoralist programming, and localized mediation, WCS provides the transboundary architecture necessary to link these efforts across our anchored landscapes. By leveraging simultaneous management mandates across Nigeria, Cameroon, CAR, and Chad, WCS acts as a strategic convener to secure rangeland integrity and ecological health within specific transboundary clusters—such as the Benoue-Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura complex. Our distinctive contribution lies in integrating One Health, technical expertise, and rights-based programming into a framework that manages the spaces between our anchored parks, protecting the remaining migration arteries and intact grasslands that are essential for both wildlife and livestock health. To achieve our vision of biodiversity thriving in connected landscapes, WCS has five intertwined strategic pillars for sustainable coexistence between biodiversity and different pastoral communities.

The five pillars described in the following section are a system. The corridor only works if communities trust the governance of the park. That trust depends on conflict resolution and livelihood alternatives. Both require a policy environment that recognizes pastoralists' rights. Every investment in one pillar increases the return on the others.



PILLAR 01

Protecting the Anchor Parks

The anchor parks are the foundation of everything else in this strategy. If they are not effectively managed, the corridors, the rangelands, and the community partnerships that depend on them cannot function.

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Effectively manage protected areas

The anchor parks are the foundation of everything else in this strategy. If they are not effectively managed, the corridors, the rangelands, and the community partnerships that depend on them cannot function.

WCS achieves protected area management through Collaborative Management Partnerships with, or technical assistance to, governments. This is an integrated approach: community conservation, law enforcement, ecosystem management, One Health, and sustainable financing, underpinned by strong operational management and capacity building. WCS considers the large national parks as anchors for conservation and stability. Other protected areas (IUCN Category V and VI) are multi-use areas where pastoralism and conservation must coexist, and where innovation in shared management can flourish.

CORE ACTIONS

Develop general management plans, strengthen protected area management capacity and effectiveness across key sites, establish fire management systems and monitor wildlife populations and livestock movements.

Zone protected areas and core reserves

To manage for a mosaic of different land uses, WCS will develop zoning plans for each landscape that identify rights, use science-based regulation, and engage rights-holding users throughout the process. Zones will include core wilderness, limited sustainable use, grazing, multiple use (including village areas and agriculture), safari hunting, tourism concessions, and potentially special economic zones. Sustainable use zones may include fishing, non-timber forest products, and in some cases managed grazing for climate emergencies and habitat management. Where ungulate populations are very low, monitored grazing systems may be ecologically beneficial, with cattle playing a functional role as protected areas are rewilded.

CORE ACTIONS

Develop zoning plans for protected area mosaics that identify core wilderness areas, tourism zones, and sustainable use zones. The process will include identifying rights, using science-based regulation, engaging rights-holding users (pastoralists, fishers, and other users) and relevant stakeholders throughout the process and to agree upon a final zoning plan for each PA. Once finalized, boundary demarcation and outreach will be critical to avoid conflicts.

PILLAR 01

Facilitate IP & LC participation in national park governance

Many neighboring communities held customary tenure before the creation of protected areas. WCS will work towards IP & LCs having a voice in the governance of the protected areas under our mandate. For national parks, this will include IP & LC seats on the governance boards (and the governance group structure needed to ensure equitable representation from different communities) as well as mechanisms for IP & LCs to participate in the management and decision-making processes of sustainable use zones in protected areas. The core challenges: ensuring traditional PA agencies share power with communities, developing safe pathways for transhumant women and youth to break through traditional public invisibility, and building trust between IP and LCs and WCS.

CORE ACTIONS

Engage governments to adopt shared governance systems, work with partner organizations to develop representative and mobile-community-inclusive local governance structures for IP & LCs.

Strengthen conservation law enforcement systems/ Rights-aware law enforcement

A core challenge across this vast geography is that many transhumants, agropastoralists, and other local actors are unaware of park boundaries, rules, and regulations, and in nearly all cases have not been consulted on significant changes affecting their access to grazing lands. Low trust with park rangers is reinforced by perceptions of unfairness. Rangers enforce park boundaries and remove herders, but the state outside parks does not provide adequate protection of pastoralist rights when herders are refused access to land controlled by sedentary communities, often provoking intercommunal violence.

WCS uses a human rights-based approach to law enforcement, ensuring rangers and other agents are trained in human rights and de-escalation. Outreach must extend far beyond park boundaries, through community radio, WhatsApp, information stands at vaccination posts, community engagement officers deployed at borders, and the EU-funded Borderlands Program (Concordis and Humanitarian Dialogue in CAR, Chad, and Cameroon).

Conservation law enforcement is a key pillar in all our site strategies across the region and is critical in this region's context where armed conflict drives instability and lawlessness. Based upon the zoning of the national parks, LE will be enacted in core wilderness areas and throughout the national parks. This will differ slightly in IUCN Category 5 and 6 protected areas (concessions, reserves) where a more flexible approach is needed and will be based upon zoning and agreements made with IP & LC communities.

