



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Photo Credits: Centre for Nature Conservation and Development

Improving Design, Evidence, and Learning (IDEAL) Vietnam Biodiversity Assessment: Final Report

DECEMBER 15, 2024

This document was produced for review by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared by Environmental Incentives LLC with its partners Foundations of Success, NORC at the University of Chicago for the Improving Design, Evidence, and Learning (IDEAL) contract #GS-00F-193DA Order #7200AA23M00012.

CONTRACT INFORMATION

This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Improving Design, Evidence, and Learning (IDEAL) contract (#GS-00F-193DA Order #7200AA23M00012). The USAID Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security funds and manages IDEAL, which is implemented by Environmental Incentives, LLC with its partners Foundations of Success, NORC at the University of Chicago, and World Resources Institute.

PREPARED BY

NORC at the University of Chicago

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Independent Consultants: Tu Nguyen Duc, Nguyen Manh Ha, John W. K. Parr, and Keith Symington

NORC at the University of Chicago: Angelo Cozzubo, Brooke Jardine, Lauren Persha, Ninar Taha, and Ron Wendt

Suggested Citation: Parr, J.W.K., T.N. Duc, H.N. Nguyen, K. Symington, A. Cozzubo, B. Jardine, N. Taha, R. Wendt and L. Persha. 2024. Vietnam Biodiversity Assessment: Final Report. USAID Improving Evidence, Design and Learning (IDEAL) activity.

SUBMITTED BY

Shelly Hicks, Chief of Party
Environmental Incentives, LLC

SUBMITTED TO

Megan Hill, Contracting Officer's Representative
USAID Bureau for Resilience, Environment, and Food Security
Center for Natural Environment, Biodiversity Division

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Environmental Incentives, LLC
725 15th Street NW, Floor 10
Washington, D.C. 20005
www.enviroincentives.com

DISCLAIMER

This document was produced for review by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared by Environmental Incentives LLC with its partners Foundations of Success, NORC at the University of Chicago, and World Resources Institute for the Improving Design, Evidence, and Learning (IDEAL) contract.

Contents

LIST OF FIGURES	4
LIST OF TABLES	4
ACRONYMS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	1
Background Context	1
Assessment Purpose, Audience, and Intended Uses	1
Assessment Objectives and Key Questions	1
METHODOLOGY	3
Approach	3
OBJECTIVE 1 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: MAPPING CURRENT BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROGRAMMING TO TRAJECTORIES OF THREATS AND DRIVERS	8
Biodiversity Importance	8
Protected Area Network and Areas of Biodiversity Significance	9
Biodiversity Threats, Drivers and Trajectories	22
USAID and Other Donor Programming Support	35
Programmatic Gaps and Opportunities	39
OBJECTIVE 2 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS	46
Sustainable Finance and Ecotourism Development	46
Rewilding Support	62
Training and Capacity Building Support	76
National and Provincial Policy and Regulatory Support	84
OBJECTIVE 3 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: FOCAL GEOGRAPHIES AND PROMISING INTERVENTIONS	91
Recommended Interventions, Geographies and Fit with Focal Interests	91
Additional Considerations	105
Discussion on Site-based vs Landscape Approaches	106
Discussion on Balance of New Directions vs Maintaining Historical Focuses	107
RECOMMENDATIONS	108
Biodiversity Values and Threats	108
Ecotourism and Sustainable Financing	109
Rewilding	110
Training and Capacity Building	110
National and Provincial Policy Frameworks	111
REFERENCES	113
ANNEXES	115
Annex 1. Assessment Scope of Work	115

Annex 2. List of Documents Reviewed	115
Annex 3. Final Daily Itinerary And Government Approvals for Field Component	116
Annex 4. Stakeholder Consultation Guide	126
Annex 5. Supplemental Tables, Charts, and Maps	133

List of Figures

Figure 1. Overview of data collection	3
Figure 2. Protected areas visited by management category	4
Figure 3. Consultations by stakeholder type	6
Figure 4. Map of Protected Areas and site visit locations for biodiversity assessment	7
Figure 5. Protected Area network and areas of higher relative biodiversity importance	12
Figure 6. Protected Areas network overlap with forest cover and loss hotspots over 2000-2022	14
Figure 7. Protected Areas network overlap with forest cover and loss hotspots (by region)	15
Figure 8. Overlap of Protected Areas network and areas of high terrestrial carbon density in Vietnam	17
Figure 9. Overlap of Protected Areas network and areas of high terrestrial carbon density (by region)	18
Figure 10. Number of Special Use Forests in Vietnam	20
Figure 11. Red List Index of species survival for Vietnam	23
Figure 12. Most significant threats to biodiversity in Vietnam	23
Figure 13. Population density in Vietnam	30
Figure 14. Map of provinces receiving USAID Biodiversity Programming Support (2016-2025)	35
Figure 15. Key Biodiversity Support Gaps and Programming Opportunities by Geographic Region	41
Figure 16. Point locations of terrestrial KBAs with 0 or 1-40 percent PA and OECM coverage	133
Figure 17. Point locations of terrestrial KBAs with 41-70 or 71-100 percent PA and OECM coverage	134

