

This annex presents the detailed implementation plan for WCS’s 2025-2030 Coral Reef Conservation Strategy using the GAME Plan framework of Goals, Actions, Measurables, and Expected 5-year outcomes. It translates high-level strategic objectives into specific, time-bound actions with clear milestones or impact targets. The GAME plan serves as a practical tool to guide program priorities, track progress, inform decision-making, and promote accountability across the WCS Marine Program. It is especially valuable for aligning efforts across teams and sustaining impact, even under resource constraints.

GOAL 01

Understand

Understand and identify high integrity climate-resilient coral reefs

Actions	Sub-actions (details)	Milestones/targets/KPIs	Expected 5-year outcomes
01. Define HICOR; produce the first global maps of HICOR and establish assessment thresholds for long-term monitoring	Establish scientific rationale for defining HICOR	Robust methods established for defining ecological integrity for coral reefs and climate-resilient refugia by 2026	Established clear scientific foundation for defining HICOR
	Use innovative machine learning models to produce the first global maps of HICOR and inform priorities for WCS conservation activities and long-term monitoring	WCS delivers the first global map of HICOR by 2026	Increased global visibility of climate-resilient reef areas with global priorities established
	Lead a multi-year communications effort to promote HICOR, shaping the global narrative and guiding conservation priorities	External awareness campaign including op-eds and media placed in key outlets; HICOR definition published by 2026	Increased global awareness of climate-resilient reef areas, aligned with call to action for key actors (governments, funders, partner NGO)
02. Advance global standards by developing consistent methods for monitoring and analyzing key indicators of reef health, including coral cover, reef fish biomass, species diversity, and fisheries catch	Develop protocol for coral cover and coral communities	Protocols published and used in WCS country program sites; monitoring thresholds for HICOR established by 2026	Standardized reef health data informs decision-making across programs
	Develop protocol for reef fish biomass		



GOAL 01

Actions	Sub-actions (details)	Milestones/targets/KPIs	Expected 5-year outcomes
	Develop protocol for species diversity		Community fisheries data can be linked to reef health decision-making
	Add standardized protocol for fisheries catch (for coral reefs and associated ecosystems) to MERMAID <sup>1</sup>		
	Explore community monitoring collaboration approach / protocols	Community monitoring approach piloted in 2+ countries by 2027	Community ownership and integration into long-term monitoring
03. Strengthen country-level reef monitoring and analysis through technical support, tools, and training. For example, refining tools like MERMAID for efficient collection, storage, analysis, and sharing of coral reef data	Maintain excellence and consistency in monitoring standards by training WCS staff, partners, and other stakeholders on data collection and analysis protocols and best practices	100% of WCS regions receive MERMAID training and use MERMAID for coral reef data collection, analysis and reporting; new MERMAID features launched	Scalable, tech-enabled reef monitoring program with strong local capacity  All WCS programs use MERMAID to enter and quality control monitoring data
	Accelerate the use of data-driven evidence by building and refining tools like MERMAID for efficient collection, storage, and analysis of coral reef data	By 2030, 100% of WCS programs that use MERMAID to enter data, 100% WCS projects that have undergone quality control checks	WCS coral reef data are accessible and quality controlled for contributed to scientific outputs led by WCS and collaborators

<sup>1</sup> This milestone depends on standardizing fish catch landing protocols across WCS programs.



