



LAOS

# CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

2021-2025, WWF-LAOS

SUMMARY



# CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
INTRODUCTION	2
MISSION & VISION	3
PROGRAMME	4
LANDSCAPE & SITE	5-6
PRIORITY SPECIES	7
PRACTICE AREA & ALIGNMENT	8
CONSERVATION OUTCOME	9

# FOREWORD

As the current strategic planning period comes to its end, it is time to analyze the lessons learned from the last five years. It is time to gather the whole family and collaboratively set new goals to guide our future paths. Goals that build on what has already been done, give voice to our ambitions, and turn them into a new vision for the upcoming phase.

This is exactly what this document embodies, the efforts of a team that has learned from each other and worked together to set the course for the next five years. This process took more than what any of us would have expected or could have achieved alone. And along the road, our family has changed and grown. Some of our dear colleagues have left to join other organizations, seek new career, and resume their studies, with the hope being that they will rejoin our panda family equipped with new ideas and skills. At the same time many new faces, including mine, contributed to a new configuration of our team, bringing new ideas, sharing their energy, and contributing to the picture that represents us today as WWF-Laos, looking to the future and presenting our 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.

This Strategic Plan is perfused with the team's love and passion for nature, conservation, and our collective mission to make Laos a place where people can thrive while still maintaining a balance with the plants and animals that enrich the ecosystems on which we all depend.

It builds on WWF-Laos' DNA. It carries on the three conservation priorities from the previous strategy – **Forest**, **Wildlife**, and **Freshwater** – and takes our targets to the next level of ambition. It is aligned to WWF- Asia Pacific priorities and strongly inspired by WWF's global targets.

This Strategic Plan is the result of over a year of consultations within the country team and engagement with the WWF Global Network, to ensure that the coming years will see WWF-Laos guided by a solid and sound strategy.

I acknowledge that the Strategy is far from perfect but it is our strategy and we can proudly recognize ourselves in it. I am truly satisfied with our achievement and I am confident that each of us is ready to give our best to make this plan successful.

Together, we aim to contribute to a better Laos in which people and nature live in harmony, where wildlife is not hunted to extinction, where rivers are flowing and fishes are free to migrate, where communities are able to live better by restoring and protecting nature.

I would like to thank you all for your valuable contribution to this five-year Strategic Plan, for your patience with the process, and the time you have invested to see it to completion. I am excited and I feel privileged to be leading the team in the implementation of this new strategy and beyond.



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BUILDING A FUTURE WHERE THE PEOPLE OF LAOS CAN THRIVE AND LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE.

Loris Palentini

Country Director  
WWF-Laos

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## ABOUT LAOS

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (hereafter Laos) is located in one of the 10 most globally important biodiversity ecoregions, home to some of the world's most biologically diverse but endangered species and habitats. Laos is situated in Southeast Asia and is bordered by China, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. The Mekong River flows through 1,900km of Lao territory, much of it mountainous terrain.

Healthy natural ecosystems that supply goods and services are essential to reducing poverty, securing livelihoods, and driving a greener economic model for Laos.

However, Laos' biodiversity is under threat from multiple pressures: climate change; illegal logging and wildlife trade; poorly planned infrastructure development; and expansion of unsustainable agriculture.

## ABOUT WWF-LAOS

WWF has had a presence in the country since the late 1980s, when it contributed to some of the first biodiversity surveys that established Laos' protected area system. The office in Laos was officially established in 2001. Our main office is in Vientiane Capital, with field offices in Savannakhet, Champassak, Salavan, and Xekong provinces.

WWF-Laos works with government, civil society, and private sector partners to address the threats to biodiversity and to move towards a greener nature-based future.

Our key partners are the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Dept. of Forestry, Dept. of Forest Inspection, Dept. of Livestock and Fisheries), the Provincial Agriculture & Forestry Offices; other conservation focused organizations; communities; Lao civil society organizations; and other stakeholders.



A photograph of a wooden boat on a river, viewed from the front. The boat's hull is made of weathered wood with some teal paint. The river is calm and reflects the sky. In the background, there are green trees and mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

## 2. MISSION AND VISION

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### OUR MISSION

**WWF-Laos strives for a future where we are strongly rooted in Laos and recognised as the leading conservation organization in the country; working in partnership with the government, local communities, and other key players towards a future where the people of Laos can thrive and live in harmony with nature.**

### OUR VISION

**Laos' unique biodiversity, cultural diversity, and ecosystems are maintained or enhanced and contribute to the sustainable development and wellbeing of Laos, the Greater Mekong region and the planet as a whole.**

