

Ecologi

Nature Projects Assessment Framework

A new benchmark for evaluating
nature-based restoration



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Foreword

Nature is finally moving out of the margins and into the financial mainstream.

There's real momentum building. More organisations want to invest in nature, more dedicated nature funds are emerging. Concepts like biodiversity, ecosystems and even holistic nature strategies show up alongside companies' climate commitments. While this momentum is encouraging, it's only one part of the puzzle. We won't unlock real scale without building trust.

Trust is what turns positive intent into durable markets. It's what gives investors confidence, helps businesses act credibly and responsibly and ensures project partners are supported for the long-term delivery of impact outcomes. In nature, trust is earned through evidence, transparency and high standards that can stand up to scrutiny.

That's why at Ecologi we've focused on building an "assessment layer" for nature, a practical framework, grounded in the latest science and building on existing best practice, which helps answer the core question for prospective funders: *is this a high-quality nature project which is likely to deliver real outcomes over time?*

Refining what quality means in restoration has challenges because nature is complex and local. Two projects can share the same certification labels and yet deliver very different outcomes depending on local contexts, incentives, community engagement and long-term management strategies. If we want to responsibly drive nature restoration, at scale, we need a standardized way to identify high-quality projects, and mitigate avoidable risk.

Our Nature Projects Assessment Framework (NPAF) sets out how Ecologi approaches these challenges.

Our aim is straightforward: to help raise standards, increase transparency and make it easier for more funding to flow to the projects that will produce the most impact with it. Success will look like moving from isolated initiatives to a credible, scalable market for restoring ecosystems and supporting the communities that depend on them.

Because restoration, done well, is one of the most practical investments we can make in long-term resilience across the environment, economy and society.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D Theocharis". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey background.

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CEO, Ecologi

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Partners

We are grateful to the several partners who have supported this work both directly and indirectly, through our valued relationships, and exchange of ideas and best practices. Together, we aim to drive the integrity of the nature market forward and we are thankful for all the support they have shown us in preparing this framework and Whitepaper.



Future Forest
COMPANY



Executive summary

Interest in investing in Nature-based Solutions (NbS) is growing rapidly, driven by rising awareness of biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and the material risks that these pose to society and to businesses.



Businesses globally are realising the impact of their operations that continue to unsustainably depend on depleting natural resources. However, unlike carbon outcomes, nature outcomes are complex to measure and the market lacks a consistent and transparent manner of assessing the quality of nature projects. Without comparable metrics, investors, policymakers and project developers alike struggle to assess the full environmental and social value of nature-focussed initiatives, making selecting the most impactful projects difficult and fraught with risk.

Responding to customer demand for improved risk mitigation and impact maximisation, Ecologi developed its Nature Projects Assessment Framework (NPAF), a standardised approach for evaluating nature projects to guide corporate investment. The NPAF applies a two-stage process, combining due diligence with a multi-dimensional scoring framework structured around four pillars: Biodiversity, Ecosystem services, Socioeconomic impacts and Governance; and a complementary risk assessment. This approach enables comparison across a wide variety of project types and diverse ecological, social and governance contexts.



Introduction

Setting the context

Global momentum for aligning climate action with nature and biodiversity conservation and restoration has continued to build through recent key international processes.

In October 2024, COP16 of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) saw focus shift decisively toward implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), with governments, civil society and the private sector coming together to reaffirm the importance of integrating the halting and reversal of nature loss into climate strategies. Outcomes from both COP16 of the CBD and COP30 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) pointed to the need for urgent mobilisation of private finance for ecosystem protection and restoration. In both cases, the deep interconnection between nature and human wellbeing was recognised.

At Ecologi, we believe corporate climate action can be divided into three elements: Reduce, Restore and Report. As we describe in our 3Rs Standard, this structure is designed to help organisations take meaningful responsibility for their impacts while strengthening regulatory readiness, responding to investor and customer expectations and building climate and nature strategies that support long-term commercial resilience.

- **Reduce** involves the measurement of emissions, reduction target-setting (for example, setting science-based targets) and the significant and permanent reduction of a business's emissions to reach net-zero;
- **Restore** involves taking accountability for the damaging effect of unabated emissions on the planet and directing funding to restoration activities globally to prevent the degradation of nature and accelerate the drive toward net-zero;
- **Report** involves the transparent and proactive disclosure of climate action taken to date, including progress against targets and acknowledgement of future steps.

While frameworks providing instruction for emissions reductions and participation in carbon markets are becoming more established, defining how nature fits into this has proven to be a complex task. Buyers are clear that they want to support projects which benefit nature, but the market lacks a standardised way to assess the quality of nature projects.

Further challenges lie in attempting to evaluate projects before implementation and, therefore, before any results are tangible. This creates uncertainty, limits comparability and increases the risk of misdirected funds for businesses seeking to ensure their actions deliver lasting benefits for ecosystems and communities.

Ecologi's Nature Projects Assessment Framework (NPAF) was developed to address this gap, providing a science-based approach for evaluating nature projects that enables differentiation between high-integrity projects and those with weaker foundations or elevated risk. The NPAF, structured around the four core pillars of **Biodiversity, Ecosystem services, Socioeconomic impacts and Governance**, provides a holistic basis for evaluating the quality, impact and long-term sustainability of nature projects.

By working with Ecologi, businesses can have confidence that the projects they support will produce meaningful impacts which meet restoration best practice.

What are Nature projects?

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) have emerged as a popular and effective response to the climate crisis, targeting crucial issues such as biodiversity loss, water security and disaster risk reduction.

NbS are critical to sustainable development, using either mitigative, adaptive or a combination of both approaches to protect environmental and social systems simultaneously. At Ecologi, we support businesses to fund NbS through both carbon markets (which we call 'carbon projects') and through contributions and philanthropy (which we call 'nature projects').

Well-designed nature projects have the potential to generate multiple interdependent and mutually reinforcing benefits. At Ecologi, we focus on projects that serve to protect, restore and enhance natural ecosystems across terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. Our host of supported projects include restoration, land and seascape management, sustainable agricultural production and community-led nature governance.



The value of investing in high-integrity nature projects

The financial value of nature's ecosystem services is still underappreciated, but awareness is growing that nature is a valuable economic asset. With more than half of global GDP either moderately or highly dependent on nature, and nature loss a top five global risk to current and future investments, nature degradation presents substantial risks for businesses and threatens economic stability. For many businesses, the key question is not whether nature matters, but how investing in nature will affect their bottom line today. And the reality is increasingly clear: nature loss is already creating measurable risks and costs while nature investment is becoming a strategic lever for market resilience and competitiveness.

Businesses face direct and growing reputational, financial and regulatory exposure:

- **Supply chains are at risk** due to nature fragility, particularly for nature-dependent inputs (e.g. food, water-intensive manufacturing) and disruption and scarcity translate into higher costs and reduced reliability.
- **Facilities, infrastructure and staff are exposed**, as nature degradation amplifies physical impacts such as flooding, heat and wildfire, increasing operational downtime, health and safety concerns and damage costs.
- **Compliance requirements are imminent**, with nature-related disclosure and due diligence expectations expanding across markets, creating reporting burden and potential penalties or restricted market access.

Nature investments can lead to many positive impacts on business practices:

- **Mitigating risk** by reducing exposure to physical climate risks and supply chain disruption while strengthening long-term operational resilience;
- **Driving revenue** by maintaining access to markets with environmental requirements and unlocking value-driven customer demand with a differentiated brand and offering;
- **Reducing costs** by enhancing ecosystem services, lowering operational costs and insurance premiums;
- **Strengthening regulatory readiness** by preparing businesses for key frameworks such as:
 - Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD): a global standard for nature-related dependencies and risk reporting;
 - Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD): requires large EU-based and EU-operating companies to disclose biodiversity and ecosystem impacts;
 - National initiatives (e.g., UK 30x30 scheme): includes regulatory incentives and obligations for nature protection and restoration;
- **Improving stakeholder trust** by protecting relationships and reputation through reduced greenwashing risk; and
- **Enhancing decision-making** by facilitating better oversight of direct operations

and supporting more informed strategic planning across sustainability agendas.

Investors, consumers and employees are increasingly gravitating toward businesses demonstrating responsibility toward nature. While investors are integrating nature-related risks into capital allotment decisions, consumers and employees are consciously choosing brands whose values align with their own. By demonstrating credible nature action, businesses can create long-term value, whereas poor-quality nature investments pose a liability.

This urgency of aligning business activity with nature-positive outcomes is reinforced at the highest levels of international scientific consensus. The latest assessment from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the leading global authority on biodiversity, delivers a clear message: continued business-as-usual trajectories will cause ecosystem and economic collapse. The report directly links corporate activity to biodiversity loss and underscores the responsibility of businesses, as individuals and as collectives, to understand, manage and reduce their impacts on nature.

