2030 Roadmap
About the HCV Network
The HCV Network is a member-based organization founded in 2005 that stewards and promotes the High Conservation Value (HCV) Approach, a methodology to identify and protect ecosystems, biodiversity, and the needs of indigenous peoples and local communities where development takes place.

This document is mainly intended for HCV Network Members, the Secretariat, and partners.

Acknowledgements
This Roadmap was produced by the HCV Network Secretariat based on more than 200 comments received from Members and partners during surveys, the 2021 HCV Summit, and direct Member engagement throughout 2022. The Secretariat team and the Management Committee provided valuable insights and strategic direction throughout the entire process.

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List of Acronyms

CBD Convention on Biological Diversity
ESIAs Environmental and Social Impact Assessments
FLAG Forest, Land and Agriculture
GEF Global Environment Facility
GBF Global Biodiversity Framework
HCV High Conservation Value
HCVs High Conservation Values
HCVN High Conservation Value Network
IPLCs Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
OECM Other effective area-based conservation measures
RTE Rare, Threatened or Endangered
SDGs United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UN United Nations
UNEP United Nations Environment Programme
VSS Voluntary sustainability standards
Introduction: Where are we now?

For more than two decades, the High Conservation Value (HCV) Approach has helped identify and protect nature and peoples’ livelihoods in a wide range of productive contexts. However, since the Approach was developed in the late 1990s, the world’s population has increased by two billion. To meet global consumption demands, vast areas have been cleared to make way for farms, plantations, mines, and many other developments.

Clearing natural ecosystems for agriculture is now the fourth largest contributor of greenhouse gas emissions, while many areas designated for commodity production are home to indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), rare, threatened, or endangered (RTE) species, forests and many other ecosystems, and vital resources like water.

Twenty years ago, major global challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss and poverty reduction were often addressed in silos. Today, there is wider recognition that these are interlinked, and strategies for addressing them have crystalized into the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement; the Convention on Biological Diversity’s (CBD) Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF); and the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, among many others. Together, these global conventions and initiatives signal a new level of problem recognition and political willingness to solve them.

In parallel, evolution of communication, data and technology has facilitated supply chain traceability, civil society scrutiny of producer performance and enabled campaigns and pressure on consumer goods companies to avoid sources linked to destruction of nature and violations of human rights. These developments – adding regulatory drivers of change on top of reputational considerations – are becoming real game changers.

Another important shift was the emergence of voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) for major internationally traded commodities like pulp, paper, soy, palm oil, sugar, and cotton, enabling consumers, at least in some markets, to choose more responsibly grown products.

Over the last decade, the private sector, financial institutions, and aid agencies in the Forest, Land and Agriculture (FLAG) sector also voluntarily pledged to eliminate human exploitation, deforestation, and conversion of natural ecosystems from their supply chains or investment portfolios. These pledges, in many different shapes and forms, require the protection of High Conservation Values (HCVs). This has resulted in rapid, widespread adoption of the HCV Approach, bringing challenges and opportunities.
Challenges

Widespread adoption, inconsistent implementation

Over the last 20 years, a wide range of users have vowed to protect HCVs. However, these commitments greatly vary in scope, ambition, and level of implementation. In other words: recognizing, following, or supporting our methodology may not immediately translate into HCVs being robustly identified and protected on the ground. Causes for this include confusion about what HCVs are, and how they are identified and protected in practice, along with poor understanding of the specific role different stakeholders (from high-level policy makers to field operators) play in enabling HCV protection. Adequate understanding of our methodology and its implementation tools is crucial to achieve effective protection of HCVs.
Measuring our impact

Rapid uptake has also made it difficult to know how the HCV Approach is being used, by whom, and where, and to systematically measure its global impact. Historically, the HCV Network has had more visibility on the first step of the HCV Approach (identification or ‘assessment’ of HCVs), but less so on the follow up management and monitoring actions to protect them.

