

Lion Recovery Fund

STRATEGY



Lion Recovery Fund Strategy

Written and edited by Peter Lindsey, Paul Thomson, and Jeffrey Parrish.
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The LRF is Managed by



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SUGGESTED CITATION

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PHOTO CREDITS

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Lion Recovery Fund STRATEGY

State of the African Lion

In just 25 years, we have lost half of Africa's lions and perhaps only 20,000 remain.

The species has been decimated by a variety of threats, some that result in the direct killing of lions, some that cause loss of their prey, and some that destroy their habitats. New threats are on the rise, such as targeted poaching of lions and their parts. Yet there is reason for hope. Lions are prolific and can recover, local people are increasingly being involved in conservation, and Africa's protected areas could support three to four times the number of lions they currently do if adequately protected. **Lion recovery is possible.**

The Lion Recovery Fund, managed by the Wildlife Conservation Network, has an ambitious vision to double the number of lions in Africa, regaining those lions lost over the past 25 years. In recovering lions, we also aim to restore the health of their landscapes and the communities that share them.

Lion Recovery Fund Strategy

AT A GLANCE

LRF Strategic Pillars

The LRF invests in projects designed to:



PROTECT LIONS

from poaching, incidental capture in snares, retaliatory and ritual killings, and other threats.



PROTECT HABITATS

from destruction by unsustainable development practices such as farming, mining, logging, charcoal production, etc.



PROTECT PREY

from poaching for bushmeat, excessive competition with domestic livestock, destruction of migratory pathways, and other threats.

Road to Lion Recovery

The LRF cannot recover lions alone. This is a gargantuan undertaking and one that requires collaboration across and beyond the conservation sector. Working through such collaborations, we see the following three steps as being critical prerequisites to the recovery of lions:

- 1 Expand the Conservation Footprint** to include landscapes that currently lack conservation support.
- 2 Build the Political, Public, and Philanthropic Will** for lion conservation.
- 3 Scale the Funding** for the conservation of lions and their landscapes.

Where the LRF Invests

All lions are important, but we prioritize project sites in three scenarios:



RESCUE

Preventing lions from going extinct in more countries by investing in protecting and recovering the last remaining populations in the most vulnerable range states.



RECOVER

Investing in landscapes with the greatest potential for lion recovery.



RETAIN

Investing in protecting the largest remaining lion populations.

Types of LRF Projects

The LRF supports projects that are congruent with the LRF Strategic Pillars and the Declarations to Recover Lions (see page 9), such as:

- 1 Support for the management of under-funded protected and other wildlife areas** to safeguard lions, their habitats, and their prey.
- 2 Support for projects that promote and incentivize coexistence** between communities and wildlife, promote nature-based land uses (such as wildlife conservancies used for photographic tourism), and that reduce the costs of living with wildlife.
- 3 Support to tackle the illegal wildlife trade**, chiefly trade in bushmeat and lion body parts.
- 4 Other projects** such as conservation planning, reintroductions, and campaigns to build public, political, and philanthropic will for lion conservation.



Vision and Goals

Vision

To double the number of lions in Africa.

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

Goals

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

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



The Lion Recovery Fund STRATEGY

STATE OF THE AFRICAN LION

During the past quarter century, Africa's lion populations have declined by approximately half. Latest estimates suggest that the number of wild lions remaining is down to around 20,000 individuals (Bauer et al., 2015). There is reason to believe that numbers have continued to decline since then and may now be lower than 20,000. Major threats facing lions are: the loss of prey through bushmeat poaching; incidental capture of lions in snares; retaliatory or pre-emptive killing of lions in response to human-lion conflict; habitat loss; encroachment of wild spaces by humans and/or livestock; and targeted poaching of lions for their body parts. Lions have vanished from 92% of their historical range, and are now extirpated from 26 countries that they formerly inhabited (Bauer et al., 2015). Only seven

nations—Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—are home to more than 1,000 lions. Now is the time to stop this decline, begin recovering lion populations, and ensure lions thrive in Africa to the benefit of African people and economies.

