



Towards a comprehensive EU Strategy with Africa

WCS EU Recommendations

WCS EU welcomes the European Commission communication titled '*Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*' published on March 9th, 2020.^[1]

We believe that the strategy provides the foundation for an ambitious partnership between the European Union (EU) and Africa and welcome the strong focus on facilitating a green transition. We agree that the fight against climate change and environmental degradation is this generation's defining task and that we must work towards conserving healthy ecosystems, limiting and halting global warming, reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing opportunities for people and ecosystems to adapt. In particular, we welcome the mention of the NaturAfrica initiative to protect wildlife and key ecosystems, as this is a key deliverable mentioned in the EU Green Deal.

Taking the EU - Africa long standing partnership to the next level is critical as many challenges remain and need to be adequately addressed. Africa is home to a vast and rich natural capital, including outstanding biodiversity and numerous intact marine, forest, grassland, and other ecosystems, which provide food, medicine, clean air and fresh water, protection against natural disasters, and contribute to climate regulation. However, increasing pressure on natural resources in Africa is leading to significant biodiversity loss and habitat degradation, bringing entire ecosystems to the brink of collapse. The EU and Africa therefore need to increase their partnership and collaboration in order to address the various challenges related to biodiversity conservation, including issues related to corruption and poor governance.

Climate change, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, if not adequately addressed, will reverse and undermine the global public health and sustainable development gains made during the past 50 years. Addressing these critical issues constitutes the biggest development and global health opportunity of this century. Today there is consensus that the links between biodiversity and public health must address as well as go beyond tackling parasites and pathogens, to also incorporate socio-economic, evolutionary and environmental factors. Healthy wildlife and wild places – ecological health and intactness – underpin global human health and health is an important way of engaging the public in conversations around nature conservation.



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We would like to provide a number of recommended actions that build on and further develop the proposed actions under priority 1 of the strategy ‘A partnership for green transition and energy access’:

1. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, provide EU support to reduce risk of future zoonotic outbreaks, including by addressing the links between human and wildlife health

As the EU, Africa and the rest of the planet face the multiple impacts of COVID-19 on human health, well-being and economies, we strongly recommend including a specific action in this strategy to reduce risk of future zoonotic outbreaks, including by addressing the links between human and wildlife health.

While the links between climate change and health are being extensively explored and effectively communicated, the links between biodiversity loss and health would benefit from further exploration. As demonstrated by the current COVID-19 pandemic, the **commercial trade in wild animals for human consumption poses serious threats to public health and safety**, causing unprecedented levels of social and economic upheaval on a global scale.

This situation highlights the urgent need for action to close commercial markets, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, as well as associated commercial wildlife trade, along with coordinated wildlife health monitoring and surveillance systems that integrate with the established surveillance of notifiable diseases in humans and domestic animals under the World Health Organization (WHO) International Health Regulations and World Organisation of Animal Health (OIE) Codes. Preventing future zoonotic outbreaks is not about targeting one or a few species, but rather should be about removing and limiting the spillover interfaces. Ignoring these interfaces will invariably lead to future spillover events.

The degradation of ecosystems is often linked to the commercial wildlife trade but also results in various other processes that affect zoonotic disease transmission. Evidence shows that ecological degradation increases the overall risk of zoonotic disease outbreaks originating from wildlife, resulting from multiple interacting pathways including increased human contact with pathogens and disruption in pathogen ecology.^[2] **Protecting ecological integrity** should therefore be a priority action within any comprehensive plan to avoid future zoonotic outbreaks, through actions such as spatial planning, the creation and management of effective protected areas, support to ecosystem management by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and policies to minimize threats caused by particular economic sectors.

In 2004, with the publication of the Manhattan Principles^[3], WCS launched the global ‘**One Health**’ initiative – calling for recognition of “the essential link between human, domestic animal



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and wildlife health and the threat disease poses to people, their food supplies and economies, and the biodiversity essential to maintaining the healthy environments and functioning ecosystems we all require.” This integrated approach, called One Health, has since been adopted by the WHO^[4] and others (and sometimes under other names, such as Planetary Health). The Principles, updated in 2019 as the Berlin Principles^[5], discuss global health challenges at the nexus of human, animal, and ecosystem health.