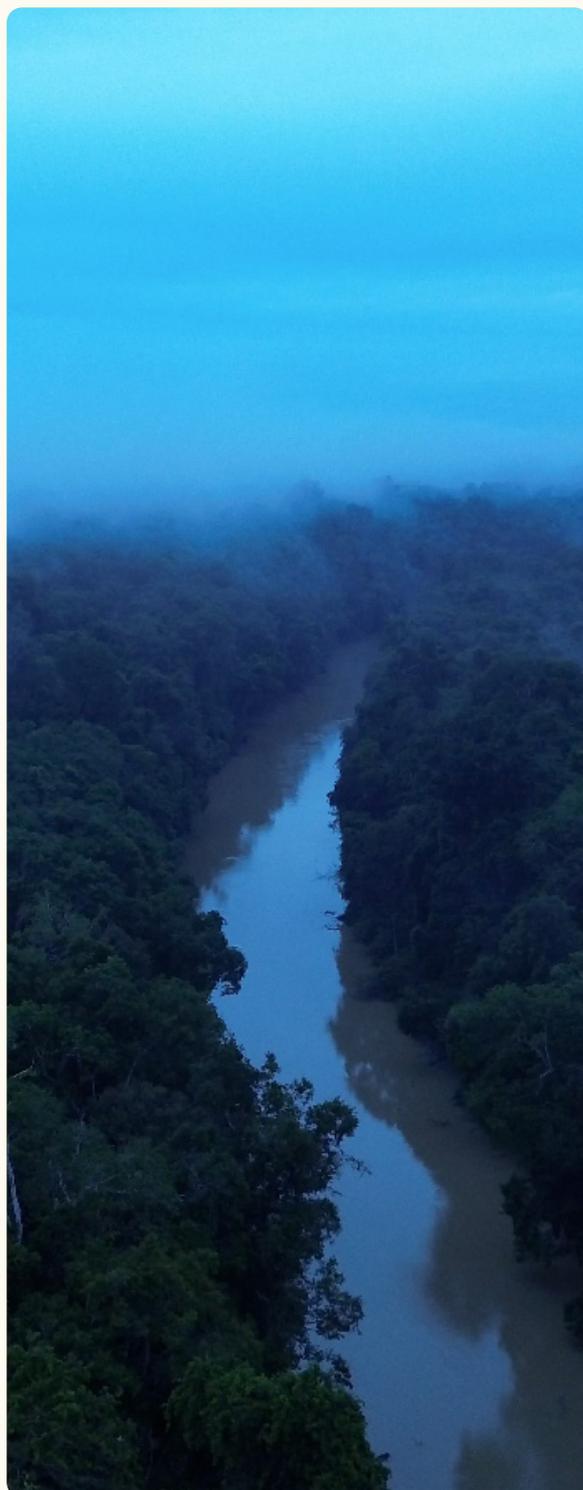


Ecological rationale for the NPAF

Climate change and biodiversity loss are creating linked planetary crises that are already materially affecting economies, communities and businesses. Natural systems that have historically buffered human activity are being pushed beyond their limits, reducing their capacity to support livelihoods and protect societies from environmental shocks.

While global warming has begun to exceed the 1.5 °C threshold, biodiversity is declining at unprecedented rates. Species extinctions and population collapses are accelerating, undermining the ecosystem services that support our way of life. If current trends persist, nature loss is expected to undermine progress across the majority of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These risks are no longer abstract or long-term; they are systemic and shaping economic performance and development outcomes.

Nature also plays a critical role in regulating the climate. But as oceans have absorbed a large share of anthropogenic CO₂ and excess heat, rising temperatures and acidification are pushing marine ecosystems toward irreversible tipping points. On land, forests, which are among the world's most important carbon sinks, are also showing signs of vulnerability, with emerging evidence suggesting that under extreme climatic stress some systems may shift from absorbing carbon to emitting it. As ecosystems approach these thresholds, their capacity to buffer climate change diminishes, amplifying global risks.





Restoration as a solution

While pressures on biodiversity are accelerating, opportunities exist to reverse ecosystem degradation through targeted restoration. Although some poorly managed old-growth forests may no longer absorb CO₂ at historical rates, newly-established forests are sequestering carbon more efficiently. Alongside protection and careful management of existing forests, the planting of new forests can play a meaningful role in mitigating climate change.

But forests are just one component of a broader suite of nature projects that support climate mitigation and adaptation globally. Beyond replacing damaged vegetation or reintroducing species, restoration aims to rebuild ecosystems that are “resilient and self-sustaining,” reestablishing the complex interactions and processes that

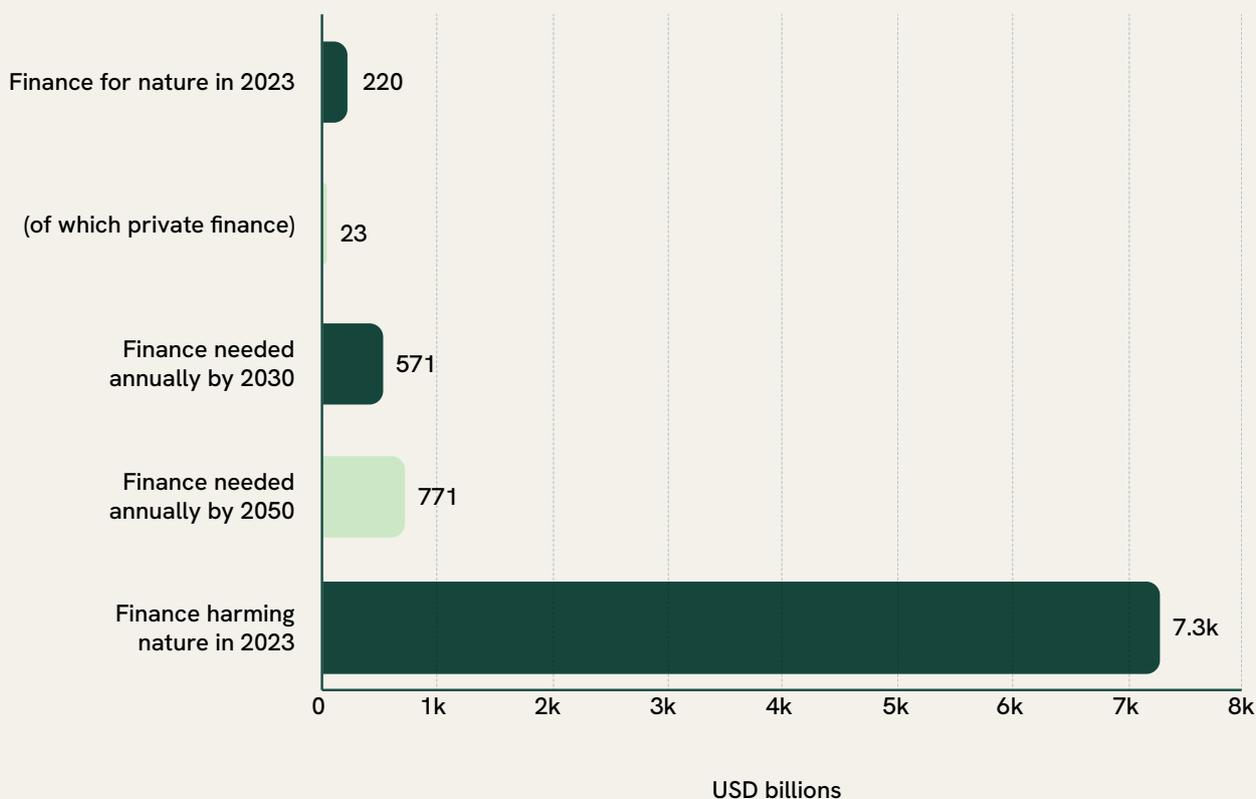
allow ecosystems to adapt and thrive under changing conditions.

Effective restoration rebuilds ecological structure, species composition and function. By doing so, it stabilises food webs, increases carbon sequestration and improves the resilience of essential ecosystem services.

At the same time, restoration can create social value and contribute to accomplishing the SDGs, including those related to poverty reduction, gender equality and decent work. In many contexts, restoration projects support sustainable livelihoods, strengthen local environmental stewardship and enhance community resilience to climate-related shocks. These benefits often accrue for communities at the frontlines of the climate crisis.

However, restoration outcomes vary widely depending on ecological and social contexts, and even well-designed projects must operate within markets that lack consistent structures to support them. While the link between climate and nature has never been more clear, reaching the scale of impact required will demand a significant increase in funding, with investments in nature restoration needing to roughly triple.

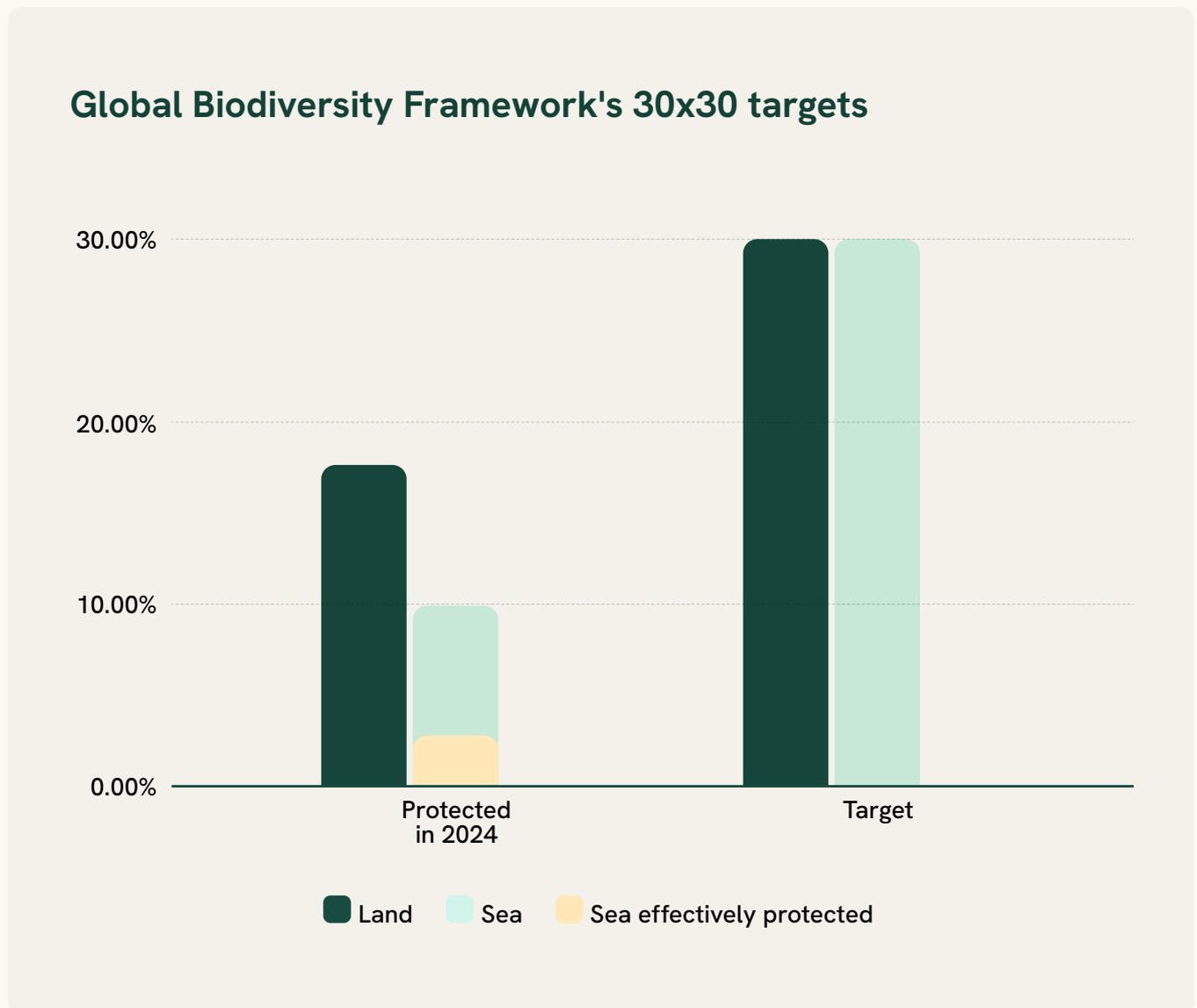
Nature funding gap



State of Finance for Nature 202, UNEP

Ultimately, the success of nature projects depends on the resilience of the ecosystems and human governance that support them, a resilience that is increasingly threatened by accelerating biodiversity loss and market-based challenges.

