



**Lion  
Recovery  
Fund**

# Lion Recovery Fund

Strategy to Recover Lions and Their Landscapes





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**WCN**

Wildlife Conservation Network



LEONARDO  
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# The Lion Recovery Fund Strategy

## *At a Glance*

### State of the African Lion

In just 25 years, we have lost half of Africa's lions and perhaps only 20,000 remain. The species has been decimated by a variety of threats, including those that result in the direct killing of lions, loss of their prey populations and destruction of their habitats. New threats are on the rise, such as targeted poaching of lions and their parts. Yet there is reason for hope. Lions are prolific and can recover when protected: research shows that Africa could have 3 to 4 times the number of lions it has today if the current protected areas within lion range were resourced appropriately (Lindsey et al. 2017). Lion recovery—and the restoration of their landscapes and all they contain—is within our grasp.

### Vision of the Lion Recovery Fund

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

### Strategy for Lion Recovery

- 1. Expand the Conservation Footprint**  
Increase the extent and effectiveness of the management of lion landscapes across Africa.
- 2. Build the Will**  
Build the public, political, and philanthropic will to bring lions back.
- 3. Scale the Funding**  
Elevate the amount of funding available for—and encourage greater focus on—the conservation of lions and their landscapes.



### Lion Recovery Fund Investment Approach

- 1. Conservation**  
Projects on the ground that improve reserve management, advance coexistence, and curb illegal wildlife trade.
- 2. Campaigns**  
Projects that build public, political, and philanthropic will for lion recovery, and abate threats to lions and their landscapes.
- 3. Collaborations**  
Projects that incentivize conservation groups to collaborate in order to strategically expand and align efforts and funding for lion and landscape recovery.

### The 100% Model

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

# The Lion Recovery Fund Strategy

## State of the African Lion

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

Lions have vanished from 92% of their historical range, and are now extirpated from 26 countries that they formerly inhabited (Bauer et al., 2015). Only 7 nations—Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—are home to more than 1,000 lions. Now is the time to stop this decline, begin recovering lion populations, and ensure lions thrive in Africa, presenting a major contribution to the economies, ecologies, and people of the continent.

### Success is Possible

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



## Protecting Lionscapes

Lions are iconic, charismatic and able to generate funding in a way that many other species are not (Macdonald et al. 2015). In addition, their survival depends upon healthy prey populations and large areas of intact habitat. When the health of prey populations or habitats decline, these changes are quickly reflected in declining lion numbers. As such, lions are a flagship, umbrella and indicator species. Protecting lions can help further the protection of landscapes and all of the other wildlife species that occur in those areas, and the human communities that share them. To that end, lion conservation should aim to achieve the protection of ‘Lionscapes’—cohesive, well-managed land areas where lions and other wildlife flourish, habitat is protected, and people thrive.

## The Lion Recovery Fund

Given these hopeful opportunities, the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), in partnership with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, created the Lion Recovery Fund. The Lion Recovery Fund’s aspirational vision is to double the number of lions in Africa via a three-pronged strategy that expands the conservation footprint, builds the public, political, and philanthropic will for lion and landscape recovery, and scales up the level of funding for conservation of lions and their habitat. These strategies guide the Fund’s investments across three portfolios: conservation projects on the ground, campaigns that build the will for lion recovery, and collaborations, as no single entity will be able to recover lions alone.



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

### The Elephant Crisis Fund

In 2013, in the midst of the elephant ivory crisis, the Wildlife Conservation Network and its partner Save The Elephants recognized that no single institution could tackle the anti-poaching, anti-trafficking, and demand reduction actions needed to recover elephants. Collaboration, high efficiency, speed of delivery, and support of the best ideas rather than a single institution were critical. Through a partnership with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, the Elephant Crisis Fund was born. To date, this approach to wildlife philanthropy has raised more than \$20 million for more than 240 projects by more than 70 partners working across more than 35 countries to protect elephants and end the trade.

All signals pointed to the need for a similar scaled-up and catalytic funding mechanism to address the decline of lions. WCN and LDF thus partnered again to create the Lion Recovery Fund, following the same principles of the Elephant Crisis Fund model.

### ***The Governance of the Lion Recovery Fund***

Thoughtful and responsible execution of donor support remains a core principle of the Lion Recovery Fund and WCN. The Lion Recovery Fund is steered by a science-driven strategy. It is governed by a Leadership Team at WCN and guided by the analysis of a Director who identifies and vets the best possible opportunities for investing in lion recovery. The Director solicits proposals from conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) undertaking work in line with this strategy, and then submits them for consideration by a Granting Committee comprised of professional conservation experts. The granting process benefits from further input by a panel of Strategic Advisors derived from the wider conservation community.