As guardians of traditional knowledge, it is critical to further engage and increase support to **secure the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs)** in biodiversity conservation. Any actions on human and wildlife health must necessarily closely involve IPLCs dependent on wildlife for food, in order to secure their needs and develop community-based monitoring to help provide early warnings of wildlife mortality, while providing a meaningful transition to non-wildlife high quality food sources, for food-insecure local communities.

Millions of people depend on wild meat and fish for food and income. Wild meat is an important source of protein, fat, and micronutrients for many rural communities. It is an essential part of the diet for many IPLCs. At present, hunting for wild meat is not managed at sustainable levels, wildlife populations are declining, and rural communities are increasingly experiencing rising levels of food insecurity, particularly protein. The situation is becoming more critical as the demand for wild meat grows, particularly in urban areas where it is consumed as a luxury or tradition. We agree with and welcome the inclusion of a proposal to join efforts to address the challenges of nutrition and food security by boosting safe and sustainable agri-food systems, promoting local production, integrating biodiversity concerns, setting sanitary and phytosanitary standards, and protecting natural resources. To achieve this, we recommend that the EU support Africa in developing **locally-produced non-wildlife animal source food** (through funding and technical partnerships) to enhance food security and reduce dependence on wild meat in villages and provincial towns. The EU should also ensure that **fisheries agreements with African countries** are transparent, based on sound science, and guarantee local community food security (see more details in section 4. *EU should encourage better ocean governance, including the development of a sustainable fisheries and blue economy*). Finally, as wildlife and wild fish are primarily eaten for their protein content, the EU can explore locally appropriate methods of raising acceptable plant proteins in large quantities and potentially insect proteins.



Local people and fishermen in Madagascar. Credit: Julie Larsen Maher © WCS



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We also encourage the EU to take leadership and continue to work closely with African governments in recognising the contribution of IPLCs and supporting efforts to secure and enforce their rights. A great example is the seven-year **Sustainable Wildlife Management (SWM) Programme**, which aims to develop innovative, collaborative, and scalable new models to conserve wildlife and improve food security for IPLCs. It is an initiative of the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), and it relies on the expertise of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD) and WCS. Respectful engagement with IPLCs is a core feature of the SWM Programme, as reflected by the community rights-based approach and a commitment to ensuring the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from the communities with whom we work.^[6]

2. EU support for the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

We agree with and welcome the inclusion of a proposal under partnership 1 to support implementation of NDCs and consider that this should include partnership agreements on forests with priority countries. The protection of **high carbon, high biodiversity ecosystems**, particularly the globally important Central African forests, can result in multiple benefits for people, climate and biodiversity. Around 30% of carbon emissions are already removed by intact forests^[7] and other ecosystems each year globally, and additional action on forests and other land use at a global level could reduce the remaining net emissions by a further 30% or more. Greater protection for the **Central African forests - covering about two million square kilometres** - could therefore make a sizable **contribution to reducing global carbon emissions**.

Forest ecosystems in Africa, including the Central African block, are facing a set of unique and expanding challenges and threats. These include poaching of elephants, pangolins, and other species, the commercial bushmeat trade, deforestation and degradation due to expanding subsistence and industrial agriculture and infrastructure development, charcoal production, and poorly managed and regulated extractive industries (mining, logging, oil). These are all exacerbated by poor governance: many of the forested countries feature at the more corrupt end of Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.^[8] Examples include illegal forestry practices, which lead to a massive loss of government revenues. Mismanagement of forest concessions facilitates access of poachers to wildlife-rich areas, depriving local communities of the socio-economic benefits that should accrue to them from the logging activities. Allocation of mining permits within protected areas is sometimes done by deliberate sidestepping of ministries responsible for forests and protected areas. Thus, the EU should pay particular attention to corruption within the forestry, agriculture and mining/petroleum sectors, as the removal of large tracts of forest and replacement by any of these three land uses is pretty much irreversible.



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Logging concession in the Republic of Congo. Credit: Mark Gately © WCS

Inadequate strategic planning of infrastructure and licenses across sectors results in limited effectiveness of social and environmental plans by each development project. The EU should therefore support the development of **coordination mechanisms** at national level in order to improve social and biodiversity outcomes from development and improve the sustainability of EU investments (see more details in section 6. *Financing of infrastructure to follow international best practice on social and biodiversity impacts*).