Achieving this resilience will require careful project design, risk management, monitoring, long-term management and strategic funding. This is why we developed the **NPAF**: a framework to help identify projects with the greatest potential to strengthen natural carbon sinks and to support the efficient allocation of funding to these critical initiatives.



[Protected Planet Report 2024](#)

[Sea effectively protected](#)



Existing best practice for nature restoration

For such a framework to be credible and effective, it must align with established global targets and standards.

A range of foundational instruments provide the core principles and guidance for project design and evaluation:

- [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) set global targets for social, environmental and economic development.
- [IUCN Global Standard for NbS](#) provides guidance on the design, implementation and evaluation of projects that address societal challenges while benefiting biodiversity.
- [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#) outlines principles for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and the equitable sharing of benefits that arise from it.
- [UNEP Decade on Ecosystem Restoration \(2021–2030\)](#) recommends principles for

ecosystem restoration projects that lead to maximum net gain for biodiversity, ecosystem health and human well-being.

- [Society for Ecological Restoration’s International Principles and Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration](#) offers guidance on planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating ecological restoration projects.

Complementary frameworks also play a role in developing more standardised approaches to assessment:

- [UN System of Environmental-Economic Accounting \(SEEA\) Ecosystem Accounting](#) offers a statistical basis for linking ecosystem extent, condition and services to national accounts, enabling policy coherence, though it does not directly evaluate project performance.
- [Peatland ACTION](#) shares advanced monitoring protocols for peatland restoration in the UK, complementing the IUCN Global Standard for NbS and [Essential Biodiversity Variables \(EBV\)](#) - aligned progress toward improving project monitoring comparability across biomes.

Alignment with such instruments ensures consistency across assessment suites and a strong backing based on industry best practices. Yet, gaps currently exist in relevant project evaluation frameworks, with many on the market positioning nature as an *additional benefit* to carbon projects, prioritising social systems over ecological systems or focusing on specific aspects of nature.

In developing the NPAF, **we drew from over 40 leading frameworks and standards**, and reviewed more than two dozen peer-reviewed articles. We found that most nature frameworks currently on the market:

- Are biodiversity or carbon credit-driven, **prioritising outcomes that can be easily measured** and underemphasising broader ecosystem services or community outcomes not captured within credit calculations;
- Are designed to support project development or evaluate success **after implementation**, assuming that projects already have measurable impacts and defined baselines;
- Address specific ecosystem types or impact themes that are often **narrow in scope** or tailored to particular project types;
- Position **nature as a co-benefit of other objectives**, rather than as the primary outcome.

While these initiatives provide high-level guidance, target-setting methodologies and reporting structures, there is little flexibility for projects falling outside these categories.

We found there to be a lack of a practical system for assessing and comparing project proposals.

Projects may be implemented by NGOs, community groups, local authorities, governments, academic institutions or private enterprises, and they vary widely in methods, scale and maturity. Biodiversity and social impacts are inherently context-specific, unfold over long timeframes and are influenced by ecological, political and climatic risks that vary widely by location. Thus, the NPAF is designed to assess this diversity consistently while accounting for these contextual differences.

Serving as a bridge between high-level international commitments and on-the-ground implementation, the NPAF makes it easier to map how outcomes achieved in a project are contributing to globally agreed upon targets for conservation and sustainable development. Projects can then more credibly be assessed and compared against other projects within the broader nature project landscape.

The NPAF now supports Ecologi's approach which has been ranked in the top 10% of organisations worldwide for due diligence and quality control process in a recent study by a team at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in collaboration with Mongabay.



Our Nature Projects Assessment Framework

Principles and objectives

At the center of the NPAF is a set of guiding principles designed to ensure that the nature projects we support are credible, equitable and capable of delivering durable benefits for ecosystems and communities.

These principles provide assurance to our community of businesses that their investments are directed towards projects with strong potential for impact. By embedding these principles from the outset, we set a clear expectation for all projects that we select and endorse to meet a high bar of integrity.

Our guiding principles include:

- **Suitability:** Projects are tailored to local ecological, social and institutional contexts and aligned with [Ecologi's organisational values](#).
- **Equity:** Projects foster strong local engagement and collaboration to support legitimacy, resilience and long-term success.
- **Transparency:** Projects maintain clear documentation, accessible data and honest reporting to strengthen accountability and stakeholder trust.

- **Scientific rigour:** Projects are grounded in robust methodologies to ensure outcomes are evidence-based, attributable to project actions and informed by best available research.
- **Additionality:** Projects deliver outcomes that would not have occurred without the actions or associated funding.
- **Permanence:** Projects address long-term stewardship to ensure that benefits endure beyond the initial restoration activities and funding period.
- **Practicality:** Projects translate scientific objectives into actionable outcomes on the ground without creating unnecessary financial or technical barriers for project partners.

Together, these principles form the foundation of Ecologi's project assessment process.



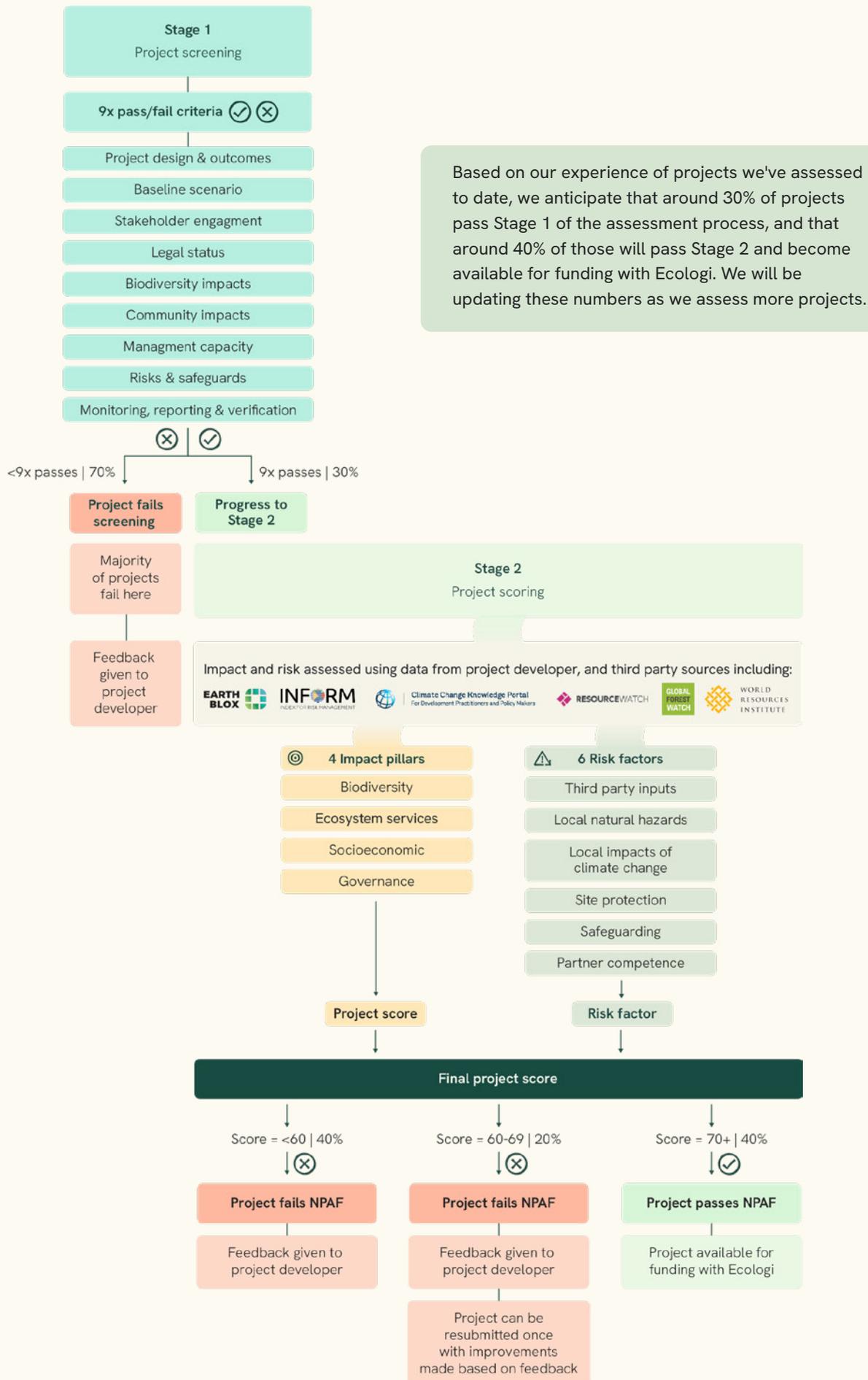
The assessment framework model

Our two-stage model

The NPAF is based on a two-stage model, consisting of initial due diligence followed by a multi-dimensional scoring process that ultimately produces a standardised score across project types. Projects that pass both stages are eligible for receipt of funding from Ecologi's community.

If a project fails at either of the stages, we provide feedback to the project partner, detailing where improvements can be made so they can reapply in the future. This creates an open feedback loop, encouraging an ongoing conversation and collaborative approach to strengthening projects.





Stage 1: Initial due diligence

The first stage of exploring potential project partnerships is to conduct due diligence, filtering out high-risk or unsuitable projects at the outset.