# 3. CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

© Nicolas Axelrod / Ruom / WWF

## CONSERVATION IS THE 'CORE' OF WHAT WWF DOES

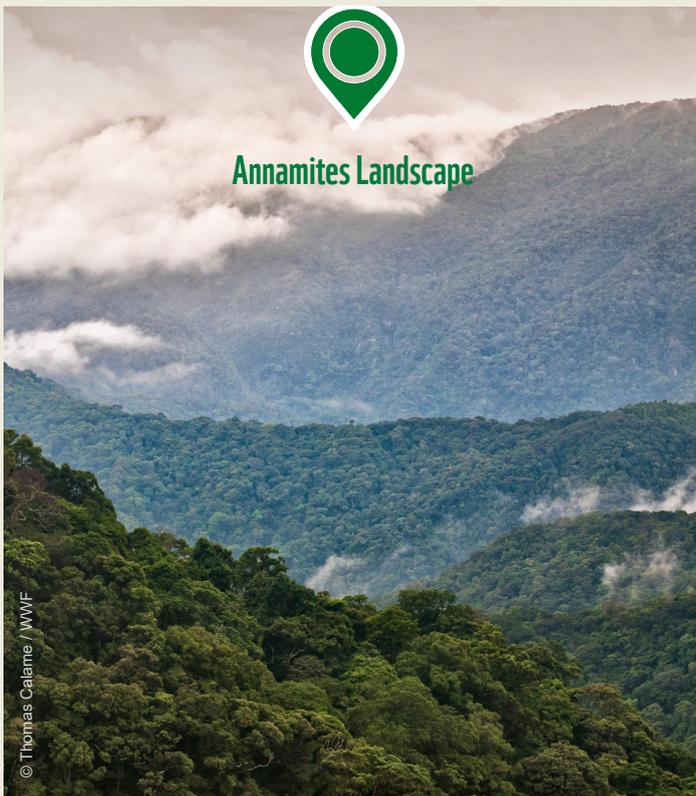
The five-year Strategic Plan is the result of input from our staff and an analysis of conservation efforts conducted by WWF-Laos and partners since the 1980s.

The conservation strategies we will implement are the result of a thorough assessment of the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, with a view to set out feasible actions to improve the overall status and health of Laos' natural systems.

We have also worked to ensure that our strategies align closely with Laos' National Socio-Economic Development Plan, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, and National Forest Strategy to 2035 and Vision to 2050, as well as global goals including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

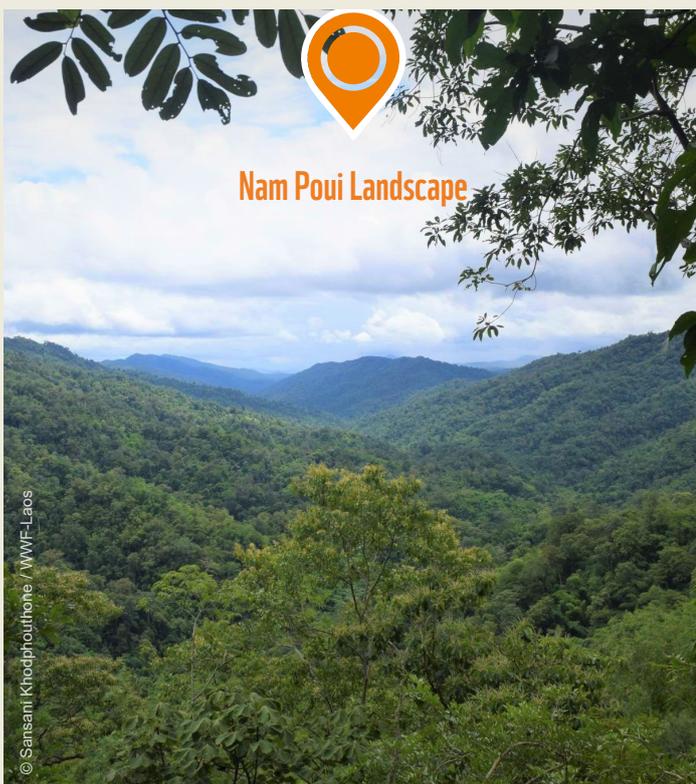
# 3.1. LANDSCAPES AND SITES

Geographically, our strategic plan focuses on **three priority landscapes** selected based on their conservation significance, level of pressure on biodiversity, and WWF-Laos' ability to have a meaningful impact. Within each of these broad landscapes, we further focus our efforts on **four priority sites**. These sites and landscapes represent key habitats for target conservation species or species groups of global and regional significance. Conserving these habitats, species and overall biodiversity ensures the health of ecosystems that provide necessary services to the people of Laos and beyond.