The EU should therefore support key partner countries, particularly in the Central African forest nations, through the development of **EU forest partnership agreements** that aim to **halt deforestation, forest degradation and conversion or degradation of natural ecosystems**. This must include support to protect Africa's last remaining ecologically intact areas of forests and other ecosystems that are of extremely high importance for biodiversity, carbon storage and IPLCs. They are globally irreplaceable for their contributions to climate change mitigation, biodiversity, ecosystem services, sustaining imperiled cultures, and their resilience in the face of climate change. There is a large and growing body of evidence that forest management by Indigenous Peoples is highly effective but in some cases these forests are particularly threatened due to a lack of recognition of land rights and inadequate support for peoples' efforts to protect and manage these areas, which the EU should play a role in addressing.

A new composite index on forest integrity is about to be published (by WCS scientists and others) which, for the first time, will provide a fine scale **global index of forest ecological integrity**. Measuring forest integrity is just as important as measuring change in forested area, because reduced ecological integrity affects most of the benefits that forests provide (for biodiversity, climate and IPLCs), over huge areas. Adoption of a metric on forest integrity should therefore be included as one measure of success for this strategy.



3. EU continues working with countries to mobilise and align a wide range of financing sources with their sustainable development priorities

We agree with and welcome the inclusion of a proposal under partnership 1 to continue working with countries in their efforts to mobilise and align a wide range of financing sources with their sustainable development priorities. It is critical for the EU and Africa to support the transition to green and circular economies that minimise negative impacts on biodiversity.

The EU should therefore set an **ambitious target for climate and environment** relevant spending across future External Financing Instruments, to deliver actions with clear and identifiable co-benefits across sectors. A **specific window for biodiversity and natural resources** should therefore be defined within future External Financing Instruments, to allow for funding to be channeled directly to environment-related priorities in support of partner countries' efforts to pursue their own commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and related multilateral agreements. Effective implementation of the future post-2020 global biodiversity framework will require that EU development aid is deforestation- and biodiversity-proofed.

Although **nature-based solutions** (such as forest conservation) have the potential to provide 30% of the climate mitigation solution through to 2030, they are currently only receiving 9% of public climate finance. It is therefore vitally important that some of this climate finance (including climate finance earmarked in development aid programmes), is redirected to investment in high carbon and high biodiversity ecosystem areas, particularly tropical forests. Such 'nature-based solution' projects should ensure investment in programmes that benefit Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and help them to secure and maintain their land and user rights.



Rainforest in Madagascar. Credit: Julie Larsen Maher © WCS



4. EU should encourage better ocean governance, including the development of a sustainable fisheries and blue economy

We agree with and welcome the inclusion of a proposal under partnership 1 to encourage better ocean governance. Marine ecosystems in Africa are facing a set of unique and expanding conservation challenges and threats, including overfishing, illegal fishing, pollution and harmful effects of oil and gas exploration and extraction, and the targeted illegal killing and trade of protected wildlife such as marine turtles, all exacerbated by corruption, as mentioned in section 2 of this document.

The EU should therefore support African countries to protect and conserve their marine ecosystems. It is critical to promote the sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, both within and outside of protected areas. This should include high biodiversity ecosystems such as coral reefs, coastal complexes including mangroves and wetlands, and efforts to achieve a more integrated approach to land/sea and ocean management. The EU should also support African countries in establishing and effectively managing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), based on sound science and strong community and other stakeholder participation and support. It is critical to maintain or recover intact, functional marine ecosystems in Africa, while also ending overfishing, mitigating bycatch, ensuring that all fisheries are sustainably and equitably managed, including through the promotion of small-scale fisheries, and ensuring local livelihood benefits.

The EU should ensure that **fisheries agreements** with African countries are **transparent to allow oversight of fisheries licences and based on sound science**. In particular, the EU should ensure that such fisheries agreements guarantee local community food security where possible (many local communities are too large to be able to obtain their protein only from wild fish); avoid and ideally ban bycatch, particularly of priority species such as cetaceans, marine turtles and sharks and rays such as whale sharks; require landing of catches in national ports to improve revenue and jobs from processing locally; require onboard human and video monitors to ensure adequate oversight of catches; and set catches based on sound science which requires investment in local fisheries science.