The due diligence process begins with a project questionnaire completed by the potential partner. The questionnaire captures detailed information across multiple criteria aligned with several key aspects of NbS effectiveness, including stakeholder participation, management capability and adaptation to local conditions:

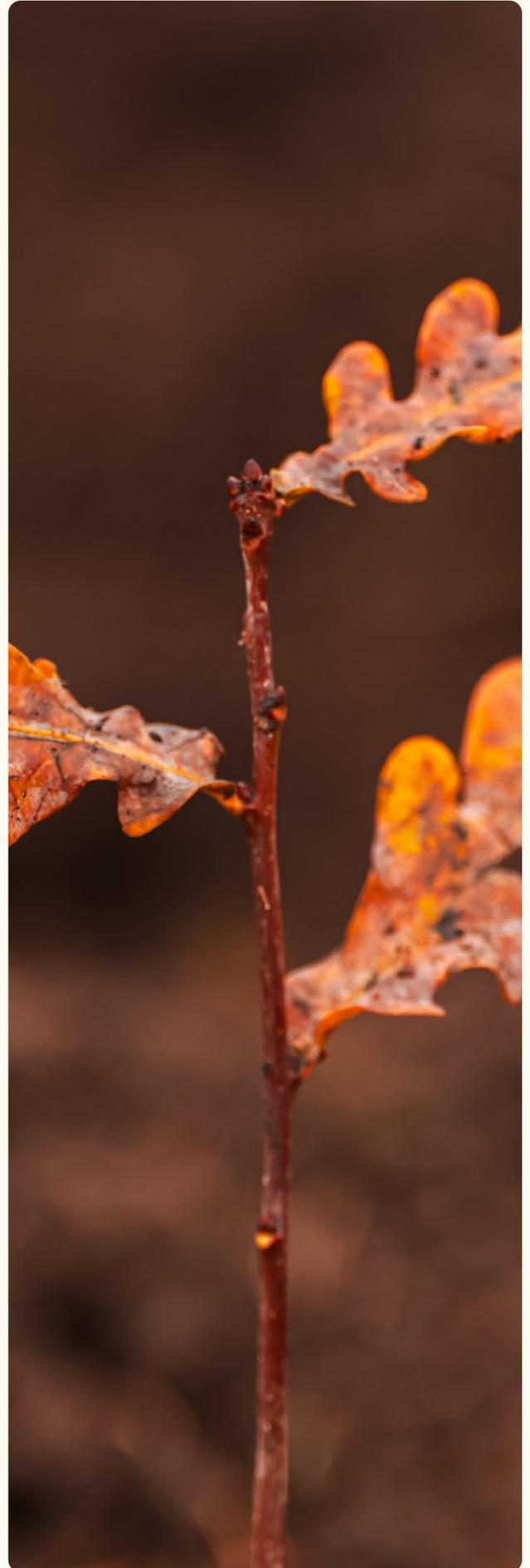
- **Project design and organisational capacity:** We assess the track record of the implementing organisation, including their experience in restoration and related projects. This includes evaluating qualifications of project leads, organisation governance structures and the technical expertise of staff to ensure the team has the capacity to deliver the project.
- **Land and resource tenure:** Securing legal rights to land and resources is critical for project permanence. The questionnaire captures evidence of land and resource ownership and considerations related to Indigenous Peoples or customary land rights. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is required where Indigenous communities are affected.
- **Biodiversity and ecosystem impacts:** Projects must demonstrate net positive impacts on biodiversity, backed by identification of ecosystem types, species present and restoration goals. The due diligence process assesses whether a project's design is suitable for a site's ecological baseline and considers both the short- and long-term threats to biodiversity.
- **Community engagement and benefits:** Projects should embed local stakeholders in planning and implementation. The questionnaire covers how communities have been engaged, the mechanisms for ongoing participation and equitable distribution of social and economic benefits for local communities.
- **Risks and safeguards:** Effective project planning includes identification of potential risks ahead of time. A project must demonstrate understanding of and mitigation against potential risks, such as human rights and labour abuses, local conflicts or climate change-related anomalies.
- **Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV):** Projects must demonstrate robust MRV procedures, including documentation of the baseline scenario, monitoring frequencies and allowances for third-party verification. This way, outcomes can be reported and audited reliably.

Along with this questionnaire, Ecologi requires supporting documentation, such as shapefiles, project plans, financial records and evidence of prior projects, where applicable. Additionally, third-party assurance and remote sensing tools, discussed further on in this paper, are used to validate claims and reduce the risk of misrepresentation.

A project must pass all required criteria to progress to the next stage of project assessment: the scoring framework.

Ongoing due diligence:

Due diligence doesn't stop once a project is onboarded. We check in with partners every quarter through progress updates, and through annual reports which document project progress and lessons learned. This regular follow-up allows us to ensure that projects are delivering on expected outcomes and that they are continuing to meet Ecologi's standards.



Stage 2: Multi-dimensional scoring

During the second stage of the framework, projects are assessed in greater depth against our pillars and supporting indicators. The multi-dimensional scoring process integrates both qualitative judgements and quantitative data to produce a numerical score.

Too often, the success of nature projects is communicated through a narrow set of outcomes (e.g., number of trees planted) because they are tangible, intuitive and simple. While useful, these metrics capture only a fraction of a project's true impact.

Our framework is structured around four pillars: Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Socioeconomic Impacts and Governance.

These pillars were identified through a review of leading international and national frameworks, complemented by consultation with partners and stakeholders. Together, they reflect the full spectrum of ecological, social and institutional factors related to the development, management and implementation of nature projects.

The four pillars





Biodiversity

The Biodiversity pillar captures the most visible, and often the most charismatic, dimensions of a nature project, relating to the health, diversity and resilience of species and their habitats.

Best practice projects support native or neighboring species appropriate to the local landscape and make measurable contributions to biodiversity by restoring or protecting critical habitats and improving connectivity in areas of high conservation value. Established monitoring systems track restoration and species, while proactive management plans mitigate risks such as invasive species or anthropogenic disturbances. During project reviews, data should demonstrate tangible improvements in vegetation and wildlife health and abundance.



Ecosystem services

The Ecosystem services pillar reflects the benefits that a project provides to people and the planet through nature's regulating, supporting, provisioning and cultural functions.

Best practice projects deliver improvements in key ecosystem functions such as water regulation, pollination, soil health, carbon sequestration and erosion control, while maintaining a balance across multiple services. During reviews, there should be clear evidence of improved ecosystem functionality and resilience.



Socioeconomic impacts

The Socioeconomic impacts pillar represents the contributions of nature projects to sustainable development, including livelihoods, education and well-being.

Best practice projects are aligned with social and economic needs and aims of the community. They should produce inclusive and durable benefits, ensure meaningful participation across gender, age and vulnerable groups, and integrate local and Indigenous knowledge systems. Evidence of community capacity building and sustained community support is central to high performance under this pillar.



Governance

The Governance pillar embodies the institutional systems, management structures and processes that enable adaptive and effective project implementation. We assess the enabling environment, which goes beyond national-level context to include local conditions.

Best practice projects demonstrate clear governance structures, secure tenure arrangements, accountability mechanisms and long-term sustainability planning. Authorities, communities and other key stakeholders are actively engaged, with well-defined financial management and reporting systems in place. Independent reviews and third-party audits further confirm effective leadership and community trust in project management.

Outcomes from nature projects are typically slow to materialise, and it is possible that in some cases the greatest impacts will be most apparent after the project ends. As we designed this NPAF to assess projects prior to implementation, this was a driving factor in the development of our indicators, focusing on the potential and likelihood of positive outcomes.

Indicators, metrics and tools

Each pillar is supported by a suite of indicators and metrics that capture the critical aspects of performance across Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Socioeconomic Impact and Governance. In total, the NPAF employs **a total of 40 indicators**: 12 Biodiversity, 11 Ecosystem Services, 10 Socioeconomic Impact and 7 Governance. These indicators represent the best predictors of project quality and long-term success, selected to balance analytical rigour with fair expectations from project partners.

We have designated **two types of indicators: core and additional** (project-specific).

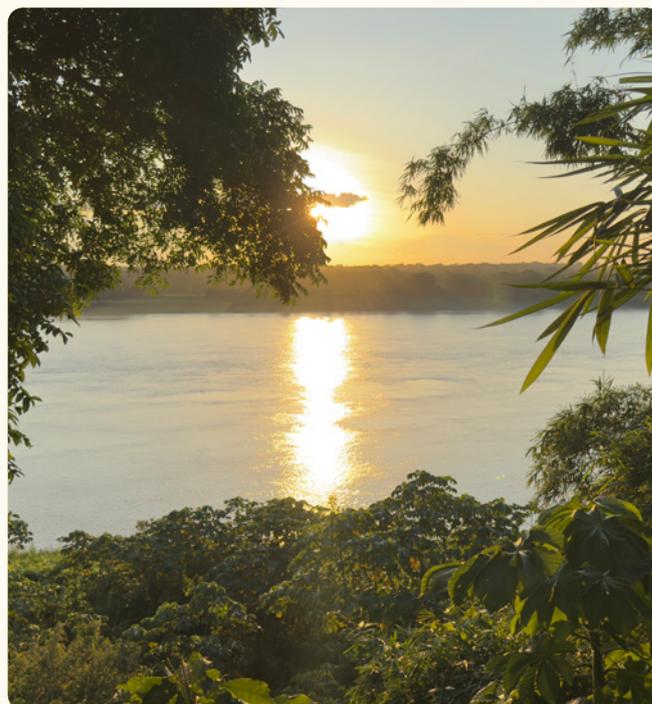
Core indicators apply universally to all nature projects, while additional indicators are tailored to capture the unique qualities that occur across different project types.

While developing our indicators, we considered factors such as methodology, temporal and spatial scale, monitoring costs, data availability at scale and long-term stability for both Ecologi and project partners. Each indicator is supported by a complementary set of metrics and tools to guide evaluation.

- **Metrics provide the benchmarks** against which progress is measured: either quantitative (e.g., percentage increase in native species richness, improvement in soil organic carbon) or qualitative (e.g., evidence of community participation in decision-making).
- **Tools provide the evidence base** required to assess each metric. Examples include field surveys, remote sensing (e.g., satellite imagery), third-party audits and stakeholder interviews.