The Annamite Mountain Range, with its unique wet evergreen forests and karst habitats, are significant to global biodiversity, with many species occurring here and nowhere else on earth - including the saola, the Annamite striped rabbit, and large antlered muntjac. The forest habitat of the Annamites is some of the most extensive and largely intact forests in continental Asia. In the last century, only six large mammal species were discovered worldwide and three of them were found in the Annamite range.

**Within this landscape, our priority site is the 1,335km<sup>2</sup> Xe Sap National Protected Area (NPA).** The Xe Sap NPA is one of the most biodiverse NPAs in Laos and is one of the last strongholds for species that are found nowhere else on earth, including the critically endangered saola, red-shanked douc langur, and large antlered muntjac.



The 5900km<sup>2</sup> Nam Poui Landscape, situated in northeast Laos and bordering Thailand to the west, encompasses the 1900km<sup>2</sup> Nam Poui NPA, the surrounding anthropogenic landscape and stretches of the Mekong in Xayabouly Province.

**Within this landscape, our priority site is the Nam Poui NPA.** The Nam Poui NPA, which is one of the most significant sites in Laos for the conservation of Asian megafauna, particularly the Asian elephant, gaur, and Asiatic black bears. It is a key stronghold for Asian elephants in Laos, containing the second largest population in the country, and is the only NPA that has populations of white-handed gibbons. The prey base, connectivity to breeding populations of tigers in Thailand and protection offered by the NPA on the Thai side of the border offer potential for recovery of tigers in this landscape.

WWF-Laos is the only international conservation organization currently working in the area.



## Mekong Plains Landscape



© WWF-Laos



© Adam Oswell / WWF

The 52,000km<sup>2</sup> Mekong Plains Landscape includes 850km of the Mekong River and the surrounding plains. The Mekong River is the world's most productive inland fishery, providing livelihoods to 60 million people, up to 80% of the animal protein to people in the Mekong River basin, and accounting for 15% of the global inland catch. It also hosts one of the most diverse and prolific freshwater capture fisheries in the world, second only to that of the Amazon.

**Within this landscape, WWF-Laos will focus on two main riverscapes:**

1. Xebanghieng riverscape
2. Siphandone riverscape

**The 12,500km<sup>2</sup> Xebanghieng** catchment contains the Xe Champhone Ramsar wetlands and its perennial and seasonal rivers as well as scattered lakes, ponds, freshwater marshes, and rice paddy fields. The Xebanghieng river is particularly important for fish migration as it is one of the few remaining tributaries of the Mekong within Laos that remains free-flowing and accessible to migratory fish. The river also flows through several NPAs and the Eld's Deer Sanctuary which contains potentially the most significant remaining population of Eld's deer in Southeast Asia. The area also supports threatened species such as Asiatic soft-shell turtles, Siamese crocodiles, giant Asian pond turtles, and elongated tortoise, and is home to at least 220 fish species. It also supports the livelihoods of over 42,000 people.

**The Siphandone (in Lao “four thousand islands”) priority site** in the far south of Laos encompasses a stretch of the Mekong River immediately adjacent to Cambodia. Here the river braids extensively into a maze of channels and islands and flows over the largest complex of waterfalls (Khone Falls) found in Asia. This variability of rich natural features, the seasonally flooded riverine habitats and surrounding gallery forest support a large range of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity.

**The Siphandone is home to at least 100,000 people, whose livelihoods are intricately linked to these habitats.**

# 3.2. PRIORITY SPECIES



Global Priority  
Flagship Species

Asian elephants, Indochinese tiger \*,  
Asiatic black and sun bear.

\* recovery/rewilding

### By 2025:

Populations of Global Priority  
Flagship Species in priority places  
are stable, increasing or have  
been assessed for restoration.



Eco-region and  
National Priority Species

Saola, felid and carnivore species,  
Lao and regionally endangered  
primates, Mekong aquatic megafauna,  
gaur and sambar deer.

### By 2025:

Populations of Eco-regional  
and National Priority Species in  
priority places are stable, increasing  
or have been assessed.



# 3.3. PRACTICE AREA

In the above-mentioned landscapes and priority sites, WWF-Laos undertakes strategies and actions to improve the status of species, habitats, and ecosystems - our Conservation Targets. By meeting our Conservation Targets, we also support healthy livelihoods and improve the wellbeing of communities depending on the services provided by these ecosystem. We also work on cross-sectoral policy engagement with government, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen our conservation effort.

