The movements of wildlife are at the core of what keeps our world connected and thriving, whether that be the great migrations of animals traversing the planet using navigation skills we barely understand, the passages of wildlife between core habitat areas and seasonal resources, crucial for maintaining population health, or the flow of ecological process through landscapes. This “ecological connectivity” is the circulatory system of nature.

However the combined impacts of land-use change, climate change, and existing and new physical infrastructure are constraining the movement of wildlife across landscapes. This is contributing to the biodiversity crisis, and limiting nature’s contributions to people with long-term indirect impacts on human well-being. The breakdown of ecological connectivity is a major driver of the loss of ecosystem services including pollination and pest regulation, as well greatly limiting the ability of ecosystems to adapt to climate change.

Wildlife Connect aims to protect, manage, and restore ecological connectivity in large landscapes, thus enabling large-scale wildlife movements and sustaining the benefits they provide for ecosystems and people. The initiative will combat habitat fragmentation, promote improved integrated land-use planning and governance to enable wildlife movements, create corridors and ecological networks, strengthen wellbeing of indigenous peoples and local communities through wildlife permeable land-uses, and mainstream biodiversity into key sectors to reduce barriers to movement.

Ecological Connectivity was recently defined by the Convention on Migratory Species as “the unimpeded movement of species and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth.”

Our planet will only survive if its ecosystems are connected. Because no entity can achieve connectivity alone this initiative was co-created from the start by a collaboration of WWF, the Center for Large Landscape Conservation, and the IUCN WCPA Connectivity Conservation Specialist Group. Together we can connect people, organisations, and our natural world.
Scope, Goal, and Objectives

Wildlife Connect focuses on large landscapes where connectivity is essential for ecosystem health. The direct interventions will mainly occur outside protected and conserved areas, focusing on the ecological corridors between them. These corridors may encompass natural, semi-natural, or heavily altered areas, and often a combination of all three. The ultimate aim or goal of the initiative is as follows:

Goal: By 2030, Wildlife Connect maintains or increases ecological connectivity of landscapes, ensuring viable wildlife populations, ecosystem services, resilience to climate change, and human well-being.

While Wildlife Connect’s overall scope is global, the initiative will coalesce around four demonstration landscapes, one each in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. These landscapes will become our laboratories of innovation, where diverse collaborators will be engaged to co-create and pilot novel solutions to the most intractable problems that prevent nature’s linkages from functioning as they should. This will be a substantial contribution to bending the curve of biodiversity loss, as well as securing the ecosystem services that Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPs and LCs) depend on. This work is encapsulated in Objective 1:

Objective 1: By 2026, structural and/or functional connectivity is maintained or increased in the four Wildlife Connect demonstration landscapes through protecting, managing, and restoring ecological corridors and ecological networks.

Whilst the landscape work is the most crucial element of Wildlife Connect in terms of on the ground results, many of the drivers of landscape fragmentation and connectivity loss come from outside the landscape. As such it is crucial to achieve systemic change by influencing the policies and practices of institutions and decision makers whose activities have the most significant impact on connectivity. This work to secure the global enabling environment for connectivity conservation is outlined in Objective 2, and has three main strands, aiming to influence global governmental policy, and the policies and practices of corporates and financial institutions.

Objective 2: By 2026, enabling conditions are enhanced at the global level, with governments, corporations, and financial institutions adopting policies and commitments that drive effective connectivity conservation outcomes on the ground.
Given the widespread extent of landscape fragmentation and connectivity loss, it is evident that the four demonstration landscapes alone will not ‘tip the balance’. Therefore Wildlife Connect’s Objective 3 aims to derive from the work in the demonstration landscapes and elsewhere key tools, approaches and lessons learned for effective connectivity conservation, and share them across the connectivity conservation community, with dedicated support to scale the most promising innovations. The IUCN Connectivity Guidelines provide a crucial starting point for this scaling, including a number of tools that are already being used in the demonstration landscapes and beyond.

**Objective 3:** By 2026, key tools and approaches for scaling effective connectivity conservation across WWF landscapes are developed and used globally, and the most promising innovations are replicated across continents

Wildlife Connect is a terrestrial initiative, and aligns in a complementary way with the WWF initiative on freshwater connectivity, Free Flowing Rivers, an initiative on avian connectivity, Asian Flyways, and one on ocean connectivity, Blue Corridors.

**4. Theory of Change**

The Theory of Change (TOC) starts with mapping the ecological network (including futures assessments that consider development scenarios and climate change), then engaging in cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder spatial planning and governance. It then moves into direct interventions to:

- **Protect ecological corridors:** avoid deforestation / conversion of key ecological corridors, including designating corridors, and securing conversion free supply chains;

- **Manage for wildlife flows:** ensure land-uses in both natural and non-natural ecological corridors are managed to allow for wildlife flow, and ensure human wildlife coexistence;

- **Restore connections:** corridor creation where connectivity has been lost (reforestation, habitat enhancement).
Ensuring sustainable infrastructure that supports connectivity, and climate resilience and adaptation are key cross-cutting streams of work across all three of these areas.

Central to the TOC will be engaging with IPs and LCs, supporting land tenure and governance rights, and strengthening wellbeing through wildlife permeable land-uses in corridors.

The work to ‘protect, manage and restore’ connectivity will utilize a range of supporting mechanisms from the finance, governance, markets and climate spheres. Within the climate sphere, the momentum around Nature Based Solutions (NbS) offers a particular opportunity - the benefits of nature-based solutions can be magnified if they are not conducted in a random set of locations but deployed along the full extent of ecological corridors, as this will deliver benefits not only from the site of the NbS itself, but will also unlock the benefits of a well-connected, climate-resilient landscape. This makes ecological networks nature’s own blueprint for taking nature-based solutions to scale.

The TOC predicts that this work collectively will deliver connected wildlife, resilient landscapes and human wellbeing.

5. Demonstration landscapes

The above Theory of Change and its strategies will be tested and adapted in the Wildlife Connect Demonstration landscapes:

- Africa: Southern Kenya Northern Tanzania (SOKNOT) or Unganisha
- Asia: Central India Landscape
- Americas: Pantanal Chaco (PACHA), covering Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil
- Europe: Carpathians, covering Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine

The demonstration landscapes vary greatly - from the African savannahs, to the largest wetland in the world, to Europe’s last remaining mountain wilderness, to the tiger’s most significant remaining refuge. Thus each landscape has adapted the TOC to suit their local context.

These demonstration landscapes are not the only places WWF, CLLC and the CCSG are working on connectivity – far from it. They are simply the landscapes where Wildlife Connect aims to orchestrate a significant scale-up of innovation, activity and impact, creating lessons that can be shared more broadly.

6. Join us

Connectivity cannot be achieved in isolation. We welcome collaboration and engagement with all entities with an interest in this topic – more information and regular updates can be found at www.wildlifeconnect.org