



Protect



Oceans, Lands and Waters

2023 YEAR-IN-REVIEW

Dear Friends,

I'm trained as a scientist and studied the ecology of migratory birds on their annual journeys for my doctorate degree. During my early days as a conservation professional, science was my guiding star, and I employed a methodical, dogmatic approach to protection, with science as the driver of any conservation investments.

Today, my perspective is completely different.

I still lead with the commitment that sound science and careful planning are critical to conservation success. Science is fundamental to our work at The Nature Conservancy. It helps us set priorities, influence policy, create conservation plans, and measure our impact to ensure we are conserving the most strategic and representative places for the diversity of life on Earth. At TNC, we are fortunate to have some of the world's leading conservation scientists amongst us, guiding everything we do.

But over the course of my career, I have come to realize that while science is critical, it is only a fraction of the solution. **People**, not just science, are the foundation of conservation success.

People—their commitments, rights, traditions, political will, well-being, economic prosperity, and hard work—define the realm of the possible when it comes to saving the planet. People craft the projects that protect nature and ground them in local realities, including Indigenous traditions that have stewarded lands and waters for generations, and they will be the actors ensuring nature thrives after TNC's protection efforts close. And people take the actions and tell the stories that inspire others—from philanthropists to policymakers—to follow. ↓





Community meeting in Mongolia. © Tseveenravdan

I'm writing this note to you en route to Mongolia, where we are working to close an [Enduring Earth Project Finance for Permanence](#) (PFP) project. This initiative will be TNC's largest land protection transaction in our history. I didn't pack my ornithologist's binoculars or researcher's field boots. I packed my suits and focused my trip on a critical meeting with the prime minister of Mongolia and several of his cabinet ministers to negotiate the terms of the PFP.

TNC's conservation history in Mongolia has been outlined and underpinned by two decades of science-based conservation planning, but its fate is driven by the motivations of Mongolia's people: from nomadic herding communities to denizens of the capital city of Ulaanbaatar to elected officials as they steward Mongolia's economic, social and natural resource future.

It is driven by people like Ariuntuya Ulaankhuu, Kentii province's first female ranger, who wants to see her culture and traditional grassland and steppe ecosystems preserved. It is driven by the teams from across TNC that work seamlessly and tirelessly as One Conservancy to deliver this complex deal. And it is supported by the people whose financial generosity makes this historic deal possible.

“
TNC's conservation history in Mongolia has been outlined and underpinned by two decades of science-based conservation planning, but its fate is driven by the motivations of Mongolia's people.
”

Without the passion and perseverance of these **people**—in all their diversity—the **science** couldn't surface, and the big accomplishments for nature's future would not be attainable.

This report details our focus and accomplishments of 2023 as we race to help nations worldwide achieve the commitments they agreed to in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework in December 2022—to protect 30% of the planet by 2030. The goal is within our grasp if we are guided by science. But we must also recognize that **people** and their rights, needs, passions, motivations, and steadfast and heroic efforts will determine our success.

I hope you enjoy hearing about our progress toward this goal, through a people lens, in the pages below. Above all, thank you for your support.



With gratitude and hope,

Jeffrey Parrish,
Global Managing Director for Nature Protection

To achieve ambitious and enduring conservation, people are key.



COLLABORATION

“The world’s 30x30 goal can seem pretty daunting to countries. Thirty percent of any biome is a lot in terms of hectares and conservation action. In Australia, policy experts and scientists from several organizations, including TNC, created a pathway forward that makes clear and compelling recommendations the government can follow.”

—Thalie Partridge, 30x30 Conservation Areas Manager, Australia Program



Patagonia, Chile. © Pedro Aros

“Impactful protection projects require having expertise and capacity available in the right place at the right time, which regional and country teams aren’t always equipped to do. The One Conservancy Protection Initiative helps us be more agile and to collaborate better with partners, by putting the resources of the larger organization—including fundraising and shared staff time—behind high-priority projects like protecting the incredible ecosystems of Patagonia.”

—Juan Jose Donoso,
Chile Country Director

People Are Key

We face a pivotal decade—arguably one of the most decisive in our species’ history—as we confront the dual crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. The consequences of current trends are dire, but around the world, people are coming together—as individuals, as governments, as organizations and coalitions—to act in bigger ways than ever before.

