



# Conservation Social Science

Understanding People to Conserve Biodiversity

Our planet is increasingly under pressure from human activity. Forests are disappearing, oceans are emptying, and species are vanishing at an alarming rate. Climate change is the number one environmental issue of our time, and the forces of globalization are unprecedented in their scale and velocity. The actions we take over the next decade will determine the future of nature – and the fate of people who depend upon the natural environment for their food, shelter and livelihoods.

To meet this challenge, WWF is expanding the horizons of conservation science

beyond its biological traditions.

With decades of experience, we have long understood that success requires an integrated approach that addresses the wide range of human activities affecting the environment. We are already working with local people, national governments, and multinational corporations around the world to strengthen their stewardship of threatened species and ecosystems. Now we are enriching our work with rigorous scientific analyses of conservation questions that explore the relationship between people and nature:



- What social contexts are most suitable for conservation investments?
- What conservation policies and practices best support sustainable human stewardship of our natural environment?
- What are the impacts of conservation programs for people and nature?

## People are the answer

WWF is leading global efforts to answer these questions and develop the emerging field of Conservation Social Science. By mainstreaming the application of social science into conservation programs, we gain a deeper understanding of the decisions people make affecting nature, why they make them, and how that knowledge can inform conservation strategies that balance the needs of people and nature. After all, conservation interventions are the product of human decisions, and require changes in human behavior to succeed.

Anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology and other social science disciplines all have analytic tools and established knowledge that can provide insights vital to the success of local, national, and international conservation efforts. Through research, technical assistance, and capacity-building efforts around the world, WWF is delivering the social science knowledge and skills necessary to ensure that conservation strategies are both biologically sustainable and socially viable.



## Social Science in Action

WWF's Conservation Social Science program conserves biodiversity through a better understanding of law, policy, culture and human behavior. We are applying this cutting-edge approach in the field, with a focus on

### • Conservation measures

To ensure that we select the best strategies, track progress, and learn from experience, WWF is measuring and analyzing key social and biological indicators in the places where we work. Our goal is to create an evidence-based snapshot of the human dimensions most relevant to conservation. These factors shape the way people use their natural resource base and their support of conservation activities. Continued investment in social measures will reveal new scientific insights, allowing WWF to achieve better conservation results.

### • The Natural Capital Project

Conservation often makes economic sense, but key decision makers – individuals as well as governments – do not have a reliable way to assess the true economic value of the services their ecosystems provide. WWF's innovative Natural Capital Project – a joint effort with Stanford University and The Nature Conservancy – is estimating and mapping the economic benefits people derive from natural ecosystems. WWF works with local, national, and international partners to implement strategies that account for these benefits and appropriately compensate landowners.



## Results

Established in 2005, WWF's Conservation Social Science program has already achieved far-reaching impacts. Successes to date include

- Protected almost 5 million acres (2 million hectares) of Borneo's unique tropical rain forest by mapping the economic value of carbon storage and air quality and showing that the standing forest would contribute 2.7 billion dollars to the region over the next 30 years
- Using Tanzania as a case study, empirically demonstrated that community involvement in protected area management enhances the health of local forests
- Designed the first assessment of social conditions in Mozambique's proposed Primeiras and Segundas National Park, laying the foundation for collaboration with local communities and management of the future park
- Catalyzed growth of Society for Conservation Biology's Social Science Working Group (SSWG) – the world's leading conservation social science professional organization, with over 600 members in 70 countries
- Published more than 15 research articles in leading academic journals, including *Environment and Development Economics*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and *Conservation Biology*
- Surveyed the WWF Network to identify critical social science needs, priorities, and capacities for a more comprehensive approach to biodiversity conservation



## Projects

To build on our successes, the Conservation Social Science program will focus on three priorities in the coming years:

### Marine Protected Area Governance

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are a critical component of marine conservation strategies, but scientists do not yet understand why some MPAs succeed and others fail. As a result, decision makers develop MPAs in relative ignorance, leading to a high failure rate among MPAs and fueling criticism of MPAs as a conservation strategy. To address this policy dilemma, WWF is leading an interdisciplinary, international research initiative to measure the conservation and poverty impacts of MPAs, explain why some MPAs provide benefits to both people and marine biodiversity, and identify key elements in developing successful MPAs.

### Social Science Training

In a recent survey of WWF science needs and capacities, social science training was identified as one of the most-needed forms of assistance. To respond to this need, WWF will provide basic social science training to field staff through short courses and by developing other tools and resources. Providing field staff with basic social science knowledge and skills will empower them to design more effective conservation strategies and better address local social needs. Where possible, we will "train the trainers" and partner with local research institutions to amplify the impact of these capacity-building efforts.

### Conservation and Poverty

Many of the world's poorest people depend on nature for their day-to-day survival. In the coming years, WWF will continue to explore the relationship among poverty, nature and conservation. We plan to further evaluate the social impacts of conservation interventions, with a focus on learning how to tailor our strategies to deliver greater benefits for both people and nature. WWF research currently focuses on strategies that promote conservation by local communities and on strategies designed to mitigate conflict between farmers and wildlife.



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