

Lion Recovery Fund

Strategy to Recover Lions and their Landscapes

The Lion Recovery Fund Strategy

At a Glance

State of the African Lion

In just 25 years, we have lost half of Africa's lions and perhaps only 20,000 remain. Lions have been decimated by bushmeat poaching, human-lion conflict, and habitat loss. New threats are on the rise, such as targeted poaching of lions and their parts. Yet the state of the lion is hopeful. Lions are prolific and can recover when protected: research shows that Africa could have 3 to 4 times the number of lions it has today if the current protected areas within lion range were resourced appropriately. Lion recovery – and the restoration of their landscapes and all they contain – is within our grasp.

Vision of the Lion Recovery Fund

The Lion Recovery Fund was created by the [Wildlife Conservation Network](#), in partnership with the [Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation](#) to double the number of lions in Africa, regaining those lions lost over the past 25 years. In recovering lions, we also aim to restore the health of their landscapes and all that they provide.

Strategy for Lion Recovery

- 1. Expand the Conservation Footprint**

Expand the current coverage of lion conservation across Africa. Strengthen existing efforts and catalyze new conservation initiatives where there are gaps in lions' range.

- 2. Build the Will**

Build the public, political, and philanthropic will that is essential to recover lions and restore their landscapes.

- 3. Scale the Funding**

Significantly increase the funding available for lion and lion landscape conservation through new private and public investment.



Lion Recovery Fund Investment Portfolio

- 1. Conservation Projects**

Investments on the ground in improving reserve management, advancing coexistence, and curbing illegal wildlife trade.

- 2. Campaigns**

Investments that build the public, political, and philanthropic will for lion recovery and change behavior to reduce threats.

- 3. Collaboration**

Investments that convene and build coalitions to make lion conservation bigger, better, and more effective.

The 100% Model

100% of each donation to the Lion Recovery Fund is directly deployed to projects that conserve lions, with no overhead nor administrative fees taken.

The Lion Recovery Fund Strategy

State of the African Lion

During the past quarter century, Africa's lion populations have declined by approximately half. Latest estimates suggest that the number of wild lions remaining is down to just over 20,000 individuals (Bauer et al., 2015). Major threats facing lions are: the loss of prey through bushmeat poaching; incidental capture of lions in snares; retaliatory or pre-emptive killing of lions in response to human-lion conflict; habitat loss; encroachment of wild spaces by humans and/or livestock; targeted poaching of lions for their body parts; and poorly managed trophy hunting.

Lions have vanished from over 80% of their historical range, and are now extirpated from 26 countries that they formerly inhabited (Bauer et al., 2015). Only 7 nations – Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe – are home to more than 1,000 lions. Now is the time to stop this decline, begin recovering lion populations, and ensure lions thrive in Africa, presenting a major contribution to the economies, ecologies, and people of the continent.

Success is Possible

Recovering lion populations can be done. The governments of many African countries have set aside vast wildlife estates and have demonstrated a firm political commitment to the conservation of wildlife and wild lands. Research indicates that in most of Africa's protected areas lions occur at a fraction of the density that they could if those areas were financed and managed adequately. The existing protected area estates across Africa alone could support three to four times the current total lion population if those places were better resourced and managed (Lindsey et al., 2017). There have been significant advances in techniques and strategies that enable communities to coexist with lions and create lion-tolerant areas outside protected areas. Furthermore, lions are able to breed quickly and can achieve relatively high densities in landscapes where they, their prey, and their habitat are protected sufficiently.



The Lion Recovery Fund

Given these hopeful opportunities, the [Wildlife Conservation Network \(WCN\)](#), in partnership with the [Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation](#), created the **Lion Recovery Fund**. The Lion Recovery Fund's vision is to double the number of lions in Africa via a three-pronged strategy that expands the conservation footprint, builds the public, political, and philanthropic will for lion and landscape recovery, and scales up the level of funding for conservation of lions and their habitat. These strategies guide the Fund's investments across three portfolios: conservation projects on the ground, campaigns that build the will

for lion recovery, and collaborations, as no single entity will be able to recover lions alone.



The Lion Recovery Fund is designed to be catalytic: it will work to stimulate new levels of financial commitment, create new conservation investments to expand the conservation footprint, scale up approaches proven to work, and convene organizations to explore ways to work together where collaboration has not been present before.

The Governance of the Lion Recovery Fund

Thoughtful and responsible execution of donor support remains a core principle of the Lion Recovery Fund and WCN. The Lion Recovery Fund is steered by a science-driven strategy. It is governed by a Leadership Team at WCN and guided by the analysis of a Director who identifies and vets the best possible investments for lion recovery. A separate Granting Committee makes decisions on each proposal and brings the frontline of guidance and assurance that each investment is the most effective to bring lions back. Each of these decisions benefits from the strategic review of a broader set of Strategic Advisors from across the conservation community.

The Wildlife Conservation Network, in partnership with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, is honored to have supported the design and creation – and continued evolution – of this ambitious Fund for the African lion and for the recovery of its landscapes.

The Success of the Species Fund Model

In 2013 a violent crisis emerged that was decimating elephant populations, anchored in human greed for their ivory. The Wildlife Conservation Network and its partner Save The Elephants recognized that no single institution could adequately address the anti-poaching, anti-trafficking, and demand reduction actions needed to recover elephants. Collaboration, high efficiency, speed of delivery, and support of the best ideas rather than a single institution were critical. With these principles, and a partnership with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation (LDF), the Elephant Crisis Fund was born. To date, this approach to wildlife philanthropy has raised more than \$17 million, supported more than 80 partners across Africa and Asia, and has supported almost 200 projects across 31 countries to protect elephants and end the trade.

All signals pointed to the need for a similar scaled-up and catalytic funding mechanism to address the decline of lions. WCN and LDF thus created the Lion Recovery Fund, following these same principles of the Elephant Crisis Fund model. The Lion Recovery Fund maintains the 100% model whereby all donor funds go to conservation, responds rapidly and efficiently with minimal bureaucracy, has sound vetting of projects which ensures confidence in donor investment, and holds an appetite for innovation and calculated risks on big ideas that could accelerate lion recovery.

Lion Recovery Fund: Vision and Goals

Vision: To double the number of lions in Africa.

In the past 25 years, lion numbers have been cut in half across Africa. The vision of the Lion Recovery Fund is to bring that half back, recovering lions continent-wide to ~40,000 individuals by 2050.

Goals

To achieve this vision, we will work with conservation partners to:

1. **Reverse lion declines** and halt country-level extinctions
2. **Achieve net positive lion population growth, or stability in populations that are near carrying capacity**, in priority landscapes

A detailed, measurable, and shared roadmap of time-limited milestones is under development with a coalition of institutions and leading individuals who are committed to pulling in one direction to recover lions and restore their landscapes.

The Lion Recovery Strategy

There is general consensus that recovering lions and restoring landscape across their range will require concerted efforts across three strategies. Lion and Lionscape recover will require that we, as a community:

❖ Expand the Conservation Footprint

Expand the current footprint of lion conservation across Africa. Strengthen existing efforts and catalyze new conservation initiatives where there are gaps in lions' range.

❖ Build the Will

Build public, political and philanthropic will that is essential to recover lions and restore their landscapes.

❖ Scale the Funding

Significantly increase the funding available for lion conservation through new private and public investment.



Jon McCormack

1. Expand the Conservation Footprint

Strengthen existing management and initiate new action where there are gaps

Latest research indicates that if properly resourced and effectively managed, Africa's protected areas could support a population three to four times greater than the current population (Lindsey et al., 2017). One of the most transformative approaches to reversing lion declines is to make these protected landscapes – their core protected areas, the corridors that connect them, and the communal lands in and around them – more protective, tolerant, and compatible with lion populations. Lions can be prolific, and they could recover in these landscapes if they had more complete protection in key areas, viable corridors for uninhibited movements and dispersal of lions from one core to the next, healthy natural prey bases, communities that took pride in their existence or at least tolerated the costs of living with lions, and strong policies and enforcement on wildlife crime. If these landscapes were managed as **lionscapes**, lion loss could be reversed and lion populations could recover.

The Lion Recovery Fund, therefore, aims to turn core reserves and the communal lands inside and around them into vast lionscapes that anchor the long-term conservation and recovery of the species and the wild ecosystems upon which they depend. To do this, we need to work with partners to strengthen existing efforts while expanding the conservation footprint, stimulating new efforts in regions that have lacked conservation investment.

