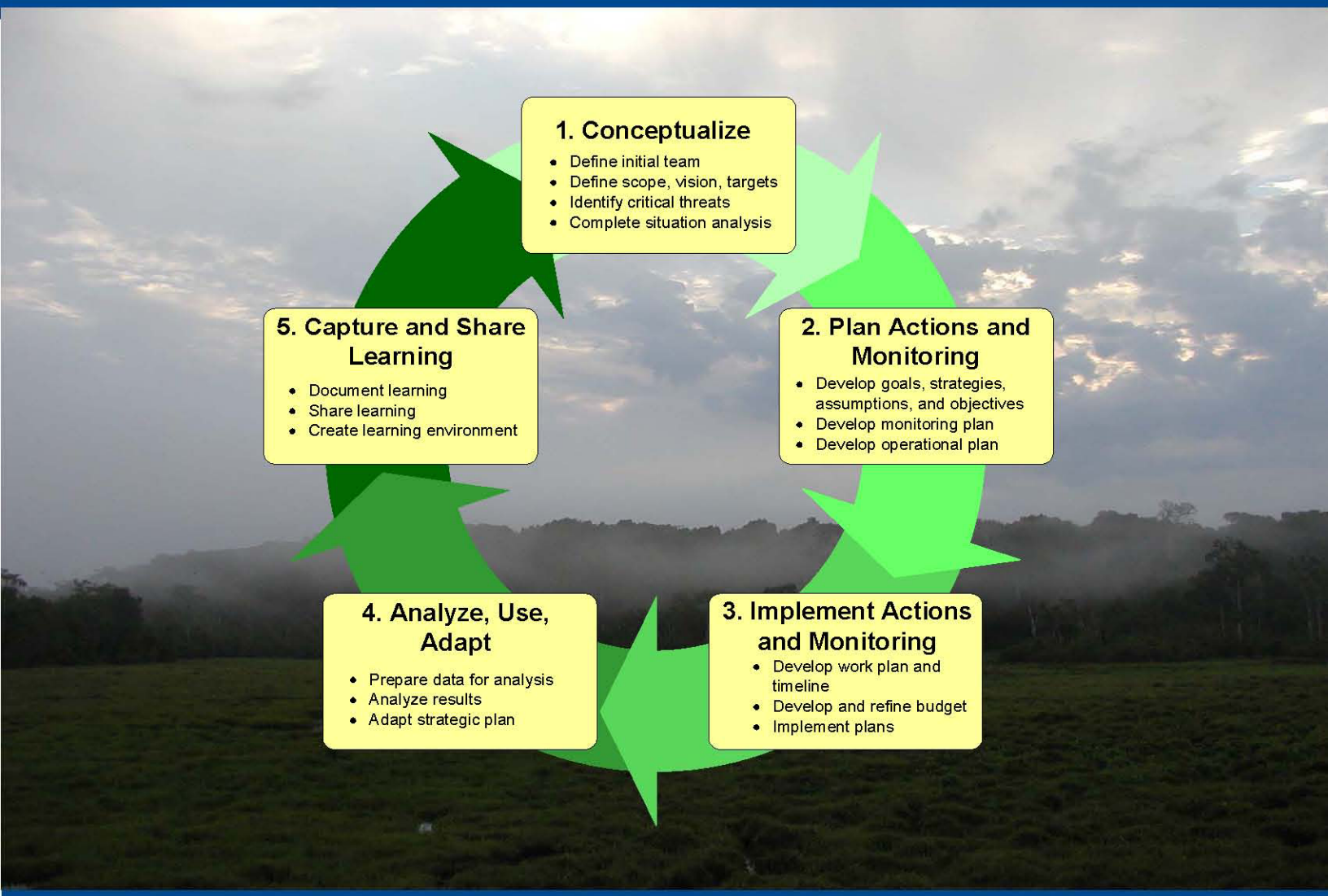
CMP

The Conservation Measures Partnership

Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

Version 2.0
October 2007



The Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP) is a joint venture of conservation NGOs that seek better ways to design, manage, and measure the impacts of their conservation actions. Partners include the African Wildlife Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wide Fund for Nature/World Wildlife Fund. Collaborators include The Cambridge Conservation Forum, Conservation International, Enterprise Works/VITA, Foundations of Success, The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Rare, the World Commission on Protected Areas and the World Conservation Union/IUCN.

This document contains an overview of the Conservation Measures Partnerships *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation, Version 2.0*. These standards are the product of inputs, field tests, discussions, and debates among many CMP members and their partners. This version of the *Open Standards* comes three years after the release of Version 1.0 and reflects how thinking has evolved over time as various conservation organizations within and outside of CMP have tried to operationalize the *Standards.*

This document has been approved by the Conservation Measures Partnership, but as part of the adaptive management process, CMP members will continue to revise and improve it over time. The CMP website (www.conservationmeasures.org) will post updated versions as they are developed. In addition, guidance materials in support of the Standards can be found on the CMP website.

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Executive Summary

In order to achieve our goals, the conservation community must determine the extent to which our actions are working – and we must be able to diagnose why some actions succeed while others do not. In recent years, there has been great convergence among conservation organizations in thinking about how best to plan and implement conservation actions.

Making the most of the extensive experience gained by conservation organizations while designing, implementing and appraising their conservation projects, the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP) has developed a set of project cycle or adaptive management *Open Standards* that are reflected in our organizations' work and that we believe are fundamental to effective conservation. These standards are less a recipe that must be followed exactly than a framework and guidance for conservation action.

Our goal in developing the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* is to bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology in conservation project design, management, and monitoring in order to help practitioners improve the practice of conservation. In particular, these standards are meant to provide the steps and general guidance necessary for the successful implementation of conservation projects. The members of CMP hope that, by developing these open standards, our colleagues in our respective organizations – and across the conservation landscape – will have a clear roadmap that will assist them to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of their projects for maximum conservation gain. In addition, we anticipate that the current version of the standards will support the refinement of a conservation audit process based on Version 1.0 (June 2004) of the *Open Standards*.

We have organized the main components of the *Open Standards* into five steps that comprise the project management cycle: 1) Conceptualizing the project vision and context; 2) Planning actions and planning monitoring; 3) Implementing actions and implementing monitoring; 4) Analyzing data, using the results, and adapting the project; and 5) Capturing and sharing learning. Although we present the *Open Standards* as a linear series of steps or stages, the entire process is rarely applied in a linear fashion from start to finish. Instead, it is a rough approximation of the more complex back-and-forth movements through which a project goes.

We intend these standards to be used once it is clear where – or on what theme – a team will work and generally what it wants to conserve. They are not "site" specific and thus apply across a variety of scales. For more detailed guidance on how to implement the steps described in the *Open* Standards, please refer to the CMP website at:

www.ConservationMeasures.org

Finally, we encourage feedback from anyone who puts these standards to the test – please e-mail us your comments at

CMPinfo@ConservationMeasures.org

What Are the *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation*?

Key questions facing all conservation practitioners and organizations are: "What actions are needed to achieve our conservation goals?" and "Are our actions effective in achieving our conservation goals?" It is imperative to answer these questions to focus attention on the most important actions, to be able to adapt and change our actions over time, to learn about which actions work and do not work, and to convince our donors and society that conservation is a worthy investment.

The conservation community finds itself at a critical time in its evolution – a time when there is great convergence in thinking about how best to plan and implement conservation actions. Making the most of the extensive experience gained by conservation organizations while designing, implementing and appraising their conservation projects, the Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP)[1] developed a set of project cycle or adaptive management standards that are reflected in our organizations' work and that we believe are fundamental to effective conservation. These standards are less a recipe that must be followed exactly than a framework and guidance for conservation action.

All conservation efforts at any scale can be either explicitly or implicitly described as "projects" – a set of actions undertaken to achieve defined goals and objectives.[2] All of the organizations involved in CMP apply some form of project cycle management to their conservation projects. While there is some variation in the way this is carried out, there is also a great deal of consistency. We, the member organizations of CMP, agree that all projects should go through a robust conceptualization, planning, implementation, and monitoring process. And we agree that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be fully integrated into the project cycle.

Our goal in developing these *Open Standards* is to bring together common concepts, approaches, and terminology in conservation project design, management, and monitoring in order to help practitioners improve the practice of conservation. In particular, these standards are meant to provide the steps and guidance necessary for the successful implementation of conservation projects. We have borrowed and adapted the term "open standards" from the information technology field to mean standards that are developed through public collaboration, freely available to anyone, and not the property of anyone or any organization and can thus be freely redistributed. What is important about open standards is not only the standards themselves, but also the means that participants follow to create and manage the standards. In the development of open standards, any interested party may contribute to their modification through participation in an industry-sanctioned governing body. For the conservation community, this means that these proposed standards are common property,

[1] The Conservation Measures Partnership (CMP) is a consortium of conservation organizations listed on the title page of this document whose mission it is to improve the practice of biodiversity conservation by developing and promoting common standards for the process of conservation and measuring conservation impact. For more information, visit our website at www.ConservationMeasures.org

[2] In this document, we use the term "project" to represent both projects and programs (groups of projects) since these standards of practice are designed to apply equally well to both.

constantly evolving and improving through the input of a wide variety of practitioners, and adaptable to individual organizations' needs.

As members of CMP, we hope that by developing these open standards, our colleagues in our respective organizations – and across the conservation landscape – will have a clear roadmap that will assist them to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of their projects for maximum conservation gain. In addition, we hope that these standards will serve to help us all know more clearly what is expected of us to achieve quality project management, thus providing a transparent basis for a consistent and standardized approach to external evaluation of our actions. Finally, we hope that these standards will promote and facilitate greater collaboration among conservation organizations – an essential ingredient if we are to be successful in achieving our goals.

How Have the *Open Standards* Been Developed, How Have They Been Used, and How Should They Be Used in the Future?

The *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation* are a product of the collaborative work of the Conservation Measures Partnership. As a starting point, CMP members used the results of the Measuring Conservation Impact (MCI) Initiative,[3] a study that reviewed experiences in seven fields – conservation, public health, family planning, international development, social services, education, and business – to determine common concepts of and approaches to good project design, management, and monitoring. The findings of MCI were compiled into a series of principles for project cycle management/adaptive management. Building on these results, individual CMP member organizations contributed their experience in conservation project implementation to refine the *Standards* and focus them more specifically on biodiversity conservation.

We developed these open standards to represent an idealized adaptive management process and provide a conceptual framework for good project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It is outside the purview of these open standards to describe all relevant selection and implementation guidance for all conservation tools and strategies under all conditions. The standards included in this document describe in more generic terms how a project manager would design, manage, and monitor any conservation project – independent of which strategy she or he chooses. These standards are meant primarily to guide *programmatic* decisions in project management (i.e., determining the best interventions for conservation success). They are not designed to fully address administrative processes and functions related to, for example, budget, contract, and human resource issues.

