

A Global Apex Goal for Nature

For Nature, For People

Restoring nature for human prosperity and equity, avoiding the climate and ecological crises, and providing a healthy planet for future generations

Zero Net Loss of Nature from 2020

Net Positive by 2030

Full Recovery by 2050

Avoiding a planetary and humanitarian emergency

The natural world is in such steep decline that we are at risk of destabilizing the very life-support systems we depend on for our own survival.

Three-quarters of the land and two-thirds of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions. We have lost half of the world's forests, half of coral reefs, 70% of wetlands and dammed two thirds of the world's main rivers. Wildlife populations have, on average, declined by 60% since 1970 and there is the potential for our actions to cause the loss of 1 million species according to the most recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

This massive loss of nature – species and ecosystems on land, freshwater and in the oceans – threatens not only direct human health and wellbeing, for example through decline in food production and freshwater availability. The ecological crisis also threatens the stability of the entire planet, by further destabilising the climate. It is only thanks to the ability of natural ecosystems, like forests, to absorb massive amounts of greenhouse gases, that we have not already exceeded 2°C of global warming. However, we are now seeing cracks in nature's ability to continue to provide us with the biosphere resilience that enables us to continue developing our common world. The climate crisis is thus intimately linked to the ecological crisis on Earth, and both need to be addressed simultaneously with equal, concerted force.

The principle driver of the massive loss of nature across the world is the food we eat and how we produce it. More than a third of the world's land surface and nearly 75% of freshwater resources are devoted to crop or livestock production (IPBES, 2019). Food and land use also account for almost a third of green-house emissions contributing to today's climate crisis. Nature-Based Solutions could provide as much as 30% of the climate change mitigation needed by 2030 in order to stay below 1.5°C of global warming.

The science is clear. From now on we need to protect or sustainably manage the planet's remaining natural habitats and resources. If we are to avoid dangerous climate change, secure our food systems and meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, we must stop the loss and begin to rapidly regenerate nature in the near future.

Why a Global Apex Goal for Nature?

As key natural ecosystems are heading towards tipping points with dangerous consequences for the stability of the planet's life support systems, our societies need to set our global compass to halt and reverse climate change and nature loss. On climate, we have a clear goal of Carbon Neutrality, articulated in the target of zero net emissions by 2050, a milestone of 50% reduction by 2030, and a reference target for emission pathways from now until the end of the century (essentially cutting emissions by half each decade from now onwards) to have a chance of stabilising global warming at 1.5°C. This allows convergence and a concerted effort from governments, companies and individuals in contributing towards achieving the goal, and allows us to measure progress and efforts.

A similar clarity of direction, ambition and destination is missing for the global Nature action agenda. We argue that a clear, science-based Global Apex Goal, that is measurable and communicable, is also needed for nature.

Though it is often argued that nature is more complex than climate, we must strive to take a complex issue and make it simpler, understandable and accessible to a range of audiences. Let's not make the perfect the enemy of the good. Paradoxically, the scale of the crisis for our natural world may make the scientific case for an Apex Goal simpler. We have so much overwhelming evidence that we have reached a point equivalent to a global ecological crisis - where the pace of species loss alone equals a global mass extinction (the 6th to have occurred, as far as we know, since life started to emerge on Earth, and the first to be caused by another species, us).

Enough is enough. We cannot afford to continue our current path of global risk taking. We know that we are approaching danger zones with rapidly rising risks, both for immediate human wellbeing and for Earth's long-term resilience and planetary stability. The time thus seems analytically, ethically and practically mature for considering a Global Apex Goal. One which drives and complements all the systems, cross-targets and approaches that we need to manage ecosystem functions and services in support of human development, from local communities to global development.

A Global Apex Goal for Nature needs to clearly signal to decision makers, markets and the public that we must stop losing nature and begin a process of restoration. Simply put, we need to "protect the best and improve the rest".

A Global Apex Goal for Nature needs to be embedded in a narrative that highlights the need to value nature for the benefit of people, as well as be accompanied by an equitably benefit sharing and just socio-economic transition.

- **What Apex Global Goal:** It must be motivational, communicable, science-based and measurable – clearly signalling the direction and the destination that the global community must embrace and converge towards.
- **Overarching:** A Global Apex Goal provides an overarching 2030 goal representing a societal and political 'North Star'/'Southern Cross' embraced at the highest levels to drive ambition in governments, business and society, to inspire the UN Convention on Biological Diversity Post-2020 framework process, as well as create the opportunity for links between biodiversity and other conventions/agreements such as climate, ocean and land degradation.

- **Translation at local levels:** It must be consistent with the notion that nation states have different capacities and contexts. It must, therefore, be actionable with clear and accountable pathways and mechanisms similar to Nationally Determined Contributions and Science-Based Targets for companies. And it must be supported by resource mobilisation mechanisms supporting a socially just transition as well as business transitions.
- **The concept of Net:** While the word 'Net' generates technical and ideological issues which must be addressed and clarified in its implementation to avoid abuses, it does allow for necessary development needs and trade-offs, particularly from the perspective of developing economies. Adequate principles, standards and metrics should be adopted to implement a mitigation hierarchy. Areas where loss simply must be avoided will be made clear (e.g. intact habitats, key biodiversity areas, etc.) and required mitigation actions will be addressed in the translation to local levels to ensure they truly contribute and are not in opposition to the spirit of the Global Apex Goal and specific targets.
- **Set the ambition for specific actions:** Second-level targets contributing to the Global Apex Goal should focus on the main drivers of nature loss as identified by the recent IPBES Global Assessment, particularly reducing the human footprint as well as strengthening protection of places and species.
- **Measurability:** Adequate indicators should be chosen to directly measure progress against the Global Apex Goal itself.

Stop losing nature and start restoring

The Global Apex Goal will address today's catastrophic nature loss based on the concept of Bending the Curve¹, whereby the decline of natural habitats and the loss of species reaches an inflection point in the coming decade.

By 2030 there must be at least as much nature on the planet as there is today and that trend will be heading steeply upwards on a path to full recovery by 2050 - with recovery defined as comparable to an agreed baseline year. We suggest a minimum baseline year of 2020. We recognize that some loss of nature will continue in the coming years, but also that additional extinctions are avoidable and that increases, in both species populations and the extent and quality of habitat, are achievable in this timeframe. It is a question of political, corporate and societal will. Such a goal requires support from all stakeholders to act now.

¹ Aiming higher to bend the curve of biodiversity loss. Mace, G. M., Barrett, M. Burgess, N. D., Cornell, S.E., Freeman, R., Grooten, M., Purvis, A. 2018. Available via: <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/publications/artiklar/2018-09-16-aiming-higher-to-bend-the-curve-of-biodiversity-loss.html>

The Global Apex Goal supported by our organizations can be summed up as:

- The baseline of 2020 (recommended) will serve as reference for zero net nature loss to ensure that by 2030 we haven't lost further nature and that we have started a process of recovery.
- By 2030, nature is recovering at a global scale. This requires us to halt the degradation of healthy ecosystems, and to take significant additional action which restores nature and builds the resilience of landscapes and seascapes.
- By 2050 we will have full recovery and restoration. At this point we will have achieved sufficient functioning ecosystems to support future generations of people and help avoid dangerous climate change. This aligns with a UN CBD 2050 Vision agreed by all governments in 2010 which calls for living in harmony with nature.

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Net Positive by 2030

Full Recovery by 2050

The following organizations support this Apex Goal and framing:

