



# Conservation and Human Rights: A Framework for Action

## OUR MISSION

WCS saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature.

## OUR VISION

WCS envisions a world where wildlife thrives in healthy lands and seas, valued by societies that embrace and benefit from the diversity and integrity of life on earth.

### **Conservation and Human Rights: A Framework for Action**

Conservation organizations work to conserve biological diversity and natural ecosystems and promote sustainable use of renewable resources, motivated by a combination of belief in the intrinsic value of the diversity of life and belief in the importance of biodiversity and healthy natural ecosystems to the quality of human life.

Both by necessity and inclination, we must work in partnership with local grassroots organizations, governments at different levels, civil society organizations, multilateral agencies and national and transnational businesses. Through these partnerships, we seek to build broadly based constituencies that have the scientific, political and financial resources to address global threats to biodiversity and ecosystems. Working with such diverse actors, with interests that are not entirely concordant, requires that we commit ourselves to working within a framework of non-congruent agreements, standards and laws.

Achieving durable conservation obliges us constantly to assess our work and do our utmost to assure that we are being transparent about our commitments and communicating effectively to our staff, partners, and supporters about the standards that these commitments obligate us to uphold. Such transparency is a necessary ingredient to the formation of lasting constituencies, which, in turn, are essential for lasting conservation.

Being transparent about our commitments to specific standards is crucial as conservation interacts with human rights. Conservation efforts can have direct impacts – some of which are positive, and some of which are limiting – on people's access to the land and natural resources they need for their livelihoods. Some issues that arise reflect differences in approach between long-term sustainability and short-term urgency and not a difference in goals. Nevertheless, because many of the people in the areas where we work are among the world's poorest and most vulnerable, we need to take special care to assure that our actions are consistent with the highest internationally accepted human rights standards.

As an organization that designs and implements conservation programs, we believe that the protection and sustenance of local people with recognized rights to access and use of resources in areas of conservation importance is essential to the vitality of the constituencies upon which our efforts depend, and, consequently, to the sustained conservation of biodiversity. We also recognize that we have a responsibility for the impacts of our work on such human communities when they share the areas where we work.

*Therefore, in the context of our work for conservation, the Wildlife Conservation Society affirms our commitment to the following Human Rights in Conservation Principles (the "Principles"), recognizing that their effective application assumes conditions of public order dependent on functioning civil institutions, including the rule of law:*

I. In the context of our work in conservation, we respect internationally proclaimed human rights<sup>1</sup> and seek to assure that, in that context, we are not complicit in and do not contribute to human rights abuses.

II. We support and promote the realization of human rights as appropriate within the scope of our conservation programs.

III. We seek to assure that our conservation work does not harm the vulnerable and supports as much as possible the fulfilment of their rights in the context of conservation and natural resource use.

IV. In the context of conservation and natural resource use, we support the improvement of governance systems that can contribute to securing the rights of local people.

*To implement these Principles, we commit to the following:*

1. We will establish appropriate institutional policies to assure that these Principles are followed, communicate our policies internally and externally, and periodically review and revise them as needed.

2. We will determine competencies needed to implement the Principles and our own policies and develop the necessary capacity.

3. We will address conservation-human rights links in program design, implementation and monitoring.

4. We will establish institutional accountability measures that allow us to assure that program design and implementation address human rights.

5. We will seek to apply the Principles and our own policies appropriately with other organizations. In particular, we will seek to include appropriate provisions on compliance with these Principles and our policies in contracts with other organizations implementing activities under our responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> As contained in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other applicable international instruments.