Studies by the HCV Network and partners have revealed that there are still numerous field-level barriers to effective HCV management and monitoring. These include: technical challenges including insufficient expertise or experience to implement activities, and practical challenges such as the large sizes of HCV areas to be patrolled; economic challenges including inadequate allocation of resources, perceived high costs of maintaining HCV areas and perceived business costs, such as lost planting opportunities; collaboration challenges including insufficient government support and regulation, and reliance on neighboring land users to ensure effective actions at the landscape level; and engagement challenges with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs).

Evolution and maintenance of guidance and tools

In 2005, the HCV Network was set up as a multi-stakeholder, global organization that provided open access ‘resources’ like guidance and tools. Although the transparent, collaborative, and not-for-profit nature of the Network facilitated rapid uptake of the methodology, it created an unintended consequence: some of the most active users of the methodology may not be directly contributing towards the continuous improvement, evolution and upkeeping of existing tools, and development of new ones.

Claims

For many years, stakeholders have made different types of claims around use of the HCV Approach and protection of HCVs. The HCV Network does not have a system in place for users to make credible claims about using the HCV Approach and protecting HCVs.

HCVs remain at risk

Historically, protected area expansion has been somewhat biased toward remote locations that are less suitable for agriculture and other land-uses, rather than areas of actual importance for IPLCs, species and ecosystems. This means that many areas
harboring High Conservation Values (HCVs) are currently classified for agricultural development or other land-uses. Robust implementation of the HCV Approach is more urgent than ever to protect HCVs in land-use change frontiers.
Opportunities

The science-based, bottom-up nature of our methodology

The HCV Approach is ideally placed to help balance environmental, social and development agendas (e.g. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework) in practice because of its science-based and bottom-up nature.

Regulation and nature-related disclosures

The HCV Approach can be used as a tool to provide comparable, consistent, bottom-up information to large companies and financial institutions on science-based targets, nature-related impacts, risk assessment and risk mitigation.

The science-based, bottom-up nature of our methodology

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) includes 23 action-oriented global targets for urgent action over the decade to 2030. The HCV Approach is ideally placed to contribute towards several targets, including Target 3, which seeks to ‘ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed.’

Protecting at least 30 per cent of the planet will require balancing social, economic, and environmental agendas, while ensuring active participation of IPLCs, who have long been effective custodians of nature1.

The HCV Approach was designed to protect critical social and environmental values as

1 According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), at least a quarter of the world’s land area is owned, managed, used, or occupied by indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs).
part of responsible land management. Therefore, it effectively supports identification of other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), which are defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as 'sites outside of protected areas that are governed and managed in ways that deliver the long-term in situ conservation of biodiversity.'

Because of its science-based and bottom-up nature, the HCV Approach is ideally placed to help balance environmental, social and development agendas in practice by:

- Supporting land-use planning efforts by guiding where responsible development could take place.
- Defining what social, cultural, and environmental values must be protected from harm.
- Defining what ‘protection’ could mean in productive landscapes, depending on local dynamics and priorities.
- Motivating commodity producers and IPLCs to become key drivers of local actions for protecting nature and livelihoods.
- Ensuring robust safeguards for IPLCs to benefit and participate in these processes.

**Regulation and nature-related disclosures**

International conventions and regional and local regulations are calling for the assessment and disclosure of nature-related risks, impacts, and dependencies by large companies and financial institutions. Currently, financial institutions and companies do not fully understand how nature-related risks may impact their financial performance, or how their actions could positively or negatively impact nature and IPLCs.

Measuring and reporting on science-based targets, nature-related impacts, risk assessment and risk mitigation, either for voluntary or regulatory purposes, will largely be based on ground-based information and metrics.

Because the HCV Approach is widely used in the sectors with the largest impacts and dependencies on nature (the FLAG sector), it is an ideal tool to provide comparable, consistent, bottom-up information that can contribute to strategic planning, risk management and asset allocation decisions.
In turn, this could provide large companies and financial institutions with clear paths for helping tackle field-level barriers for conservation. For example, there are opportunities around emerging tools such as biodiversity credits\(^2\), which could directly benefit local projects that avoid biodiversity loss; show measurable improvement of sites (e.g., through restoration), or successfully manage them (e.g., HCV area management and monitoring).

