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CURRENT SITUATION IN LAOS

WHY TIGERS MATTER

Lao PDR remains recognized as a tiger range country, but there have been no verified wild tiger records since 2013. While local communities have reported possible signs of tigers in some areas, these have not been scientifically confirmed through systematic monitoring, including camera trapping.

Tiger recovery remains challenged by poaching and snaring, declining prey populations, habitat fragmentation, and limited enforcement capacity. Despite this, Laos still holds long-term recovery potential with priority landscapes connected to neighbouring tiger source populations.

Tigers are more than an iconic species. As top predators, they help maintain healthy and balanced forest ecosystems by regulating prey populations and supporting broader ecological balance. Their presence is a sign of a thriving forest with strong protection, abundant prey, and functioning biodiversity.

Recovering tiger landscapes also benefit people by strengthening forest governance, protecting ecosystem services such as clean water and climate resilience, and supporting long-term conservation partnerships with local communities.

NATIONAL TIGER RECOVERY ACTION PLAN 2026-2035

Paving the Way for a Future with Tigers in Laos

Lao PDR was once part of the historical range of the Indochinese tiger and is still recognized as part of the wider tiger range. However, there have been no verified records of wild tigers in the country since 2013. Despite this, Lao PDR still holds long-term potential for tiger recovery, supported by its large forest landscapes, remaining prey species, and strategic connectivity with neighbouring tiger source populations, particularly in Thailand.

The National Tiger Recovery Action Plan (NTRAP) 2026–2035 marks a strategic shift – from protecting a remaining tiger population to restoring the ecological and institutional foundations needed for the future return of wild tigers. This includes secure and connected habitats, recovered prey populations, stronger law enforcement, improved protected area management, community participation, and transboundary cooperation.

Developed through consultation and technical review, the NTRAP provides a national framework for coordinated action. WWF-Laos provided technical and financial support to its development and remains committed to supporting implementation with government agencies and conservation partners.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACTION PLAN

The NTRAP sets out the main actions, requirements and partnerships needed to support tiger recovery in Lao PDR. It focuses on restoring the ecological conditions, protection systems and long-term support needed for tiger recovery. It also includes a roadmap for closing captive tiger facilities in Lao PDR, particularly those associated with the breeding or keeping of tigers in captivity for commercial trade, in line with the country's commitment to close tiger farms and follow relevant international recommendations.



Priority 1 landscape: Nam Poui National Protected Area as the main focus for supporting the potential natural return of tigers.



Priority 2 landscapes: Nam Et-Phou Louey, Nakai-Nam Theun and Xe Pian National Parks for longer-term recovery.



Restoring prey populations: rebuilding the wild prey base needed to support future tiger recovery.



Strengthening protection: reducing snaring, illegal hunting and wildlife trafficking through stronger law enforcement and monitoring.



Long-term support: sustainable financing, technical partnerships, institutional capacity and transboundary collaboration.



Monitoring and adaptive management: establishing research, monitoring and learning systems to track progress and guide future action.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION PLAN

Signed by the Minister of Agriculture and Environment in March 2026, the NTRAP will move forward under the leadership of the Department of Forestry. As one of the supporting partners for implementation, WWF-Laos will provide technical input, help mobilize resources, and contribute to work planning, monitoring, and adaptive management in priority landscapes.

The plan also provides a basis for continued support from neighbouring tiger range countries, development partners and other conservation partners. The focus will be on turning the Action Plan's priorities into practical field activities, tracking progress over time, and adjusting approaches as needed to keep tiger recovery efforts realistic, coordinated, and action oriented.



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TIGER HABITAT AND PRIORITY LANDSCAPES

1 Nam Poui National Protected Area is recognized as Lao PDR's Priority 1 landscape and the main focus for supporting the potential natural return of tigers from neighbouring source populations, particularly from Thailand. With its strategic location, habitat connectivity, and long-term potential for tiger dispersal, Nam Poui is considered the country's most feasible landscape for supporting the future natural return of wild tigers.

2 Nam Et-Phou Louey, Nakai-Nam Theun, and Xe Pian National Parks are recognized as Priority 2 landscapes. These landscapes remain important to Lao PDR's longer-term tiger recovery strategy, but will require continued restoration, including prey recovery, stronger protection, and improved ecological connectivity, to strengthen their long-term potential to support tiger recovery.

To support implementation, the NTRAP focuses on the key conditions needed for tiger recovery: secure habitats, restored prey populations, stronger law enforcement, effective monitoring, community support, sustainable financing, and improved coordination with neighbouring countries.

The plan also recognizes the challenges ahead, including limited patrol coverage, illegal hunting and wildlife trafficking, the need for stronger trans-boundary coordination, and the decline of prey species that tigers depend on for food. Long-term financing, technical partnerships, stronger wildlife crime prosecution, and improved institutional capacity will be essential to turn the plan into action.

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THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Tiger recovery in Lao PDR faces several major challenges. The NTRAP recognizes that future recovery will depend not only on restoring habitats, but also on reducing threats, rebuilding prey populations, strengthening law enforcement, and ensuring long-term resources and coordination.

Ongoing challenges include:



Poaching and snaring affect both tigers and the prey species they depend on.



Limited patrol coverage and enforcement capacity in and around key protected areas.



Declining prey populations, which limits the ability of landscapes to support tigers in the future.



Illegal wildlife trade and cross-border trafficking.



Habitat loss, fragmentation, disturbance from land-use change and infrastructure development.



Limited long-term resources and coordination, including financing, technical support and institutional capacity.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR TIGER RECOVERY SOLUTIONS

Tiger recovery in Lao PDR will require strong partnerships and coordinated action. Through the NTRAP, government agencies, protected area authorities, local communities, conservation organizations, research institutions, development partners and neighbouring countries can work together to address key threats. These partnerships will help strengthen protected area management, improve law enforcement, restore prey populations, protect key habitats and corridors, support communities, and mobilize sustainable financing – creating the conditions needed for the future natural return of wild tigers in Laos.

THE WAY FORWARD: WWF'S SUPPORT

The next step is to move from planning to implementation – turning priorities into action across key landscapes. With sustained investment, monitoring, and adaptive management, Lao PDR can rebuild healthy tiger landscapes and keep open the possibility for wild tigers to return in the future. As a key partner in the development of the NTRAP, WWF-Laos stands ready to work with government, partners and donors to mobilize the technical and financial support needed to translate this vision into action.

(Note: The tiger images used in this factsheet are illustrative and were photographed outside Lao PDR.)