The Conservation Measures Partnership published the first version (1.0) of the *Open Standards* in June 2004. Since then, several initiatives have emerged to help the *Standards* become the common and accepted practice within the conservation community. For example, several member organizations within CMP have worked especially hard to

[3] The MCI initiative was conducted by Foundations of Success (FOS) in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Conservation International (CI), and was funded by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

operationalize the *Standards* – including The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and Foundations of Success (FOS). This is an ongoing, dynamic process that has included the development of organization-specific standards that draw heavily on the CMP *Open Standards*, development of more detailed guidance materials for each step, training of various project teams across the globe in parts of the *Standards*, and implementation of the *Standards* by these teams. This wide-scale application of the *Standards* has provided CMP with helpful feedback and suggestions for improvement.

CMP has also used Version 1.0 of the *Open Standards* to develop the CMP Audit Protocol. This protocol provides a basis for consistently examining how conservation projects of all shapes and sizes compare in terms of their adherence to the *Standards*. In the financial world, audits against Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) standards are important in establishing that the "books" of a company are constructed in a way that allows potential investors to understand what they mean. The audit does not certify that a company is profitable, but merely that the financial information is presented in a standard and consistent language. In a similar fashion, the CMP Conservation Audits focus mainly on the process of conservation, but are clearly essential to determine whether the information is available to enable managers and potential investors to analyze and understand the conservation project. To date, CMP members have conducted dozens of test audits. We are in the process of using the results of these tests and this current version (2.0) of the *Open Standards* to modify and improve the audit process.

The *Open Standards* have also served as the framework for the development of the Miradi Adaptive Management Software Program (Miradi means "project" in Swahili). The current version of the software walks practitioners through the conceptualization and planning steps in the adaptive management cycle (Steps 1 and 2), helping them, for example, to: identify what they want to conserve; specify what threats and opportunities are affecting their conservation targets; determine which threats are of greatest significance; and outline how their actions are believed to influence the situation at their site. Later versions will incorporate the other steps in the adaptive management cycle. CMP released its beta version in early 2007 and is continuously refining it based on practitioner feedback. See www.Miradi.org for more details.

With the passing of three years and the experience and feedback gained from these various initiatives, the time has come to refine the original *Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation*. It is with this in mind that we present the next iteration of the *Standards* (Version 2.0) in this document. As a matter of practice and when warranted, CMP will continue to update, refine, and publish new versions based on the feedback we receive from our colleagues from around the world who use them in the field.[4]

Using these open standards to improve the practice of conservation is part science, part art. That is, it requires some skill and experience to take these very orderly and structured principles and artfully apply them to real-world situations. While inexperienced conservation practitioners can certainly benefit from these open standards as they determine how to initiate

[4] Please send your comments to *Attention: Open Standards* at CMPinfo@ConservationMeasures.org

a new conservation project, experienced practitioners will more clearly understand the true challenges and opportunities associated with their implementation.

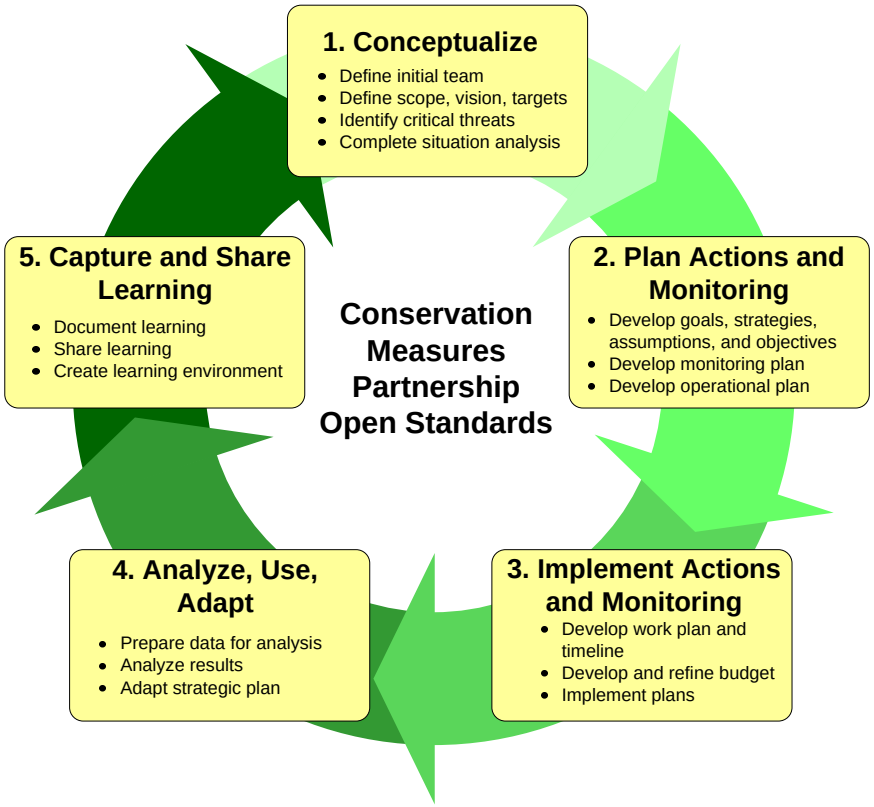
About This Document

We have organized the main components of the *Open Standards* into five steps that comprise the project management cycle (see figure below). The basic structure of these generic steps is widely used in conservation and other fields that implement projects to achieve clearly defined goals. The steps include:

1. **Conceptualize** what you will achieve in the context of where you are working.
2. **Plan** both your **Actions** and **Monitoring.**
3. **Implement** both your **Actions** and **Monitoring.**
4. **Analyze** your data to evaluate the effectiveness of your activities. **Use** your results to **Adapt** your project to maximize impact.
5. **Capture and Share** your results with key external and internal audiences to promote **Learning**.

For each step, the document provides a brief description of the standards of practice (sub-steps) and the expected outputs for that practice (see Annex 3). Numbers denote steps and sub-steps, and diamond bullets (♦) denote outputs. (Once again, for guidance material in support of the implementation of the standards, please go to www.ConservationMeasures.org) Of course, not all standards or outputs are appropriate under all conditions and for all projects, so you should adapt as necessary.

Figure 1. CMP *Open Standards* Project Management Cycle Version 2.0



For specific guidance on implementation, go to www.ConservationMeasures.org

Although we present the *Standards* as a sequential series of steps or stages, the entire process is rarely applied in a linear fashion from start to finish – instead it is typically only a rough approximation of the more complex series of back-and-forth movements that a project goes through. For example, we were challenged trying to adequately capture the relationship between planning and implementation – it is hard to clearly determine if specific tasks and guidance should be included exclusively in a planning phase or an implementation phase when, in fact, they must be addressed in both. For the sake of simplicity, we decided to divide both planning and implementation into two parts – 1) actions and 2) monitoring – and put the bulk of our recommendations in the planning phase. In the implementation phase, we have included the development, implementation, and refinement of more detailed work plans that are necessary to put planning into action.

General Principles for Implementing the *Open Standards*

There are some essential principles that apply not exclusively to any one step, but instead to all of the steps in these standards. Instead of listing them for each step, we describe them here. These essential principles include:

- **Involve stakeholders** – One of the first requirements is to define internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include your project team (which can be as few as two people) composed of NGO staff, local stakeholders, researchers, or whomever else you find important to include. External stakeholders include community members, government personnel, donor agencies, international community members, and other individuals and institutions that have some interest in and connection to the project. In conducting your project, it is important at every step to make sure you involve the appropriate internal and external stakeholders in the proper manner. (See Step 1D for more details on the analysis of actors and stakeholders.)

- **Develop and cultivate partnerships** – Similarly, you will likely need to formalize some of your partnerships and work on cultivating them throughout the life of your project. Successful conservation depends on forging effective partnerships with key stakeholders. Most conservation projects will probably not have sufficient expertise or internal resources to do all the work that needs to be done. Furthermore, most if not all projects need to ensure that the work that they start will continue after the initial project ends. To ensure sustainability of the work, you will need to mobilize effective participation and information-sharing with these partners both throughout and beyond the life of the project. This means developing partnerships early on, revisiting them as you move through the cycle, formalizing them as appropriate, and working to maintain positive, supportive relationships.

- **Document your decisions** – For just about every step, you could write down how you decided to proceed, but this could quickly become repetitive. You must decide what level of documentation is appropriate, but we cannot emphasize enough the importance of documenting the reasons for your decisions at each step. Not only does this give you the opportunity to analyze why things worked or did not, but it also serves as a basis for others to understand the logic of your choices.

- **Adjust as necessary** – The steps described in this document should generally apply to all conservation projects but will have to be adjusted to meet each project's needs. In particular, each project team should go into a level of detail commensurate with the overall investment in its project. Also, some project teams may find that certain steps don't work for them. It's expected that teams will change or adapt these basic steps as necessary.

Assumptions Made in Developing the *Open Standards*

As you read through this document, keep in mind that there are a number of assumptions that we have made as we put it together. These include:

Some priority-setting has already taken place – These standards do not define where you and you organization will work (the purpose of priority-setting exercises). Instead, they outline how to design, implement, and evaluate your project activities once it is clear where – or on what issue – you wish to work. Priority-setting is an essential precursor to these standards and should be completed before these standards are used, although some of the materials in the *Open Standards* are often addressed while establishing priorities. In addition, learning achieved during the application of these standards can be fed back into future priority setting exercises.

Few projects will start at the beginning of these standards – While it would be ideal to apply these standards right from the start, most projects that will benefit from the application of these standards are already in operation. You can "retrofit" these standards to your project to help you identify gaps that need to be addressed to improve your project. If you are just beginning to think about initiating a new project, these standards can help you be comprehensive in your approach.

These standards represent the "ideal" – It is difficult to expect all projects to address all of the principles and tasks outlined in these open standards. A quick read of the *Open Standards* may prove overwhelming at first – with a seemingly infinite number of issues to consider and things to do. But these standards are meant to provide a comprehensive view of what comprises the ideal in project design, management and monitoring. While they can be used as a goal to attain by any project manager, it is important to acknowledge that it may not be feasible – for a variety of reasons – to address each and every component of the *Standards*. What is important, however, is that you use a systematic and logical process for applying the *Standards.* For example, you should not identify your indicators (Step 2B) before you have given thought to what you want to conserve (Step 1B). Likewise, if you are not able to address a particular component, you should be clear about how this will influence the rest of your work.

Each project is different in potentially significant ways – Similar to the previous assumption, every project varies from the norm in some way. We have not developed these standards to be "one-size-fits-all." Instead we have written them in fairly general terms in order to provide project teams the flexibility they need to adapt and modify the *Standards* to their particular conditions. In fact, we believe that it is these differences – and testing these standards in a variety of contexts – that will make the *Standards* increasingly more robust and useful over time.

These standards will change over time – These standards are not written to be the last word on how to do effective conservation. Instead, they are meant to capture the prevailing wisdom on what it takes to do conservation well under a variety of conditions. To this end, CMP intends to constantly update and modify the *Standards* as they are applied and tested in the field and as our knowledge increases about what works and what does not.

These standards are not "site" specific – These standards apply across a variety of scales and are not designed exclusively for site-based conservation actions. We see projects covering a variety of scales – from small-scale projects limited in geographic scope, to large projects that may stretch across ecoregions, landscapes, or corridors. In addition, projects may not be limited in geographic scale but instead may be more thematic in nature, including, for example, policy-based or species-focused initiatives. No matter the scope, these standards can be used to guide you in designing an effective project.

These standards are not divorced from strategy, tool, and indicator standards – The *Standards* are meant to represent the state-of-the-art in the conservation community's collective knowledge of the process for designing, managing, and monitoring conservation projects. They provide guidance on how to do conservation – independent of any strategies or tools that may be used. In addition to these process standards, it is essential to develop guidance for the wide range of strategies, tools, and indicators that project managers need to know how to use to achieve conservation.

These standards seek to clearly define and consistently use terminology – There seems to be an endless debate among planners as to the relative meaning of technical terms such as goals, objectives, strategies, activities, targets, milestones, outputs, and results. Every office, project, and even individual seems to have their own preferred set of terms. There is no right answer – the *Standards*, however, maintain that it is very important that the members of your project team, and the people with whom you work, have a clear and common definition of whatever terms you choose to use. With this in mind, the technical terms in this document were carefully selected, underlined when first used, consistently used thereafter, and defined in the glossary at the end. The selection of specific terms for a given concept and the definitions for these terms are based on current usage of words by professionals from various disciplines working in planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

A Caveat

The process outlined in this document might appear to be complex and somewhat overwhelming, but you probably have already done many of the steps described here, even if you did not have a formal name or description for that step. Your project is not expected to produce flawless outputs the first time you go through each step in this process. Instead, this is meant to be an iterative cycle – the idea is to deliberately and yet rapidly go through the steps, develop a credible draft of the outputs, and then revise your work over time as your project changes and matures. Likewise, when you encounter data gaps, do not be paralyzed – state your hypotheses, move forward with the best available information, and record any assumptions you are making. Good planning and implementation are an ongoing series of successive approximations built on assumptions that you can systematically test.

Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation

1. Conceptualize

This first step involves specifying the basic parameters for your project in preparation for the design work that will come in the next step. Specifically, it involves identifying who will initially be involved on the project team, articulating your project's geographic and/or thematic scope, your vision of what you hope to achieve, and the conservation targets which will be the focus of your work. It also includes making sense of the context in which your project is intending to work, including threats and opportunities, and key stakeholders.

1A. Define initial project team

A project is ultimately designed and implemented by a specific group of individuals who comprise your project team. Team members typically include your organization's staff as well as other key internal and external partners. One of the team members is typically designated as the project leader. This leader should be responsible for the overall coordination of the project and moving the team forward. You should be clear about who is on your team and what the roles and responsibilities of each member are. The team composition may change as you move through the management cycle. The key, however, is to recognize and make use of existing skills and experience to ensure that the project moves forward with the best available knowledge. In addition to the project team, you may also need to identify one or more advisors to whom the core team can turn for honest feedback and counsel and who can champion your cause.

Outputs for this step include:

- ***Selection of initial project team, including project leader, core members, and advisory members.***
- ***Identification of key skills each team member brings.***
- ***Designation of roles and responsibilities.***

1B. Define scope, vision, and targets

Scope

Before you begin to think about what you will do (the strategies you will implement) you must have a good understanding of what you hope to accomplish. A project's scope defines broad parameters related to what the project will affect and might include descriptions of biodiversity and/or maps of the area. Efforts to conserve or effectively manage ecoregions, priority areas, or protected areas typically have a geographic scope or project area. Efforts to address specific targets, threats, opportunities, or enabling conditions have a thematic scope.

Vision

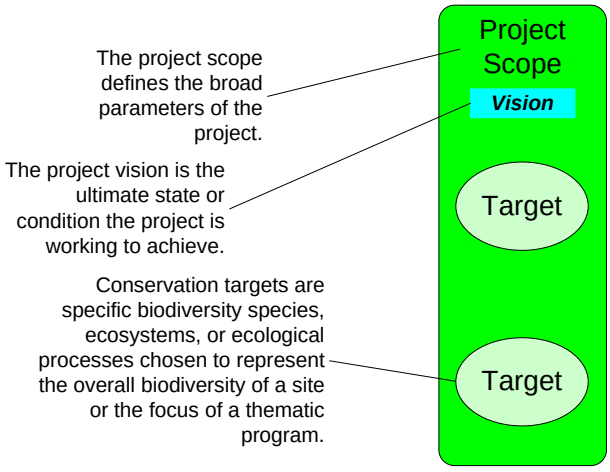
In addition to defining the scope, it is also necessary to decide on a clear and common vision, a description of the desired state or ultimate condition that you are working to achieve (see Figure 2). Your vision can be summarized in a vision statement, which meets the criteria of being *relatively general, visionary, and brief* (see Annex 2 for descriptions of these criteria). A project's vision should fit within the context of your organization's overall mission.

Targets

Projects select a limited number of conservation targets (also known as biodiversity targets or, more simply, targets). Conservation targets are specific species, ecological systems/habitats, or ecological processes that are chosen to represent and encompass the full suite of biodiversity in the project area for place-based conservation or the focus of a thematic program. They are the basis for setting goals, carrying out conservation actions, and measuring conservation effectiveness. For place-based conservation a complete suite of targets will – in theory – ensure the conservation of all native biodiversity within the project site. Most place-based projects can be reasonably well defined by eight or fewer well chosen conservation targets. Thematic programs are often characterized by focusing on one main conservation target – or one main threat that affects multiple targets (e.g., a program to conserve blue whales or reduce world trade in endangered species). Selection of conservation targets typically requires input from experts and analysis of spatial data.

You should next determine the current status of each conservation target. At the most basic level, this involves developing an overall assessment of the "health" of each target. More detailed status assessments involve specifying key ecological attributes of each target, determining indicators for each attribute, outlining your sense of what the acceptable range of variation is for each indicator, and finally determining the current status of the attribute in reference to this range of variation.

Figure 2. Generic Partial Project Model Showing Scope, Vision, & Targets



Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Brief description of the project scope.***
- ***If appropriate, a map of the project area (GIS file or hand sketch).***
- ***Vision statement for the project.***
- ***Selection of conservation targets, including a brief explanation of why they were chosen.***
- ***Description of the status of each priority conservation target***

1C. Identify critical threats

Once you have settled on your priority targets, you need to identify the direct threats that influence your targets. Direct threats are primarily *human activities* that immediately affect a target (e.g., unsustainable fishing, hunting, oil drilling, construction of roads, pollution or introduction of exotic invasive species), but they can be *natural phenomena* altered by human activities (e.g., increase in water temperature caused by global warming) or *natural phenomena whose impact is increased* by other human activities (e.g., a potential tsunami that threatens the last remaining population of an Asian rhino).

As part of your analysis of the project's context, it is also important to prioritize the direct threats that affect your targets so that you can concentrate your activities where they are most needed. In particular, you should try to determine which are critical threats – the ones that are most important to address. There are a number of threat rating and ranking tools that can be used to help in this prioritization process. Most of these assess the scope or extent of the threat and its severity on the targets. Taken together, these two criteria assess overall threat magnitude. Other commonly-used criteria include permanence/irreversibility and urgency. Depending upon the circumstances, you can rate the threats as they affect an overall site or you can rate them as they affect specific targets, including those that may define a thematic program.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Identification of direct threats.***
- ***Rating or ranking of direct threats to identify critical threats.***

1D. Complete situation analysis

This standard asks you to complete the description of the context within which your project takes place. A situation analysis is a process that will help you and your project team create together a common understanding of your project's context – including the biological environment and the social, economic, political, and institutional systems that affect the conservation targets you want to conserve. Depending upon the scale of the project and the resources available to it, a situation analysis can be an in-depth formal study of the area or a less formal description based on input of those familiar with the area. Often referred to a *needs assessment* in other fields, this step is one that is sometimes overlooked – at least explicitly – in conservation projects, yet it is one of the most important. By understanding the biological and social context, you will have a better chance of designing activities that will achieve your conservation goals and objectives.

This standard builds off of work you have already done related to your project context (scope, conservation targets, and direct threats). It involves completing a situation analysis by identifying the key factors that drive the direct threats and ultimately influence your targets. These include indirect threats (also known as root causes and drivers) and opportunities and enabling conditions. These factors can range in scale from local to global.

Each factor can typically be linked to one or more stakeholders – those individuals, groups, or institutions that have an interest in or will be affected by your project's activities. As part of your situation analysis, you should conduct a stakeholder analysis. You need to consider both powerful and influential stakeholders, as well as those that might be disadvantaged or marginalized. As you review stakeholders, also keep in mind which stakeholders could become important strategic partners that you could involve in action planning.

As part of your analysis of the situation, you should also describe the relationships among targets, direct threats, opportunities, and stakeholders. To do this, you should use a conceptual model. A conceptual model is a tool that visually portrays the relationships among the different factors in your situation analysis (see Figure 3 for a generic model and Figure 4 for an example based on a real-world site). A good model illustrates the cause-and effect relationships that you and your team assume exist within the project area. It should be as simple as possible while still including the most important details. To make sure your conceptual model generally represents what is happening at your site and that all team members are in agreement, you should build it as a team. Likewise, it is ideal to ground-truth (or field test) the model with key stakeholders and partners both inside and outside the project team to make sure that the model reflects their understanding of the situation.