5. Joint action to protect and reduce pressure on ecosystems while enhancing their management, combating environmental crime and launch a 'NaturAfrica' initiative

We agree with and welcome the inclusion of a proposal under partnership 1 to take joint action to protect and reduce pressure on forests, water and marine ecosystems while enhancing their management by tackling illegal harvesting and combating environmental crime.

Many of the last remaining wild places on earth are in Africa – the continent which is set to undergo the greatest transformation in the coming years and faces the greatest economic and demographic pressures. The EU has already led the way in investing in conservation and protecting some of the last remaining strongholds for nature in Central Africa through long-term support to a number of key protected areas. These interventions have not only conserved wildlife but have also improved the living standards of local communities through development interventions and the creation of economic opportunities. The EU has also identified the most important '**Key Landscapes for Conservation**' through a number of comprehensive studies that have been undertaken (the 'Larger than Studies'). We recommend that the EU implement and fully fund the **recommendations of the EU-funded study 'Larger than Elephants' outlining a strategic approach to wildlife conservation in Africa**.^[9] We also encourage the European Commission to prepare and publish an accompanying strategic approach document to guide investments in marine and coastal wildlife conservation around the coast of Africa.

Wildlife trafficking has become one of the most lucrative criminal activities and constitutes one of the most immediate threats to biodiversity in many parts of the world, including Africa in particular. In addition to harming wildlife species, wildlife trafficking undermines local livelihoods and weakens impoverished rural economies further. As highlighted by the **2019 DG DEVCO 'Study on the interaction between security and wildlife conservation in sub-Saharan Africa'**, wildlife trafficking weakens the rule of law, exacerbates corruption, triggers conflicts, funds organised crime syndicates, and in some cases contributes to migration flows.^[10] We recommend that the EU implement and fully fund the recommendations of this study.

Although there has been increased political attention given to this issue in recent years, including at EU level, the resources deployed globally to tackle it and the penalties and sanctions applied to offenders fall far short of that required. This is despite wildlife crime being officially recognised as a 'serious crime' in several UN General Assembly resolutions.

The EU and Africa have an important role to play in addressing wildlife trafficking, as the former constitutes a destination market and a hub for trafficking in transit to other parts of the world, while the latter constitutes a source region for illegal trade in many species, including elephants for ivory, rhinos for their horns, pangolins, African grey parrots, and many others.



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In particular, **ivory trafficking** is often cited as a crime undermining the rule of law and exacerbating conflict, corruption, and poverty in African countries that are already struggling to defend their economic and national security.^[11] Evidence shows that the link between the legal and illegal ivory trade exists in the EU – the world's largest exporter of legal ivory – where traffickers exploit regulatory loopholes in order to misrepresent illegal ivory as legal ivory. It is therefore critical that the EU responds to the call from a coalition of **30 African countries urging the EU to close its domestic ivory market**.^[12] Given the scale of the current elephant poaching crisis in Africa, and the modus operandi of the trade, the EU must close its domestic ivory market and implement a ban on all ivory imports and (re)exports, without further delays.



Confiscated ivory items. Credit: Julie Larsen Maher © WCS

The EU and African partners can build on existing efforts to increase their partnership and collaboration in tackling wildlife trafficking, for example through the development of full-chain wildlife law enforcement programmes. The 2019 DG DEVCO study on security and wildlife conservation highlights the necessity of expanding and increasing investments in conservation – security – development programmes in order to achieve sustained global, regional, and local security and stabilisation objectives.

We therefore welcome the announcement in the Green Deal that the EU will launch a **'NaturAfrica' initiative** by creating a network of protected areas that will protect wildlife and create economic opportunities for local communities.