CORE ACTIONS

Build up sufficient, equipped, trained (including human rights and de-escalation) ranger teams; clearly define their purpose and function vis-a-vis communities (sedentary and pastoralist); ensure strong MOUs with other law enforcement agencies; community conservation (CoCo) teams to set up information systems for IP & LC communities and other stakeholders to know protected area rules & regulations and agree upon sanctions for violators.

Recognize and mitigate legacy issues of protected areas

Many of the protected areas in the region were created during an era where the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities were insufficiently considered, and in many cases, violated. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) was not a recognized practice; government agencies created protected areas and decided upon boundaries unilaterally or with limited involvement of community leaders. The result has been vast areas of lands that overlap with traditional territories and cattle migration routes; IP & LCs failing to recognize the legitimacy of PAs; and a lack of support for conservation initiatives. Many protected areas created in the past have not been managed for decades and only exist on paper. As governments seek to reassert management (for example in old hunting concessions), these legacy issues are a source of major conflict.

CORE ACTIONS

Conduct FPIC on all future PA zoning and boundary initiatives; mitigate PA-people conflicts with the help of specialist partners; develop a legacy issues strategy that focuses on peaceful solutions for conflicting land use and develops constituencies for PAs.

PILLAR 01

Protecting the Anchor Parks Impact

WHAT IT DELIVERS

The ecological core. Anchor parks managed to a standard that allows wildlife populations to stabilize and recover, and governance arrangements that make that recovery durable rather than dependent on any single administration.

OUTCOMES

Lion occupancy in integrally protected zones stabilized within five years, with net increase in spatial distribution over ten years

Large mammal populations in integrally protected zones stable or increasing within five years

50% reduction in unauthorized grazing in core protected zones

Ecological integrity indicators (ungulates, elephants, vultures, large carnivores) holding or improving across all anchor parks

Without ecological anchors, there is nothing for the surrounding mosaic to connect to. Pillar 1 secures the cores that provide a foundation for the landscapes to reconnect and recover.

PILLAR 02

Resilient rangelands
Managing the Space Between the Parks

Nearly half (44%) of the conservation lands WCS supports are not national parks. They are hunting concessions, reserves, buffer zones, and corridors: the contested space where pasto-ralism and conservation must find practical accommodation.

These rangelands are critical for the culture and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people; ensuring that these ecosystems remain productive and well managed is critical for the integrity of the protected areas and sustainable use of natural resources

WCS will develop participatory management systems with concession operators, smaller NGOs, or community-based governance groups with a common goal of sustainable use. In Namibia's arid regions, such as the Kunene (home to Himba and Herero pastoralists), communal conservancies are a leading example of how traditional herding can coexist with wildlife. The model relies on creating land-use zones—separating core grazing areas from core wildlife areas while designating seasonal corridors that both can use. For herders, the benefits come not just from tourism revenue but from a systematic approach to reducing conflict, which is crucial for corridor management.

What are Transhumance Corridors?	Large, contiguous networks of PAs do not account for trans-humant movements through landscapes, resulting in poor knowledge and coordination of grazing patterns to secure wildlife and human access to rangelands. As conflict, climate, and population growth contribute to existing and evolving cattle movements, coordination to direct these movements into 'safe' areas is extremely urgent to reduce armed conflict, support transhumant security, and manage rangelands for wildlife and cattle. The creation of 'transhumance corridors' is an effort by conservation organizations to engage customary landowners, governments, and transhumant communities to demarcate pathways for cattle to pass through PAs and agricultural lands, and avoid national parks.

PILLAR 02

Develop land-use planning systems

Participatory land-use planning processes will manage corridors (WCS is already developing corridor systems in CAR and around Sena Oura and Bouba Ndjidda through multi-stakeholder engagement), secure pastoral tenure (current corridor delineation is interim; formal tenure systems are needed to prevent rangeland conversion to farmland), zone agricultural areas (uncontrolled expansion is the major threat to non-park protected areas), and manage infrastructure and extractive resources on PA peripheries.

*Significant LUP processes are (or will be) in development across our landscapes to:

Manage corridors	Support conservation efforts beyond our landscapes and ensure access to basic resources during transhumant migration, WCS will partner with conservation NGOs, peace-building organizations and pastoralist groups to coordinate planning and track movements of long-distance transhumants.
Secure pastoral rights to rangelands	Work with governments and encourage NGOs such as the Tenure Facility who facilitate land tenure solutions to support transhumants to secure lands and seasonal access to resources while at the same time ensuring rangelands do not get converted to farmland.
Zone agricultural areas	Engage government agencies to align a single vision for PA land use (and lands that border parks). Uncontrolled agricultural expansion is the major threat to non-park protected areas and can lead to conflict as it restricts access to areas for transhumants.
Manage infrastructure and extractive resources	Work with government, NGO and private sector actors to plan infrastructure development inside or on the peripheries of PAs and develop special economic zones that provide guidance and management over extractive enterprises in/around PAs.

*New changes in access to land or land tenure systems in protected areas and corridors require a rigorous and inclusive Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) process, which is part of WCS's standard Human Rights-Based Approach.