## **Vision and Goals**

### **Vision:** To double the number of lions in Africa.

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

### **Goals**

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

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

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



## **The Lion Recovery Strategy**

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

### ❖ **Expand the Conservation Footprint**

Increase the extent and effectiveness of the management of lion landscapes across Africa.

### ❖ **Build the Will**

Build the public, political, and philanthropic will to bring lions back.

### ❖ **Scale the Funding**

Elevate the amount of funding available for—and encourage greater focus on—the conservation of lions and their landscapes.

## **1. Expand the Conservation Footprint**

### **Strengthen existing management and initiate new action where there are gaps**

Latest research indicates that if properly resourced and effectively managed, Africa's protected areas could support a population three to four times greater than the current population (Lindsey et al., 2017). One of the most transformative approaches to reversing lion declines is to improve the management of protected landscapes and to create conditions conducive to lion conservation in the adjacent community lands, such that lions are tolerated and valued. Lions can be prolific and can recover quickly if they, their prey and their habitats are protected. We envisage Lionscapes, where lions, their prey and their habitats thrive, to the benefit of people and economies. Specifically, the LRF works to:

- Support the management of protected areas like national parks, reserves, and other wildlife areas
- To promote land uses conducive to conservation outside of protected areas
- To reduce the costs that local people bear from living with wildlife
- To incentivize coexistence between people and wildlife
- To tackle illegal wildlife trade through support for law enforcement

## **2. Build the Will**

### **Encouraging people and governments to make lion conservation a priority**

For the most part, people around the world are unfamiliar with the dramatic reduction in lion numbers, what their loss means for economies and ecologies, or what can be done to address it. Similarly, many living within lion range either do not know of the decline in lions, are apathetic, or are actively antagonistic in their attitudes towards them, often with good reason. Further, the political will of African governments is often not adequate to allow for the effective resourcing of protected areas, or for taking the legislative steps to allow threats to be tackled decisively or to create conditions conducive to conservation success.

Lions are revered within donor countries and the 'existence value' derived by people simply from knowing that the species survives, is significant. These values are in addition to utilitarian values

derived from opportunities to experience lions in the wild, and through the use of lions as logos and mascots. In spite of these values, political will and philanthropy from developed nations is inadequate.

Recognizing that inadequate public, philanthropic and political will are fundamental obstacles to achieving lion protection and recovery at scale, the Lion Recovery Fund has made central to its strategy catalyzing investments in campaigns to tackle these shortcomings.

The Lion Recovery Fund strategy aims to build:

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

### 3. Scale the Funding

#### Significantly increase funding needed to recover lions

Recent studies of the funding needed to secure Africa's savannah protected areas show that approximately three-quarters of protected areas in lion range operate at a budget deficit and the average funding in those areas is <10% of what is needed (Lindsey et al. 2018). Thus, without a significant elevation of support, we are going to see ongoing, dramatic declines in the abundance and distribution of lions and their prey—even within protected areas (Lindsey et al. 2018). To double the number of lions, the funding for lion conservation must significantly increase.

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

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

## The Lion Recovery Fund's Investment Approach

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

1. **Conservation** projects on the ground that improve reserve management, advance coexistence, and curb illegal wildlife trade.
2. **Campaigns** that build public, political, and philanthropic will for lion recovery, and abate threats to lions and their landscapes.
3. **Collaborations** that incentivize conservation groups to collaborate in order to strategically expand and align efforts and funding for lion and landscape recovery.

## 1. Conservation

### *Projects that grow the conservation footprint for lions and their habitats*

The Lion Recovery Fund targets field conservation efforts that:

- **Expand and deepen the protection and management of lion landscapes**  
The Fund supports projects that aim to strengthen and expand the protection and effective management of critical lion core areas. Supporting public-private partnerships between NGOs and wildlife authorities for the management of protected areas is essential to improve the prospects for the effective protection of lions, their habitats and prey. The Fund will invest in strengthening existing public-private partnerships in PAs, scaling up projects that are working, and catalyzing new projects in areas that currently lack a conservation presence. Projects involving the management and protection of land need not focus solely on lions – so long as lions, their habitat and their prey benefit from the interventions.
- **Promote coexistence and connectivity**  
The African human population is rapidly growing and is expanding into lion landscapes. Living with lions is hard for these communities, but coexistence is possible. The LRF invests in interventions that encourage coexistence between people and lions by making it easier and even desirable for communities to live with the species. These investments will make the effective management of neighboring protected areas easier; they will expand the conservation reach of protected areas; and will help retain connectivity among protected areas. The LRF supports include projects that:
  - Reduce the costs borne by communities associated with living with lions and their prey such as conflict mitigation teams and strengthening bomas/kraals for livestock;
  - Incentivize coexistence between communities and wildlife by creating benefits for local people or building local pride in wildlife conservation;
  - Support land uses outside of protected areas that are conducive to the conservation of lions and other wildlife.
- **Tackle the illegal wildlife trade**  
The illegal trade in lion skins and parts, as well as the illegal harvesting of wildlife for bushmeat, are rising and significant threats. The Fund invests in projects to tackle the trafficking and demand for these wildlife products to reduce poaching of lions and their prey. This will involve investments in such initiatives as the training of law enforcement agencies, anti-trafficking projects to disrupt trade routes and networks, and demand reduction campaigns. Such interventions will be supported both in Africa and in other continents where wildlife products are consumed.

## 2. Campaigns

### *Building the will for conservation and changing behavior that threatens lions*

The Lion Recovery Fund invests in campaigns that build public and political will. Campaigns to build public will may revolve around fostering support for conservation in Africa or elsewhere, growing pride in wildlife conservation, or encouraging behavior change in relevant ways (such as by reducing demand for bushmeat or lion-products). Campaigns to build political will may be targeted to countries where lion populations exist, to countries with significant potential for funding conservation, and to countries that are the source of demand for illegal wildlife products.

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



### 3. Collaborations

#### *Facilitating alliances to advance lion recovery and put Lions Before Logos*

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

There is a need for great collaboration among conservation organizations (whether focused on lions, community development, or protected area management) to come together and coordinate their investments of time, funds and resources. The Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN) has long played a supportive role to other conservation groups, with the objective of strengthening their conservation impact. WCN and the Lion Recovery Fund uses this neutral role to help convene key players, from large international organizations to small grassroots entities, and build alignment where possible so that conservation practitioners are working together more effectively to conserve lions and their landscapes. The Lion Recovery Fund invests in partnerships and outcome-focused gatherings and other initiatives that yield collaborative efforts to conserve lions and lionscapes at scale.

#### ***Changing the face of lion conservation by promoting diversity and inclusivity***

Recognizing that conservation is most effective when diverse perspectives are included in decision-making processes, and when those processes are led by well-trained leaders, the Lion Recovery Fund aspires to play a role in shaping a new era of leadership in wildlife conservation—one that is more inclusive, diverse, and representative of the many groups associated with conservation. Within the scope of its programmatic investment approach, the LRF supports initiatives that incorporate opportunities to foster and support skilled, effective, and diverse conservation leaders, particularly from range states. Embedded throughout our approaches is a goal of helping long-marginalized groups—in particular young African nationals, women, and indigenous groups—find employment opportunities, pursue higher education in conservation-related fields, acquire skills training, and placed on pathways to eventually lead organizations and/or strategies to advance lion conservation. Looking inward as a first step, the LRF is making changes to increase diversity within its governance teams. Ultimately, the Lion Recovery Fund believes that diverse, equitable, and inclusive projects are the most effective in recovering lions and restore landscapes.

### Where the LRF Invests

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

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

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

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

## Principles of the Lion Recovery Fund

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|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>100% Model</b>             | Our 100% model ensures every cent of your donated dollar is invested in lions, with zero administrative or overhead fees.  |
| <b>Lions Not Logos</b>        | No one organization can recover lions single-handedly. The LRF works to unite efforts and investments through collaborative efforts.   |
| <b>A VC for Lions</b>         | Like a conservation venture capital firm, the LRF seeks out innovative ideas and provides seed funding for new projects, or bolsters approaches known to work.   |
| <b>Ideas not Institutions</b> | We support the best ideas, not any one single institution, whether those ideas come from individuals, small organizations, or larger non-profits.  |
| <b>Range-Wide</b>             | The LRF believes all lions matter, and invests in projects to recover lions throughout their entire range.   |
| <b>Leadership</b>             | The LRF is governed by a committed team of conservation and philanthropic professionals, with a Board, a Granting Committee, and a team of technical advisors that bring sound conservation, philanthropy, and communications. |

### Contact Us

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