



# WCS Social Safeguard Mechanisms



**Wildlife  
Conservation  
Society**

## 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.



## Ensuring WCS Compliance with International Human Rights and Social Safeguards Standards

WCS believes that conservation of nature and natural resources is essential to life on earth, the future of humanity, and the wellbeing and cultural identities of Indigenous Peoples and traditional and local communities.

WCS's policies and practices used in the field with its community, government and private sector partners are designed to ensure that WCS's conservation actions are consistent with best practices for social safeguards and comply with international human rights standards (for more information, see <https://www.wcs.org/about-us/literature/conservation-and-human-rights>). The following summarizes WCS's approach, policies and procedures relevant to the organization's compliance with social safeguards and international human rights standards, such as the [World Bank Environmental and Social Framework](#), the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), the [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#) and the [Belmont Report](#) on the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research.

### Section 1. The WCS Code of Conduct

WCS's policies and procedures are framed by the organization's Code of Conduct, formally adopted in February 2019, which provides explicit guidance on standards of conduct for all WCS personnel, regardless of location, position and level of responsibility, as well as to those who act on behalf of WCS. The WCS Code of Conduct requires compliance with a set of principles and organizational policies including respect for human rights, safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, combatting human trafficking, respect in the workplace and protection of whistleblowers.

Under the Code of Conduct all WCS personnel are held accountable for their actions and the actions of others under their management authority, and for ensuring compliance with the Code of Conduct. Failure to comply with the WCS Code of Conduct and its specific social safeguards is subject to discipline, including termination of employment.

## Section 2. Global Policies, Practices and Guidelines

**Rights-based Conservation and Free, Prior, & Informed Consent (FPIC):** WCS’s long-term commitment to the places we work includes building effective and lasting partnerships with the Indigenous Peoples and local communities whose livelihoods, wellbeing and cultural identities depend on the conservation and sustainable use of the land, water, wildlife and other natural resources that make these places special. These partnerships are rooted in a rights-based approach, whereby we support Indigenous Peoples and local communities to clarify and secure recognition of land and resource rights and exercise them effectively. In situations where WCS works as a partner to governments and donors in support of externally conceived and driven conservation, our adherence to international standards means that we are committed to ensuring that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are meaningfully engaged, through a FPIC process, in decisions related to creating and managing state recognized protected areas and that they are not involuntarily displaced physically or economically.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** In 2009, WCS approved [Conservation and Human Rights: A Framework for Action](#), affirming our commitment to a set of principles concerning WCS’s respect for and advancement of global human rights standards in the course of its conservation work. The WCS Conservation and Human Rights Framework for Action includes stakeholder engagement as a fundamental component. Some country programs have developed formal protocols to guide stakeholder engagement. WCS believes inclusive approaches to stakeholder engagement are critical for a human rights-based approach to conservation.

**Displacement Policy:** The [WCS Policy on Human Displacement and Modification of Resource Access to Achieve Conservation Objectives](#) states that physical and economic displacement should be treated as a last resort and, when it is undertaken, must be carried out according to the highest international standards. In practice, this means abiding by the United Nation’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2) and current best practices in the field (e.g., World Bank Environmental Social Standards 5).

**Safeguarding Policy:** The WCS Safeguarding Policy sets forth WCS’s commitments, and informs WCS personnel and others acting for WCS or under our direction of their responsibilities, regarding the protection of people—particularly children, vulnerable adults and communities with whom we work—from abuse or exploitation that may be caused due to their coming into contact with WCS’s work and programs.

**Global Grievance Redress Mechanism:** WCS has put in place a [WCS Global Grievance Redress Mechanism \(GRM\)](#) that enables external stakeholders as well as WCS personnel to report any good faith complaint about a project or activity implemented or sponsored by WCS that is reasonably believed to contribute to or cause human rights abuses, violation of the human rights of individuals or communities, or safeguarding violations. The Global GRM is available to all our global programs and establishes a process to ensure these types of grievances are handled, responded to and documented in a fair and timely manner. The Global GRM may be supplemented by additional,



site-based and locally-adapted complaint procedures developed by individual country programs and projects, as appropriate.

**Internal Review of Research with Human Subjects:** WCS has signed a Federal Wide Assurance (FWA) under which we agree to adhere to 45 CFR 46, otherwise known as the Common Rule, and apply these recognized standards for the protection of human participants, regardless of funding source, unless otherwise covered by another Assurance. In accordance with the FWA, WCS ensures that all WCS staff involved in collecting data from human subjects must first complete training in human subjects research, and all human subjects research must be approved by the WCS Institutional Review Board.

**Training & Capacity:** The WCS Conservation and Human Rights Framework for Action includes our commitment to develop the necessary capacity to implement the principles and our own policies for respecting human rights. Accordingly, WCS incorporates appropriate training and capacity building across its programs, including specialized human rights training for eco-guards and other law enforcement personnel, where we support protected areas, and for staff working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, where we engage in community-based programs and projects. Having in place standard operating procedures and training is essential not only to protect the rights of others, but also to ensure the safety, professionalism and effectiveness of WCS personnel.

**Combating Trafficking in Persons:** WCS is committed to protecting the dignity and integrity of everyone working with WCS and condemns human trafficking and forced labor in any form. To this end, WCS has adopted a formal plan to ensure that WCS employees, and anyone working on our behalf, are accountable for ensuring that we do not contribute to or facilitate human trafficking, forced labor or other conduct prohibited by the plan, and that any violations of the plan are reported and addressed appropriately.

### **Section 3. Regionally Adapted Practices**

Deployment of universal standards in a locally meaningful way needs to account for the nuances of national laws, institutional strength of partners, donor requirements, and specific conservation objectives and activities. This includes molding guidance to the local context and implementing locally appropriate protocols rigorously. WCS is committed to field-based leadership in developing such locally adapted social safeguards, as it is best positioned to implement global and institutional principles, policies and procedures sensitively and appropriately.

The dual approach of requiring the highest global standards everywhere we work, combined with empowering locally-based management to incorporate and adapt to additional cultural sensitivities in the diverse cultural, linguistic and political settings in which we operate is essential. This is a key feature of WCS's approach to implementing and credibly complying with WCS's institutional policies and international social safeguard standards. For more information about WCS's site-based work with communities, see <https://www.wcs.org/our-work/communities>.

## Section 4. Social Safeguards Compliance, Training and Adaptation Mechanisms

Effective development, implementation and refinement of social safeguards is a continuing process. To manage these efforts, WCS has established a Social Safeguards Management Team (SSMT) which works closely with WCS's global, regional and field leadership on the following:

- Leading the development of WCS global policies related to human rights and social safeguards;
- Supporting implementation of WCS's social safeguard policies;
- Providing thought leadership on compliance with social safeguard policies and protocols;
- Overseeing WCS's Global Grievance Redress Mechanism;
- Providing coordination to ensure the Institutional Review Board process supports and is consistent with WCS's overall Social Safeguards; and
- Advising on external communications concerning human rights and social safeguard issues.

As national and international policies and donor requirements evolve to address emerging social safeguard and human rights challenges, WCS will continue to develop, update and disseminate specific policies and procedures, as appropriate, to ensure adherence to international human rights standards.

**Questions about WCS's Social Safeguards Mechanisms may be directed to the WCS Social Safeguards Management Team at [ssmt@wcs.org](mailto:ssmt@wcs.org).**