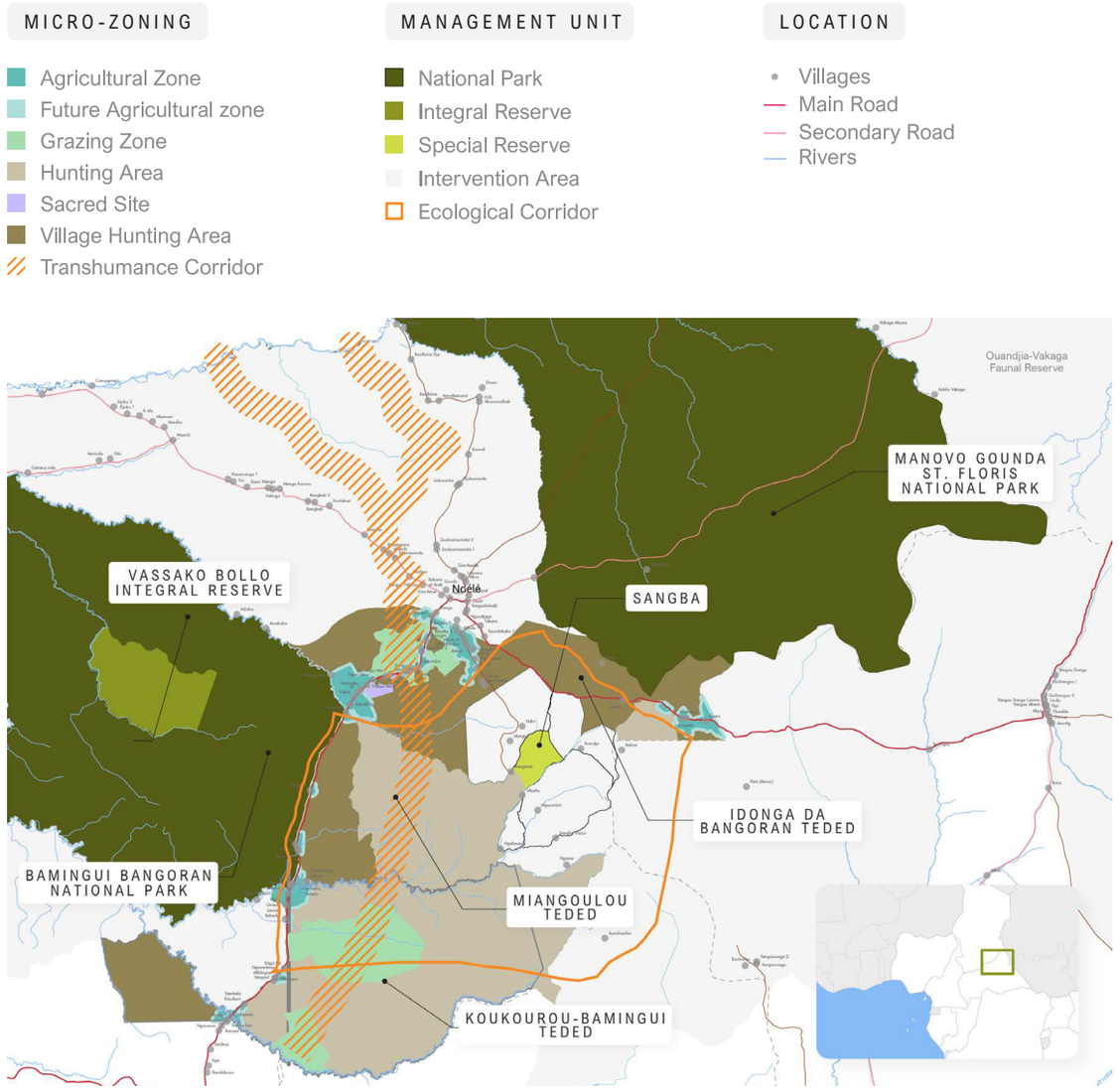


Figure 7 Example of a draft participatory land use designations between anchor parks in CAR, including a transhumance corridor through the middle. Working with both pastoralists and farmers on agreed land use is critical for ensuring pastoralists have space outside national parks to graze and move their animals.

CORE ACTIONS

Develop site-specific strategies that outline a multi-stakeholder vision for land use and coordinate with stakeholders at local, national, and regional levels; advocate with governments to adopt innovative policies on PA management.

PILLAR 02

Develop community-based natural resource management systems

Small PAs in the landscapes have strong potential for communities to regain levels of tenure and stewardship over these areas to ensure they are effectively managed. WCS will support interested sedentary and mobile communities and institutions (ALGEST (village hunting zone associations in CAR), ILODs (local decision-making bodies in Chad)) to develop community-managed or co-managed areas (e.g. community conservancies or community forests). This will require strengthening local governance systems and helping IP & LC communities develop management systems such as sustainable fisheries, non-timber forest product (NTFP) value chains, and community-based sustainable wildlife management.