Figure 3. Generic Conceptual Model Showing Project Context

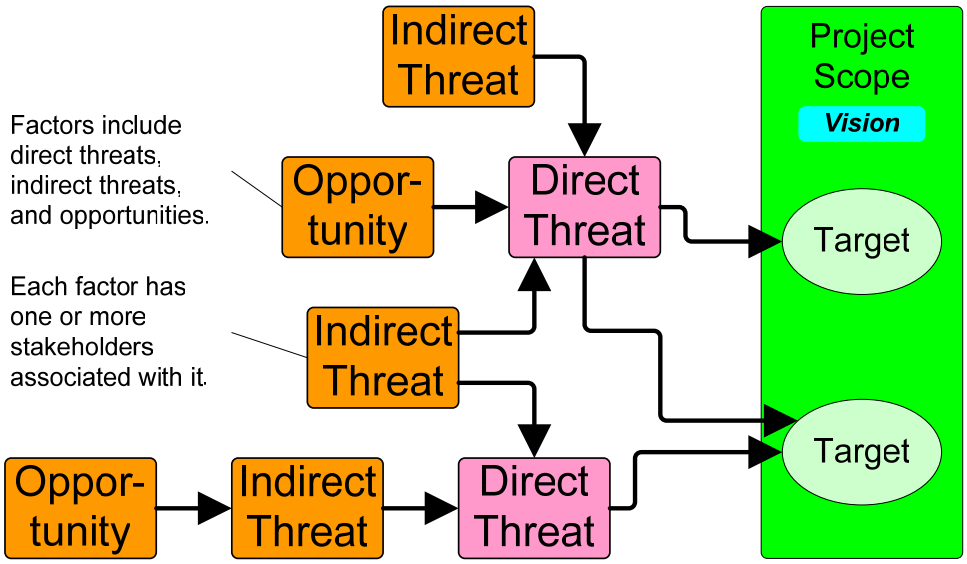
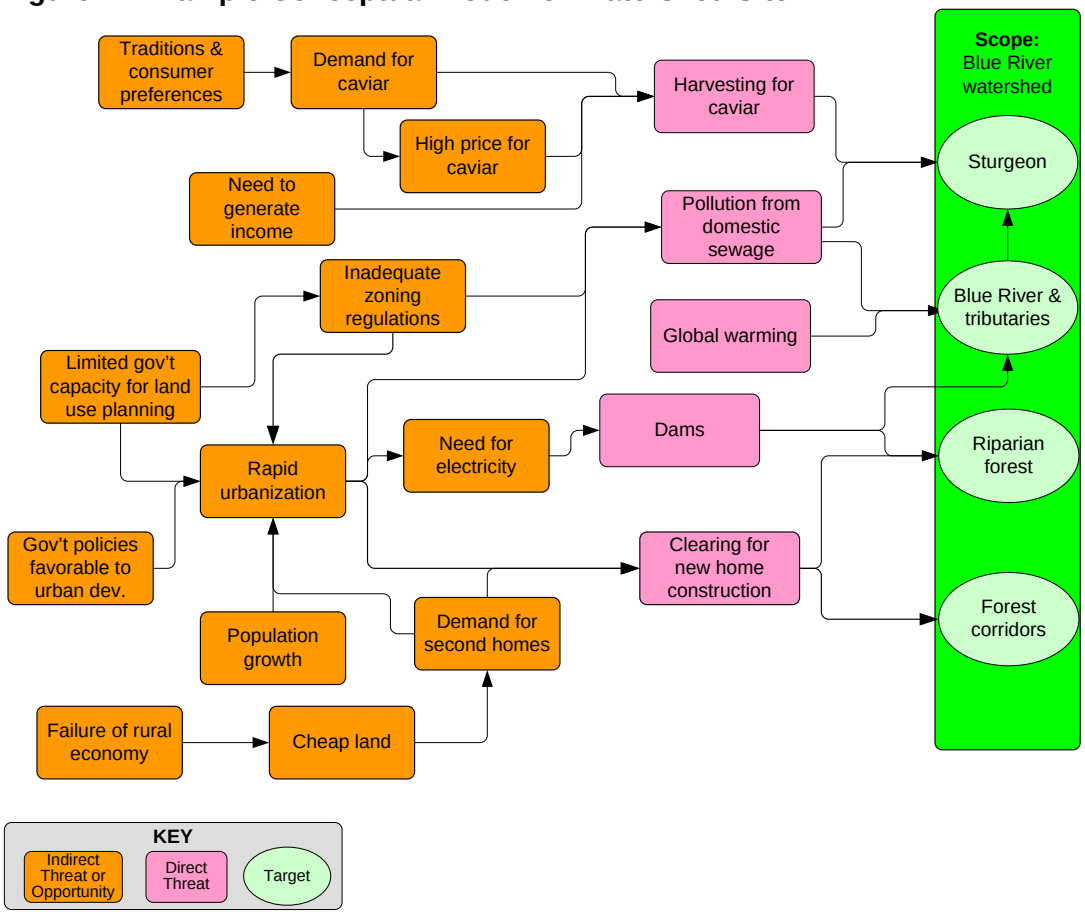


Figure 4. Example Conceptual Model for Watershed Site



Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Identification and analysis of indirect threats and opportunities.***
- ***Assessment of stakeholders.***
- ***Initial conceptual model that illustrates cause and effect relationships among factors operating at your site.***
- ***Ground-truthing and revision of your model.***

2. Plan your actions and monitoring

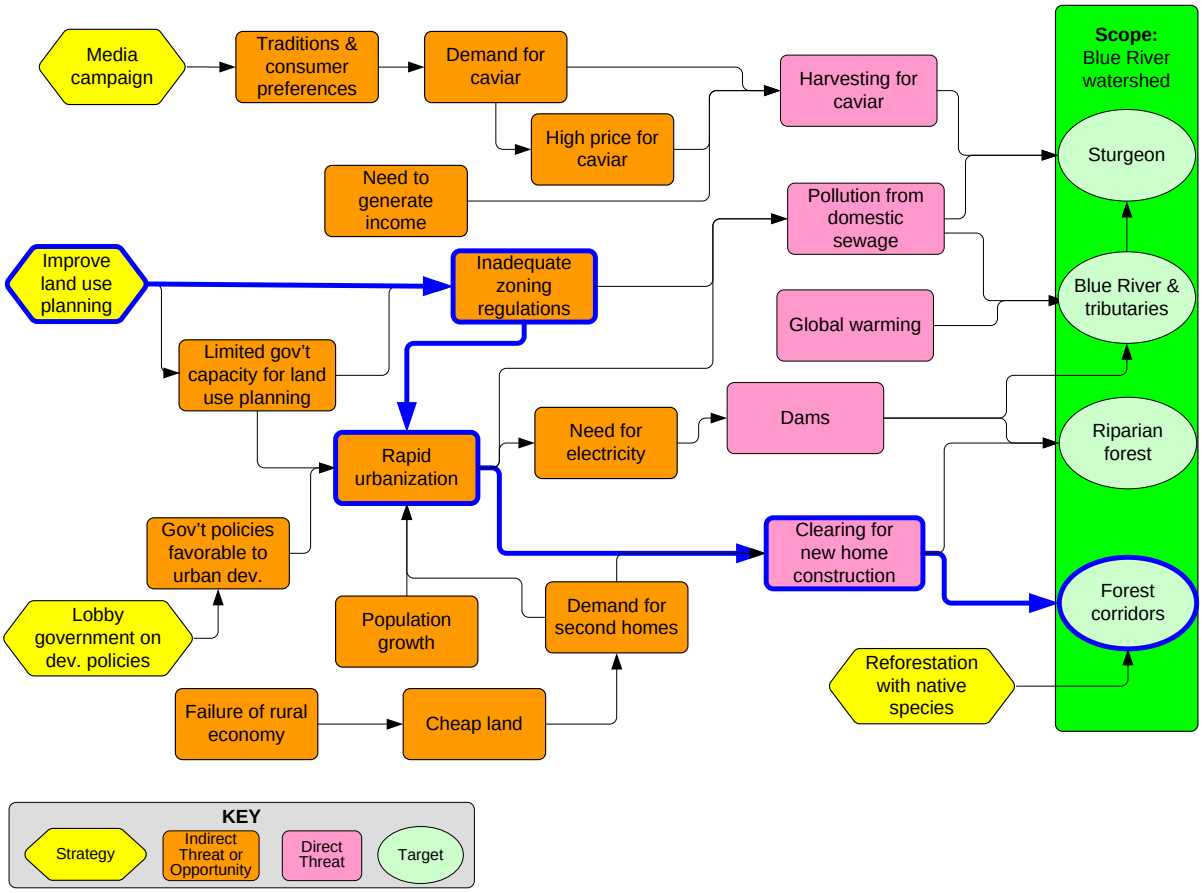
Once you have described the basic parameters for your project, the next step is to design the specific strategies you will undertake to achieve conservation. In particular, this step involves developing your Action Plan that you will use to record your project's goals, strategies, and objectives. It also includes developing the Monitoring Plan that you will use to track your progress and developing your Operational Plan that will specify the resources you need and risks you should consider. Finally, it involves compiling all your work from Steps 1 (Conceptualize) and 2 (Plan) into your Strategic Plan.

2A. Develop a formal action plan: Goals, strategies, assumptions, and objectives

Goals

Developing a clear idea of what you would like to accomplish is the essential first part of putting together your action plan. Goals are linked to your project's conservation targets and represent the desired status of the targets over the long-term – they are formal statements of the ultimate impacts you hope to achieve. A good goal meets the criteria of being *linked to targets, impact oriented, measurable, time limited,* and *specific* (see Annex 2 for descriptions of these criteria). For example, looking at Figure 5, a goal for the forest corridor target might be: By 2025, the forest corridor linking the Blue River watershed to Los Grillos is unfragmented and at least 5 km wide.

Figure 5. Example Conceptual Model for Watershed Site with Key Factors and Strategies Identified



Strategies

Once you determine what you want to accomplish, you then need to think about what you need to do. Good strategic planning involves determining where you will intervene – and also where you will not. The first decision that you have to make is to prioritize on which factor in your conceptual model you need to take action – these are the key intervention points. In some cases, the most obvious key intervention point is the direct threat itself. But in many other cases, you get more leverage if you intervene on an indirect threat or

opportunity affecting the direct threat – on the chain of factors affecting each direct threat. For example, in Figure 5, the key intervention points include: traditions and consumer preferences; inadequate zoning regulations, limited government capacity for land use planning, government policies favorable to urban development, and forest corridors (a target).

After you have selected on which factor in your conceptual model you will intervene, you may need to brainstorm a list of strategies. Your brainstormed list will likely have more strategies than you can realistically undertake with your project. You could narrow down the factors through a discussion with your team, or you could do a ranking exercise to help you choose your strategies. Regardless of how you narrow down your strategies, some useful conditions to consider include: likelihood the strategy will be successful; feasibility of strategy; cost of strategy; and gap the strategy would address. In addition, you should make sure each strategy you select meets the following criteria: *linked, focused, feasible,* and *appropriate* (see Annex 2 for descriptions of these criteria). Your strategies can range in scale from local to global, depending on the situation. Strategies, in turn, are composed of multiple activities.

You can use your conceptual model to show the strategy you will use, the key intervention point you are addressing with that strategy, and the chain of factors you presume you will affect with that strategy. For example, in Figure 5, the strategy "support land use planning" directly addresses two key intervention points (inadequate zoning regulations and limited government capacity for land use planning). The figure also shows how the team assumes that affecting one of those key intervention points (inadequate land use planning) will lead to changes in other factors (see the blue highlighted chain).

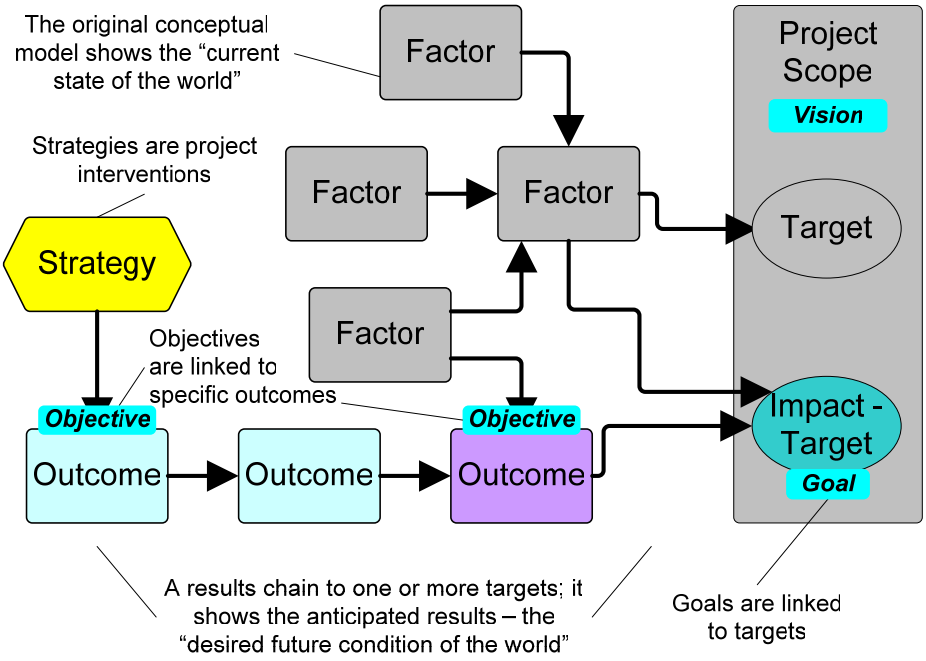
Assumptions and objectives

As implied above, once you have selected your strategies, you then need to be clear about how you think that strategy will help you achieve your conservation results. This means you need to make explicit the assumptions that show how you believe your strategies will contribute to reducing threats and achieving the conservation of your targets. A results chain is a tool that provides a graphical depiction of these assumptions. You can use your conceptual model as the basis for developing your results chains (see Figure 6 for a generic representation of this relationship; see the factors highlighted in blue in Figure 5 and the corresponding results chain in Figure 7 for an example based on a real-world watershed site).