2. Build the Will

Campaigns to build strong, positive will for lion conservation

For the most part, people around the world are unfamiliar with the dramatic reduction in lion numbers, what their loss means for economies and ecologies, or what can be done to address it. Similarly, many living within lion range either do not know of the decline in lions, are apathetic, or are actively antagonistic in their attitudes towards them, often with good reason. Further, the political will of African governments is often not adequate to allow for the effective resourcing of protected areas, or for taking the legislative steps to allow effective conservation on community and private lands. While lions may well be revered within donor countries as logos and mascots, political will and philanthropy from the United States and other developed nations is inadequate. Recognizing that these are fundamental obstacles to achieving lion protection and recovery at scale, the Lion Recovery Fund has made central to its strategy catalyzing investments in campaigns that amplify the public, political, and philanthropic commitment to lion recovery.

The Lion Recovery Fund strategy aims to build:

- **Public Will** by taking creative and strategic actions to ensure targeted segments of society in Africa and abroad are significantly more aware of the lion crisis and invest in their recovery. In Africa, efforts to raise public will must include both communities living with lions and urban residents to create a constituency for conservation.
- **Political Will** such that governments in Africa invest more in their protected areas, and donor governments elevate their support to them in this effort. There is a further and equally significant need for supportive policies that protect or connect lion landscapes and that support human-wildlife conflict abatement efforts.

- **Philanthropic Will** such that the financial support of corporations, large foundations, bi-lateral government aid agencies, multi-lateral agencies, and private individuals is dramatically elevated to resource the recovery of lions and their landscapes.

3. Scale the Funding

Significantly increase funding needed to recover lions

Recent studies of the funding needed to secure Africa's savannah protected areas show that approximately three-quarters of protected areas in lion range operate at a budget deficit and the average funding in those areas is <10% of what is needed. Thus, without a significant elevation of support, we are going to see ongoing, dramatic declines in the abundance and distribution of lions and their prey – even within protected areas (Lindsey et al., *In review*). To double the number of lions, the funding for lion conservation must significantly increase.

The Lion Recovery Fund is designed to be catalytic, not only raising funds directly but also leveraging additional funds from other groups. Convening philanthropists with a common interest in Africa can allow for the sharing of new and leveraged ways to donate. It can seek ways to overcome obstacles to philanthropy (such as perceptions about corruption). Collaborative grant making (see box below) can also result in efficiencies in project vetting, extension of the duration of funding for long-term recovery efforts, and complementary investment to address multiple needs in a landscape of common interest.

Due to the disparity between the scale of need and current available funding, the Lion Recovery Fund is designed to support interventions that are effective and cost efficient and which are likely to leverage additional resources for lion conservation.

The Lion Recovery Fund's Investment Portfolio

To advance this three-part strategy, the Lion Recovery Fund invests in **three programmatic portfolios**:

1. **Conservation** projects on the ground at the forefront of lion/landscape conservation.
2. **Campaigns** that build public, political, and philanthropic will for lion recovery, and change behavior to reduce threats.
3. **Collaborations** that convene players and build coalitions for aligned efforts to make conservation of lions bigger, better, and more effective.

1. Conservation Projects

Investments to grow the conservation footprint for lions and their habitats

The Lion Recovery Fund targets field conservation efforts that:

- **Expand and deepen the protection and management of lion landscapes**

The Fund supports projects that aim to strengthen and expand the protection and effective management of critical lion core areas. The support of co-management partnerships between NGOs and wildlife authorities for the management of protected areas is essential to improve protected areas' ability to secure lions, their habitats and their prey. The Fund will invest in strengthening existing co-management and technical assistance projects, scaling up projects that are working, and catalyzing new protection and management in areas that currently lack a conservation presence. Projects involving the management and protection of land need not focus solely on lions – so long as lions and their prey benefit from the presence of improved protection of wildlife and habitats.