CORE ACTIONS

Partner with conflict mitigation and organizational development partners to strengthen local governance groups and community institutions. Design pilot community concessions with strong rangeland governance and management.

Establish flexible rangeland management systems

Climate vulnerability and insecurity are key concerns of pastoralists, often driving their movement patterns. WCS will work with pasto-ralists, governments, transhumance platforms, and other stakeholders to co-produce knowledge and ensure flexible management systems within both large and small protected areas to mitigate conflict and support pastoralist lifeways. These flexible managements systems include:

Fire management regimes which are crucial for maintaining the health and productivity of rangelands, mitigating the risks of wildfires, and protecting wildlife and plant diversity

Rotational grazing systems to reduce pressures on grasslands and support coexistence with target ungulate species

Rangeland hydrology systems that do not exacerbate overgrazing and human wildlife conflict nor undermine watersheds

Adaptable management systems that respect core wilderness zones whilst developing zoning for emergency situations specified by agreements with pastoralist stakeholders that include rules and regulations for exceptional circumstances.

With this information, multi-stakeholder plans will include early warning systems to reduce climate and security vulnerability, drought/flood preparedness systems, and steps for strengthening economic resilience of mobile and sedentary communities (see Section 5.3).

CORE ACTIONS

Placing co-production of knowledge on rangeland management at the forefront, WCS will support IP & LC knowledge production and agency in developing fine-scale landscape-level climate vulnerability scenarios with key stakeholders, identify critical watersheds for wildlife and people, and engage with partners to outline fire/rangeland/hydrology management systems approaches.

PILLAR 02

Resilient rangelands Impact

WHAT IT DELIVERS

The spatial logic that turns anchor parks into a functional landscape. Corridors secured, rangelands planned, the ~44% of multiple-use area brought into a coherent management frame.

OUTCOMES

Land-use plans developed for connective rangelands in at least three landscapes

Transhumant corridors secured through formal recognition around at least four national parks

Resilient rangelands: pastoralist and community-managed lands outside anchor parks functioning ecologically and economically

Pillar 2 is what makes the Sudano-Sahel function as a landscape rather than a collection of islands and gives transhumants a legitimate, recognized geography to operate within.

PILLAR 03

Thriving Communities

WCS is committed to supporting both mobile and sedentary communities—from farmers and agropastoralists to Indigenous transhumants who travel through landscapes where we work to continue their traditional lifeways.

Ensuring that communities have their basic needs met enables them to effectively continue as stewards of lands and natural resources and partners in conservation efforts.

Communities whose basic needs are not met cannot be effective stewards of the lands they live on. This pillar exists because genuine conservation partnership is only possible when people have resilient livelihoods, climate buffers, and access to basic services. Community resilience and conservation success are not competing priorities. They are the same outcome.



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Livelihood strengthening & diversification

WCS will partner with local and international NGOs to co-design conflict-sensitive livelihood programming aligned with community-led local development plans. To ensure these interventions support traditional household safety nets rather than disrupting them, initiatives will include livestock services (as outlined in 5.2.4) and explicitly target the distinct economic domains of women and youth. For women, livestock-derived value chains—such as milk, butter, and small livestock processing—where they traditionally hold independent capital but lack market access. For young men, programming can focus on technical and veterinary capacity building, herd security tracking tools, and climate-smart fodder banks to lower the high operational barriers that currently drive youth discouragement and displacement.

Building adaptive capacity is crucial for enabling both mobile and sedentary communities to withstand increasing climate shocks such as droughts and floods. Where feasible, we will support community-led adaptation planning. This approach includes promoting climate-smart livelihood buffers, such as fodder banks and village savings groups, to strengthen household economic resilience against climate-related losses. Furthermore, we will explore investments in sustainable water infrastructure and improved herd management to protect the core natural and economic assets upon which pastoralist life-ways depend.

CORE ACTIONS

Conduct value chain analyses for each landscape; conduct climate vulnerability analyses; tech-based program development; partner with livestock enterprise development NGOs to build livelihood programs for mobile and sedentary communities.

Social services

Health and educational infrastructure are insufficient in most of our landscapes due to weak government investment and insecurity. Whilst WCS is not a development organization, investment in literacy, basic health services, and water infrastructure that supports both mobile and sedentary communities is a basic need outlined by many communities and is an engine for resilience and sustainable landscapes. WCS will partner with communities and, as appropriate, with local and international NGOs to invest in these systems, ensuring a ‘buffer zone parity’ to ensure water points are strategically placed away from park boundaries to pull pressure off core conservation zones. Sustainable financing and local capacity will be critical for long-term outcomes.

CORE ACTIONS

Support water infrastructure along cattle corridors; engage with NGO partners to evaluate existing efforts and then with communities to map out gaps.