Indicators are evidenced through a set of 4-10 metrics, supported by multiple tools, provided by project partners, Ecologi or independent sources. In practice, a single project assessment can draw on ~100 metrics, depending on project scope and data availability. Examples of indicators and metrics are included in Table 1 below. This structure allows the framework to remain comprehensive without double or triple-counting impacts, which is at risk of occurring when a single project intervention is rewarded multiple times under loosely related labels (e.g., broadly claiming that riparian restoration delivers water quality improvement, fisheries enhancement, livelihoods support and climate resilience without assessing the intentionality of actions).

To avoid this, our indicators assess **evidence, logic and intent**, rather than the magnitude of downstream benefits, apply an additionality assessment that distinguishes between outcomes that are deliberately designed for, and those that arise incidentally from, an intervention.



| Pillar | Indicator | Metric | Tools |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Biodiversity | Does the project demonstrate that the ecosystem is degraded or under pressure, and that prevention of further degradation would not take place without the project activity? | Historical land cover change trends (e.g., % loss of native habitat over last 25 years) | Remote sensing - Landsat (change in NDVI) |
| Socioeconomic | Does the project evidence a positive impact on education, awareness and attitudes of local communities to the environment? | Type of education activities planned and how they are tailored to target audiences | Project documentation Community surveys |
| Environmental Services | Does the project evidence an improvement in water quality in and around the site? | Causal pathway between project activities and improved access to clean water for household use | Baseline scenario |
| Governance | Does the project reference an appropriate MRV timeframe, incorporating the necessary data and tools and hired personnel with the expertise to use them? | Presence of dedicated MRV budget and staffing (relevant technical expertise, clear assignment of roles and responsibilities) | Project documentation |

Table 1: Examples of indicators and metrics used within the NPAF pillars, showing how performance is assessed using a combination of supporting resources.

We plan to review our indicators periodically to incorporate emerging science, data innovations, availability of new tools and stakeholder feedback. This ongoing process ensures that the NPAF remains relevant, scalable and aligned with global best practices.



Role of remote sensing

High-quality MRV is critical to the credibility of nature projects. Remote sensing provides decades of historical imagery and environmental indicators, playing an essential role in establishing baselines and providing consistent data to monitor project performance. Satellite measurements, just one form of remote sensing, offer an objective view of landscape change. Publicly available satellite datasets from space agencies, such as NASA and the European Space Agency, allow us to analyse land conditions and climate variables with a level of precision and repeatability that traditional field methods cannot match.

These tools complement on-the-ground engagement by offering continuous insights into land-use dynamics and ecological change. They can identify drivers of land use change, such as deforestation, or detect soil condition and hydrological shifts, as well as climate variables like surface temperature, drought stress and precipitation anomalies.

Using geospatial platforms like EarthBlox, we integrate multi-sensor satellite data to characterise baseline ecological conditions, detect historical change and identify the drivers of degradation in a project area (see Figure 1). Time-series analyses allow us to quantify trends in vegetation health, hydrological function

and disturbance regimes, while global datasets on human modification, fire activity, carbon stocks and biodiversity are essential for risk assessment and contextual understanding. For example, the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is used to quantify vegetation greenness, allowing us to model changes in vegetation density and health over time.

Within the NPAF, remote sensing is not used in isolation. It is a tool that complements project documentation, local knowledge and field-based monitoring. This approach ensures that assessments are grounded in observable change and not reliant on self-reported data.

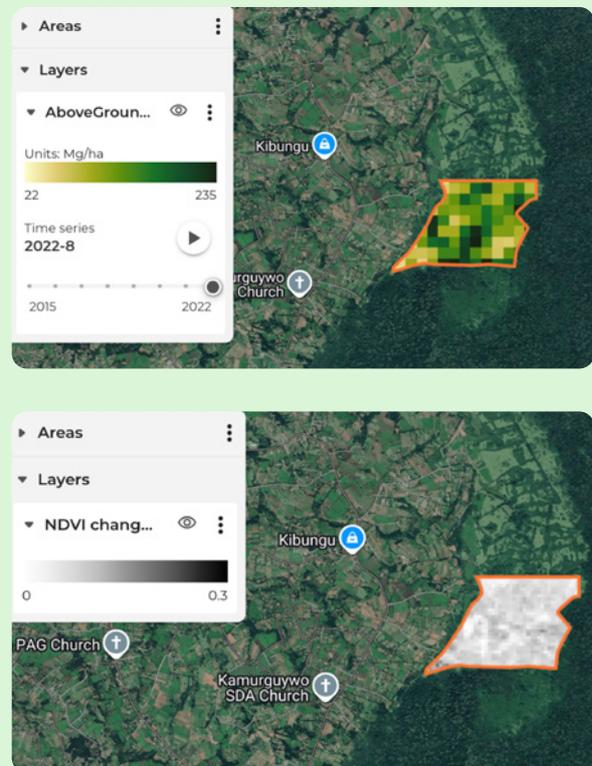


Figure 1: EarthBlox datasets capturing *Phase 4 of the Restoring Kakamega Forest project*, Kenya. Above to below: ESA Aboveground Biomass, 2022; Landsat 4/5/7/8/9 Combined (30m), 2000-2025 change in NDVI.

Risk assessment

Even the most well-designed projects operate within dynamic contexts which can have significant impacts on their outcomes. To account for uncertainty and external challenges, our scoring framework incorporates a risk assessment, designed to identify potential hazards before Ecologi invests in a project. While risk can never be fully eliminated, it can be clearly understood, mitigated and monitored to reduce the likelihood and severity of adverse outcomes.

For companies, understanding these risks is essential. Investments in nature projects directly affect financial performance, reputational integrity and regulatory exposure. When risks are poorly understood, projects may fail to deliver intended outcomes, capital may be misused and businesses may face greenwashing allegations.

To assess these risks, we incorporate several pieces of data, including globally used datasets, such as the [INFORM Risk indices](#) which measures countries' exposure to hazards, vulnerabilities and lack of coping capacity and the [World Bank's CMIP6 indices](#), in addition to project documentation and in-house remote sensing tools.

These inputs allow us to differentiate between:

- **Risks within the partner's control**, such as safeguarding practices, partner capacity, management systems and project governance.
- **Risks outside the partner's control**, including natural disasters, political instability, economic challenges or community-level resistance that cannot be fully mitigated at the project level.

The risk assessment is made up of six risk 'blocks,' each capturing a distinct aspect of potential vulnerability:

Third-party inputs: Measures broader country-level risks using globally recognised indices, including the INFORM Risk Index (overall risk, pessimistic and optimistic crisis projections for 2050) and Sylvera country reputational risk, government effectiveness and political stability. This block evaluates exposure to systemic hazards such as civil unrest, war or governance weaknesses.

Local natural hazards: Assesses exposure to environmental hazards including earthquakes, floods, tropical cyclones, tsunamis, droughts and epidemics.

Local impacts of climate change: Examines climate-driven risks specific to the project site, including rising temperatures, extreme heat days, precipitation anomalies, landslides, wildfires, sea level rise, coral bleaching and disease, acidification, eutrophication and local threats to biodiversity. Scenario-based climate projections are incorporated here, drawing from CMIP6 datasets and using high-impact Shared Socio-economic Pathways (SSP) scenarios (e.g., SSP5-8.5 or SSP3-7.0) to test resilience under extreme, plausible climate conditions.

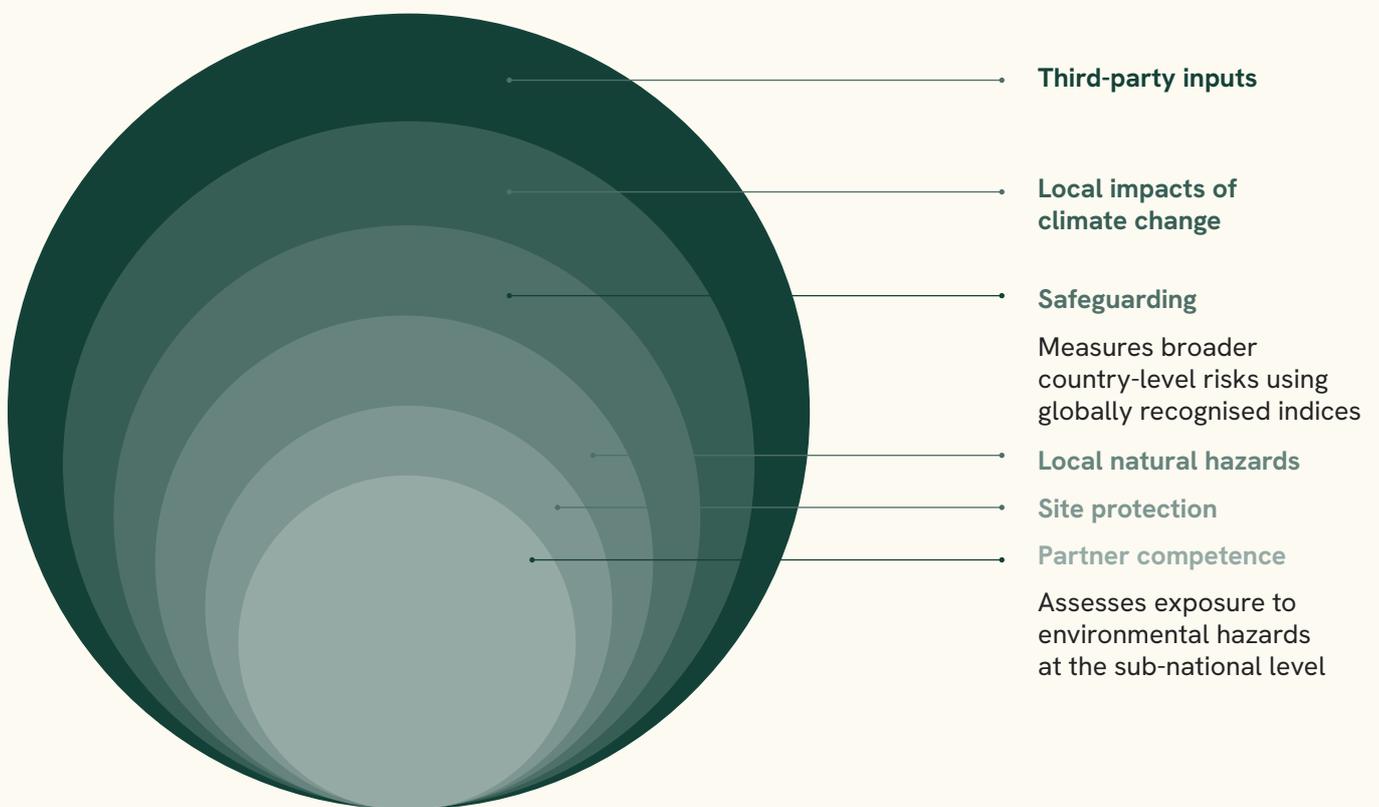
Site protection: Evaluates risks related to land tenure, local conflict, extractive pressures, tourism, pollution, poor survival rates, monocultures, invasive species and pest or disease outbreaks.