# Safeguard

Safeguard coral reefs through a multi-intervention approach to conservation

Actions	Sub-actions (details)	Milestones/targets/KPIs	Expected 5-year outcomes
04. Identify and prioritize HICOR for inclusion in networks of conserved and protected areas (e.g. more HICOR in marine protected areas)	HICOR recognized and protected with specific protected and conserved areas supported by WCS (e.g., Ocean Accelerator, Women Ocean Guardians)	HICOR and adjacent coastal ecosystems included in 100,000 km² of new and effectively implemented protected and conserved areas; At least 30 new marine protected and conserved areas include HICOR	HICOR integrated into national and regional 30x30 strategies. Joint metric reported on in # ha of HICOR in protected and conserved areas
05. Embed best practices for climate-resilient reef management in fisheries co-management agreements	Co-management improved for HICOR with communities	Support fisheries co-management agreements and approaches with at least 50 communities in HICOR areas	Co-management agreements with community-buy in all HICOR WCS sites
06. Develop standards and guidelines to reduce pollution threats to climate-resilient coral reefs, including from watersheds, tourism, and coastal development	Develop open-access data layers of pollution to support evidence-based decision making on managing pollution for HICOR reefs	At least three best practices and standards published and adopted in pilot locations with HICOR  At least 10 WCS HICOR sites evaluated for pollution risk using global data layers  At least three pollution mitigation plans established and implemented in WCS HICOR sites	Global maps to prioritize reduced pollution threats to HICOR
	Co-develop pollution mitigation standards (e.g., tourism, solid waste) to inform conservation action to address pollution in HICOR		Pollution pressures are identified and plans implemented to mitigate top pollution threats in HICOR
	Co-develop pollution reduction management plans in priority watersheds with WCS programs and partners		
	Support access to pollution funding and infrastructure		Pollution plans are funded and implemented in WCS HICOR sites



GOAL 02

Actions	Sub-actions (details)	Milestones/targets/KPIs	Expected 5-year outcomes
07. Support new trade protections for coral-associated non-shark species, such as groupers, grunts, triggerfish, beche-de-mer and other reef invertebrates	<div>Development of at least 10 NPoAs for reef-associated species</div> <div>Endorsement of specific policies that protect threatened reef-associated species or restrict trade (including through CITES listings)</div> <div>Field monitoring showing recovery of specific populations (at subnational to regional scales)</div>	10 populations of coral and coral-associated species listed or uplisted under national or international frameworks	Strengthened national and international legal protections for reefs and associated threatened species (e.g., coral sharks and rays, coral trade species)
08. Convene national governments and supporting partners to advance new commitments for national coral reef policies and action plans	<div>Provide policy recommendations and support implementation (e.g., national coral reef action plans)</div> <div>Deliver a global platform for political commitments and action on climate-resilient coral reefs by COP31</div>	<div>National coral reef action plans in at least 5 countries recognize and focus safeguards on HICOR reefs by 2030</div> <div>31 countries commit to protections and implement actions to improve ecological outcomes for HICOR globally, including at least 10 WCS countries by 2030</div>	A growing number of countries sign and implement political commitments to protect high integrity climate-resilient coral reefs
09. Critically evaluate the potential of coral restoration within climate-resilient reef conservation, ensuring approaches are context-appropriate, evidence-based, and scalable	<div>Conduct review and engage experts to determine strategic use of restoration</div> <div>Collaborate with external organizations (e.g., Coral Restoration Consortium, International Coral Reef Initiative) to evaluate guidance and explore tools like MERMAID for measuring restoration impact</div>	Release WCS position paper on coral restoration and HICOR conservation by 2026	Clarity on role of restoration in HICOR strategies; potential for implementation and impact measurement in 2-3 pilot sites. Tools available for WCS programs to evaluate potential restoration strategies and evaluate ecosystem-level impact of restoration (e.g., MERMAID)