6. Financing of infrastructure to follow international best practice on social and biodiversity impacts

We strongly recommend including a specific action in this strategy to ensure that financing of infrastructure follows international best practice on social and biodiversity impacts. Infrastructure for transport, energy production and transmission, extractive industry and agriculture can cause some of the greatest negative impacts on the environment. This takes place when infrastructure is developed within natural habitats and other areas of importance for biodiversity and climate protection. New and upgraded infrastructure in formerly intact habitats such as forests will cause direct loss of biodiversity, carbon and other ecosystem services. It is a driver of biodiversity loss and climate impacts, as well as disease threats, as it facilitates access to formerly remote areas. This allows unplanned clearance of habitat for agriculture and charcoal, as well as aiding hunting.

Impacts on the most important biodiversity, such as intact forests, grasslands and coral reefs, can be avoided and reduced by following good practice. The EBRD's Environmental and Social Policy^[13], the EIB's Environmental and Social Standards^[14] and the International Finance Corporation's Performance Standards^[15] are recent examples of good practice on which the EU could build a framework for ensuring its investments in Africa avoid and mitigate potential impacts on biodiversity. Notably, the EBRD's policy requires adequate consideration of priority biodiversity such as threatened habitats, vulnerable species and **Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)**. WCS has leading experience in helping African governments identify and conserve Key Biodiversity Areas and in helping these governments avoid impacts from development on such priority sites.

The EU should develop and apply **relevant safeguards to ensure its infrastructure investments in Africa are environmentally and socially sound, sustainable, and fully in line with the Mitigation Hierarchy**. There is good evidence that application of standards for people and biodiversity when developing infrastructure will reduce climate risk.

The EU should also support African governments in developing their own policies on **mitigating impacts from much needed economic development**. This will encourage sustainability and conserve wildlife and community resources. WCS has been successful in developing policy in several African countries, and we are now supporting application of those policies.

Infrastructure development covers many different industry sectors. A lack of coordinated planning limits effectiveness of investor policy in avoiding social and environmental impacts. The EU should therefore help governments in developing cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms, possibly using the Gabon experience^[16] for guidance as a South-South initiative.



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These will help coordinate infrastructure and industry development and therefore make investment more efficient. Coordination will also allow biodiversity and social priorities to be considered strategically so the long-term sustainable benefits of investments are maximised.

Developers may find it hard to access information on biodiversity priorities and individual projects may not have resources for necessary detailed impact assessments. The EU should therefore **support national analyses of biodiversity spatial priorities**, as was done in Gabon, such as application of Key Biodiversity Area criteria.^[17] This will help inform strategic planning of development. It also can support alignment of mitigation of development impacts with national biodiversity objectives and contributions to global targets.



The Niassa National Reserve in Mozambique, November 2015.

Credit: M. Kock © WCS



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Summary of WCS EU Recommendations

1. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, provide EU support to reduce risk of future zoonotic outbreaks, including by addressing the links between human and wildlife health

- a. Support global efforts to apply a fully integrated 'One Health' approach
- b. Support greater research on the links between wildlife and human health and targeted community-based outreach programmes to protect people and wildlife
- c. Stop all commercial trade in wildlife for human consumption (particularly of birds and mammals), both nationally, regionally and internationally, close all such markets
- d. Make the protection of ecological integrity a priority action within any comprehensive plan to avoid future zoonotic outbreaks
- e. Increase support to securing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as key partners in biodiversity conservation
- f. Increase support for locally-produced non-wildlife animal and plant protein sources, through funding and technical partnerships, to enhance food security and reduce dependence on wild meat in villages and provincial towns
- g. Change the attitudes and behaviour of urban wildlife consumers

2. EU support for the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

- a. Develop EU forest partnership agreements to protect high carbon, high biodiversity ecosystems, by halting deforestation, forest degradation and conversion or degradation of natural ecosystems to help achieve NDCs
- b. Support the development of coordination mechanisms at national level in order to improve social and biodiversity outcomes from development and improve the sustainability of EU investments
- c. Ensure the recognition of land rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and support their efforts to protect and manage forests
- d. Adopt a metric on forest integrity as one measure of success for this strategy

3. EU continues working with countries to mobilise and align a wide range of financing sources with their sustainable development priorities