- **Promote coexistence and connectivity**

The African human population is rapidly growing and is expanding into lion landscapes. Living with lions is hard for these communities, but coexistence is absolutely within reach. The Fund invests in supporting coexistence between people and lions to make it easier, if not economically or culturally beneficial, to live with growing lion populations. These investments will make the effective management of neighboring protected areas easier; will expand the conservation reach of protected areas; and will help to achieve connectivity between the core reserves within lion range. Key field activities that the Fund supports include projects that a)



reduce the costs borne by communities associated with living with lions and their prey such as conflict mitigation teams and strengthening bomas/kraals for livestock; b) incentivize coexistence between communities and wildlife by creating benefits for local people or building local pride in wildlife conservation; and c) support the management of land, livestock and wildlife in community areas to address root causes of conflict between humans and lion populations.

- **Tackle the illegal wildlife trade**

The illegal trade in lion skins and parts, as well as the illegal harvesting of wildlife for bushmeat, are rising and significant threats. The Fund invests in projects to tackle the trafficking and demand for these wildlife products to reduce poaching of lions and their prey. This will involve investments in such initiatives as the training of law enforcement agencies, anti-trafficking

projects to disrupt trade routes and networks, and demand reduction campaigns. Such interventions will be supported both in Africa and in other continents where wildlife products are consumed.



2. Campaigns

Building the will for conservation and changing behavior that threatens lions

The Lion Recovery Fund invests in campaigns that build public and political will. Campaigns will incentivize philanthropic engagement in lion conservation to accelerate funding available for lion recovery. Campaign investments, for example, may support engagement of an industry or companies to support lion conservation financially and tell the story of lion loss and recovery to customers, or creative ideas to harness donations from targeted populations within western nations (e.g. zoo visitors) that are likely to commit to supporting lion conservation if only they were made aware of the issues at hand.

The Lion Recovery Fund also invests in campaigns that change behaviour that threatens lions; for example, one grant supported a campaign encouraging urban Zambians to stop buying bushmeat, which decimates the lion prey base and kills lions in snares (see Appendix 1). Campaign investments can also encourage deeper socio-cultural support for lion conservation, such as fostering national pride for lions or improving attitudes for living alongside them.

Fundamental to any campaign investment will be measurable activities that lead directly to conservation outcomes and/or clearly defined pathways toward the strategy for lion recovery. The Lion Recovery Fund encourages such campaigns to come from not just inside the conservation community, but also from for-profit and other entities beyond traditional environmental organizations that are skilled in changing behaviors and building commitment.

3. Collaborations

Facilitating alliances to advance lion recovery and put Lions Before Logos

Doubling lion numbers and recovering their landscapes is a bold goal – one that will require the actions of many dedicated institutions – which is why it has been designed to be catalytic in its grant making and collaborative in its approach. Competition among conservation groups, funding bodies, and other stakeholders has been a major impediment to conservation success.

A coalition of conservation organizations (whether focused on lions, community development, or protected area management) must come together and coordinate their investments of time, funds and energy. The Wildlife Conservation Network has always played a supportive role to others, boosting partners' efforts. The Lion Recovery Fund therefore hopes to use this neutral role to help convene key players, from large international organizations to small grassroots entities, and build alignment where possible amongst these institutions so that conservation practitioners are working together towards a common agenda and roadmap to conserve lions and their landscapes. The Lion Recovery Fund will invest in partnerships and outcome-focused gatherings that will encourage collaborative efforts to scale up conservation for lions and their landscapes.

Collaboration at Work

A partnership between the Lion Recovery Fund and National Geographic's Big Cats Initiative.

The Lion Recovery Fund and National Geographic Society's Big Cats Initiative (BCI) are combining forces to invest in lion landscapes together. In addition to joint fundraising and convening around key threats and strategies for lions, the two initiatives have committed to three ways they will coordinate grant programs:

1. *Sequential Funding.* Multi-year funding is needed for many conservation footprint and coexistence projects, but is often lacking or limited by grantmakers. In landscapes and projects of mutual interest, LRF and BCI will work to sequentially fund projects to make their dollars go further and extend the funding commitment.
2. *Complementary Funding.* In landscapes of mutual concern the two institutions can choose to invest in preferred but complementary approaches to more holistically address the needs of a lion landscape. For example, the LRF might choose to increase law enforcement and management of a national reserve, while BCI coordinates its giving to address human-lion conflict around its boundaries.
3. *CoFunding.* Where there are urgent or critically important projects that are of mutual interest to both institutions BCI and the LRF may co-invest to ensure the project has sufficient funding in a timely manner to expand the footprint or promote coexistence.