\(^2\) The three main types of biodiversity credits are geared towards: avoid biodiversity loss; measuring improvement; or reward successful management of pristine sites. Note that biodiversity credits are different than biodiversity offsets.
This Roadmap stakes out how the HCV Network will address challenges and support current and future users of the HCV Approach to protect HCVs.

**Re-defining our vision, mission, and values**

To align with global targets around climate, nature and people, the HCV Network has reformulated its vision, mission, and values.

**Vision**

The HCV Network envisions a world where production to meet human needs conserves nature, benefits people, and respects their rights.

**Mission**

The HCV Network provides practical tools to conserve nature and benefit people where commodities are produced, linking local actions with global sustainability targets.

**Values**

The HCV Network provides practical tools to conserve nature and benefit people where commodities are produced, linking local actions with global sustainability targets.

- **Integrity:** Our work is guided by a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values.

- **Pragmatism:** For the HCV Approach to be further adopted and effectively implemented, it needs to continue to strike the right balance between robustness and adaptability. Our tools are user-friendly and can be applied in a variety of ecosystems, scales, and contexts.
• **Collaboration**: At the heart of the Network is the sense of openness, interconnection, and a spirit of long-term collaboration with diverse stakeholder groups.

• **Transparency**: The Network operates in an open, communicative, and accountable way.
1. Policy

Objective: To accelerate further adoption of the HCV Approach through proactive engagement with policy drivers.

Widespread adoption of the HCV Approach has largely been facilitated by stakeholders who indirectly drive the protection of HCVs through diverse, high-level policies, requirements, and pledges. These high-level signals cascade down to entire sectors, supply chains, and geographies, catalyzing ground action.

To accelerate further adoption of the HCV Approach and make sure that stakeholders driving HCV protection understand how they can best support implementation, the HCV Network will prioritize working in partnership with global platforms and initiatives that aggregate users of the HCV Approach, such as:

1. Policy
2. Implementation
3. Learning
4. Assurance
Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS)

More than twenty voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) require the protection of HCVs in production sites and landscapes as a requisite for achieving and maintaining certification. Although achieving certification is no longer the only motivation to use the HCV Approach, VSS continue to be key drivers of HCV protection in commodity production landscapes. By closely collaborating with VSS, and with global organizations that aggregate credible sustainability standards (such as the ISEAL Alliance), the HCV Network will ensure that high-level HCV principles and criteria effectively translate into HCVs being protected by commodity producers and other relevant supply chain actors.

Financial Institutions (FIs)

FIs, including monetary financial institutions, investment funds, and pension funds, often require the protection of HCVs as a condition for investment. For example, some of the largest commercial banks have policies that target commodities such as cocoa, coffee, tea, cotton, pulp and paper, rubber, oil palm, soy, and sugarcane.

The HCV Network will engage with FIs, relevant industry platforms, and global institutions such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to ensure that financial flows do not drive damage or destruction of HCVs, and to ultimately channel finance towards the protection of HCV areas. A priority is to develop practical tools for FIs to benefit from field-level HCV metrics when locating, evaluating, assessing, and responding to nature-related risks, as required by voluntary or regulatory risk management and disclosure frameworks.

Platforms targeted towards the Private Sector

Deforestation, and conversion free pledges send positive signals, however, their impact is often difficult to measure in practice. Since the HCV Approach is widely recognized as a tool for implementing these pledges, the HCV Network will collaborate with organizations driving sector efficiency and accountability, such as the Accountability Framework Initiative, the World Economic Forum’s Tropical Forest Alliance, and the Consumer Goods Forum to identify where implementation gaps are and where tools may be needed.