- a. Set an ambitious target for climate and environment relevant spending across future External Financing Instruments
- b. Define a specific window for biodiversity and natural resources within future External Financing Instruments, to allow for funding to be channelled directly to environment-related priorities
- c. Strengthen biodiversity proofing frameworks to ensure that all funding is biodiversity-friendly
- d. Assess the opportunities for nature-based solutions to deliver climate change policy objectives through the conservation of intact ecosystems that are high in carbon and biodiversity (both terrestrial and marine)
- e. Direct a proportion of the development finance earmarked for climate finance towards funding nature-based solutions



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Summary of WCS EU Recommendations

4. EU should encourage better ocean governance, including the development of a sustainable fisheries and blue economy

- a. Protect and conserve marine ecosystems, and promote the sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, both within and outside of protected areas
- b. Establish and effectively manage Marine Protected Areas, based on sound science and strong community and other stakeholder participation and support
- c. Maintain or recover intact, functional marine ecosystems in Africa, and ending overfishing and mitigating bycatch
- d. Ensure that all fisheries are sustainably and equitably managed, including through promoting small-scale fisheries and ensuring local livelihood benefits
- e. Ensure that EU fisheries agreements with African countries are transparent to allow oversight of fisheries licences and based on sound science: guarantee local community food security where possible (many local communities are too large to be able to obtain their protein only from wild fish); avoid and ideally ban bycatch, particularly of priority species such as cetaceans, marine turtles and sharks and rays such as whale sharks; require landing of catches in national ports to improve local revenue and jobs from processing; require onboard human and video monitors to ensure adequate oversight of catch levels and fishing practices; and set catches based on sound science which requires investment in local fisheries science

5. Joint action to protect and reduce pressure on ecosystems while enhancing their management, combating environmental crime and launch a 'NaturAfrica' initiative

- a. Implement and fully fund the recommendations of the EU-funded study 'Larger than Elephants' outlining a strategic approach to wildlife conservation in Africa
- b. Implement and fully fund the recommendations of the EU-funded study on the interaction between security and wildlife conservation in sub-Saharan Africa
- c. Close the EU domestic ivory market and implement a ban on all ivory imports and (re)exports, without further delay
- d. Treat wildlife crime as a serious transnational crime, including by committing a similar level of resources and penalties as deployed to fight other serious crimes such as drug trafficking
- e. Support actions to counter wildlife trafficking along the trade chain from the supply to the demand side. For example, resources should be targeted towards developing anti-trafficking programmes, managing key protected areas, developing community-based conservation initiatives and tackling corruption



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Summary of WCS EU Recommendations

6. Financing of infrastructure to follow international best practice on social and biodiversity impacts

- a. Develop and apply relevant safeguards to ensure its infrastructure investments in Africa are environmentally and socially sound, sustainable, and fully in line with the Mitigation Hierarchy
- b. Support African governments in developing their own policies on mitigating impacts from much needed economic development
- c. Help governments in developing cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms possibly using the Gabon experience for guidance as a South-South initiative. These will help coordinate infrastructure and industry development and therefore make investment more efficient
- d. Support national analyses of biodiversity spatial priorities, as was done in Gabon, such as application of Key Biodiversity Area criteria

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About WCS EU

WCS EU is a Belgian NGO affiliated with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), a global organisation working to deliver wildlife conservation programmes in over 60 countries, mainly in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America. WCS operates the largest and longest standing field conservation program in Africa, with projects spanning from the tropical forests of Nouabalé Ndoki in the Central Congo Basin to the remote savannahs of Ruaha in southern Tanzania. We protect some of the continent's most ecologically intact wild places like Niassa in Mozambique, while conducting groundbreaking research on some of the continent's most iconic species, including forest elephants and Grauer's gorillas. WCS is committed to conserving Africa's wildlife through partnerships designed to benefit people and nature, and has selected the most suited places to achieve long-term conservation success. For more information, please visit www.wcs.org/our-work/places/africa

For further information, please contact:

Janice Weatherley-Singh, Director, EU Strategic Relations, WCS EU, jweatherleysingh@wcs.org
Arnaud Goessens, Senior Manager, EU Policy, WCS EU, agoessens@wcs.org

Website: brussels.wcs.org

Twitter: [@WCSBrussels](https://twitter.com/WCSBrussels)

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Published on 20 May 2020