Results chains are also a very useful tool for setting objectives.[5] Objectives specify the desired changes in specific threats and opportunities ("Factors" in Figure 5) that you would like to achieve in the short and medium-term. In short, they are formal statements of the outcomes (or intermediate results) that you believe are necessary to attain your goals. A good objective meets the criteria of being *results oriented, measurable, time limited, specific,* and *practical* (see Annex 2 for descriptions of these criteria).

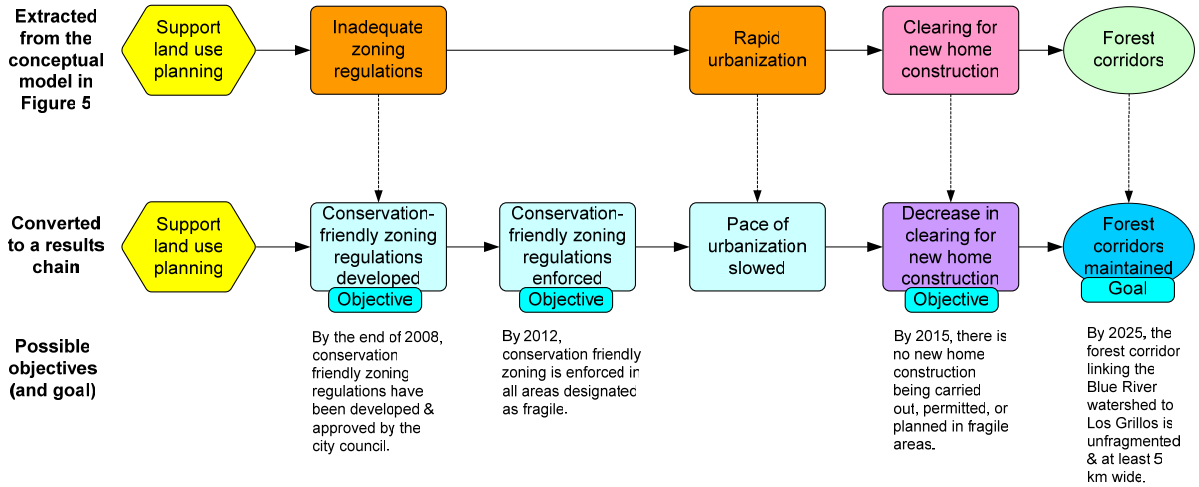
[5] Although the Standards discuss objectives in Step 2A, you should keep in mind that the steps are not necessarily linear. Ideally, you should be articulating your assumptions and setting your objectives based on those assumptions. So, Step 2B is actually a parallel step to 2A.

Figure 6. Generic Conceptual Model with Action Plan Components



As shown in Figure 7, your objectives are tied to the results you would like to see for the different factors in your chain. As a start, you should always develop an objective for the direct threat that is in your results chain. Using the chain in Figure 7, the objective associated with the direct threat "Clearing for new home construction" is: By 2015, there is no new home construction being carried out, permitted, or planned in fragile areas. Similarly, for the first assumed result in the chain stemming from the land use planning strategy, a good objective might be: By the end of 2008, conservation friendly zoning regulations have been developed and approved by the city council. (Note: to truly meet the criterion of "specific," the team eventually would have to clarify what it meant by "conservation friendly zoning regulations.")

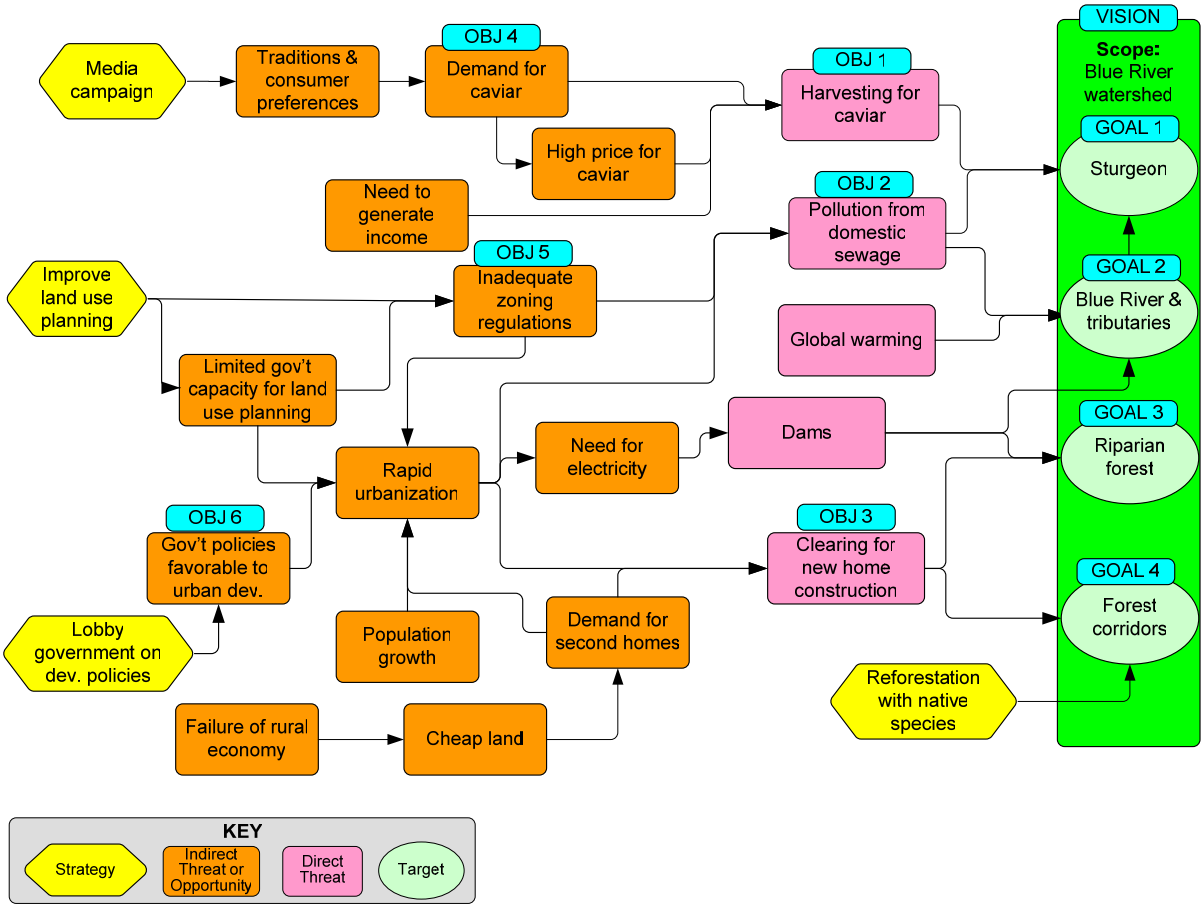
Figure 7. Example Results Chain for Improving Land Use Planning in Watershed Site



The goals and objectives specified in your results chain represent what you need to accomplish and the assumptions you hold about how your strategies will help you reach those accomplishments. As such, these results chain components become the ultimate measure against which you will gauge the progress of your project.

Together, your goals, objectives, strategies, and assumptions form your Action Plan. You should have some text describing each of these components, but you can use your conceptual model as an elegant way to present much of this information in a succinct manner that can be quickly understood by others (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Example Conceptual Model for Watershed Site with Action Plan Components



Vision: Biodiversity conserved in the Blue River Watershed to meet the cultural, economic, and spiritual needs of present and future generations.
Example Goal 4: By 2025, the forest corridor linking the Blue River watershed to Los Grillos is unfragmented and at least 5 km wide.
Example Objective 5: By the end of 2008, conservation friendly zoning regulations have been developed and approved by the city council.
Example Objective 3: By 2015, there is no new home construction being carried out, permitted, or planned in fragile areas.

You should capture the final versions of your goals, objectives, strategies, and assumptions in your formal Action Plan.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Goals for each target.***
- ***Identification of "key factors" and draft strategies.***
- ***Ranking of draft strategies.***
- ***Results chains that specify assumptions for key strategies.***
- ***Objectives for key factors.***
- ***Finalized project conceptual model that incorporates goals, objectives, and strategies.***
- ***Finalized Action Plan.***

2B. Develop a formal monitoring plan

Audiences and Information Needs

The first part of developing your Monitoring Plan involves specifying your audience and their information needs. Effective monitoring uses the minimum amount of financial and human resources to provide you with the minimum information needed to determine if your project is on track and what to do if you are not. All too often project teams either collect no information or too much information because they are unsure of what is needed. As a first step, you should be clear about for whom you are doing the monitoring. For example, are you monitoring to satisfy external demands for accountability? While this may be part of the reason behind monitoring, it ideally should not be your only or even your primary reason. In the spirit of adaptive management, you should conduct monitoring to serve the needs of the project and project team, helping the team learn from experience and integrate those lessons into current and future programming. The following table lists some common audiences and their general information needs.

Table 1. Common Monitoring Audiences and Their Information Needs

Audience	Typical Information Needs/Interests
Project team	How is the project progressing; What is working and what is not and why; How to improve the project
Project partners	How is the project progressing; What is working and what is not and why; How to improve the project
Donors	How is the project progressing
Communities or stakeholders affected	How is the project progressing; How will the project impact them
Conservation community	What is working, what is not, and why
Academics and students	What is working, what is not, and why

Once you know for whom you are monitoring, you need to then identify what you want to know (your learning questions) and what you should monitor. By focusing your monitoring

efforts squarely on the core assumptions you have made in your project (illustrated in your results chains that link your goals, objectives, and strategies), you are more likely to collect only the information that will be useful to you and your monitoring audiences as you manage your project.

Indicators and Methods

Once you have identified your audiences and their information needs, the next step is to develop the specific indicators you will use to collect and analyze the data required to meet your information needs. Good indicators meet the criteria of being *measurable, precise, consistent,* and *sensitive* (see Annex 2 for descriptions of these criteria).