In December 2022, nearly 200 nations signed the landmark Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which laid out a roadmap for a more nature-positive future. In the months since, nations have stepped forward to define how they will protect 30% of the world’s terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems by 2030 (30x30).

These intentions are powerful, but the way the world follows through will be even more critical.

Commitments to large-scale conservation require protections that are representative of the planet’s biodiversity, effectively managed, durably financed, and inclusive and respectful of the rights of communities and Indigenous Peoples.

Many countries lack the expertise and funding to achieve these targets. Here at The Nature Conservancy, we’re leaning into our strengths—our conservation experience and expertise, our innovation in effective strategies and sustainable financing, and our convening power—to support countries’ 30x30 ambitions and build the enabling conditions for success.

We’re developing [go-to guidance](#) for nations on how to deliver their 30x30 goals and working with the High Ambition Coalition, a group of over 115 countries that are taking bold steps to address the biodiversity crisis. We’re working with governments, public and private financial institutions, donors, and communities to deploy two of the most ambitious pathways for biodiversity conservation in our history: **Project**

Finance for Permanence, the model employed by [Enduring Earth](#), and our [Nature Bonds Program](#), both of which combine sustainable financing with science, planning and policy to support lasting, large-scale conservation commitments.

Above all, the people behind these strategies are the key to our success in averting biodiversity loss and mitigating the impacts of climate change. From our hardworking teams around the world to our partners in the nonprofit, corporate and public sectors to our Indigenous and local community allies who drive, inform and strengthen our efforts. This year has been about you.

Conservation does not end with the closing of a deal, and it is not just a series of lines on a map. It is an enduring process characterized by the commitment and passion of conservation stakeholders and rightsholders, and the passing of that responsibility from one generation to another. It is a legacy we build together.



Fishers meeting in Gome-Dakar Village on Lake Gome.
© Roshni Lodhia

We're making strides toward our ambitious [2030 Goals](#), which include targets for freshwater, terrestrial and marine conservation, climate change mitigation, and benefits for people through:

30x30 Accelerator

Our leadership and support for global, regional and national efforts to achieve the ambitious goal of 30% protection by 2030 (30x30) with scientific and technical resources, tools, best-practice recommendations, and on-the-ground delivery.

Enduring Earth

An ambitious conservation collaboration that utilizes the Project Finance for Permanence model, working alongside nations and local communities to deliver the full financing needed to sustain conservation efforts long into the future.

Nature Bonds Program

A proven approach that refinances a nation's sovereign debt and delivers bold conservation commitments, the technical assistance to achieve them, and durable financing to make them last.

One Conservancy Protection Initiative

A powerful means to identify, elevate and close our highest-impact protection projects around the world and harness the power of "One Conservancy" to direct talent and financial resources from across our organization to these must-win opportunities.

Durable Freshwater Protection

In a world faced with an 83% decline in freshwater species populations since 1970, we deliver the science, tools, policy interventions and strategies unique to freshwater systems to TNC staff and partners around the world to help deliver the long-lasting protection of rivers, lakes and wetlands.

Ocean Protection

We are conserving the world's oceans with new and better-managed protected areas, using science and planning, innovative financing, and capacity building.

Protection Science

We are guiding conservation investments and priorities around the world, informing what we do and where we do it with cutting-edge science, research and conservation planning, while measuring the true biological outcomes of our investments.

What We Do





Our Approach

Fundamental to TNC's vision is the pursuit of conservation that is REDI:

Representative of the full variety of habitat types, ecosystems and species that make up the diversity of life on Earth.

Effective in delivering the management and actions needed to achieve a project's ecological, cultural and economic goals.

Durable in the financing and political commitment to ensure our protection efforts last in a dynamic, warming and more-crowded world.

Inclusive in engaging rightsholders, stakeholders and decision-makers through full, active and equitable participation, and ensuring they benefit from conservation efforts.

“Countries like Kenya are eager to meet their 30x30 goals, but conservation at this unprecedented scale is complicated. It requires substantial funding, commitment and technical expertise. TNC is bringing conservation experience, convening power, and powerful financial tools to leverage the conservation work and goals of community conservancies and government protected areas.”

