

Governments achieve target of protecting 17% of land globally

UN report warns that quantity not matched by quality, with many conserved areas poorly protected, as Germany backs new landscapes fund for developing countries



Gonarezhou national park, Zimbabwe, home to about 11,000 elephants, could benefit from the new Legacy Landscapes Fund. Photograph: EyeEm/Alamy

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An area greater than the land mass of Russia has been added to the world's network of national parks and conservation areas since 2010, amid growing pressure to protect nature.

As of today, about 17% of land and inland water ecosystems and 8% of marine areas are within formal protected areas, with the total coverage increasing by 42% since the beginning of the last decade, according to the **Protected Planet report** by the UN Environment Programme (Unep) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Protected Planet report is the final report card on **Aichi Target 11** – the global 10-year target on protected and conserved areas. The UN calculated that 16.64% of land and inland waters has been protected to date but concluded that governments had met the 17% target because of a lag in reporting on data. The 17% ambition was just one of seven parts of Aichi Target 11. Governments **have not fully met** any of the 20 Aichi biodiversity targets agreed in Nagoya, Japan, in 2010.

Despite making significant progress, the report warns, a third of key biodiversity areas lack any coverage, connectivity between areas protected for nature remains poor and gaps remain in the quality of conservation work.

“Many protected and conserved areas are not demonstrating effectiveness,” said James Hardcastle, who leads the **IUCN’s green list** initiative. “There hasn’t been enough focus on the quality. They’re not able to fulfil their true potential.”



Mother orangutan with her babies in **Gunung Leuser national park**, Sumatra, Indonesia, a pilot area of the Legacy Landscapes Fund. Photograph: Matthew Williams-Ellis/Alamy

The report comes as a new public-private scheme backed by the German government to provide long-term funding for biodiverse areas in developing countries is launched on Wednesday. Known as the **Legacy Landscapes Fund** (LLF), it aims to provide stable financing for at least 30 conservation areas by the end of this decade to pay for park rangers, support surrounding communities and maintain infrastructure. Under the 30x30 initiative, more

than 50 countries have committed to protect almost a third of the planet by 2030.

Through public and private donors, the LLF aims to become one of the biggest nature conservation foundations in the world, with \$1bn (£700m) of capital by 2030. Pilot projects in [Angola](#), [Indonesia](#) and [Bolivia](#) are among those selected for the launch.

Stefanie Lang, executive director of the LLF, said: “It’s much easier to find funding for something spectacular like a rhino introduction than operational costs for monitoring and law enforcement. That is the gap the fund wants to close: establish something that ensures funding for perpetuity.”



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Lang said the fund was looking at schemes like the IUCN’s green list, a standard that aspires to uphold high-quality governance, planning, management and preservation of nature in protected and conserved areas, an initiative also highlighted by the Protected Planet report.

Hardcastle welcomed increased momentum around protected areas outlined in the report but said there were big caveats, and that respect for human rights and

indigenous communities must be at the heart of the expansion of protected areas.

“It is not just about creating new areas. It’s the identification and full recognition for existing areas that might be governed by indigenous peoples, local communities and private actors. That is going to be the key to the future,” he said.

About 22.5m sq km (16.64%) of land and inland water ecosystems are within documented protected and conserved areas, according to the Protected Planet report.

Neville Ash, director of Unep’s Conservation Monitoring Centre, said governments must ensure that biodiversity and benefits for people are at the heart of the UN agreement for this decade, which is scheduled to be formalised in Kunming, China, later this year. Protecting **30% of the world’s oceans and land** is likely to be one of the 20 targets.

“Protected areas are only part of the solution for addressing the biodiversity crisis and the opportunities ahead of us. They need to sit alongside wider sustainability measures, sustainable consumption and production patterns, aligning financial flows to the benefit of nature and reducing perverse subsidies,” Ash said.