PILLAR 03

One Health

WCS recognizes that intact, functional, and resilient ecosystems provide the foundation for life, health, and well-being. In the Sudano-Sahel region, where ecological systems are deeply intertwined with the livelihoods of mobile, transboundary pastoralist communities, a cross-cutting One Health approach reflects the perspectives of local communities and integrates human, domestic animal, and wildlife health into a unified framework. By aligning conservation efforts with health and development goals, a comprehensive strategy can protect the health of humans, livestock, and wildlife (carnivores and ungulates), while simultaneously supporting sustainable livelihoods and conservation goals. With WCS's extensive history of integrating health into our landscape-based conservation approaches across the globe, we are uniquely positioned to partner with key stakeholders on:

Disease surveillance and early warning systems to detect and mitigate disease outbreaks before they escalate

Animal health care and access to veterinary services, such as vaccination programs, to improve livestock and domestic animal health and reduce disease transmission between livestock and wildlife

Improving hygiene and sanitation systems within communities to prevent the spread of zoonotic and other infectious diseases

Improving access to healthcare services and nutrition to improve overall community health and resilience

Fostering community engagement, participation, and ownership through outreach and education programs that build trust and shared responsibility for health and conservation

As a wildlife organization, WCS will also engage at a policy level to advocate for government commitments to wildlife conservation and the integration of One Health principles into national and regional frameworks.

CORE ACTIONS

To operationalize this approach, WCS will conduct an initial analysis of health challenges across these landscapes, and current actors delivering health-related services and interventions to develop and/or enhance a tailored One Health Strategy for each. This strategic framework will guide the implementation of integrated actions that benefit people, livestock and other domestic animals, wildlife, and ecosystems, ensuring that the interconnected health of all species is recognized and protected.

PILLAR 03

Thriving Communities Impact

WHAT IT DELIVERS

Pastoralists and farming communities as co-architects of programming rather than subjects of it. Tangible benefits, recognized rights, and a relationship with conservation that is durable because it is mutual.

OUTCOMES

Targeted pastoral programming supporting livelihood activities for women and youth in at least five landscapes

Human Wellbeing Index scores across sites with 50% of targeted pastoralist report improved wellbeing

Cultural lifeways: pastoralist traditions, mobility, and identity actively supported rather than eroded

Equitable benefits and conservation co-ownership: communities share in the value generated by the landscape

Human rights respected and embedded in ranger operations, governance, and programming

Resilience is not only ecological. A landscape where communities are thriving, rights respected, and economically secure is a landscape where conservation has social license to endure. Without this pillar, the others are defended against the people who live there rather than with them.



PILLAR 04

Changing the Policy Environment

Sustainable rangeland management and wildlife conservation are typically absent from pastoral policy dialogues. Conservation is perceived as a barrier to economic growth and pastoralist rights, a view reinforced by livestock policies that ignore conservation land use. Conservation laws are frequently seen as illegitimate and are difficult to enforce.

Sustainable rangeland management and wildlife conservation are typically absent from pastoral policy dialogues. Conservation is often perceived as a barrier to economic growth and pastoralist rights, a view reinforced by livestock policies that largely ignore conservation land use. Consequently, conservation laws are frequently seen as illegitimate and are difficult to enforce. A central tenet of our APT strategy is therefore to build collaborative partnerships that bring together diverse actors—from pastoralist communities and government agencies to NGOs and the private sector—to create and implement shared conservation plans.

PILLAR 04

Policy engagement

The success of this APT Strategy is fundamentally linked to strong partnerships with host governments and the ministries that guide national policy. The challenges facing pastoral-ism, conservation, and land use are complex and cut across multiple sectors, often requiring enhanced alignment between different policy frameworks. Our role is to act as a dedicated technical partner, supporting governments in navigating these complexities to achieve shared national goals for security, sustainable development, and biodiversity conservation.

To this end, WCS country programs will seek to engage collaboratively with government partners to advance key policy areas, including:

Developing flexible protected area management plans that incorporate sustainable-use zoning across broader protected area landscapes and recognize community rights.

Piloting innovative co-management models for hunting concessions and other multiple-use areas (IUCN Category VI).

Ensuring inclusive protected area governance that formally integrates IP & LC communities and upholds pastoralist rights.

Strengthening national animal health policies and services to support resilient livestock systems.

Harmonizing land and agricultural policies to mitigate resource competition and reduce conflict between farming and pastoralist communities.

Supporting the development of clear management mandates that are effective and explicitly uphold human rights.

CORE ACTIONS

Identify internal focal points to participate in national pastoral fora; develop government engagement strategies for each country; identify topics for research as needed on political economy and land use and tenure.

Partnerships

To capture the different actors, each WCS site has conducted a stakeholder analysis, and together we have a cross-regional stakeholder mapping. There are many synergistic programs in the region, particularly GIZ's PETRA (peaceful transhumance), EU Borderlands Program (conflict mitigation), and CaSeVe (Green and Resilient Northern Cameroon) amongst others. Universities and research institutions are also important future partners who can help understand complex ecological and social systems. Breaking through our sometimes-siloed approach to conservation, proactive participation and engagement with these programs will improve long-term success of our conservation objectives.