List of Tables

Table 1. Forest cover for natural and planted forests in eight ecoregions of Vietnam in 2021	16
Table 2. Representation of the different Special-use forests in Vietnam (in 2019)	20
Table 3. Globally threatened species in Vietnam per the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool	22
Table 4. Summary of key threats to biodiversity at 13 assessment sites as identified by SUF managers	24
Table 5. Forest land conversion from different infrastructure and development project types	31
Table 6. Key programming gaps and corresponding opportunities for future programming	39
Table 7. Key considerations and types of support for future ecotourism-focused programming	55
Table 8. Historical conservation breeding programs in Vietnam	60
Table 9. Key considerations and types of support for future rewilding-focused programming	68
Table 11. Summary of recommended activities across different strategic directions	89
Table 12. List of sites and locations	110
Table 13. Filed Component Daily Itinerary	111
Table 14. A list of Protected Areas assigned with international designations (as of May 2024)	127
Table 15. List of Endemic Bird Areas and Secondary Areas located in Vietnam	128
Table 16. List of recent USAID and other donor programming support for biodiversity conservation	137

Acronyms

BCA	Biodiversity Conservation Activity
CBC	Center for Biodiversity Conservation
CBO	Community Based Organization
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DoF	Department of Forestry
DFPM	Department of Forest Protection and Management
EBA	Endemic Bird Area
FFI	Fauna and Flora International
FPD	Forestry Protection Department
GA	Green Annamites
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoVN	Government of Vietnam
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
IBA	Important Bird Area
IBAT	Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool
IDEAL	Improving Design, Evidence and Learning Project
ISPONRE	International Strategy and Policy for Natural Resources and Environment
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MB	Management Board
MoNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NP	National Park
NR	Nature Reserve
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Product
OCEE	Office of Climate Change, Energy and Environment
PA	Protected Area
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plan
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SFMP	Sustainable Forest Management Plan
SHCA	Species and Habitat Conservation Area
SMART	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool
SUF	Special-Use Forest
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VND	Vietnamese Dong
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

USAID/Vietnam has requested the Improving Design, Evidence, and Learning (IDEAL) activity to complete a biodiversity assessment to inform Mission biodiversity conservation programming decisions and new activity design. The assessment will assess threats and opportunities to biodiversity in Vietnam and provide recommendations of interventions and geographies for future USAID biodiversity program design. To do so, the assessment:

- takes stock of biodiversity conservation threats and drivers;
- assesses and identifies opportunities across a range of potential strategic directions; and
- makes specific recommendations regarding innovative strategies and interventions to address key threats that may increase the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation programming, and the priority geographies they should be implemented in.

The primary audiences for this assessment include the Office of Climate Change, Energy and Environment within USAID/Vietnam (USAID/Vietnam/OCEE), the Biodiversity Division under the Center for Natural Environment within the Bureau of Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (USAID/REFS/CNE/BD), and government of Vietnam (GoVN) stakeholders.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES AND KEY QUESTIONS

Objective 1: Summarize current threats and drivers to biodiversity conservation in Vietnam, their trajectories, and assess the extent to which the current geographic and programming focus of USAID-supported and other biodiversity conservation programming is situated to address those threats and achieve substantial impact.

Objective 2: Take stock of the common types of strategic approaches and interventions USAID and other donors have supported over recent decades in Vietnam and assess opportunities for USAID to consider investing in new or innovative additional strategies and interventions, to increase the effectiveness of its biodiversity conservation work. The assessment focused on four strategic directions for new or additional programming support:

- Ecotourism
- Rewilding
- Training and capacity building
- National and provincial policy framework

Objective 3: Advise on which geographies with related specific biodiversity focal interests USAID should consider for future biodiversity conservation programming and the most promising interventions within each of these, with clear recommendations and justifications.

APPROACH

The assessment employs a mixed-methods approach to respond to the assessment objectives, drawing on analysis and synthesis of existing data via desk-based document review and integrating that with primary qualitative data collected via site visits and stakeholder consultations. In-country data collection for the assessment took place from May 28th-June 15th, 2024. The team visited 13 sites distributed across 11 provinces and five regions of Vietnam during the field component, following a field itinerary developed with and approved by USAID and GoVN counterparts. The assessment team conducted 45 individual or small group consultations with over 150 individuals, using a semi-structured consultation guide. Consultations were held with a range of stakeholder types that included Government of Vietnam, international and local NGOs, USAID and other donors, provincial authorities, management board members, ranger and patrol teams, local tourism operations and local community-based organizations.

The team also reviewed more than 80 relevant documents and conducted supplemental GIS mapping with available data sources to facilitate data visualization and communicate information across geographies of interest on issues related to biodiversity status, forest cover and loss, and protected areas in Vietnam. To synthesize information and respond to each of the assessment's objectives, the team used structured matrices by assessment objective and sub-objective, and priority geography, to summarize and triangulate information across the range of data sources and map key findings to assessment objectives.