SUCCESS IS POSSIBLE

Recovering lion populations can be done. The governments of many African countries have set aside vast wildlife estates and have demonstrated a firm political commitment to conservation. Research indicates that in most of Africa's protected areas (PAs) lions occur at a fraction of the density that they could if those areas were financed and managed adequately. The existing PA network across Africa alone could support three to four times the current total lion

population if those places were better resourced and managed (Lindsey et al., 2017). The conservation community has the tools that we know work to conserve lions and to enable coexistence with people. Furthermore, lions are able to breed quickly and can achieve relatively high densities in landscapes where they, their prey, and their habitat are protected sufficiently.

THE LION RECOVERY FUND

Given this hopeful context, the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN) created the Lion Recovery Fund (LRF), with support from our founding partner, the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation. The LRF's aspirational vision is to double the number of lions in Africa via a three-pronged strategy designed to protect lions, protect habitats, and protect prey. The LRF is designed to be catalytic: it will work to stimulate new levels of financial commitment, create new conservation investments to expand the conservation footprint, scale up approaches proven to work, and convene organizations to explore ways to work together where collaboration has not been present before.

GOVERNANCE

Thoughtful and responsible execution of donor support remains a core principle of the LRF and WCN. The LRF strategy is science-based and the

fund is governed by a Leadership Team at WCN and guided by the analysis of a Director who identifies and vets the best possible opportunities for investing in lion recovery. The Director solicits proposals from organizations and individuals undertaking work in line with this strategy, and then submits them for consideration by a Granting Committee that is composed of professional conservation experts. The granting process benefits from further input by a panel of Strategic Advisors derived from the wider conservation community.

LIONS AS AN UMBRELLA AND FLAGSHIP SPECIES

Lions are an excellent proxy for savanna ecosystem health. If a savanna landscape has a healthy lion population, it means that the habitat and prey populations are intact, that human disturbance is low, and that wildlife in general is able to thrive. Lions are an excellent 'umbrella species'—because their conservation needs encompass those of most other species. Lions are also an excellent 'flagship' species because their popularity and charisma enable them to be used to raise funding for conservation in a way that is not possible for most other species. The LRF works hard to ensure that our efforts to conserve lions benefit savanna ecosystems, and all the wildlife species that occur there, and not just lions. ■

The Lion Recovery Fund's Strategic Pillars

The LRF has three strategic pillars that underpin our approach for recovering lions. We invest in projects that:



PROTECT LIONS

from poaching, incidental capture in snares, retaliatory and ritual killings, and other threats.



A lion skin confiscated from traders of illegal wildlife products.

As such, the LRF invests in projects that protect lions directly (e.g. through anti-poaching), and also those that help to include local communities as partners in conservation through approaches such as tackling human-lion conflict, supporting communities in the development of wildlife conservancies, and creating financial and other incentives for local people to conserve lions. The growing threat of demand for lion body parts poses an existential threat for lions in parts of their range, and so the LRF is working to understand that threat, reduce poaching, disrupt trade in lion-parts, and reduce demand.



PROTECT HABITATS

from destruction by unsustainable development practices such as farming, mining, logging, charcoal production, etc.

Here, the primary interventions that we support include support for the management of protected

areas and community conservation areas to help restrict illegal logging, charcoal production, and encroachment for agriculture. The LRF also provides support for land use planning, which is critical to prevent habitat loss.