GOAL 02

Actions	Sub-actions (details)	Milestones/targets/KPIs	Expected 5-year outcomes
10. Use MERMAID to track progress and evaluate the evidence for intervention successes to guide potential adoption of interventions elsewhere where appropriate	<p>Establish ecological baselines (e.g., coral cover, fish biomass) for key sites using MERMAID</p> <p>Train field teams and partners to input monitoring data consistently and use MERMAID analytics tools</p> <p>Conduct annual portfolio-wide data reviews to identify trends, gaps, and outliers</p>	<p>At least 10 WCS country programs trained in MERMAID data entry and analysis protocols by 2027</p> <p>At least 80% of new WCS reef surveys undergo quality control / quality assurance within 3 months of data collection by 2027</p> <p>At least 80% of new WCS reef surveys create standardized reports of coral reef trends within 3 months of data collection by 2027</p>	<p>WCS coral reef programs have robust baseline data for coral reef condition in HICOR sites, and have tools to quickly and easily evaluate conservation impact over time</p>
	<p>Set 5-year ecological improvement targets aligned with national and site-level conservation goals</p> <p>Work with country teams to interpret results and recommend adaptive actions</p>	<p>At least 5 adaptive management actions documented based on MERMAID analysis by 2028</p> <p>At least 10 WCS country programs set 5-year coral reef targets by 2027</p>	<p>Ecological improvement targets integrated into WCS country and regional strategies national and local conservation strategies</p>
	<p>Use MERMAID’s real-time, open-access platform to track and evaluate progress toward these targets, informing adaptive management</p> <p>Conduct annual portfolio-wide data reviews to identify trends, gaps, and outliers</p>	<p>Annual MERMAID portfolio analysis report produced and shared internally for WCS HICOR sites by 2028</p>	<p>WCS programs use MERMAID for adaptive decision-making and progress tracking of HICOR ecological integrity in real time</p>
	<p>Evaluate the effectiveness of interventions based on ecological outcomes, and use these results to guide scale-up or refinement</p> <p>Support teams to publish case studies on management outcomes using MERMAID data</p>	<p>At least 10 case studies (e.g., MERMAID Analysis Hub) or peer-reviewed publications produced using MERMAID data by 2027</p>	<p>MERMAID evidence supports broader uptake of effective management approaches in WCS HICOR sites, and tracks trends in HICOR globally</p>
	<p>Standardize and expand WCS data inputs (e.g., integrate fisheries catch data) into MERMAID to strengthen ecosystem-based decision-making across WCS and partners</p> <p>Integrate MERMAID outputs into donor reporting and internal performance reviews</p>	<p>MERMAID data featured in 100% of annual donor reports for coral reef grants by 2028</p>	<p>MERMAID embedded in WCS institutional learning, reporting, and decision frameworks</p>





# Connect

Connect and empower people at WCS doing work on coral reef conservation

Actions	Sub-actions (details)	Milestones/targets/KPIs	Expected 5-year outcomes
11. Strengthen WCS teams working in coral reef ecosystems by sharing knowledge, tools, and resources	In-person gatherings, regional workshops, and global trainings	By 2030, WCS will cumulatively engage at least 200 staff in sharing knowledge and strengthening their work on coral reefs	Strengthened community of HICOR practitioners sharing learning and tools
	Build funding and donor relationships to sustain and grow reef networks	2 new funders brought in for flexible / core funding of coral reef work at WCS by 2028	Sustainable, diversified funding base established for WCS coral reef conservation, with long-term support from at least two new core funders contributing to program growth and resilience across priority geographies
12. Grow MERMAID into a global community of practice and shared data platform for climate-resilient reef conservation, enabling training, standardized datasets, and peer-to-peer exchange to drive learning, decision-making, and impact across countries	Train WCS staff, partners, and external organizations to contribute to and use MERMAID for decision-making	By 2030, online and in-person training events strengthen capacity of >100 WCS staff and partners to use MERMAID; 50% increase in non-WCS users contributing data to MERMAID	MERMAID is the leading open-access platform for coral reef field data in climate-resilient reef conservation, with a global network of practitioners actively contributing and applying data in policy and management
	Support the development of standardized global datasets to enable cross-country learning and impact tracking	100% of WCS coral reef monitoring data is quality controlled and made available as open data (where appropriate, following the development of a WCS open data policy) by 2027	
	Facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges, partnerships, and visibility for MERMAID users across the WCS coral reef community	Organize a MERMAID User Summit to share innovations and impact across WCS programs	



GOAL 03

Actions	Sub-actions (details)	Milestones/targets/KPIs	Expected 5-year outcomes
13. Strengthen synergies across WCS marine workstreams by realigning around the WCS Marine Conservation Strategy and this strategy	Scale out and deep: find a pilot project to work with a local community and create a highly impactful success story to scale elsewhere	At least 3 WCS country programs have effectively implemented HICOR and other Marine Program workstreams by 2028	Pilot launched and evaluated; plan to scale in other regions based on successes
14. Equip WCS programs with communication materials and tools to engage their audiences in supporting conservation efforts	Produce communications materials for local and national advocacy	Locally adaptable toolkit developed; materials used in at least 5 country programs by 2028	Improved communications capacity at country level
15. Launch a WCS story lab focused on coral reefs to inspire, raise awareness, shift narratives, mobilize support, and connect supporters		Story lab launched by 2026	Increased global engagement and new funding streams for coral reef protection