—Munira Anyonge Bashir, Kenya Program Director

MONGOLIA

“The Eternal Mongolia PFP will create financial sustainability, support ambitious conservation goals, and demonstrate Mongolia’s global leadership in conservation and sustainable finance.”

—Gala Davaa, Mongolia Country Director

“It is important for herders to protect and love their land ... and pass it on to their descendants.”

—Ariuntuya Ulaankhu,
State Environmental Inspector, Mongolia



Ariuntuya Ulaankhu, Kentii province’s first female ranger, now supports dozens of volunteer rangers from local herding communities. © Bayanjargal Batbayar



Mongolia in winter. © Michael Fung

Enduring Protection of Mongolia’s Grasslands, Rivers and Unique Nomadic Culture



Conservation efforts in Mongolia are reaching new heights as we work with the Government of Mongolia, the country’s herder communities and other partners to develop Eternal Mongolia, an ambitious Enduring Earth Project Finance for Permanence initiative.

This program will radically enhance the conservation gains we’ve made over our 15 years of work in Mongolia, supporting effective and community-led conservation, providing scientific and technical advice, and building capacity and local expertise in communities like Ariuntuya Ulaankhu’s.

“It is important for herders to protect and love their land, protect it from outsiders, illegal activities and severe weather conditions, and pass it on to their descendants,” says Ariuntuya. Her region’s first female ranger, Ariuntuya is now a state environmental inspector who supports dozens of volunteer rangers drawn from local herding communities.

Eternal Mongolia is expected to train more than 1,000 new volunteer rangers and engage more than 15,000 herders in protected area planning. In addition, at least

Freshwater ecosystems are an important part of life in Mongolia.
© Bayar Balgantseren

24,000 herder households will benefit from policies supporting sustainable grassland management, business development and training, or increased livelihood opportunities.

Eternal Mongolia will mobilize \$198 million from public, private and domestic sources to:

- protect an additional 14.4 million hectares of Mongolia’s unique freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems
- strengthen the management effectiveness of Mongolia’s entire network of protected area systems
- extend sustainable, climate-resilient and community-managed practices to 34 million hectares outside protected areas

Through this initiative, more communities in Mongolia will be able to protect and care for the lands they love.



[Learn More About the Eternal Mongolia Project](#)

GABON

"Conservation is rarely a simple process with a straight road to success. But through innovation, resourcefulness and solid partnerships, we do this hard work so that future generations can enjoy the same benefits that we have today."

—Marie-Claire Paiz, TNC Congo Basin Director and Former Gabon Country Director



Scientists working in the Lake Oguemoué region of Gabon. © Roshni Lodhia

Long-Lasting Protection at Scale in Gabon

Marine ecosystems thrive off the coast of Gabon, where the rivers that shape the daily lives of Gabonese flow past mangroves into the Atlantic.

A recently secured Blue Bonds/Nature Bonds project will unlock \$163 million in funding over 15 years and support conservation and improved management for up to 30% of Gabon's ocean. The project was finalized in 2023 with support from Bank of America and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation.

A multiyear, inclusive marine spatial planning process, led by Gabon, will help the country increase the extent and durability of its conservation measures. The funding generated through the Blue Bonds project will support the institutional and technical capacity needed for effective long-term management of the ocean.

In addition, a complementary Project Finance for Permanence effort in the works will facilitate large-scale protection of Gabon's terrestrial and freshwater habitats, while securing benefits for climate mitigation and for the people of Gabon long into the future.

"Ambitious, long-lasting conservation is critically important in places like Gabon, where so many extensive ecosystems are still healthy and intact," says Matteo Cantoro, Gabon's PFP project director.



[Learn More About Gabon's Conservation Ambitions](#)



A new Blue Bonds/Nature Bonds project will unlock \$163 million in funding over 15 years for marine conservation in Gabon. © Roshni Lodhia



Through a multiyear, participatory marine spatial planning process, the people of Gabon will consider how to plan for and manage the health of their marine space. © Irina K.

ECUADOR

"The fluvial reserve is important for our survival because it is the only source for having clean water and fish. In general terms, the community fluvial reserve means life."
—Norma Nemquimo, Vice President of the Waorani Indigenous Nation of Ecuador

Protecting Freshwater Ecosystems in Ecuador

Ecuador is leading the way in protecting freshwater biodiversity, with the recognition that the protection of freshwater ecosystems is key to ensuring the health and traditions of the Indigenous Peoples and communities who depend on them.