PROTECT PREY

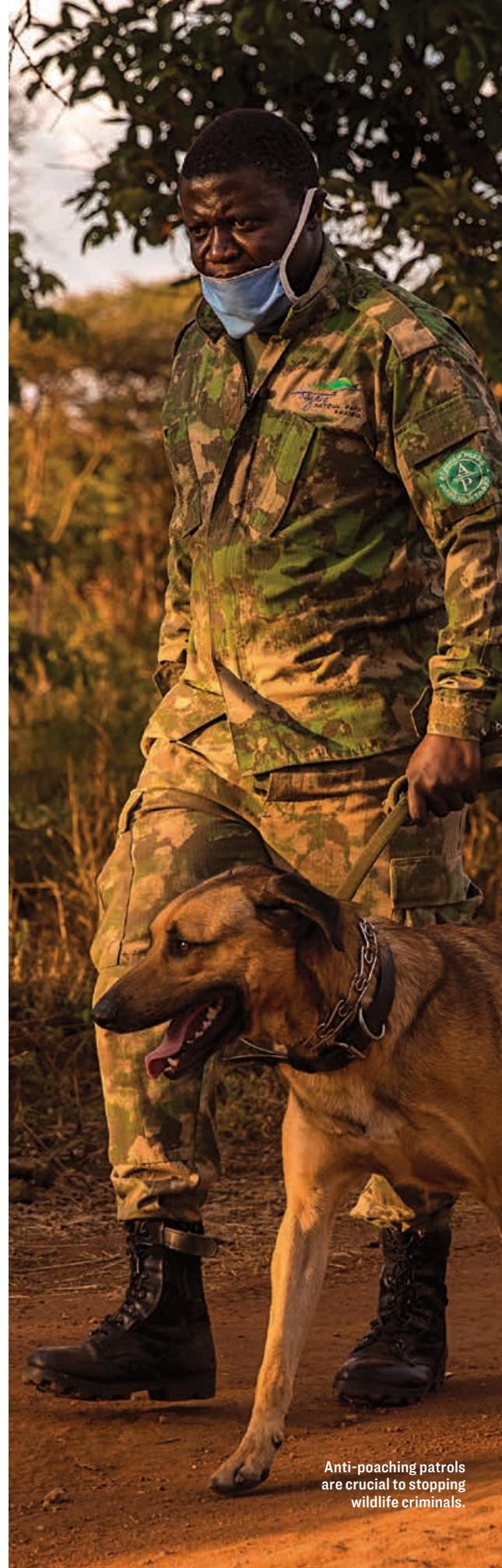
from poaching for bushmeat, excessive competition with domestic livestock, destruction of migratory pathways, and other threats.

The LRF's principal interventions to protect prey populations include support for the management of protected areas and community conservation areas to help reduce bushmeat poaching, and interventions to minimize competition between wild ungulates and livestock. LRF investments also tackle the bushmeat trade via anti-trafficking efforts to disrupt trade in the



Bushmeat snares cause gruesome injuries and even lion deaths.

product and via campaigns to reduce demand for bushmeat. We also address loss of migratory pathways by working with local communities and governments and through land use and conservation planning processes. ■



Anti-poaching patrols are crucial to stopping wildlife criminals.

Declarations to Recover Lions

In May 2019, Disney and the Lion Recovery Fund partnered to host the Lion Footprint Forum, the first meeting of its kind, which brought together many prominent conservationists working in Africa to brainstorm strategies for recovering lions. At this meeting, participants identified a set of declarations needed for lion recovery. The LRF supports these declarations via strategic granting.

We agree lions are in crisis and half the lions have been lost in the past 25 years with as few as 20,000 remaining in Africa. Our shared commitment is to ensure that wild lions, landscapes, and African people thrive.

We recognize that the presidents and leaders of the African countries, and the communities who live alongside lions, are the custodians of African lions for the world.

We recognize that lions are national and global treasures. We know that recovering lion populations is possible.

We will work to:

STOP THE LOSS

We must protect lions, their prey, and their landscapes.

REDUCE THE COST

We must minimize the burden on people in Africa who share landscapes with lions.

UNLOCK THE VALUE

We must uncover and magnify the cultural, economic, and ecological benefits lions and their landscapes bring to communities, national economies, and the global community.

Road to Lion Recovery

The LRF cannot recover lions alone. This is a gargantuan undertaking and one that requires collaboration across and beyond the conservation sector. Working through such collaborations, we see the following three steps as being critical prerequisites to the recovery of lions:

1 EXPAND THE CONSERVATION FOOTPRINT

To increase the extent and effectiveness of the management of lion landscapes across Africa.

One of the most transformative approaches to reversing lion declines is to introduce effective management in landscapes where it is currently lacking. A high proportion of Africa's wildlife areas suffer from inadequate funding and lack of support from non-governmental conservation groups. The LRF contributes to expanding the conservation footprint by helping to catalyze new projects in such areas.

2 BUILD THE WILL

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

There is an urgent need to build the public, political, and philanthropic will to conserve lions and

their landscapes. The LRF contributes to these ends by supporting targeted campaigns.