Your results chains, along with their corresponding goals and objectives, provide you with the basis for identifying what you need to measure and what indicators you should use. By developing results chains and setting good goals and objectives, you have narrowed down a nearly infinite set of potential indicators to a very manageable set. Figure 9 shows this in a generic fashion, while Figure 10 provides a concrete example of how results chains can help you narrow down your indicators. Remember, you should aim to collect the least amount of information to show that your project is making progress. Thus, for the most part, you will want to limit the indicators you monitor to those that correspond to your results chains.

Figure 9. Generic Results Chain with Indicators

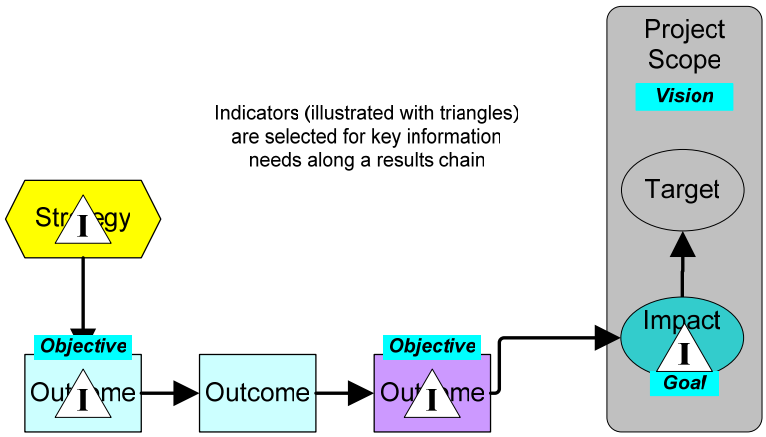
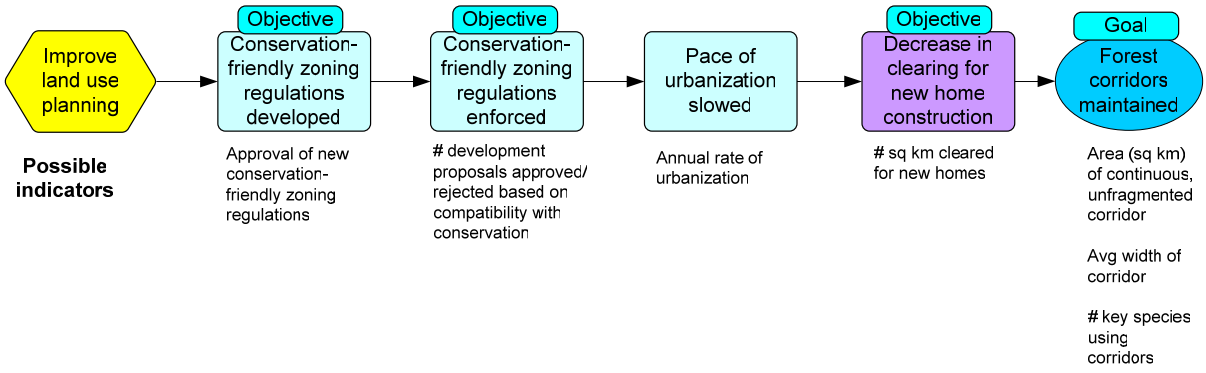


Figure 10. Land Use Planning Results Chain with Potential Indicators



After developing your indicators, you need to think about *how* you will measure them – in other words, what methods you will use. Methods vary in their *accuracy and reliability, cost-effectiveness, feasibility,* and *appropriateness.* The key is to select the most cost-effective method that will give you data that is reliable enough to meet your management needs. For many information needs, you may not have to collect primary data. For example, one method for collecting data about a given fish population would be to "download harvest records posted by a government agency on the Internet." Finally, you should also determine roughly when, where, and by whom data will be collected, and how data will be analyzed and used (see Table 2 for a sample template of a monitoring plan). In developing your Monitoring Plan, it is best to test and adjust indicators and methods before using them. You should also plan for how you will store and process each type of data in advance, and formally budget for monitoring activities in your overall financial planning (See Steps 3 and 4 for more information about managing data and budgeting for monitoring).

Table 2. Sample Template for a Monitoring Plan*

PROJECT GOALS					
What? *(Indicator)*	**How?** *(Methods)*	**When?**	**Who**	**Where?**	**Comments**
Goal 1:					
Goal 2:					
Goal 3:					
STRATEGY 1:					
What? *(Indicator)*	**How?** *(Methods)*	**When?**	**Who**	**Where?**	**Comments**
Objective 1.1:					
Objective 1.2:					
Objective 1.3:					
STRATEGY 2:					
What? *(Indicator)*	**How?** *(Methods)*	**When?**	**Who**	**Where?**	**Comments**
Objective 2.1:					
Objective 2.2:					
Objective 2.3:					

** In situations with multiple indicators for a goal or objective, you would need to have multiple rows.*

Outputs for this standard practice include a formal monitoring plan that contains:

- ***Audiences and their associated information needs clearly defined.***
- ***Indicators defined.***
- ***Finalized Monitoring Plan.***

2C. Develop an operational plan

Conservation projects are ultimately implemented by people and institutions. Even the best action and monitoring plans are useless unless you make sure you can actually put them into operation. In other words, you need an Operational Plan for your project. Key components for an operational plan include analyses of:

- Funding required to implement your project, and your current and potential sources of these funds
- Human capacity and skills and other non-financial resources required to implement your project and what you need to do to develop those resources
- What risk factors exist for your project and how they can be addressed.
- How long your project will last, how you will ensure the sustainability of your project's achievements, and what your exit strategy will be.

The level of detail and formality of your operational plan will vary depending on the size and level of complexity of your project. Small projects may only briefly touch on each of these topics whereas large, complex ones might have an extensive and formal treatment of each.

Outputs for this standard practice include an operational plan that contains:

- ***Assessment of human, financial, and other resources.***
- ***Risk assessment and mitigation.***
- ***Estimate of lifespan and exit strategy.***

In addition, at the conclusion of Step 2, you should compile the work you did in Steps 1 and 2 into your overall Strategic Plan. Specific components of this plan are shown in Box 1. The output here is:

- ***Your overall Strategic Plan.***

Box 1. Components of a Strategic Plan

Products from Step 1
- Project Team
- Scope and Vision
- Conservation Targets
- Analysis of Project Situation (including conceptual model, stakeholder assessment, and prioritized threats)

Products from Step 2
- Action Plan (goals, strategies, objectives, and assumptions)
- Monitoring Plan
- Operational Plan

3. Implement actions and monitoring

This is the most important step in the entire adaptive management cycle process. It is the time in which you put all of the planning efforts you conducted in the previous steps into action. The step involves developing and implementing specific work plans while ensuring sufficient resources, capacity, and partners.

3A. Develop a detailed short-term work plan and timeline

In the previous steps of the project cycle, your project team developed your general action, monitoring, and operational plans. In this phase of the cycle, you need to turn these general plans into more specific ones and then implement these plans on an ongoing basis.

The first part of this step is to take your overall plans and work with your project team and partners to develop a much more specific short-term work plan covering the next few months or at most, year. This work plan uses your overall action, monitoring, and operational plans to specify in much greater detail:

- **What** specific activities and tasks are required to complete each planned strategy, monitoring step, or operational function,
- **Who** will be responsible for helping to complete each activity and task,
- **When** will each task be undertaken and what will be the sequence of linked activities and tasks, and
- **How** much money and other resources will be needed to complete each activity and task (see Step 3B for greater detail).

Your work plan can be recorded in a table, Gantt chart, and/or project calendar.

Your detailed work plan will also provide you with the basis for developing a project timeline or calendar. In some situations, your work plan will not only specify tasks and responsibilities, it will also record in a calendar format when these tasks will happen. In other situations, your timeline or calendar will be more implicit. It is important to develop your timeline so that all project team members budget their time according to the project needs.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Work plan detailing the tasks, activities, and responsibilities associated with your Action Plan, Monitoring Plan, and Operational Plan***
- ***Project timeline or calendar.***

3B. Develop and refine your project budget

Once you know exactly what tasks and activities you need to undertake, you will be in a better position to figure out what resources you need. You should work off of your initial analysis of funding required that you developed in your operational plan (Step 2C). This, along with your strategic plan and your work plan, will help you develop a more refined estimate of costs for specific activities and tasks and the broader strategies into which those tasks feed. Your work plan will be an important input for this process, but you should keep

in mind that the work plan is short-term in nature, so you will need to make some informed estimates projecting potential costs over the life of the project. You should not delay too long, hoping to get more accurate estimates, as there is often a long lead time between developing funding proposals and having money in the bank that you can spend. Thus, you will want to develop your project budget as soon as you have a clear idea of what your project will do (in other words, a good draft of your strategic plan).

You should work closely with the finance or accounting staff in your office to develop your project budget. For many projects, your most expensive resource needs will be staff time. In addition, you should consider what other major expenses such as physical infrastructure, vehicles, boats or machinery are needed. You should also consider the related functions or logistical support that the project might need, ranging from monitoring and management expenses, to administrative or logistical support.

Once you have developed your project budget, you will need to identify potential funding sources, and develop and submit proposals to those potential donors.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Project budget.***
- ***Potential funding sources identified.***
- ***Funding proposals developed and submitted.***
- ***Financial resources obtained.***

3C. Implement your plans

The next and most important part of Step 3 – and indeed this entire process – is to implement your strategic plan and your more detailed work plan according to schedule and within budget.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Generally, implementation of strategic plan (action, monitoring, and operational plans).***
- ***More specifically, implementation of your work plan, keeping in mind your project budget and schedule***

4. Analyze, use, adapt

This step involves managing your data as it comes in and regularly analyzing it to convert it into useful information. In particular, you need to analyze your project's results and core assumptions as well as operational and financial data and then adapt your work plans as necessary. The amount of time needed to complete this step is often underestimated by project managers, leaving them with lots of data that they have collected but have not analyzed or used. By making this a deliberate step, you should find it easier to observe and understand changes, solve problems, and make improvements to your project.

4A. Prepare your data for analysis

Analysis is a process of transforming raw data into useful information. Analysis should not happen at only one point in time during the life of the project. To continuously understand what is going on in your project – and to be able to change things in a timely fashion – it is essential to capture and analyze your monitoring data as part of routine project work.

To do this, you need to have sound data management systems in place. You need to have methods and systems established for recording, storing, and processing data. This includes processes for systematically checking, cleaning, and coding raw data as soon as you get them and for storing and backing-up your data. This work should be done for both programmatic data as well as operational and financial data.

Output for this standard practice includes:

- ***Development and regular use of systems for recording, storing, processing and backing up project data.***

4B. Analyze results

One of the most important aspects of adaptive management is that it allows you to systematically assess whether you are on track to achieve your stated goals and objectives. Your monitoring data should provide you with the information needed to see whether you have achieved your expected intermediate results and whether you are on track to achieve long-term success. In addition, adaptive management also allows you to determine why certain activities have succeeded or failed. Your monitoring data provide you with the opportunity to see whether the core assumptions you laid out in the planning steps above hold true in reality. By testing these core assumptions, you are in a better position to adapt and change your project activities accordingly.