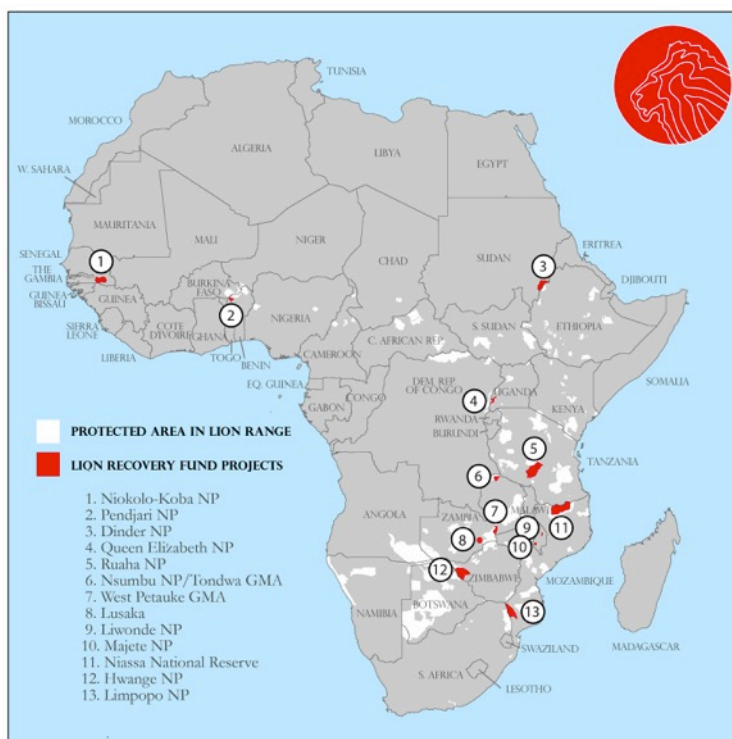
Where Will the Lion Recovery Fund Support Lion Conservation?

We believe that **all lion populations matter** – not just from a genetic or population perspective, but also from a social and political perspective. We consider projects throughout the entire lion range. Our conservation investments are within a mixed portfolio of sites where we can:

- **Retain** lions, to ensure that the largest populations that remain are protected. This, for example, would include some of the landscapes in Tanzania, Kenya, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

- **Recover** lions in landscapes that are below their prey and lion population carrying capacity, and help those numbers recover. This would include sites in a wide range of countries such as Zambia, Ethiopia, and Mozambique.
- **Rescue** the most imperilled lion populations and ensure that there are no further national-level extinctions – in places like Angola, Malawi, West and Central Africa, Uganda, Sudan and South Sudan.

To further guide project investments, a number of criteria relating to prospective sites and partner organizations are used as the basis for assessing the likely return on investment from a grant. See Appendix 2.



Summary of projects funded in 2017

Number of projects	13
Number of countries	9
Number of partners	11
Amount allocated	\$1.147 million
Number of Projects by objective	
• Expand the conservation footprint:	7
• Promote human-lion coexistence:	3
• Tackle the illegal wildlife trade:	2
• Reintroduce lions where they can recover:	1

Why is WCN's Lion Recovery Fund Different?

100% Model

Our 100% model ensures every cent of your donated dollar is invested in lions, with zero administrative or overhead fees.

Lions Not Logos

No one organization can recover lions single-handedly. The LRF works to unite efforts and investments through collaborative efforts.

A VC for Lions

Like a conservation venture capital firm, the LRF seeks out innovative ideas and provides seed funding for new projects, or bolsters approaches known to work.

Ideas not Institutions

We support the best ideas, not any one single institution, whether those ideas come from individuals, small organizations, or larger non-profits.

Range-Wide

The LRF believes all lions matter, and invests in projects to recover lions throughout their entire range.

Leadership

The LRF is governed by a committed team of conservation and philanthropic professionals, with a Board, a Granting Committee, a Campaigns Committee, and a team of technical advisors that bring sound conservation, philanthropy, and communications.

Talk to Us

We welcome your feedback and your support in this bold strategy to bring lions back!