A core area of growth for WCS will be the development of partnerships with grassroots and civil society organizations. Long term sustainability and scaling of our work will depend upon work through community institutions who share the vision of resilient rangelands, sustainable livelihoods, protection of cultural lifeways, and biodiversity conservation. This will likely require WCS supporting organizational capacity building and developing funding streams for them.

CORE ACTIONS

Identify and develop partnerships with local organizations; strengthen local governance; identify WCS focal points to engage in synergistic programs.

PILLAR 04

Multistakeholder platforms

Based on WCS land management mandates, each WCS landscape will be the convener of a multi-stakeholder platform. Key topics for collaboration include transhumance corridors, transboundary migration and crime, land-use planning, conflict mitigation, economic opportunities, One Health actions, transhumance permits, and compliance with conservation law. At a regional level, WCS participates in other key initiatives and should strengthen dialogue, accenting lessons learned across our sites.

Ndjamena Declaration

The 2019 Ndjamena Declaration is a guiding framework for policymakers, development agencies, and other stakeholders that recognizes the rights and important roles of pastoralists in ecosystem management and conservation and emphasizes the need for sustainable land use practices that balance the needs of pastoralists with the conservation of biodiversity. There are three blocks for implementation of this pastoralist rights framework, of which WCS leads one.

CORE ACTIONS

Design a replicable approach for site-based multistakeholder platforms; develop a concept note to strengthen or establish our engagement with existing platforms and nominate focal points; contribute data into IRAM/OFAC and CEBEVHIRA transhumance observatories.

Transfrontier collaboration

WCS will work with government, peace-building partners, GIZ, African Parks Network (APN), and other national and international partners through our landscape platforms to ensure peaceful and constructive engagement with international transhumants. This includes joint transhumance corridors and grazing agreements, rights-protection, and ensuring the safe movement of livestock while minimizing human-wildlife conflict.

Furthermore, WCS will work with government agencies and conservation partners to strengthen law enforcement and combat wildlife trafficking.

CORE ACTIONS

Capitalize on past WCS pastoral program outcomes and outline a rights-based approach for international transhumance.

Engage absentee cattle owners

As a relatively new economic force, elite herding (neo-élevage) presents a profound structural threat to protected areas due to its heavy environmental and social footprint and a complex, often armed network of actors operating with relative impunity. To counter this, WCS is actively collaborating with researchers to map the specific political economy of our landscapes and determine how best to engage both the remote elite investors and their local herd keepers. Operationalizing this requires WCS and partners to deploy specialized staff and conflict-mitigation specialists equipped to constructively navigate these group dynamics and address unsustainable grazing within protected areas. Finally, because this is an elite-driven commercial sector, interventions may also expand beyond landscapes to engage national-level business forums and chambers of commerce to address private-sector compliance standards

CORE ACTIONS

Conduct Political Economy Analyses (PEAs) in each landscape to understand livestock investors and keepers; collaborate with partners and researchers on future iterations of research; use adaptive management principles to convert research into site-specific mitigation efforts.

PILLAR 04

Changing the Policy Environment Impact

WHAT IT DELIVERS

The legal and institutional scaffolding that lets the landscape-scale model survive shifts in government, funding, and politics. WCS acts not as a pastoral rights advocate but as a technical partner that embeds conservation in pastoral policy — so ecological connectivity, wildlife protection, and managed grazing are recognized as mutually reinforcing, shifting conservation from adversary to enabler of pastoral actors' own legal protections, corridor rights, and cross-border agreements.

OUTCOMES

Conservation integrated into pastoral frameworks: Conservation, ecological connectivity, and wildlife management are formally recognized as essential pillars, rather than constraints, within national pastoral and land-use policy frameworks across all four countries.

Pastoral actors empowered in policy arenas: National and regional pastoral associations successfully utilize multi-stakeholder platforms to secure formal legal standing for transhu-mance corridors and open rangelands.

Strengthened transboundary governance: Cross-border transhumance agreements and regional coalitions (such as the N'Djamena Declaration frameworks) are advanced directly by state and regional pastoral actors, with ecological connectivity fully integrated into their design.

Field-level gains could potentially collapse without policy to hold them. Pillar 4 is what turns a successful program into a durable system.



PILLAR 05

Coexistence

Conflict is not a side-effect of working in the Sudano-Sahel. It is the operating environment. Pastoral-conservation, agriculture-pastoral, and inter-pastoral tensions are permanent features, compounded by a larger web of systemic fragility: livestock banditry, destabilizing political actors, and weak state apparatus that challenge local governance and the baseline stability coexistence depends on.

Coexistence is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of systems to manage it. Approaches that address root causes such as competition over resources, predation, and differing land-use practices among different communities. WCS brings global conflict-mitigation expertise, building site-level capacity through regional partnerships and working with professional organizations on larger-scale conflict.

Park-People Mediation Systems and Social Cohesion

WCS, alongside neutral, trusted conflict mitigation partners, will map different conflicts within each site and develop grassroots conflict mediation platforms that include both sedentary and mobile communities, particularly young herders who are the frontline actors physically navigating changing corridors and park borders. In addition to addressing past injustices, broader legacy issues, active conflicts, and human-wildlife conflict will be addressed. WCS staff, including rangers, will need training on conflict de-escalation and prevention, recognizing the distinct social pressures facing young herders on the ground.