For learning and effective communication, it is important that the right people be involved in the analyses and/or made aware of the results of the analyses. As a general rule, analyses should involve members of the project team. However, input from outside experts or those with other perspectives is valuable during the analyses of your monitoring results.

To check if you are on track or why something may have succeeded or failed, you should undertake the following tasks:

- Consider your results in the context of your conceptual model and results chains;
- Review your assumptions and assess if your assumptions are correct, if you are on track to meet your goals and objectives and if your strategies are having the desired impact;
- Assess the utility of your indicators; and
- Determine if your goals and objectives were set at an appropriate level and if the timeline for achieving them was appropriate.

Depending on the type of data that you have and your information needs, these analyses can range from formal statistical studies to simple qualitative assessments.

It is also important to consider whether the operational processes supporting your project are functioning properly. You may have a project that uses the perfect strategies to address the threats and opportunities affecting your conservation targets, but maybe your team is not operating efficiently or it does not have the administrative or financial support it needs to do its job well. Some questions you might want to explore during your analysis include:

- To what extent do you have sufficient resources (e.g., financial, human, administrative, political) to carry out your project?
- To what extent do you have the physical infrastructure and equipment (e.g., office space, vehicles, computers) you need to do your job?
- To what extent does your project team operate smoothly or are there areas where you could improve how the team functions? (e.g., communications, delegation of responsibilities)

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Analyses of project results and assumptions.***
- ***Analyses of operational and financial data.***
- ***Documentation of discussions and decisions.***

4C. Adapt your strategic plan

Collecting and analyzing data as part of routine monitoring activities allow you to determine how effective your interventions are and what you need to do to adjust your project to reach your goals and objectives more efficiently. As the final part of this step, you need to use what you have learned during the analyses and discussions to modify and optimize your activities. This is the essence of adaptive management.

All the planning that you did earlier was not meant to be a one-time event, never to be revisited or used again. Instead, in order to learn over time and to continue to improve the effectiveness of your project, you must revisit and adjust your project parameters and core assumptions, action plan, monitoring plan, operational plan, work plan and budget. Therefore, you may need to update all sections of your strategic plan to reflect what you have learned. As you make changes, you should also document the rationale behind them so that others will understand what you learned and why you made these changes.

When updating your strategic plan, you should also incorporate findings from analyses done outside of your project team. For example, if your project has undergone a formal evaluation or audit (see Step 5C), you should examine the findings and see how you can use them to adapt and improve your project and your strategic plan.

Output for this standard practice includes:

- ***Revised project documents (including action plan, monitoring plan, operational plan, work plan, and budget).***

5. Capture and share learning

The final step in the management cycle involves sharing lessons and formal products with key internal and external audiences. It also involves giving and receiving feedback, conducting evaluations and audits, and promoting a learning culture. In this step, it is important to foster learning not only within the project but also at an institutional level and, more generally, within the conservation community. With this in mind, these standards include practices that your organization should adopt at an institutional level to help foster learning and sharing.

5A. Document what you learn

As you go through the process described in these standards, you should make sure you harvest and document the lessons that your project team is learning on a regular basis. Lessons can take the form of formal statistical results or anecdotal stories and can focus on something as large as your core project assumptions or something as specific as a new and improved way of tracking project expenses. One of the keys to harvesting lessons is to keep track of learning questions that emerge as you go through the project management process and then try to answer these questions when data become available to do so. Another key is to provide time and incentives to do this work. Harvesting lessons requires a balance between art and science – and will require patience and making time in any work plan for these tasks.

To a large degree, however, you will have already harvested those lessons in Step 4 based on the learning questions you have defined. Here, you should make sure that you document or record those lessons so that they are available in the future to your team and your organization.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Documentation of key results and lessons.***

5B. Share what you learn

If you capture what you have learned in written or recorded documents, you will be able to remember from year to year what you have done, what you found worked and what didn't, and what you plan to do in the future. This will help your current project team over the long term and will ensure that new project staff will have a record of what you did and what you learned. Production of formal documents will also help you communicate your findings to practitioners around the world. Documenting and sharing what you have learned will help practitioners working under similar conditions, dealing with similar threats, and using similar tools to benefit from your successes and avoid any pitfalls or problems you may have encountered during the implementation of your project.

In order to create documents that a variety of audiences will understand, internalize and use, you must understand how they typically receive messages, and what they would be interested in learning. Although we present communications as the final step in the cycle, you really need to be preparing for communicating your results and other relevant project information much earlier. For example, in Step 2B, you should have identified your audiences for your

monitoring results and what information they would be interested in having. To effectively reach these audiences, you need a clear communications and dissemination strategy. You need to decide which lessons you wish to communicate to these priority audiences, determine the best format to reach each key audience, and then develop and distribute your communications products. For example, you may use informal communications means (e-mail, phone calls) to share lessons with your internal audiences (the project staff, partners and other stakeholders). You should make sure to provide:

- Clear management recommendations to all the right people based on your analysis;
- Necessary details to help interpret results;
- Alternatives and contingencies based on the results; and
- Regular reports to all team members.

For communicating and sharing lessons with your external audiences (donors, other practitioners, broader public), you will probably use more formal communications means (reports, presentations, videos). Communications products can encompass many different forms ranging from formal academic papers to stories and videos. It is important to evaluate each product to see if it effectively communicated your messages and to learn what you might do to improve similar efforts in the future.

Finally, you should also look to others in the conservation community as sources of information and learning for your project. Some of the best sources of lessons are the experiences of others.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Identification of key audiences.***
- ***Development of a communications strategy.***
- ***Regular reports or other types of communication to project team members and key stakeholders.***
- ***Development and distribution of appropriate communication products.***
- ***Use of other people's communication products.***

5C. Create a learning environment

The last standard of practice in the cycle involves creating a performance and learning culture within your project team, across your organization and partners, and among conservation practitioners around the world. A performance and learning culture at these levels is important to ensure that all parties learn and benefit from your team's experience. Although this is listed as the last step, it really is something you need to cultivate right from the start. To effectively apply these standards, you need to work in a project environment that promotes learning and adaptation over time. This means that you, your team, and your organization should be constantly reflecting, seeking feedback, and providing feedback. That feedback could be formal or informal and might come internally from your team members or other staff members in your organization. Alternatively, it might come from external mechanisms, such as evaluations, which assess a project against its own stated goals and objectives, and audits, which assess a project against an external set of process standards,

such as the ones outlined in this document. In creating a learning environment, it is important to be open to outside opinions that can give you fresh and insightful perspectives.

Creating a learning environment is not easy. It requires leaders and donors who understand the need to reallocate scarce resources from immediate action to the long-term work of adaptive management. It often requires enabling practitioners to take some chances and question the conventional wisdom related to specific conservation tools and strategies. It requires providing project teams with the institutional security that innovation and questioning assumptions are valued in their organizations. And it requires a commitment to share both successes and failures with other practitioners around the world – to create true communities of practice.

Outputs for this standard practice include:

- ***Regular feedback shared formally or informally.***
- ***Evaluations and/or audits at appropriate times during the project cycle.***
- ***Demonstrated commitment from leaders to learning and innovation.***
- ***A safe environment for encouraging experimentation and questioning the status quo.***
- ***A commitment to share success and failures with practitioners around the world.***

Close the loop

The *Standards of Practice* outlined in this document are presented in the form of a cycle. A typical project team might go through Steps 1 & 2 fairly quickly (perhaps over a 4-5 day workshop) to sketch out the basic strategic plan for their project. They may then circle back and fill in the details over the next few months for Steps 1 & 2 while they are also beginning the implementation work in Step 3. The team might then conduct its first analyses in Step 4 after six months and then use this work to develop their first communication products in Step 5.

As shown in Figure 1, once you complete Step 5, the arrow then takes you back to Step 1. The intent behind this cycle is not to put you and your project team is an endless loop of work. Instead it is to remind you that adaptive management is a dynamic process that requires you to constantly learn and change over time. For example, based on your analysis of your data, should you revisit your vision and targets? Are there new factors or relationships that you had not previously considered that you believe should be incorporated into your conceptual model or addressed by a specific goal or objective? Do you need to change your Monitoring Plan? Do you need to adapt your Operational Plan? Closing the loop is about repeatedly going through the steps in the project cycle to determine if you need to augment or further develop any of them over time. It is the essence of transforming ordinary management into true adaptive management.

Annex 1. Glossary

There is an endless debate among planners as to the relative meaning of technical terms such as goals, objectives, activities, targets, milestones, outputs, and results. Every office, project, and even individual seems to have their own preferred set of terms. There is no right answer – the most important thing is that the members of your project team, and the people with whom you work, have a clear and common definition of whatever terms you choose to use.

Over time, however, there are real advantages to having a standard glossary. To this end, technical terms in this document were carefully selected, underlined when first used, consistently used thereafter, and defined in this glossary. These definitions are based on current usage by many CMP members, other conservation organizations, and planners in other disciplines.

Action Plan – A description of a project's goals, objectives, and strategies that will be undertaken to abate identified threats and make use of opportunities.

Activity – A specific action or set of tasks undertaken by project staff and/or partners to reach one or more objectives. Sometimes called an action, intervention, response, or strategic action. (See relationship to strategies below.)

Adaptive Management – The incorporation of a formal learning process into conservation action. Specifically, it is the integration of project design, management, and monitoring, to provide a framework to systematically test assumptions, promote learning, and supply timely information for management decisions.

Assumption – A project's core assumptions are the logical sequences linking project strategies to one or more targets as reflected in a results chain diagram. Other assumptions are related to factors that can positively or negatively affect project performance **–** see also risk factor.

Audit – An assessment of a project or program in relation to an external set of criteria such as generally accepted accounting principles, sustainable harvest principles, or the standards outlined in this document. Compare to evaluation.

Biodiversity Target – A synonym for conservation target.

Community of Practice – A group of practitioners who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

Conceptual Model – A diagram that represents relationships between key factors that are believed to impact or lead to one or more conservation targets. A good model should link the conservation targets to threats, opportunities, stakeholders, and intervention points (factors – threats, opportunities, or targets – in a conceptual model where a team can develop strategies that will influence those factors. It should also indicate which factors are most important to monitor.

Conservation Target – An element of biodiversity at a project site, which can be a species, habitat/ecological system, or ecological process that a project has chosen to focus on. All

targets at a site should collectively represent the biodiversity of concern at the site. Synonymous with biodiversity target.

Critical Threat – Direct threats that have been prioritized as being the most important to address.

Direct Threat – A human action that immediately degrades one or more conservation targets. For example, "logging" or "fishing." Typically tied to one or more stakeholders. Sometimes referred to as a "pressure" or "source of stress." Compare with indirect threat.

Enabling Condition – A broad or high-level opportunity within a situation analysis. For example, the legal or policy framework within a country.

Evaluation – An assessment of a project or program in relation to its own previously stated goals and objectives. See monitoring and compare to audit.

Factor – A generic term for an element of a conceptual model including direct and indirect threats, opportunities, and associated stakeholders. It is often advantageous to use this generic term since many factors – for example tourism – could be both a threat and an opportunity.