International aid agencies and multi-lateral organizations

Several international aid agencies require the HCV Approach as a safeguard in country-level or regional programs. For example, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the
financial mechanism that enables implementation of several environmental conventions, has included the HCV Approach as a safeguard in the architecture of major global forestry and sustainable land-use programs around the world (e.g., GEF 6, GEF 7 and GEF 8). International development agencies also require the use of our methodology in several country programs. Direct engagement with agencies will be prioritized to ensure robust implementation of the HCV Approach in projects and programs.

Pillar 1. Policy – Summary of actions

- Identify and engage with global platforms and initiatives that aggregate ‘drivers.’
- Develop specific guidelines for those driving the protection of HCVs. For example, specific guidelines for VSS could support consistency in development of principles and criteria around HCVs, avoid duplication with other requirements, improve auditing, foster development of cross-commodity HCV tools, and promote further transparency around HCV impacts.
2. Implementation

Objective: To provide those directly implementing the HCV Approach in practice with a clear journey to follow, and the tools to support it.

High-level policies, requirements, and pledges ultimately impact those who directly implement the HCV Approach. This pillar focuses on ensuring robust and consistent implementation in all scales, ecosystems, and contexts where our methodology is applied.

Fundamentals of the HCV Approach

Current global socioenvironmental challenges require re-examining some of the fundamentals of our methodology.

Principles for Implementation

Based on lessons learned from two decades of implementation, the Network will transform its Charter and Common Guidance documents into overarching Principles for Implementation of the HCV Approach. These principles will constitute the fundamental aspects to be followed, regardless of the scale, ecosystem, or context of implementation. The Network will analyze documents produced to date, extract existing principles, identify new ones, and develop the overarching principles document.

Clarify and strengthen the interpretation of the six HCV categories

The six categories of High Conservation Values (HCVs) were first set forth in the late 1990s. More than twenty years later, many HCVs (particularly in land-use change frontiers) remain at risk.

Rather than revising the HCV categories (which are still relevant and are embedded in a multitude of processes, policies, and documents), the HCV Network will clarify and strengthen the interpretations of the HCV categories for them to better resonate with what is considered outstanding and critically important today. Aspects for clarification and strengthening could include forest protection and restoration; local food and water security; strengthening grassland and savanna interpretations; application to aquatic ecosystems; and addressing additional ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, among other. This may require examining the future of HCV National Interpretations.
The HCV Journey

The HCV Network will develop a clear, stepwise ‘HCV journey’ that summarizes all steps in the implementation process and the available tools and assurance mechanisms available for each step.

Re-examining the steps

Currently, the HCV Approach has three main components or ‘steps’: identification or ‘assessment’, which entails interpreting what the six HCV categories mean in the local or national context and deciding which HCVs are present; management of areas for which appropriate decisions must be taken to maintain or enhance an HCV; and monitoring to ensure that management practices effectively maintain and/or enhance the HCVs over time.

Given increased use of the HCV Approach in guiding large-scale land-use planning (e.g., county-level) it may be necessary to include two additional steps in the journey – an initial one to ensure that implementation actions are commensurate to the level of risk posed to HCVs; and a subsequent one that ensures field-level metrics feed back into higher-level sustainability targets.

The first step will be designed to increase efficiency and speed in deciding what implementation steps and assurance will be needed depending on the risks to HCVs, and the last step will help the Network to consistently measure its contributions towards global targets and, in parallel, provide those working in FLAG sectors (the ones with the largest impacts and dependencies on nature) with comparable, consistent, bottom-up data to meet voluntary and regulatory requirements.
Implementation toolbox

Most implementation tools available today are for HCV identification or ‘assessment’ in single management units or sites. Tools for addressing field-level barriers in management and monitoring, and for gathering and reporting consistently on HCV information need to be prioritized. Implementation tools will need to consider the intersections between terrestrial and aquatic activities (such as aquaculture) and encourage direct involvement of IPLCs in protecting HCVs.