PUBLIC WILL In Africa, local people are often disenfranchised from conservation because they incur opportunity costs associated with setting aside or being excluded from lands for conservation (i.e. by being prevented from using and deriving income from those lands), and actual costs associated with living with dangerous wildlife such as lions, such as via loss of livestock (Dickman et al. 2011). Such costs result from human-wildlife conflict and limitations on free and safe movement. Lack of local support for conservation allows threats to wildlife to proliferate and undermines political will for conservation. The LRF supports campaigns designed to build public interest and support in conservation.

POLITICAL WILL Similarly, political will for conservation is inadequate. African governments are confronted with a range of competing priorities and very limited budgets. Consequently,

conservation often ends up receiving a fraction of the funds and attention it needs. This tendency is exacerbated by the fact that the value of natural assets such as lions and lion habitats are not

3 SCALE THE FUNDING

To elevate the amount of funding available for the conservation of lions and their landscapes.

Recent research suggests that approximately three-quarters of protected areas in lion range suffer budget deficits and the average funding in those areas is less than 10% of what is needed (Lindsey et al. 2018). Thus, without a significant elevation of support, we are going to see ongoing, dramatic declines in the abundance and distribution of lions and their prey (Lindsey et al. 2018). The LRF works towards the goal of scaling the funding by raising and leveraging funds from new sources. ■



Livestock being herded into a predator-proof boma enclosure.

easily captured on traditional balance sheets, meaning they are under-valued and receive limited investments. Under-funded conservation departments are not able to effectively tackle threats to wildlife, with the effect that lions and other species are disappearing at pace across much of the continent (Lindsey et al. 2018). The LRF supports research or campaigns designed to build political will for conservation in Africa.

PHILANTHROPIC WILL International support for conservation is also insufficient. The reasons for this are not clear, but may include: lack of appreciation of how serious threats are to biodiversity in Africa; failure of the international community to quantify the value of natural assets in developing countries and the global ecosystem services they provide; failure to appreciate the critical links between nature and human well-being; and failure to recognize the potential for nature to contribute positively to African development. Whatever the reasons, the international philanthropic community is currently not providing nearly enough support to African governments for conservation. Many African countries bear a higher conservation 'burden' in terms of land area to protect relative to wealth than the international average (Lindsey et al. 2017) and have an intense array of competing pressures on national budgets. The LRF is working to both raise awareness of the dire funding shortages facing conservation in Africa and simultaneously, to raise funding from as many different sources as possible to help fill the gap.

CHANGING THE FACE OF LION CONSERVATION BY PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

Recognizing that conservation is most effective when diverse perspectives are included in decision-making processes, and when those processes are led by well-trained leaders, the Lion Recovery Fund aspires to play a role in shaping a new era of leadership in wildlife conservation, one that is more inclusive, diverse, and representative of the many groups associated with conservation.

With its investments, the Lion Recovery Fund supports projects that develop skilled, effective, diverse, and local conservation leaders. Embedded in our approach is a specific focus on creating leadership opportunities for marginalized groups who have historically been excluded from conservation leadership, such as African nationals—specifically Black Africans—and women.

Ultimately, the Lion Recovery Fund aims to support the best projects to recover lions and restore landscapes, and those projects will be diverse, equitable, and inclusive.



Campaigns against bushmeat consumption build public, political, and philanthropic will for lions.



Where the LRF Invests

We believe that all lion populations are important, so we consider projects throughout the entire lion range. However, we focus the majority of our investments in the best candidate sites within three scenarios:



RESCUE

Sites where risk of total local extinction of lion populations is high, and urgent efforts are needed to rescue those populations from extirpation. Examples of countries where lions are on the edge include Angola, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon, Malawi, Niger, Uganda, and Sudan.



RECOVER

Landscapes where lions and their prey are below their respective carrying capacities but have significant potential for recovery. Examples include Chinko Reserve, Kafue National Park, Luengue-Luiana National Park, and Southern National Park.



RETAIN

Sites that retain the largest remaining lion populations, or 'strongholds.' Examples include Hwange National Park, The Luangwa Valley, Niassa Special Reserve, the Okavango Delta, Serengeti-Mara system, Selous Game Reserve/Nyerere National Park, and Ruaha National Park.

Some sites qualify as both Retain and Recover (e.g. Niassa Special Reserve in Mozambique) and Recover and Rescue (e.g. Niokolo-Koba National Park in Senegal).