In addition to PA-community conflict, local conflict between different community actors is a major source of insecurity. Although not directly involved, WCS will encourage investment by other stakeholders in social cohesion and farmer/herder conflict mitigation systems.

CORE ACTIONS

Partner with conflict mitigation partners; develop human-wildlife coexistence action plans; train community teams, rangers and park managers in conflict de-escalation techniques.

Social safeguard systems (FPIC, GRM, EWS)

Ensuring WCS has in place robust and auditable safeguards systems is a priority for all sites. Establishing Grievance Redress Mechanisms serves a critical role to flag and quickly address problems with IP & LCs. Where appropriate, WCS and partners will investigate the establishment of safety and security early warning systems (EWS), which can provide alerts and preparation for larger insecurity events and weather-related crises. Land-use planning initiatives, including the development of corridors, community co-managed protected areas, programming with IPs that may impact their livelihoods and culture, and changes in access to land/resources will require robust FPIC systems to circumvent future land conflicts between people and protected areas.

CORE ACTIONS

Train staff on safeguards systems; ensure GRMs in place at each landscape; develop and train staff on FPIC implementation and documentation; ensure access restrictions are understood by all staff; engage partners on transhumance tracking tools (TTT).

PILLAR 05

Community engagement systems

Underpinning our engagement is a tiered system where CoCo (community conservation) teams work with sedentary villages while specialized CoPa (Conservation & Pastoralism) units serve as the first wave of engagement for mobile transhumants. Recruited directly from these communities for their linguistic and cultural fluency, COPAs can use dedicated, real-time spatial data and geofenced park and agricultural zones to proactively redirect herds away from protected areas while remaining digitally linked to park Operations Rooms to ensure staff safety and rights-based coordination. To provide clear community incentives, these teams are professionally trained in One Health services, such as livestock vaccination and disease surveillance, alongside conflict mediation and human rights. This integrated approach transforms local men and women into the “outward face” of a strategy that balances ecological integrity with the essential needs of pastoralist livelihoods.

The TANGO Model: Peace through Dialogue

Developed by African Parks in the Chinko Conservation Area, the TANGO (Transhumance Engagement Officers) system replaces traditional armed enforcement with “tea diplomacy” led by officers recruited from pastoralist communities. These teams focus on cultural fluency and linguistic alignment to build trust for voluntary compliance with seasonal grazing corridors. The model has successfully reduced illegal incursions in Chinko and serves as the strong example by which conservation organizations use for engaging pastoralists.

CORE ACTIONS

Strengthen community engagement, build out CoPa teams for each site through hiring and equipping local staff, design offline data-drive spatial guidance tools, develop wide-ranging and culturally appropriate wide-ranging training systems.

PILLAR 05

Coexistence Impact

WHAT IT DELIVERS

Conflict treated as the operating environment rather than an exception. Dedicated mediation infrastructure, trained Conservation & Pastoralist (CoPa) teams, and physical security for staff, partners, and communities.

OUTCOMES

Physical security: mobile and sedentary communities carry out economic and social activities free from armed conflict

Social cohesion between agropastoralist, transhumant, elite herders, and farming communities strengthened across the landscape

One Health programming established in at least three landscapes, reducing disease transmission risk at the pastoralist–livestock–wildlife interface and creating a connective tissue of shared benefit

Reduced incidence of violent human–wildlife and human–human conflict in and around anchor parks

In the Sudano-Sahel, the question is not whether conflict will occur but how it will be managed. Pillar 5 is what keeps the rest of the strategy operable when the region is under stress — and stress is the baseline, not the exception.





The pillars, taken together, produce three reinforcing outcomes:

1	Thriving biodiversity	Anchor parks secure and recovering. Wildlife populations stable or increasing. Ecological integrity holding across the landscape mosaic, not just inside park boundaries.
2	Thriving communities	Pastoralist and farming communities with recognized rights, secure livelihoods, cultural continuity, and genuine partnership in the governance of the landscape they depend on.
3	A durable system	Policy frameworks, cross-border coordination, conflict mediation, and One Health infrastructure that together allow the first two outcomes to survive climate shocks, political instability, and demographic pressure.