Safeguarding: Captures risks related to social responsibility and ethical practice, including forced evictions, undermining local employment, child or forced labour, discrimination, inadequate pay, occupational health and safety protocols, lack of external scrutiny and potential leakage (negative impacts on surrounding areas).

Partner competence: Assesses the project proponent’s capacity to deliver, including relevant experience in the project type or local ecosystem, absence of corruption or illegal activity, and existence of a credible exit strategy. When available, a partner’s track record of strong performance from comparable projects can strengthen confidence that a project is likely to deliver the intended outcomes.

In developing the local impacts of climate change risk block, we incorporated high-impact yet reasonable worst-case climate scenarios to ensure projects are stress-tested against the most extreme future scenarios.

While more moderate SSPs (e.g., SSP2-4.5 or SSP3-7.0) reflect more likely emissions pathways under current policies, they do not adequately capture potential tipping points or the severity of climate hazards in the decades-long lifespan of many nature projects. SSP5-8.5, though increasingly unlikely as a business-as-usual trajectory, provides a valuable tool for evaluating resilience under maximum plausible climate stress, particularly for ecosystems highly sensitive to sea-level rise, salinity changes, coastal erosion or thermal stress, such as mangroves and coral reefs. Where possible, we model climate impacts out to 30+ years in the future to ensure that long-lived projects are tested against evolving risks over their entire lifespan.



Scoring and rating methodology

The NPAF is specifically designed to assess nature projects, with the four pillars weighted according to their relative importance to the core objectives. The weighting reflects the framework's philosophy: biodiversity and social outcomes are the most critical, while ecosystem services and governance play complementary roles in supporting project success. This balance allows the NPAF to evaluate projects holistically while maintaining a clear focus on delivering benefits for nature and people.

30% Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the primary focus of nature projects, directly reflecting a project's potential to protect, restore and enhance natural systems. Metrics capturing species richness and habitat quality form the foundation upon which other outcomes depend. Allocating 30% to biodiversity ensures projects are evaluated first and foremost on their ability to deliver tangible ecological impact.

20% Ecosystem services

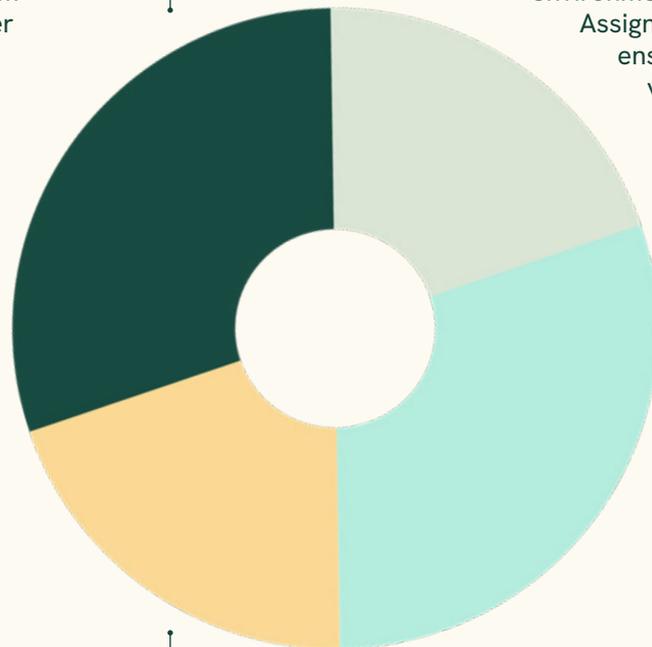
Closely linked to biodiversity, this pillar captures the functional outcomes of a healthy ecosystem, such as climate regulation, water provision or soil stability. Ecosystem services translate ecological change into environmental and societal value. Assigning 20% to this pillar ensures the framework values projects that capture these critical functions, recognising them as a key mechanism through which biodiversity gains deliver benefits for people and landscapes and reinforcing the broader impact of nature projects beyond biodiversity alone.

20% Governance

Governance underpins project delivery, accountability and longevity. While essential, it is weighted 20% because the primary focus is on the ecological and societal outcomes of the project. Strong governance supports project success but cannot compensate for weak outcomes. This weighting recognizes governance as an enabler rather than an end in itself.

30% Socioeconomic

While not always framed as the primary objective of nature projects, these outcomes are critical for long-term durability of impact. Weighting this pillar 30% recognises that restoration cannot succeed without people. Projects that deliver benefits to local communities are more likely to secure sustained participation, avoid conflict and maintain outcomes over time; conversely, even ecologically strong projects may fail where social benefits are weak or unevenly distributed.



Indicators

Indicators are scored on a 0-2 scale, reflecting the quality and specificity of evidence provided to meet their accompanying metrics:

- **0 – Not considered / mentioned without evidence:** The indicator is not considered in project documentation or the indicator is referenced, but without backing.
- **1 – Partially evidenced / generic:** Some evidence is provided, but it is limited in scope, relies on high-level information or lacks site-specific detail.
- **2 – Well-evidenced and site-specific:** The indicator is supported by project-specific evidence, with logical links to intended outcomes.

For example, when assessing whether a project is supported by a well-developed baseline assessment, our scoring would reflect the overall quality and relevance of the baseline. A 0 may reflect a purely qualitative characterisation of site conditions, while a score of 2 requires the meeting of several metrics with site-specific quantification and methodological transparency.

Our methodology separates data availability from performance scoring to ensure fairness and analytical integrity. A score of 0 reflects a deliberate choice not to address an indicator, rather than a lack of capacity, whereas when data are unavailable or incomplete, this is explicitly flagged. We recognise that data collection can be constrained by geographic, technical

or socioeconomic factors, so lack of data is not immediately disqualifying. However, data gaps are visible within the assessment and trigger follow-up with project partners to seek clarification or additional evidence. When data cannot be reasonably provided, indicators may be excluded from the scoring process, with this uncertainty transparently documented.

Once all indicators within a pillar have been assessed, pillar averages are calculated. Pillar scores are then combined using the weighting structure above to generate a project score, ranging from 0-100.



Incorporating risk

Simultaneous with the scoring of indicators, we complete the risk assessment for each potential project. In the risk assessment, each of the abovementioned blocks refers to a different aspect of risk and is normalised to a score ranging from 0-1.

To reflect that some risks largely lie outside the project proponent's control, the contribution of different risk blocks to the overall risk score is weighted appropriately, allowing for context-aware adjustment rather than penalisation. Risks beyond a partner's direct control therefore have a more moderate influence on the score, reflecting contextual uncertainty and the potential need for additional support or monitoring in the future.

Conversely, risks stemming from poor design, weak governance or inadequate safeguarding are weighted more heavily, ensuring that project quality and partner capability are core factors in determining final scores. In this way, our assessment fairly represents both the context in which a project operates and the elements that developers are expected to manage directly. The weighting of each of these blocks to the overall risk score is given in the table below:

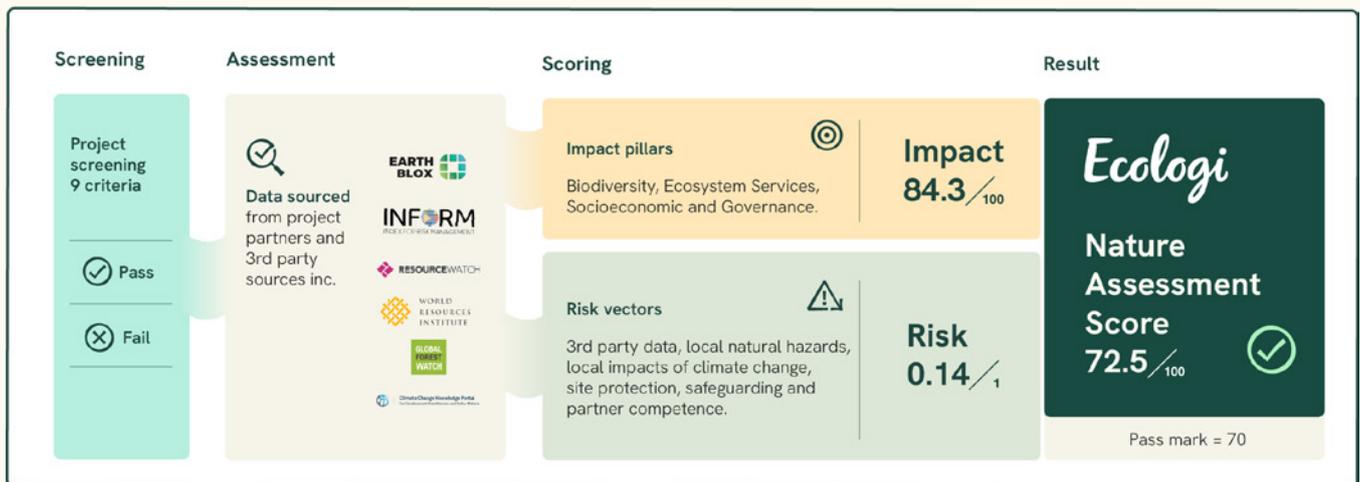
| Block | Weighting |
|--|------------------|
| Third-party inputs | 5% |
| Local natural hazards | 10% |
| Local impacts of climate change | 10% |
| Site protection | 25% |
| Safeguarding | 25% |
| Partner competence | 25% |

Table 2: Relative weighting of risk 'blocks', reflecting their contribution to overall risk adjustment score.

After these calculations, the comprehensive risk factor produces a score 0-1, which is used as a multiplier of the final score. A very low risk factor would be in the range of 0.00-0.19, while a high risk factor would be 0.60-1.00.