The Ecuadorian government, TNC and other nonprofits, and local and Indigenous communities have worked together to create water protection areas in watersheds that range in altitude from the high Andes to the lowland tributaries of the Amazon River. The extensive areas support a significant array of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity, provide benefits to local communities, and help mitigate climate change by capturing and sequestering atmospheric carbon dioxide.

“In this moment, water is bringing us together,” says Mary Paucar, a zone coordinator for the Ecuador Ministry of Environment.

In another part of the Ecuadorian Amazon, 80 Indigenous communities worked together, with support from TNC, to create an extensive, 371,380-hectare fluvial reserve that will help the communities protect the three rivers it spans and the more than 200 species of fish the communities rely on for food.

“With 60% of the Ecuadorian Amazon stewarded by Indigenous nations, these partnerships, based on dialogue and collaboration, are critical to long-term conservation success in the region,” says Gabriela Celi Checa, coordinator of TNC’s Ecuadorian Amazon strategy.

“In this moment, water is bringing us together.”

—Mary Paucar, Zone Coordinator,
Ecuador Ministry of Environment



[Learn About Freshwater Ecosystems Conservation in Ecuador](#)



Camouflaged black caiman alligator (above). © Roberto Valdez
Boats in the Ecuadorian Amazon (right). © Gabriela Celi



— COLOMBIA —

“The Manacacías range is like something from another world, with its gentle, undulating savannas. The natural water wells. A peaceful place. One spends time enjoying the landscape and watching the deer, chestnut horses and capybaras go by.”

—Humberto Castro, former ranch owner



“What gives me the most hope in this process is that we are giving the world a new lung.”

—Jaime Rey Mora, former ranch owner

A New National Park Is Born in Colombia

Traditional llaneros (Colombian cowboys), like Gustavo Guarín Guevara, have long stewarded sections of the rolling savanna that links the biodiverse Orinoquía region and the Amazon, where wildlife and livestock graze and a network of wetlands and streams nourish a stunning diversity of life.



Gustavo Guarín Guevara, now a guide at National Natural Park Serranía de Manacacías. © Federico Ríos

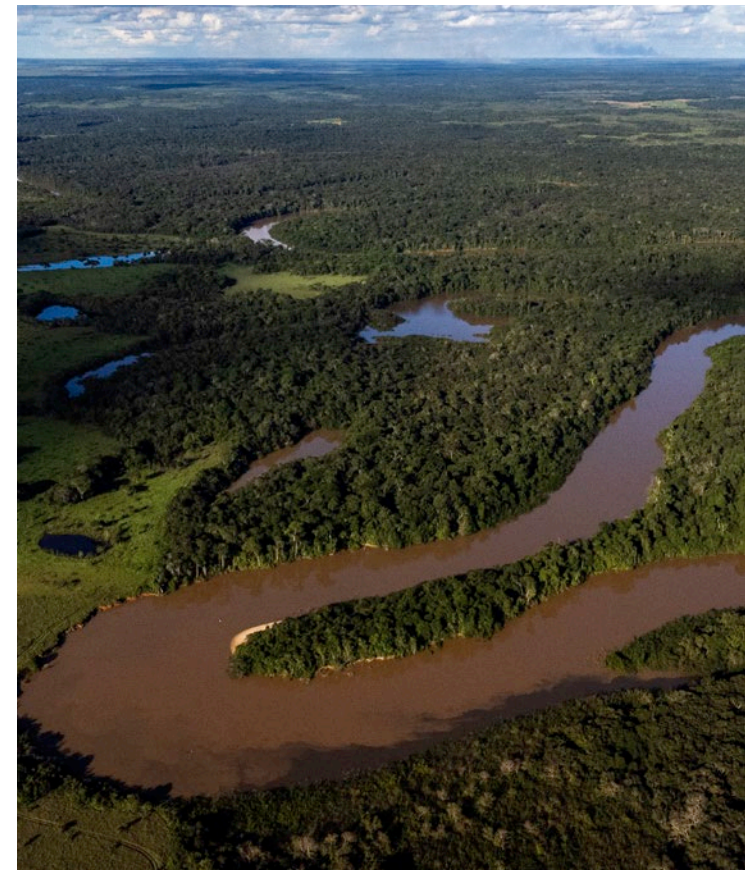
Years of armed conflict left scars on the landscape but shielded it from widespread conversion. After a 2016 Colombian peace agreement, the area became more inviting for industrial-scale oil palm and rice cultivation.