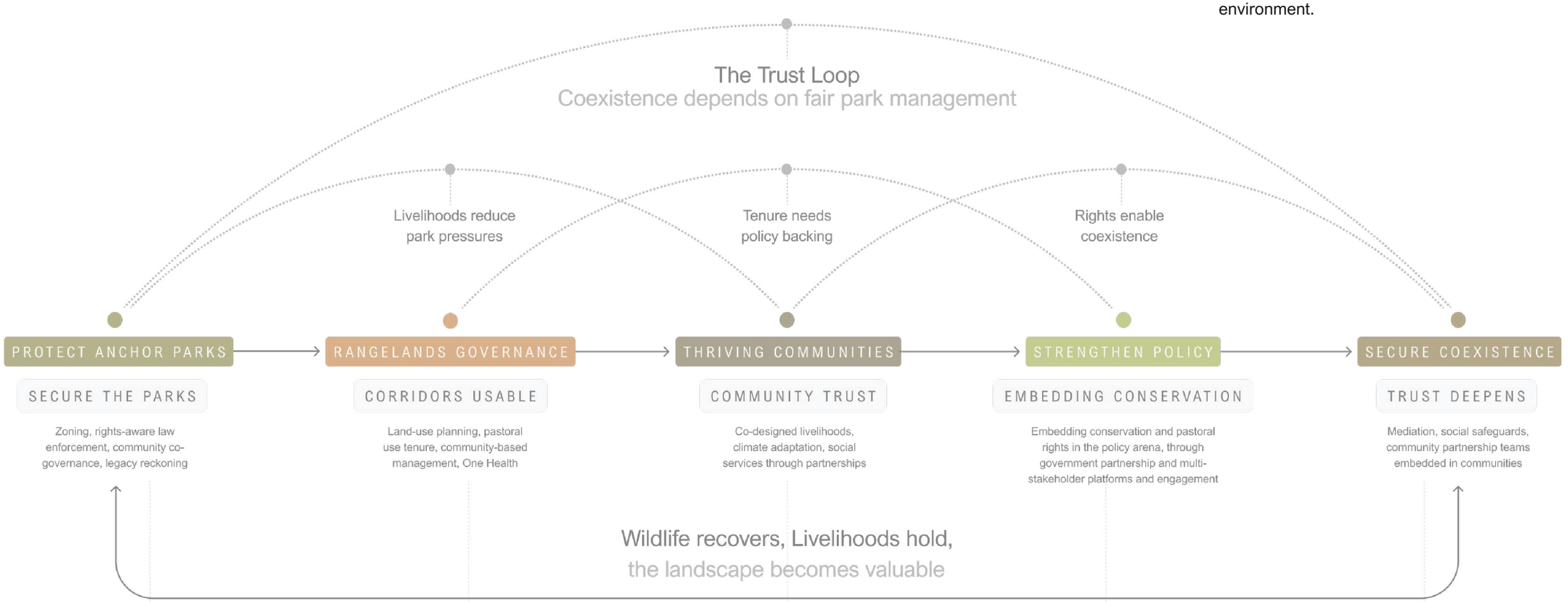
This is what we mean by a resilient Sudano-Sahel. A landscape able to absorb shock without losing either its biodiversity or its pastoralist cultures, because the mechanism for delivery is designed around both.

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SECTION 05

Impact

Each pillar delivers a specific set of ecological and wellbeing outcomes, and because the pillars are interdependent, so are the outcomes — wildlife recovery depends on community partnership, community resilience depends on secure corridors, secure corridors depend on policy recognition, and all of it depends on conflict being managed as the operating environment.



What this system delivers

50% less unauthorised grazing
IN CORE ZONES

CORRIDORS AROUND
4+ National Parks

50% OF TARGETED PASTORALISTS
report improved wellbeing

Conservation in policy
PASTORAL RIGHTS + CONSERVATION

Lion populations increasing
OVER 10 YEARS

SECTION 06

Closing

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Closing



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This Agropastoral and Transhumance Strategy marks a deliberate evolution in our approach to conservation in the Sudano-Sahel. It is grounded in the conviction that the long-term integrity of these vast, complex landscapes is inseparable from the rights, resilience, and active partnership of the pastoralist and farming communities who depend upon them. Without a robust framework that integrates One Health and rights-based programming, the region faces irreversible tipping points including species extinction and the permanent displacement of Indigenous communities. Failure to secure landscape mosaics will result in the terminal loss of the Sudano-Sahel's last great wildernesses and the unique pastoral-ist cultures that depend on their ecological integrity. Moving beyond a singular focus on enforcement, the integrated pillars of this framework—from co-designing land use plans to enhancing community health and mitigating conflict—represent a comprehensive commitment to shared stewardship.

If we are successful, the northern lion, the savanna elephant, and the large ungulates that define the Sudano-Sahel will be recovering rather than disappearing. Pastoralist communities — agropastoralist, transhumant, and elite herders — will be partners in that recovery rather than adversaries to it. Livestock corridors will be formally recognized, rangelands planned, rights respected. The anchor parks will be secure, and the ~44% of land between them will be functional, governed, and shared.

The Sudano-Sahel will not be a region defined by its losses — extinctions, displacement, conflict — but by its recovery: a landscape where healthy ecosystems secure local lifeways and thriving wildlife populations and pastoral communities are mutually reinforcing.

That is resilience in the Sudano-Sahel. That is the ambition of this strategy. The question is no longer whether conservation and pastoralism can coexist. It is how. This strategy is our answer.

Wildlife Conservation Society

Connected Landscapes: Building a Resilient Sudano-Sahel Together with Pastoral Communities

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