The following equation is applied to get the weighted project score:

$$\text{Project score} \times (1 - \text{risk factor}) = \text{weighted final score}$$



- A **70 or above** corresponds to a high scoring project which has successfully passed the assessment.
- A **60-69** corresponds to a medium scoring project which has not passed the assessment.
- A **59 or below** corresponds to a low scoring project which has not passed the assessment.

A score of 70 has been set as the minimum threshold for a project to be considered eligible for selection. This reflects the point at which a project demonstrates sufficient evidence of sound design, credible outcomes and appropriate risk management across all pillars of the

NPAF. Projects that score below this level typically signal a lack of causal logic between interventions and results or exhibit gaps in governance and safeguarding that could undermine long-term impact.

Projects that do not meet the pass threshold are not excluded permanently; instead, the NPAF is designed to allow us to provide structured feedback to project partners on how they can strengthen their design and resubmit for reassessment in the future.

Case study



Assessing an agroforestry project in Mt. Elgon National Park, Uganda

Mt. Elgon National Park (MENP), located in Eastern Uganda, is one of the world's 35 global biodiversity hotspots and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The forested slopes of MENP feed the Nile River and Lake Victoria basins, supporting water, ecosystem services and livelihoods for more than ten African countries downstream. Despite its ecological importance, the area is severely threatened.

A high population density and annual growth rate are driving unsustainable practices, leading to heavy encroachment and deforestation with MENP. Local households depend heavily on the park for natural resources like firewood and grazing and this reliance, coupled with the use of inefficient cookstoves, has increased land degradation and community-park conflicts. The area is also highly susceptible to the impacts of extreme climate events, including long droughts and landslides.

In 2023, the International Tree Foundation, in partnership with Mt. Elgon Tree Growers Enterprise (METGE) and the Uganda Wildlife Authority, launched a community-led restoration initiative to rehabilitate

90 hectares of degraded forest and buffer zones. The project integrates enrichment planting within MENP, agroforestry on residents farms, endemic and threatened species conservation and livelihood diversification. Additionally, the initiative targeted women, identified as often being forced into illegal tree cutting for fuel wood, by offering alternative livelihood support, with interventions including training on sustainable land management (e.g., climate smart agriculture), establishment of 50 apiaries, training on energy-efficient Lorena stoves and strengthening local microfinance institutions. A total of 100,000 trees would be planted by the end of the project.

This project was evaluated using the NPAF.



Stage 1: Due diligence

The project successfully passed all preliminary due diligence checks, confirming its alignment with Ecologi's organisational goals, sufficient understanding of MENP's baseline scenarios, assurance of relevant stakeholder participation and fulfillment of legal and land rights requirements. At this stage, we were able to understand forest loss trends, land-use dynamics and the role of the community in this project.

This initial screening confirmed that Mt. Elgon was a strong candidate with substantial biodiversity and ecosystem impact potential and local implementation capacity.



Stage 2: Multi-dimensional scoring

The second stage utilized indicators across our four pillars: Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Socioeconomic and Governance, leveraging remote sensing and various datasets to provide detailed, geospatial risk analysis and quality verification. The results: the scoring process validated that Mt. Elgon is a high quality project.

- **Biodiversity (95.45)** – Exceptional performance due to restoration of a globally recognised hotspot, inclusion of threatened species and a strong case for maintenance of benefits.
- **Socioeconomic (81.25)** – Strong community co-management, gender mainstreaming, livelihood diversification and training components.
- **Ecosystem services (92.50)** – Substantial contributions to water regulation, soil stability and climate resilience, though agroforestry benefits are longer-term.
- **Governance (78.85)** – Demonstrated local partnership strength and clear land-use arrangements; moderate score due to contextual governance risks in the region.

| Pillar | Scoring | Weighting |
|--------------------|---------|-----------|
| Biodiversity | 95.45 | 30% |
| Socioeconomic | 94.44 | 30% |
| Ecosystem services | 91.67 | 20% |
| Governance | 81.25 | 20% |

With the appropriate pillar weights applied, this gives the project an initial score of 91.55.

| Risk block | Weighted score |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Third party inputs | 0.038 |
| Local natural hazards | 0.041 |
| Local impacts of climate change | 0.025 |
| Site protection | 0.056 |
| Safeguarding | 0.023 |
| Partner competence | 0 |

The risk assessment led to the calculation of a risk factor of 0.19, which when applied was applied to the project score.

The project achieved a final total score of 74.80, placing it firmly in the category of a high-quality, investable nature project.

Mt. Elgon's strong performance reflects a combination of factors, including:

- High ecological value, as a restoration project in a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve with critical water-tower functions;
- Clear additionality, evidenced by strong rationale of forest loss without intervention;
- Community-led implementation, incorporating gender-sensitive design, and integration of secondary sustainable income means;
- Long-term approach, proposing a multi-year survival monitoring, improvement of threatened species and continuity through METGE's existing structures; and
- Risk mitigation, with threats such as fires and human pressures well documented and addressed through the intervention.



Why we need an NPAF

Addressing linked planetary crises

Global warming has begun to surpass the 1.5°C limit

To understand the full impact of investing in nature projects, it is necessary to take a broader look at the scale and pace of climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, which are now overwhelming the natural systems that have historically buffered human impact on nature.

The consequences of nature loss are already material and far-reaching, threatening economic stability, public health and long-term development.

3bn

people globally are adversely affected by land degradation

\$577

in annual global crop production at risk due to the decline of pollinator species

300m

people vulnerable to floods and storms due to the loss of mangroves, reefs and wetlands along coastlines - weakening disaster protection while climate hazards are intensifying

79.5%

of progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets will be undermined if current trends in the decline of nature and biodiversity continue. 35 of the 44 SDGs will be effected relating to poverty, hunger, health and water

Beyond its inherent value, nature serves as our primary defense against a changing climate. Our forests, oceans, wetlands and other ecosystems have historically absorbed and stored vast amounts of greenhouse gases, helping to slow global warming. Yet many are approaching ecological tipping points, beyond which impacts become irreversible and self-reinforcing. Recent

climate data highlight the urgency: 2024 was the warmest year on record, 2025 the third warmest and 2023–2025 marked the first consecutive three-year period exceeding ~1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels. As the impact of pushing natural systems towards their tipping points is becoming more apparent, the urgency of addressing these risks is ever more critical.

Oceans

40%

of CO₂ emissions have been absorbed by oceans from human activity since 1850

Source

90%

of the excess heat generated by anthropogenic climate change has also been absorbed by our oceans

Source

CO₂

levels increased in our oceans, lowering their ph, causing acidification, and excess heat caused by climate change to be absorbed by oceans, causing waters to warm.

Warm water corals are, as a result, crossing their thermal tipping point, causing irreversible die-off of a habitat crucial for biodiversity and livelihoods.



Forests

One of nature's biggest carbon sinks have the potential to become net emitters of carbon if not managed properly too.

A [2025 study](#) found that above-ground biomass in Australian moist tropical forests had transitioned from being a carbon sink to a carbon source, largely driven by extreme climatic conditions causing increased tree mortality. The authors of this study posited that this trend could be replicated in tropical forests worldwide, resulting in one of our biggest carbon sinks emitting more CO₂ than it absorbs.



The following section has been contributed by a member of Ecologi's Climate Committee, a group of academics and industry experts who bring best-practice thinking and the latest developments with regards to global climate and ecological science, carbon accounting and nature projects to the Ecologi team.

Global biodiversity continues to decline

(contributed by Dr. Daniel Souto-Vilarós)

Daniel Souto-Vilarós, Ph.D., is an evolutionary ecologist and entomologist whose research focuses on molecular ecology, insect biodiversity and pollinator behaviour.

He has conducted extensive field research, including biodiversity surveys to uncover the ecological, habitat and distributional diversity of insects across diverse ecosystems. He earned his doctorate in Entomology from the University of South Bohemia (Czech Republic) and dual MSc degrees through the Erasmus Mundus programme in Evolutionary Biology (MEME).



Dr. Daniel Souto-Vilarós

Biodiversity underpins all life on Earth, yet we are losing species at an alarming pace. The current rate of extinction is estimated to be tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the last 10 million years. Approximately 28% of the more than 170,000 species assessed by the IUCN Red List are now threatened with extinction, and since 1500, around 2,500 species are known to have gone extinct. Despite years of policy interventions to curb nature loss, we are still falling behind the global goals set under the CBD. The combined pressures of habitat loss, overexploitation, invasive species, pollution and climate change have also driven catastrophic declines in species abundance and distribution worldwide. The 2024 Living Planet Index report revealed that, since the 1970s, the population sizes of over 5,000 vertebrate species, including amphibians, birds, fish, mammals and reptiles have declined by 75%.

This biodiversity loss disrupts ecological processes that directly sustain humanity; it compromises food security, water regulation, disease control and climate stability by degrading the ecosystem services upon which both nature and society depend. A global synthesis by the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment Board revealed that over 60% of ecosystem services have been rapidly degrading due to human activity.

Accounting for the likely effects of projects on biodiversity and wider ecosystem health is therefore a critical element of any worthwhile nature project assessment. Pollinators, such as insects, offer a particularly informative measure: they constitute the largest share of macroscopic terrestrial biodiversity, sustaining nearly all ecosystem processes, and are highly sensitive to environmental change. Widespread declines in insect abundance, species richness, geographic ranges and community composition provide an early warning of broader ecosystem disruption and can help predict overall biodiversity status.

Despite growing awareness of the biodiversity crisis and the importance of biodiversity to the stability of global systems, the absence of a nature project assessment framework that places sufficient focus on biodiversity impacts remains a major barrier to effective conservation and ecosystem recovery.



Providing a solution for businesses

(contributed by Dr. Rémi Jaligot)

Rémi Jaligot, Ph.D, is a sustainability expert whose work primarily focuses on ecosystem services, biodiversity and carbon removal accounting. Rémi is devoted to understanding the interactions and dependencies of businesses on nature and how they fit into climate strategies. His recent roles span nature-related impact and risk assessments, voluntary carbon markets and multi-stakeholder projects in Africa and the Middle East. He holds a Ph.D in Ecosystem Services Assessment from École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) and a MSc in Environmental Engineering from Imperial College London.