To counter this expanding development, Colombia established the new 68,000-hectare National Natural Park Serranía de Manacacías after seven years of work among landowners, government agencies, donors and conservation organizations. The Nature Conservancy’s goal is to create a network of protected land and sustainable foodscapes in the buffer area around the park to support the region’s unique culture and ecosystems.

Guarín, who is now a park guide, has high hopes. “There will be so many deer,” he says, “we’ll have to get out of their way.”



[Read More About Colombia’s 60th National Park](#)



The Manacacías River, Colombia. © Federico Ríos

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

“The work we do is important because no one knows our land better than us, the ones who are out on the land every day. It’s up to us to make sure that it is taken care of properly and that things are done in a good way.”
—Devon McLeod, lands manager for the Misipawistik Cree Nation

Centering Indigenous Leadership

Around the world, demand for food, energy, minerals, and infrastructure is pushing development into areas that have historically avoided large-scale conversion. A new global study by TNC scientists indicates this trend could affect over 60% of Indigenous Peoples' lands—more than 22.7 million hectares across 64 countries—which harbor a significant proportion of the world's biodiversity and help mitigate climate change.



Siang Geah. © Della Yulia

“The forest is rich with many things supporting life that cannot be quantified, such as clean air, water, flora, fauna and medicines, but most important for us, the forest has all that we need to perform our ritual culture. ... That is why we should protect the forest, and we cannot do it alone.”

—Siang Geah, Dayak Wehea
Community Leader, Indonesia

The study identifies what socioeconomic and political contexts can contribute to conversion risk and how Indigenous communities, governments and organizations can work together on solutions that support Indigenous governance and stewardship, which are critical to protecting healthy ecosystems.

Alongside this research, we are working to understand the diverse voices, values and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to explore the unique challenges they confront, and to help them secure better outcomes aligned with their visions for the future.

For example, with the Awajún of Peru, who are navigating a range of threats—from the overextraction of resources to hydroelectric dams, highways and illegal mining—we are partnering on the creation of quality-of-life and land-use plans they can use to more effectively articulate their values and visions when negotiating with outside parties.



© Carmen Carrion



Learn More About the Study by Christina Kennedy and Brandie Fariss et al. and Ways to Support Indigenous Stewardship



César Sarasara, an Awajún community leader, introducing a meeting in the local language. © TNC

Nature.org

Amid Industrial Development Threats to Lands, Major Opportunities to Support Indigenous Stewardship



Wall Street Journal

Gabon Joins Blue Bond Wave With \$500 Million Debt Refinancing



The New York Times

Where Anteaters and Anacondas Roam, and Ranchers Are Now Rangers



Mongabay

Three new studies on Indigenous conservation for International Indigenous Peoples Day



2023

Media Highlights

NPR's Morning Edition

Some developing countries are working on ways to swap their debt for climate action



Nature.org

Ecuador Shows What Freshwater Ecosystem Protection Looks Like



The Freshwater Imperative

Explore the beauty of Earth's freshwater systems, the urgency to protect them and the role we can all play to ensure a water-secure future.



From Hunter to Ranger: Protecting Mongolia's Wildlife

One former hunter is using his knowledge to help rangers protect snow leopard habitat and the ancestral lands of the Mongolian people.



Climate-Resilient Reefs of the Future

Despite the odds, some coral reefs are proving more resilient in the face of climate change.





“We cannot meet the dual challenges of the biodiversity and climate crises without setting ambitious goals for change. How we do our work is just as important as how much we conserve. TNC science indicates that with good planning, substantive protection goals can be met while also ensuring that communities and livelihoods thrive. It is our responsibility to forge partnerships, build the enabling conditions, and leverage ambitious solutions for people and nature.”

—Jennifer Morris, CEO of The Nature Conservancy



The Nature Conservancy
4245 Fairfax Dr #100
Arlington, VA 22203
(703) 841-5300