Please contact:

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Ken and Michell Dyball

Appendix 1. *Examples of Lion Recovery Fund Investments*

Securing the heartland of the West African lion's range

Grantee: African Parks Network

Project Type: Expanding conservation footprint

Location: Pendjari National Park, Benin

Grant Amount: \$100,000

Project Duration: 2 years

The West African Lion is Critically Endangered. Pendjari National Park in Benin forms part of the 10,488 mi² W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) protected area complex that straddles Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger and which holds 90% of West Africa's lions. Pendjari retains the largest wildlife population in the WAP complex, including its population of about 110 lions. The park could conceivably hold 3x times that number given adequate law enforcement and management. African Parks Network have signed in 2017 a long-term contract to assume management of the park. The Lion Recovery Fund has granted funding for increasing law enforcement in the complex, for understanding lion population sizes and movements, and for appraising the impact of trophy hunting on lions in the area. The LRF's grant will unlock as much as 2x more funding from the Wyss Foundation which was allocated to African Parks Network as a challenge matching-grant.



Incentivizing human-lion coexistence**Grantee:** Ruaha Carnivore Project**Type:** Promoting coexistence between people and wildlife**Location:** Ruaha National Park, Tanzania**Grant Amount:** \$120,000**Duration:** 3 years

The Ruaha Carnivore Project (RCP) is receiving funding from the LRF for expansion of its community engagement project on the borders of Ruaha National Park in Tanzania. Ruaha is considered to hold one of the most significant lion populations in Africa. The project, led by Dr. Amy Dickman, aims to reduce human-lion conflict and to reduce both retaliatory and ritual killing of lions. In addition, she is trialling innovative techniques to incentivise coexistence between people and carnivores. One such innovation is the use of 'performance payments' for communities, based on the abundance and diversity of wildlife on their land – to incentivize active protection of wildlife in the community lands around Ruaha. The LRF will help RCP expand this project from 12 to 16 villages.



Combatting the demand for bushmeat in Zambia

Grantee: The Wildlife Crime Prevention Project

Type: Tackling illegal wildlife trade

Location: Zambia

Grant Amount: \$69,920

Duration: 1 year

The illegal bushmeat trade is probably the single greatest threat to wildlife (including lions) in Zambia. Bushmeat poaching has reduced prey populations significantly, even in protected areas. Lions are killed directly in the wire snares set by poachers to catch ungulates, such as impalas and buffaloes, which lions eat. An increasing proportion of bushmeat poaching is done for commercial trade to urban areas. A recent study on the bushmeat trade in Zambia demonstrated the limited understanding of consumers of bushmeat regarding the impacts of their consumption on wildlife populations, on prospects for tourism in Zambia and thus for job creation. Wildlife Crime Prevention created a campaign funded by the LRF to educate the public in Zambia about the negative impacts of consuming bushmeat sourced from poachers. Their campaign raises awareness of: the damage done to the Zambian economy by illegal bushmeat hunting by undermining tourism; the illegality of being in possession of or trading in illegally-sourced bushmeat; health issues associated with consuming illegal bushmeat; the fact that consumers are often misled regarding the species being consumed; and the difference between illegal and unsustainable bushmeat and legal and sustainable 'game meat'.



Appendix 2. *Criteria for selecting sites and partners for investment by the Lion Recovery Fund.*

Site-based criteria	Description
Size of population	Larger population scores higher.
Potential increase	Greater potential, higher score.
Vulnerability of national population	Greater vulnerability, higher score.
Other wildlife	Key species - wild dogs, cheetahs, elephants, black and white rhinos.
Management budget	Higher priority for sites with greater financial need/fewer resources – and for sites with less donor activity.
Scope for effective community engagement	Priority for sites where community engagement is needed and is likely to happen effectively.

Partner based characteristics	Description
Does the organisation have permissions for the work in place?	Partners without clear evidence of permission (or a high likelihood of obtaining it) will not be considered for LRF investment.
Adequate admin and accounting capacity	Partners without these skills will not be considered.
Quality of potential partner (reputation, experience, accountability)	Partner strength considered to be the single most important factor in site-choice.
Financial sustainability of institution	Higher priority for sites where the partner has better prospects of sustaining the conservation effort in the absence of LRF funding.
Scope for leverage of funding	Higher priority for sites where we can leverage funding / conservation action and co-investment.

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