



# **WCS Policy on Human Displacement and Modification of Resource Access to Achieve Conservation Objectives**

## 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.

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## **WCS POLICY ON HUMAN DISPLACEMENT AND MODIFICATION OF RESOURCE ACCESS TO ACHIEVE CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has as its mission saving wildlife and wild places by understanding critical issues, crafting science-based solutions, and taking conservation actions that benefit nature and humanity. In pursuit of this mission, WCS advises and provides technical assistance to Indigenous Peoples, local communities, governments and donor organizations around the world, on matters relating to the occupancy of land and use of natural resources.

In this policy statement, we use the term “modification of resource access” to mean actions by local or national authorities to regulate or modify access to or use of wildlife, land, oceans, or other renewable resources of people under their jurisdiction. We use the term “displacement” to mean actions by such authorities to move or resettle people from one residence to another.

This policy statement concerns both modification of resource access and displacement. Although both of these occurrences raise complex moral, political, and financial issues, the first (modification of access) is an almost inevitable outcome of conservation activity, while the second (displacement) has rightly become a rare eventuality and should be avoided if at all possible.

Pursuit of WCS’s conservation mission frequently involves advising Indigenous Peoples, local communities, government authorities and donor organizations on issues related to modifying people’s access to land and resources, to ensure that such access will be sustainable in the future, provide durable benefits, and will not permanently damage intact natural ecosystems and important wildlife populations.

WCS only rarely, and as a last resort, advises in favor of actions that involve the displacement of people from particularly fragile, valuable, or dangerous terrestrial or marine environments to places where they can live their lives with less risk to nature and/or themselves. WCS feels that any resettlement, whether voluntary or involuntary, to achieve conservation ends, should be a last resort, because of the complexities that resettlement entails and the high potential for harming vulnerable people. This is especially true in the case of involuntary resettlement, because people are denied the authority to make the most basic choices about their own wellbeing.

1. It is WCS’s policy, in advising on either modification of resource access or physical displacement, to take into account:

- 1.1. The legitimacy of the claims to the land or resources of the people facing modification of access or displacement;
  - 1.2. Whether the claims of the people facing modification of access or displacement have been staked prior to or subsequent to any legal protection of the land or resources;
  - 1.3. Whether the people facing modification of access or physical displacement are or might become vulnerable economically, politically, or physically;
  - 1.4. The nature of the evidence that effective conservation of explicitly prioritized species or places cannot be achieved without modification of access or displacement; and
  - 1.5. The right of all people to a standard of living adequate for their health and wellbeing (Article 25, Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and our shared obligation flowing from that right to ensure that any actions that we take or recommend that affect people's standard of living are accompanied by actions that improve or, at a minimum, restore their quality of life.
2. It is WCS's policy, where authorities seek to modify resource access or to displace people and where those people are vulnerable and have previous legitimate claims to the land or resources, to make every effort to ensure that:
- 2.1. The authorities obtain in advance the freely given and informed consent of all persons proposed to be displaced or to lose resource access;
  - 2.2. The authorities seek to minimize the impact on the people proposed to be displaced or to lose resource access;
  - 2.3. The authorities take into account both the material and nonmaterial needs of the people proposed to be displaced or lose resource access and take the necessary measures to allow them to improve, or at least restore, their quality of life;
  - 2.4. The authorities meet all their legal and contractual obligations to the people.

Should there be circumstances in which, in spite of WCS's efforts, vulnerable people have been or are proposed to be displaced or to lose previous legitimate access to resources for the purpose of achieving conservation objectives, the highest applicable international standards should guide planning and implementing such activity. Should WCS conclude that an activity is not consistent with our policy and/or does not meet the highest international standards, WCS may take a number of actions, including advocating for alternatives, issuing one or more public statements calling attention to issues we find concerning, disengaging from the conservation program or project in question and/or ceasing to work with the funders and local and national authorities involved.

