**Apex Goal Task force on Target 1[[1]](#footnote-1) “no net loss/net gain” meaning and principles**

*Why we need “net” in the target*

The Global Biodiversity Framework must “protect the best and improve the rest.” The highest conservation value areas need to be safeguarded against any further degradation or conversion. The science suggests a **minimum** level of secured natural habitat to help prevent biodiversity loss that is somewhere between 30% (as proposed in the Zero/.5 Drafts) and 70% of the planet.[[2]](#endnote-1),[[3]](#endnote-2), [[4]](#endnote-3), [[5]](#endnote-4) All ecosystems have unique features that are not fungible or replaceable; protection will always be the bedrock of biodiversity conservation.

This does not mean that all areas that are not under some form of legal protection can or should be converted or exploited for human use. Indeed, we have already lost too much nature and urgently need to restore many ecosystems, both to conserve biodiversity and stabilize climate. Further, each year, millions of hectares of natural habitat are degraded or converted in the name of ‘development’, while extraction of marine resources is growing unsustainably.[[6]](#endnote-5) Well over 90% of the resulting impact on natural habitat is uncompensated, meaning that nature effectively subsidizes economic activity and room for wildlife continues to shrink.[[7]](#endnote-6) The highest rates of conversion are often in ecoregions with little remaining natural habitat.[[8]](#endnote-7) Similarly, unsustainable use of marine resources is concentrated where governance is weakest.[[9]](#endnote-8)

Further species habitat and ecosystem loss in some locations is highly likely if not unavoidable, due to demographic and economic pressures, weak governance, and to meet humanity’s growing demand for food, energy, materials, transport and health. The concept of “net” simply acknowledges that some loss or degradation of nature is an inevitable result of human use and pressures.[[10]](#endnote-9) However, the term “net” also implies that the magnitude of these losses should be systematically assessed when economic projects are designed, and that robust efforts should made to implement the mitigation hierarchy—to avoid certain areas that are significant for biodiversity, and to limit and compensate for other losses, ideally in-kind. By the same token, the concept of “net” implies that additions to or improvements in natural habitat, through restoration or ecological enhancement, may be considered as potential compensatory actions.

If we don’t address habitat disturbance and conversion for human use, we will suffer further ecosystem loss even if we expand protected area networks, as protection often displaces economic activity and impacts to other vulnerable locations.[[11]](#endnote-10) A target for **Net Gain** of ecosystem extent and quality can help to address conversion pressure and drive habitat restoration, which is essential to meet even the 30% protected area target.[[12]](#endnote-11) Moreover, net gain must be assessed in ecological and also socio-economic terms, noting that healthy habitats provide a range of valuable ecosystem services to local and global communities. Further, efforts to ensure net gain must tackle all the key drivers of nature loss—not just conversion, but also overexploitation, climate change, pollution, and the spread of invasive species—on land, in freshwater, and in the oceans—to protect and expand both ecosystem extent and quality.

The UNCCD has recognized the need to address adverse impacts and to promote restoration needs through its Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) goal. This provides a template for how the Global Biodiversity Framework could express a net gain target for ecoregions, whilst recognizing that net gain and restoration must never be used as a smokescreen or an excuse to facilitate increased destruction of highly intact ecosystems.

***Some common principles for net gain approaches include:***

* High conservation value habitats, highly intact ecosystems and sites, sites that are critical to the persistency of biodiversity (such as Key Biodiversity Areas, including Alliance for Zero Extinction sites and Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas), and rare/unique ecosystems must be strictly protected; impacts to those areas should be prohibited to prevent any further degradation or loss. This principle is paramount and is reflected in the area-based conservation measures target (currently Target 2 in the .5 draft).
* Economic investments, such those in the energy, mining, infrastructure, fishing and commercial agriculture sectors, should first seek to avoid and minimize impacts to natural habitats (both within and outside protected areas and OECMs) to the maximum extent possible, in accordance with the Mitigation Hierarchy. Alternatives to the proposed economic activity must be considered seriously before any permits are issued.
* Biodiversity values are difficult and often impossible to restore or replace to their pre-disturbance condition in any human time scale; hence the avoidance of loss should always be the first priority and restoration should be carried out in advance if possible.
* Any unavoidable impacts to natural ecosystems should be more than compensated by restoration or ecological enhancement in a manner that is sustainable and durable and accounts for the risk of failure, whilst recognizing that some impacts to highly intact ecosystems can never be fully compensated. Compensation ratios should include risk buffers and also allow for differences in quality, especially during the early stages of regeneration. In practice, this means that compensation will generally be far greater than one-to-one.
* Net gain outcomes must leave ecosystems better off (in terms of extent and/or condition) following the economic activity, or for the duration of the activity, than before the activity. This should include consideration of net gain in ecosystem services to affected communities and especially to vulnerable groups.
* Conservation actions to compensate for economic activity should ideally take place in the same administrative jurisdiction or cultural territory and ecoregion as the impacts.[[13]](#footnote-2) Where this is not possible, net gain outcomes should focus on areas recognized as high conservation priorities.