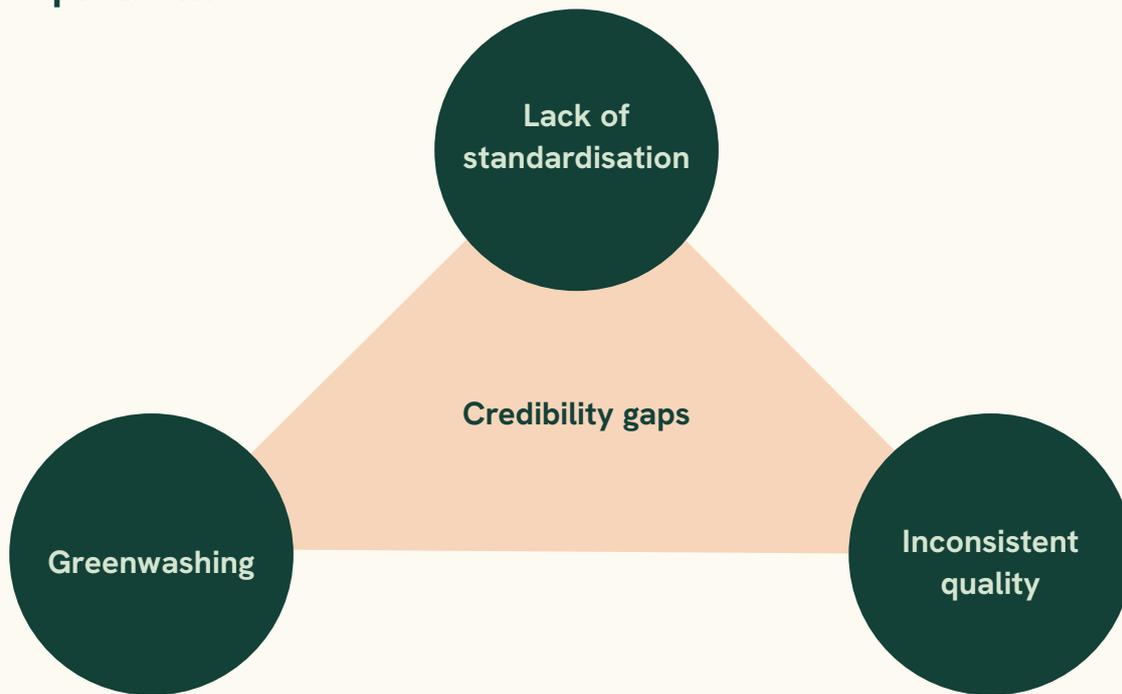


Rémi Jaligot
PhD

As well as considering the wide range of impacts of nature projects, and the foundations on which successful projects must be built, nature projects must be structured in ways that give businesses confidence they are meaningfully contributing to the climate and nature targets they wish to support. Nature projects can be central to corporate climate and nature strategies, but the current market is characterised by credibility gaps that prevent long-term investment and undermine outcomes.

We identified three structural problems driving credibility issues: inconsistent project quality, greenwashing and a lack of standardised evaluation. The drivers of these inconsistencies stem from multiple factors, including the diversity of nature projects, difficulties in measuring outcomes and poor project planning.

Market problems



01. Addressing inconsistent project quality

The wide variety in quality across similar project types is a reflection of the differences that exist in ecological conditions, governance, land tenure, methodological choices and monitoring practices. Years of ecological recovery from restoration projects in fire-prone landscapes can be rapidly undone by wildfires if risks are not adequately anticipated and managed. In such contexts, site selection, landscape-level planning and adaptive management are critical determinants of long-term success. Similar challenges arise in flood-prone catchments, coastal systems exposed to sea level rise or drought-affected regions. Such environmental risks, if insufficiently accounted for in project design, can undermine restoration outcomes regardless of initial ambition.

Variation in project quality extends beyond climate-related risks and is particularly pronounced for biodiversity-focused initiatives. Outcomes span species, habitats and ecosystem functions, often measured with incompatible metrics. In the United Kingdom, mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) established a minimum biodiversity improvement threshold for development projects, providing a degree of standardisation for habitat-based measurements, but without accounting for extinction risk. Complementary species-level metrics such as IUCN's Species Threat Abatement and Restoration (STAR) can quantify potential reductions in extinction risk and improve comparability, but adoption by businesses remains uneven.

For businesses, the key question should be: how do I ensure that what I am funding will still be standing and delivering the intended benefits decades from now?

By clearly separating gross outcomes from adjustments for risk, project quality can be assessed more reliably. We implemented these best practices into the NPAF through an indicator-based scoring system, complemented by a separate assessment addressing several dimensions of risk.

02. Avoiding greenwashing and resolving credibility gaps

Greenwashing arises when claims go beyond evidence. Projects often rely on optimistic baselines that inflate benefits, while permanence and leakage risks are downplayed or social co-benefits are asserted but poorly documented. Regulators are trying to respond, for example, with the EU's 2024 Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition directive that restricts generic environmental claims and prohibits "climate-neutral" claims based solely on offsetting, unless firm substantiation criteria are met. The restrictions around claiming nature-related benefits, however, are less defined.

Integrity in this space depends on additionality, leakage prevention and permanence, all grounded in robust MRV. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasises that guaranteeing these attributes is inherently complex in dynamic ecological and socio-economic systems. Counterfactual baselines remain a key uncertainty for nature projects.

Real-world evidence shows why this matters. Analyses of wetland restoration projects have shown that many initiatives fail to deliver biodiversity or ecosystem service gains at the levels implied by their original plans, often due to poor site selection, ecological risks or inadequate management. Independent baseline construction, explicit quantification of additionality, leakage and permanence and uncertainty discounting where evidence is weak is necessary to avoid overstating a project's impact.

The NPAF requires outcomes to be substantiated with auditable evidence rather than overstated, clearly separating primary impacts from additional benefits.

03. Providing standardised evaluation

Finally, fragmentation across standards and frameworks continues to limit comparability between projects. This inconsistency makes apples-to-apples comparison difficult and slows the flow of capital to high-impact projects.

Reforms on both the supply and demand sides are beginning to bring greater alignment. In carbon markets, the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM) and the Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative (VCMI) are establishing clearer principles for carbon credit quality and corporate claims. While these frameworks help raise standards, they remain largely carbon-focused and cannot substitute for assessments that capture both climate and biodiversity outcomes.

For nature more broadly, the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) provides a structure for reporting dependencies, impacts, risks and opportunities, aligned to GBF Target 15, which calls on governments to require corporate assessment and disclosure of nature impacts. Together, these initiatives improve market homogenisation but do not substitute for project-level evaluation that integrates climate and biodiversity evidence.

While global frameworks and disclosure initiatives provide important guidance, they often struggle to account for the unique contexts and ecosystems in which projects operate. The NPAF addresses this challenge by incorporating core (project-agnostic) and additional (project-specific) indicators to cover the full range of potential impacts.

The NPAF in Action

The NPAF strengthens investor confidence that projects are high-quality and have been evaluated beyond narrative claims alone. Projects are assessed against clearly defined indicators, which ensures that these are projects with the most realistic implementation pathways and a clear understanding of potential outcomes. This enables businesses to choose projects that allow them to report credibly on the impacts they are contributing towards, demonstrating how their funding delivers climate action. The case study below gives one example of how the NPAF has supported our corporate customers.

Case study

Applying the NPAF The Up To Good Fund



Each year, the media and advertising industry emits around 2-3% of global emissions, meaning it has a significant impact on the climate and nature crises.

The industry also wields significant power to shape societal behaviour, consumer choices and public perception.

In 2023, giffgaff and MG OMD partnered with Ecologi to launch the Up To Good Fund, with the goal of embedding UK nature action directly into their media campaigns. Supported by organisations such as Activision, LADBible, Global, Snap, WeAre8 and several other media agencies, the fund enables brands to contribute a small percentage of campaign spend to high-impact nature projects.

The NPAF is used to assess and select projects supported by the Fund, giving giffgaff and its partners confidence that funding is directed towards projects that are aligned with giffgaff's Responsible Marketing Manifesto and wider sustainability strategy.

Since launch, the Fund has raised over £145,000 and, in 2025, supported a portfolio of ten UK projects, including peatland restoration, woodland creation, wetland and meadow restoration, enhanced rock weathering and biochar production.

Our shared ambition is for the UK media ecosystem to become a powerful force for nature and climate recovery, proving that environmental action can sit alongside campaign performance. The Fund is now being positioned as a model that can be scaled across the media and advertising sector.

In an environment of heightened scrutiny around nature and biodiversity claims, the NPAF can play an important role in reducing risks related to reputation and integrity. By minimising the likelihood of unsupported claims or unintended negative impacts, businesses can support nature action in a way that is responsible. And while the landscape of nature-related standards and disclosures continues to evolve, the principles underpinning the NPAF allow for it to adapt, leaving customers better positioned to respond to future requirements as they emerge.

Conclusion: Looking to a nature-positive future

Developing a framework capable of evaluating different types of nature projects in diverse ecosystems across the globe inevitably involves balancing rigour with accessibility. A primary goal of the NPAF was to avoid unintended bias that often favours well-funded organisations over smaller, grassroots initiatives. We recognise that polished documentation is not a proxy for ecological impact. Instead, we designed the NPAF to explicitly value credible intent, adaptive planning and locally-driven governance alongside formal evidence. This way, the NPAF ensures that the potential and likelihood of positive outcomes is the primary measure of a project's merit.

We also recognise that a "one-size-fits-all" approach fails in a world of hyper-local ecological needs. The NPAF solves this by remaining applicable across all nature projects yet locally nuanced. It is broad enough to span global geographies, yet flexible enough to respect the location-based knowledge that no data set can replace.

Importantly, the NPAF is a dynamic instrument, not a static document. As conservation science and monitoring technologies evolve, so will our methodology. **Ecologi is committed to periodic updates of the NPAF** as our project portfolio expands, integrating emerging indicators and

strengthening metrics where evidence and experience allow.

We built the NPAF to define what truly constitutes a high-quality nature project. It paves the way for more equitable access to funding for projects that will deliver genuine results. By offering structured guidance to strengthen project design, documentation and implementation, and by embedding safeguards for long-term sustainability, the NPAF meets the expectations of corporate customers while honoring the needs of local partners and communities. **As we move toward a nature-positive future, this framework will serve as our roadmap for integrity, transparency and lasting impact.**



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