OUR PROGRAMME IS IMPLEMENTED UNDER THREE BROAD 'PRACTICE AREAS':



HEALTHY FORESTS AND  
HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



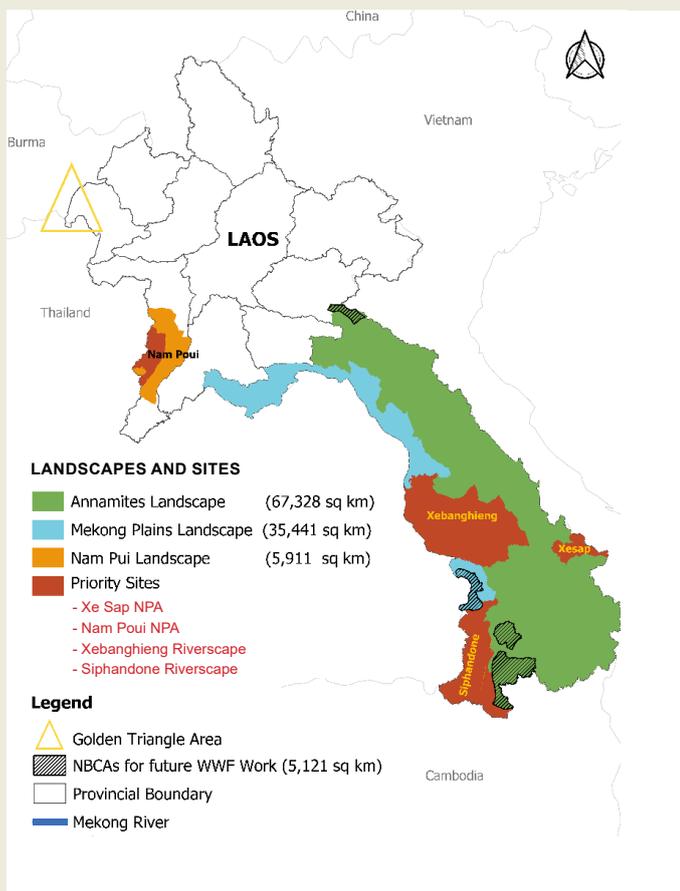
STOP THE TRADE AND  
KEEP WILDLIFE ALIVE



RIVERS FOR LIFE

The Conservation Outcomes of WWF-Laos are linked to the below national and international priorities, and directly contribute to the WWF's global goals.

## 3.4. GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE



## 3.5. GLOBAL & NATIONAL ALIGNMENT

Contribution to Global Goals:  
SDGs and Aichi Biodiversity  
Targets.



AICHI  
TARGETS

**National Strategies:**

Biodiversity Strategy  
and Action Plan  
2016-2025

Forest Strategy  
to 2035 and Vision  
to 2050

Socio-Economic  
Development Plan  
2021-2025

## 3.6. WWF'S GLOBAL GOALS



ZERO LOSS OF  
NATURAL HABITATS



ZERO EXTINCTION  
OF SPECIES



HALVE  
FOOTPRINT

# 3.7. OUTCOMES BY 2025

By working in close cooperation with the Lao Government, other partners and communities in Laos, we aim to achieve the following outcomes:



## HEALTHY FORESTS AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Strengthen protected area management and promote the sustainable use of forest resources for the benefit of local communities and wildlife.

The annual net rate of natural forest loss in the Annamite and Nam Poui Landscapes are maintained below 0.5%.

Forest under national protection in the Annamite and Nam Poui Landscapes has increased by 17.5%, from 3,312 sq km to 3,892 sq km.

Signs of illegal natural resource extraction will be reduced by 20% against baselines in the total protected zone of the Nam Poui and Xe Sap NPAs.



## STOP THE TRADE AND KEEP WILDLIFE ALIVE

Strengthen wildlife law enforcement and reduce demand in order to stop the illegal hunting and trading of wildlife and wildlife products.

Local agency capacity to detect, investigate and prosecute wildlife crime, and interagency collaboration has improved.

International and domestic illegal wildlife trade at priority sites, market hotspots or trade routes has been disrupted.

Motivation to trade or consume key wildlife products in key target consumers declines.

Eco-regional and national priority species populations are maintained or have increased, with key knowledge gaps filled at priority sites.



## RIVERS FOR LIFE

Maintain a free-flowing middle Mekong and strengthen community-led conservation and sustainable fisheries.

At least 3,300 km of Mekong mainstream and tributaries within the Mekong Plains Landscape is free-flowing.

Management of capture fisheries, conservation knowledge of Mekong fish megafauna, and community livelihoods have improved in priority sites in the Mekong Plains Landscape.



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**FOR A FUTURE WHERE THE PEOPLE OF LAOS  
CAN THRIVE AND LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE.**

**WWF'S MISSION IS TO STOP THE  
DEGRADATION OF THE PLANET'S  
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND  
TO BUILD A FUTURE IN WHICH  
HUMANS LIVE IN HARMONY  
WITH NATURE.**



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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