Goal – A formal statement detailing a desired impact of a project, such as the desired future status of a target. A good goal meets the criteria of being *linked to targets, impact oriented, measurable, time limited,* and *specific.*

Indicator – A measurable entity related to a specific information need such as the status of a target/factor, change in a threat, or progress toward an objective. A good indicator meets the criteria of being: *measurable, precise, consistent,* and *sensitive*.

Indirect Threat – A factor identified in an analysis of the project situation that is a driver of direct threats. Often an entry point for conservation actions. For example, "logging policies" or "demand for fish." Sometimes called a root cause or underlying cause. Compare with direct threat.

Information Need – Something that a project team and/or other people must know about a project. The basis for designing a monitoring plan.

Intermediate Result – A specific benchmark or milestone that a project is working to achieve en route to accomplishing a final goal or objective (in this case, "intermediate" typically refers to a temporal dimension).

Learning Questions – Questions that define what you want to learn based on the implementation of your project. Learning questions drive the identification of information needs, and thus, your monitoring plan.

Logical Framework – Often abbreviated as logframe. A matrix that results from a logical framework analysis that is used to display a project's goals, objectives, and indicators in tabular form, showing the logic of the project.

Monitoring – The periodic collection and evaluation of data relative to stated project goals and objectives. (Many people often also refer to this process as monitoring and evaluation (abbreviated M&E)).

Monitoring Plan – The plan for monitoring your project. It includes information needs, indicators, and methods, spatial scale and locations, timeframe, and roles and responsibilities for collecting data.

Method – A specific technique used to collect data to measure an indicator. A good method should meet the criteria of *accurate, reliable, cost-effective, feasible,* and *appropriate*.

Objective – A formal statement detailing a desired outcome of a project such as reducing a critical threat. A good objective meets the criteria of being: *results oriented, measurable, time limited, specific,* and *practical.* If the project is well conceptualized and designed, realization of a project's objectives should lead to the fulfillment of the project's goals and ultimately its vision. Compare to vision and goal.

Operational Plan – A plan that includes analyses of: funding required; human capacity and skills and other non-financial resources required; risk assessment and mitigation; and estimate of project lifespan and exit strategy.

Opportunity – A factor identified in an analysis of the project situation that potentially has a positive effect on one or more targets, either directly or indirectly. Often an entry point for conservation actions. For example, "demand for sustainably harvested timber." In some senses, the opposite of a threat.

Practitioners – All people involved in designing, managing, and monitoring conservation projects and programs.

Program – A group of projects which together aim to achieve a common broad vision. In the interest of simplicity, this document uses the term "project" to represent both projects and programs since these standards of practice are designed to apply equally well to both.

Project – A set of actions undertaken by a defined group of practitioners – including managers, researchers, community members, or other stakeholders – to achieve defined goals and objectives. The basic unit of conservation work. Compare with program.

Project Area – The place where the biodiversity of interest to the project is located. It can include one or more "conservation areas" or "areas of biodiversity significance" as identified through ecoregional assessments. Note that in some cases, project actions may take place outside of the defined project area.

Project Team – A specific core group of practitioners who are responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring a project. This group can include managers, stakeholders, researchers, operations staff and other key implementers.

Result – The desired future state of a target or factor. Results include *impacts* which are linked to targets and *outcomes* which are linked to threats and opportunities.

Results Chain – A graphical depiction of a project's core assumption, the logical sequence linking project strategies to one or more targets. In scientific terms, it lays out hypothesized relationships.

Risk Factor – A condition under which the project is expected to function, but which can cause problems for the project. Often, a condition over which the project has no direct

control. Killer risks are those that when not overcome, will completely stop the project from achieving its goals and objectives.

Scope – The broad geographic or thematic focus of a project.

Stakeholder – Any individual, group, or institution that has a vested interest in the natural resources of the project area and/or that potentially will be affected by project activities and have something to gain or lose if conditions change or stay the same. Stakeholders are all those who need to be considered in achieving project goals and whose participation and support are crucial to its success.

Strategic Plan – The overall plan for a project. A complete strategic plan includes descriptions of a project's scope, vision, and targets; an analysis of project situation, an Action Plan, a Monitoring Plan, and an Operational Plan.

Strategy – A group of actions with a common focus that work together to reduce threats, capitalize on opportunities, or restore natural systems. Strategies include one or more activities and are designed to achieve specific objectives and goals. A good strategy

meets the criteria of being: *linked, focused, feasible,* and *appropriate.*

Target – Shorthand for biodiversity/conservation target.

Task – A specific action in a work plan required to implement activities, a Monitoring Plan, or other components of a Strategic Plan.

Threat – A human activity that directly or indirectly degrades one or more targets. Typically tied to one or more stakeholders. See also direct threat and indirect threat.

Vision – A description of the desired state or ultimate condition that a project is working to achieve. A complete vision can include a description of the biodiversity of the site and/or a map of the project area as well as a summary vision statement.

Vision Statement – A brief summary of the project's vision. A good vision statement meets the criteria of being *relatively general, visionary,* and *brief.*

Work plan – A short-term schedule for implementing an action, monitoring, or operational plan. Work plans typically list tasks required, who will be responsible for each task, when each task will need to be undertaken, and how much money and other resources will be required.

Annex 2. Definitions of and Criteria for Key Terms

Vision Statement: A general statement of the desired state or ultimate condition that a project is working to achieve.

- **Relatively General** – Broadly defined to encompass all project activities
- **Visionary** – Inspirational in outlining the desired change in the state of the targets toward which the project is working
- **Brief** – Simple and succinct so that that all project participants can remember it

Goal: A formal statement detailing a desired impact of a project such as the desired future status of a target.

- **Linked to Targets** – Directly associated with one or more of your conservation targets
- **Impact Oriented** – Represents the desired future status of the conservation target over the long-term
- **Measurable** – Definable in relation to some standard scale (numbers, percentage, fractions, or all/nothing states)
- **Time Limited** – Achievable within a specific period of time, generally 10 or more years
- **Specific** – Clearly defined so that all people involved in the project have the same understanding of what the terms in the goal mean

Objective: A formal statement detailing a desired outcome of a project.

- **Results Oriented** – Represents necessary changes in critical threat and opportunity factors that affect one or more conservation targets or project goals
- **Measurable** – Definable in relation to some standard scale (numbers, percentage, fractions, or all/nothing states)
- **Time Limited** – Achievable within a specific period of time, generally 3-10 years
- **Specific** – Clearly defined so that all people involved in the project have the same understanding of what the terms in the objective mean
- **Practical** – Achievable and appropriate within the context of the project site, and in light of the political, social and financial context

Strategy: A group of actions with a common focus that work together to reduce threats, capitalize on opportunities, or restore natural systems. Strategies include one or more activities and are designed to achieve specific objectives and goals.

- **Linked –** Directly affects one or more critical factors
- **Focused** – Outlines specific courses of action that need to be carried out
- **Feasible** – Accomplishable in light of the project's resources and constraints
- **Appropriate** – Acceptable to and fitting within site-specific cultural, social, and biological norms

Indicator: A measurable entity related to a specific information need such as the status of a target, change in a threat, or progress toward an objective.

- **Measurable** – Able to be recorded and analyzed in quantitative and qualitative terms
- **Precise** – Defined the same way by all people
- **Consistent** – Not changing over time so that it always measures the same thing

- **Sensitive** – Changes proportionately in response to the actual changes in the condition being measured

Method: A specific technique used to collect data to measure an indicator.

- **Accurate** – The data collection method has little or no margin of error.
- **Reliable** – The results are consistently repeatable - each time that the method is used it produces the same result.
- **Cost-Effective** – The method does not cost too much in relation to the data it produces and the resources the project has.
- **Feasible** – method can be implemented by people on the project team.
- **Appropriate** – Acceptable to and fitting within site-specific cultural, social, and biological norms.

Annex 3. Summary of Standards of Practice and Outputs

Numbers denote steps and sub-steps, and diamond bullets (♦) denote outputs. Of course, not all standards or outputs are appropriate under all conditions and for all projects, so you should adapt as necessary.

1. Conceptualize

1A. Define initial project team

- ♦ Selection of initial project team.
- ♦ Identification of key skills.
- ♦ Designation of roles and responsibilities.

1B. Define scope, vision, and targets

- ♦ Brief description of the project scope.
- ♦ Map of the project area.
- ♦ Vision statement for the project.
- ♦ Selection of conservation targets.
- ♦ Description of the status of each priority conservation target.

1C. Identify critical threats

- ♦ Identification of direct threats.
- ♦ Rating or ranking of direct threats.

1D. Complete situation analysis

- ♦ Identification and analysis of indirect threats and opportunities.
- ♦ Assessment of stakeholders.
- ♦ Initial conceptual model.
- ♦ Ground-truthing and revision of your model.

2. Plan Your Actions and Monitoring

2A. Develop a formal action plan: Goals, strategies, assumptions, & objectives

- ♦ Goals for each target.
- ♦ Identification of "key factors" and draft strategies.
- ♦ Ranking of draft strategies.
- ♦ Results chains that specify assumptions for key strategies.
- ♦ Objectives for key factors.
- ♦ Finalized project conceptual model.
- ♦ Finalized Action Plan.

2B. Develop a formal monitoring plan

- ♦ Audiences and information needs defined.
- ♦ Indicators defined.
- ♦ Finalized Monitoring Plan.

2C. Develop an operational plan

- ♦ Assessment of human, financial, and other resources.
- ♦ Risk assessment and mitigation.
- ♦ Estimate of lifespan and exit strategy.

3. Implement Actions and Monitoring

3A. Develop detailed short-term work plan and timeline

- ♦ Work plan detailing tasks, activities, and responsibilities.
- ♦ Project timeline or calendar.

3B. Develop and refine your project budget

- ♦ Project budget.
- ♦ Potential funding sources identified.
- ♦ Funding proposals developed and submitted.
- ♦ Financial resources obtained.

3C. Implement your plans

- ♦ Implementation of strategic plan.
- ♦ Implementation of work plan.

4. Analyze, use, adapt

4A. Prepare your data for analysis

- ♦ Development and use of systems for recording, storing, processing and backing up project data

4B. Analyze results

- ♦ Analyses of project results and assumptions.
- ♦ Analyses of operational and financial data.
- ♦ Documentation of discussions and decisions.

4C. Adapt your strategic plan

- ♦ Revised project documents - action plan, monitoring plan, operational plan, work plan, and budget.

5. Capture and Share Learning

5A. Document what you learn

- ♦ Documentation of key results and lessons.

5B. Share what you learn

- ♦ Identification of key audiences.
- ♦ Development of a communications strategy.
- ♦ Regular reports to project team members and key stakeholders.
- ♦ Development and distribution of appropriate communication products.
- ♦ Use of other people's communication products.

5C. Create a learning environment

- ♦ Regular feedback shared formally or informally.
- ♦ Evaluations and/or audits at appropriate times during the project cycle.
- ♦ Demonstrated commitment from leaders to learning and innovation.
- ♦ A safe environment for encouraging experimentation.
- ♦ A commitment to share success and failures with practitioners around the world.

Close the Loop

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