*Endnotes*

1. Target 1: Retain and restore freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems, increasing by at least [50%] the land and sea area under comprehensive spatial planning addressing land/sea use change, achieving by 2030 a net increase in area, connectivity and integrity and retaining existing intact areas and wilderness. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dinerstein, E. *et al.* A Global Deal for Nature: Guiding principles, milestones, and targets. *Science Advances* **5**, eaaw2869 (2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. Stephen Woodley, Harvey Locke, Dan Laffoley, Kathy MacKinnon, Trevor Sandwith and Jane Smart. A Review of Evidence for Area‐Based Conservation Targets for the Post‐2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. *PARKS* vol. 25, (November 2019)**.** [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. Allan, James R., Hugh P. Possingham, Scott C. Atkinson, Anthony Waldron, Moreno Di Marco, Vanessa M. Adams, Stuart H. M. Butchart, Oscar Venter, Martine Maron, Brooke A. Williams, Kendall R. Jones, Piero Visconti, Brendan A. Wintle, April E. Reside, James E.M. Watson. Conservation attention necessary across at least 44% of Earth’s terrestrial area to safeguard biodiversity. Biorxiv.org Preprint. doi: https://doi.org/10.1101/839977. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. Jones, K. R. *et al.* Area Requirements to Safeguard Earth’s Marine Species. *One Earth* 2, 188–196 (2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. <http://www.fao.org/state-of-fisheries-aquaculture>. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. Deutz, A., Heal, G., Niu R., Swanson, E., Townshend T., Zhu L., Delmar, A., Meghji, A., Sethi, S., Tobin-de la Puente, J. 2020. Financing Nature: Closing the global biodiversity financing gap. The Paulson Institute, The Nature Conservancy, and Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability.  [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. Watson, J.E., Jones, K.R., Fuller, R.A., Marco, M.D., Segan, D.B., Butchart, S.H., Allan, J.R., McDonald‐Madden, E. and Venter, O. (2016), Persistent Disparities between Recent Rates of Habitat Conversion and Protection and Implications for Future Global Conservation Targets. CONSERVATION LETTERS, 9: 413-421. doi:[10.1111/conl.12295](https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12295) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. <https://worldoceanreview.com/en/wor-2/fisheries/illegal-fishing/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
10. Maron, M., Simmonds, J. S., Watson, J. E. M., Sonter, L. J., Bennun, L., Griffiths, V. F., Quétier, F., Hase, A. von, Edwards, S., Rainey, H., Bull, J. W., Savy, C. E., Victurine, R., Kiesecker, J., Puydarrieux, P., Stevens, T., Cozannet, N., & Jones, J. P. G. (2019). Global no net loss of natural ecosystems. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-019-1067-z. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
11. Watson, J.E., Jones, K.R., Fuller, R.A., Marco, M.D., Segan, D.B., Butchart, S.H., Allan, J.R., McDonald‐Madden, E. and Venter, O. (2016), Persistent Disparities between Recent Rates of Habitat Conversion and Protection and Implications for Future Global Conservation Targets. CONSERVATION LETTERS, 9: 413-421. doi:[10.1111/conl.12295](https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12295) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
12. Mappin, B., Chauvenet, A., Adams, V., Marco, M., Beyer, H., Venter, O., Halpern, B., Possingham, H., Watson, J. (2019). Restoration priorities to achieve the global protected area target Conservation Letters 12(4), e12646. https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/conl.12646 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
13. While this discussion of net refers to an ecoregional/global scale, its implementation necessarily requires local actions. A robust discussion of application at different scales can be found in [forthcoming] Milner-Gulland et al. “Four Steps for the Earth: Mainstreaming the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)