Small holders produce about a third of the world’s food, however, due to poverty, and lack of support and incentives, they clear millions of hectares of natural ecosystems every year. The HCV Network will also prioritize production of tools to support smallholder inclusion so that companies can help them protect nature, rather than exclude them from sustainable supply chains. This will include developing smallholder-adapted participatory tools and outreach materials, and determining the range of benefits and incentives available to smallholders when protecting HCVs. It will also be necessary to shift focus from single commodities and individual farms to wider cross-commodity collaboration in entire landscapes and jurisdictions with many stakeholders and land-uses to steer development away from priority areas for conservation, restoration, and local use, and address unintended consequences such as leakage.

The Network will evaluate the best way to ensure active users contribute towards the continuous improvement, evolution and upkeeping of current tools, and development of new ones. This could involve a combination of open-access tools, and tools that are only available to Network Members.
Pillar 2. Implementation – Summary of actions

- Develop overarching principles for implementation of the HCV Approach.
- Clarify and strengthen the interpretation of the six HCV categories.
- Clearly explain the HCV Journey and all associated tools.
- Re-examine the steps of the HCV Approach to make implementation more efficient and transparent.
- Identify gaps in existing tools and produce new ones that are needed.
- Identify entry points for the HCV Approach and its toolbox in other existing frameworks and initiatives to avoid duplication.
- Explore what tools should be open-access and which ones should only be available to Network Members.
3. Learning

Objective: To ensure all users understand the HCV Approach and can robustly implement it.

Causes for inconsistent implementation of the HCV Approach include confusion about what HCVs are, and how they are identified and protected in practice, along with poor understanding of the specific role different stakeholders (from high-level policy makers to field operators) play in enabling HCV protection.

Existing practitioners

Since the 1990s, hundreds of professionals around the world have been trained or have worked with the HCV Approach, or similar methodologies. This presents an incredible opportunity for the HCV Network to roll out this Roadmap. The Network will proactively reach out to professionals with HCV experience to provide them with continuous improvement opportunities so that they can support users in their HCV journey.

A new generation

The Network will also continue to nurture a new generation of HCV practitioners. With nature, climate and people becoming central to research, education, governmental, private sector and non-profit agendas, there is opportunity to tap into qualified and motivated professionals who can support HCV protection in sectors such as agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, forestry and beyond.

Maximize efficiency

Conducting several studies to meet legal and voluntary requirements is often a bottleneck for rapid conservation action. Although the purpose of the HCV Approach and other field methodologies and studies (e.g., Environmental and Social Impact Assessments -ESIAs) is often very different, much of the baseline information is similar and thus can be collected in parallel. The Network will train professionals to be able to make field-level efforts more efficient.

The Network will also provide learning opportunities around the intersection between field-based HCV actions and higher-level regulations, disclosures, initiatives, frameworks, and global targets. Clearly understanding the links between field-level actions and data, and global priorities could help stakeholders simultaneously tackle several
voluntary or regulatory requirements.

Field-level barriers

The Network will prioritize learning opportunities that can help address field-level barriers around management and monitoring of HCVs and can support proactive engagement with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in all steps of the HCV journey.

Pillar 3. Learning – Summary of actions

- Reach out to exiting practitioners, provide opportunities for continuous development and continue to nurture a new generation of HCV practitioners who can support users in their HCV journey.
- Develop learning opportunities to support ground-level efficiencies.
- Promote cross-sectorial peer-to-peer learning.
- Prioritize content that helps address field-level barriers such as engagement with IPLCs, who can be amongst the most effective custodians of nature.
4. Assurance

Objective: To ensure HCVs are being protected and provide a system for making credible claims around use of the HCV Approach.

**Checkpoints in the HCV journey**

Assurance supports achievement of sustainability impacts, in this case, long-term protection of HCVs. The HCV Network will develop checkpoints throughout the HCV journey where assurance may be needed for claims to be credible. Assurance may be around transparency; field-based or desk-based verification; or a combination of several options. The objective is not to create an onerous system, but rather to incentivize information sharing and transparency and encourage users by acknowledging their efforts, while ensuring the integrity of the HCV Approach and reputation of the HCV Network are maintained, and that HCVs are ultimately being protected.