CATALYTIC AND REPEAT INVESTMENTS

LRF grants are designed to be catalytic in nature to help kickstart thematic or geographic expansions of existing projects, or to help catalyze new projects. For projects with particular potential and value, repeat grants are considered. In addition, the LRF identifies some sites for deep

investment—where more funding is issued over a longer period. These sites are characterized by their notable potential for lion recovery, by the presence of highly equipped conservation groups with strong support from local authorities, and where LRF funding can make a transformational, additive difference. ■

Types of Projects Supported by the LRF

We protect lions, habitats, and their prey via investments in a range of conservation projects, including, but not limited to:

1 SUPPORTING THE MANAGEMENT OF UNDER-FUNDED PROTECTED AREAS

The LRF supports projects that strengthen and expand the effective management of key PAs and other categories of wildlife areas. This is achieved by supporting partnerships between NGOs and wildlife authorities for the management of these areas. The LRF invests in strengthening and expanding existing projects in PAs and also catalyzing new projects in areas that currently lack a conservation presence. These projects are critical for protecting lions, their habitats and their prey, and for addressing key threats.

2 PROMOTING COEXISTENCE BETWEEN PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

Africa's human population is rapidly growing and is expanding into many of the remaining patches of natural habitat, putting lions and people in closer contact. Lions are not an easy species for rural communities to live with, but coexistence is possible. The LRF invests in interventions that improve the prospects for coexistence. These investments are designed to protect valuable habitat for lions occurring outside of PAs, expand the effective size of PAs, and to buffer and connect PAs. Specifically, the LRF supports include projects that:

- Reduce the costs borne by communities associated with living with lions and their prey. For example, by reducing human-wildlife conflict and the loss of livestock to depredation by lions

through early-warning systems, 'lion ranger' programs, efforts to improve herding and to strengthen livestock corrals, etc.

- Unlock the value of lions for local people by creating incentives for communities to live with and protect lions and to manage land for wildlife conservation.

3 DISRUPTING THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

Lions are affected by the illegal wildlife trade in two primary ways. First, through poaching of wildlife for bushmeat, which kills lions directly as they inadvertently become caught in snares and traps and which depletes prey populations. Second, through the poaching of lions for their body parts for local and international trade. The LRF invests in projects to improve understanding of these issues and tackle them via investments in projects that: build capacity among law enforcement agencies and judiciaries; conduct anti-trafficking activities that disrupt trade routes and networks; and work to reduce demand for wildlife products.

4 OTHER

The LRF also invests in a range of other kinds of projects, such as those that: a) contribute to conservation planning; b) result in the reintroductions of lions and their prey; c) involve campaigns to build public, political, and philanthropic will for conservation or that encourage behavior change in ways that aid the conservation of lions. ■

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: A sedated lion being fitted with a radio collar • The LRF promotes habitat restoration and rangeland management • Rangers debriefing after a patrol • Community rangers track lions to prevent livestock predation and reduce conflict • A trader of illegal wildlife products, such as lion body parts, being arrested • Snares removed by rangers from buffer zones around protected areas • The LRF supports community livestock husbandry programs • LRF grantees help local people improve their livelihoods with crop production support.



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The Lion Recovery Fund

VALUES

Conservation Venture Capitalism

Like a venture capital firm for lions, the LRF seeks out innovative ideas and provides seed funding for new projects, or bolsters approaches known to work.

Lions not Logos

Collaboration is key. The LRF works to bring conservation groups together for elevated impact.

Ideas not Institutions

The LRF supports the best ideas, whether they come from individuals, small organizations, or larger non-profits.

Range-wide

The LRF believes all lion populations are important, and invests in projects to recover lions throughout their entire range.

Diversity and Inclusion

The LRF aspires to play a role in shaping a new era of leadership in wildlife conservation—one that is more inclusive, diverse, and representative of the many groups associated with conservation.

100% Model

The LRF is managed transparently with sound financial management. Every cent of funding received by the LRF is invested in conservation, not overhead.

Sound Governance

The LRF is governed by a team of professionals, with a Board, a Granting Committee, and a team of technical advisors that provide sound conservation, philanthropy, and communications guidance.





**Lion
Recovery
Fund**

lionrecoveryfund.org

The Lion Recovery Fund is managed by:



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network

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