The HCV Network’s assurance system for the identification (or assessment) of HCVs in management units or sites where there is high risk of damage or destruction of HCVs can provide valuable lessons for development of assurance systems where risks to HCVs may be lower. The priority will be to develop assurance systems that are lean and consider different levels of risk to HCVs.
Guidelines for credible claims

Users of the HCV Approach have different motivations, and consequently, make different claims. The HCV Network will develop guidelines for making credible claims based on variables such as:

The different stakeholders who would like to make and communicate claims. Examples include voluntary sustainability standards (VSS), financial institutions, commodity producers, or landscape or jurisdictional initiatives.

Actions that the different stakeholders take, such as participating in an HCV initiative, investing in, or sourcing from a specific area.

The types of claims they would like to make. For example, identifying an HCV does not necessarily mean it is being effectively protected.

The results based on the actions taken by stakeholders. For example, what were the actions taken and the concrete results achieved? What data or baseline information can inform the ability to make a claim?

The HCV Network will define what permutations of the variables above would be acceptable. For example, if a stakeholder invested in an HCV initiative once, does this allow that stakeholder to make continuous claims about long-term HCV protection? Guidelines outlining the elements that will need to be in place for any credible claims to be made about use of the HCV Approach are to be produced.

Pillar 4. Assurance – Summary of actions

- Design checkpoints along the HCV journey to ensure users are heading in the right direction and encourage them by recognizing their actions.
- Identify what assurance systems are best suited for each checkpoint.
- Develop assurance systems that are commensurate to the level of risk posed to HCVs.
- Develop guidelines for credible claims that can benefit all users (from policy drivers, to field-operators).
A strong Secretariat

The Secretariat runs the Network’s day-to-day operations. It provides quality assurance, learning opportunities, tools and guidance, and technical support to all users. Having a technically strong Secretariat has always been one of the greatest strengths of the HCV Network.

To implement this Roadmap, the Secretariat will need to continue to recruit talent to ensure there is adequate technical capacity to oversee, and scale-up, all pillars.

The legal setup of the Secretariat will evolve to include a charitable incorporated organization (CIO) overseen by Trustees, and a private company limited by guarantee without share capital, overseen by directors. The CIO will facilitate scaling up fundraising efforts, while the limited company will ensure diversified income from services, which have ensured the financial self-sufficiency of the Secretariat for over a decade.

A lean and agile governance

From 2005 to 2013, the HCV Network was governed by a Steering Group. HCV Network membership was introduced in 2013-2014, and from 2014 to 2023, the Network was governed by a Management Committee elected by Members. In 2022 it was decided that the Management Committee would gradually be phased out, and decision-making responsibilities would be delegated to HCV Network Members, with strategic oversight from Trustees and Legal Directors.

A strength of the HCV Network has always been its lean and agile decision-making. The Management Committee and previous governance bodies have always advocated for this; encouraging collaboration and engagement over strict ‘rules’ or ‘terms’ that HCV Network Members must follow. This will continue to be prioritized, to ensure that the Secretariat remains focused on Roadmap implementation activities, rather than onerous governance processes.
A priority will be to proactively recruit new Members and pursue partnerships that are strategic and directly support all Roadmap pillars and activities.

Implementing this Roadmap will only be possible if the entire Network membership buys into it, socializes, and promotes it, and actively supports the Secretariat in finding the resources needed to kick-off work.

Enabling conditions - Summary of actions

- Recruit talent and leverage the funds needed for the Secretariat to oversee and scale-up all Roadmap pillars and actions.
- Setup a CIO to increase fundraising capacity.
- Evolve governance systems while maintaining the lean and agile decision-making nature of the Network, to ensure the Secretariat remains focused on implementing this Roadmap.
- Recruit Members and pursue partnerships that strategically support all pillars.

Get involved
The Network is always looking for new members and partners who are interested in supporting our work, for talented professionals who can join the growing Secretariat team, and for professionals who can lead assessments globally. For more information about how to get involved, please email us at secretariat@hcvnetwork.org