OBJECTIVE I FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: MAPPING CURRENT BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROGRAMMING TO TRAJECTORIES OF THREATS AND DRIVERS

Biodiversity Importance, Protected Area Network and Areas of Biodiversity Significance

The assessment findings reinforce that biodiversity in Vietnam remains under immense threat. In terms of biodiversity status and decline, among other data, the report highlights a 2021 World Wildlife Fund analysis which points to declining population trends since 1992 for 33 percent of mammal species, 46 percent of bird species, 14 percent of reptiles, 61 percent of amphibians and 11 percent of fish species with available data.

As of 2024, the government of Vietnam has designated a total of 172 protected areas, which includes 33 national parks, 65 nature reserves, 18 species and habitat conservation areas, and 56 landscape protected areas. According to the World Database on Protected Areas, Vietnam's protected area network covers 7.6 percent of the total land area and 0.6 percent of the country's total marine area. As of May 2024, Vietnam's protected area network included 168 Special-use Forests (SUFs) that cover approximately 2.4 million hectares (approximately 7.6 percent) of Vietnam's total land area. The country's protected area network is mainly comprised of terrestrial forest sites but also includes a small number of wetland and marine sites. Vietnam's terrestrial protected area system is primarily represented by a single forest management category, namely the SUFs as provided for under the 2017 Forestry Law. The SUF system is relatively well-developed, but many SUFs are very small in area and many reserves do not have a management board or only have part-time management staff.

Vietnam's natural forest ecosystems have been severely degraded over the past half century, largely as a result of deforestation and shifting agriculture use that are driven primarily by underlying pressures of population growth and economic development. The quality and connectivity of natural forests in Vietnam has also declined significantly over the same period, with only small patches of good primary forests remaining, and primarily located in remote areas within SUFs. The remaining primary forest is also highly fragmented, consisting of small forest patches primarily scattered across the central highlands, southeastern and north-central Vietnam.

Biodiversity Threats, Drivers and Trajectories

Threats to Vietnam's biodiversity at the national level, and their underlying drivers, have been well documented across several recent analyses and national level assessments. Threats include illegal and excessive exploitation of biological resources (including hunting, illegal trade in wildlife, logging), illegal trade in wild animals and their products, natural systems modifications, environmental pollution, climate change, and the introduction of invasive alien species. Illegal and over exploitation of forest resources includes wild animals and timber, as well as trade in medicinal plants and other NTFPs. The illegal trade in wildlife includes trade in species and in wildlife products and has been on an increasing trajectory over the past two decades.

Threats to biodiversity and individual species occur across Vietnam, although the highest concentration of threatened species, particularly threatened plants and terrestrial vertebrates, is found in forests within mountainous areas of the northwest, northeast, southern Annamites and southeast regions of the country. Endangered mammals are primarily concentrated in forest landscapes in the central and southern regions of Vietnam.

Many of the stakeholders consulted for this assessment indicated in interviews that several of the key threats to biodiversity in Vietnam have been on somewhat positive or declining trajectory in recent years. However, the assessment team's review of available data makes clear that Vietnam's biodiversity is still deteriorating under the pressures of population growth and economic development. Despite stakeholders' somewhat positive outlook on the trajectory of threats at their sites, on net the assessment team's review of current documentation on overarching trends in threats at the national level suggest that Vietnam's biodiversity has become increasingly threatened in recent years.

The main underlying drivers of biodiversity loss in Vietnam are also well-documented and have been identified as population growth (which fuels increasing demand for natural resources and energy and drives overextraction and overexploitation of forest and other natural resources) and economic development. Per Vietnam's recent national ecosystem assessment, the trajectories of drivers are anticipated to remain largely unchanged in coming years, although the relative importance of some may shift (for example, with respect to population growth).

USAID and Other Donor Programming Support

USAID's history of support for biodiversity programming in Vietnam is relatively short, but it has quickly become one of the largest funders in the sector. Geographically, USAID's biodiversity programming

support has focused primarily in forested landscapes in the North Central Coast provinces and northernmost province of South Central Coast region. USAID's strategic focus for biodiversity programming in Vietnam has been oriented towards strengthening the management of SUFs and protection forests, increasing the functionality of law enforcement systems for forest and/or wildlife crimes, promoting conservation friendly enterprises in forest dependent communities, and reducing local demand for illicit wildlife and forest products.

USAID biodiversity programming has typically been implemented across multiple levels, with a primary focus on site-based interventions in selected geographies that consist of selected protected areas (SUFs, production or protection forests) and communities in surrounding buffer zones. Activities typically partner with a range of relevant national, provincial and local agencies and community partners, together with courts, police and other law enforcement institutions, as well as civil society organizations. At the community level, this has included support to local cooperatives, community patrolling groups and other community-based groups.

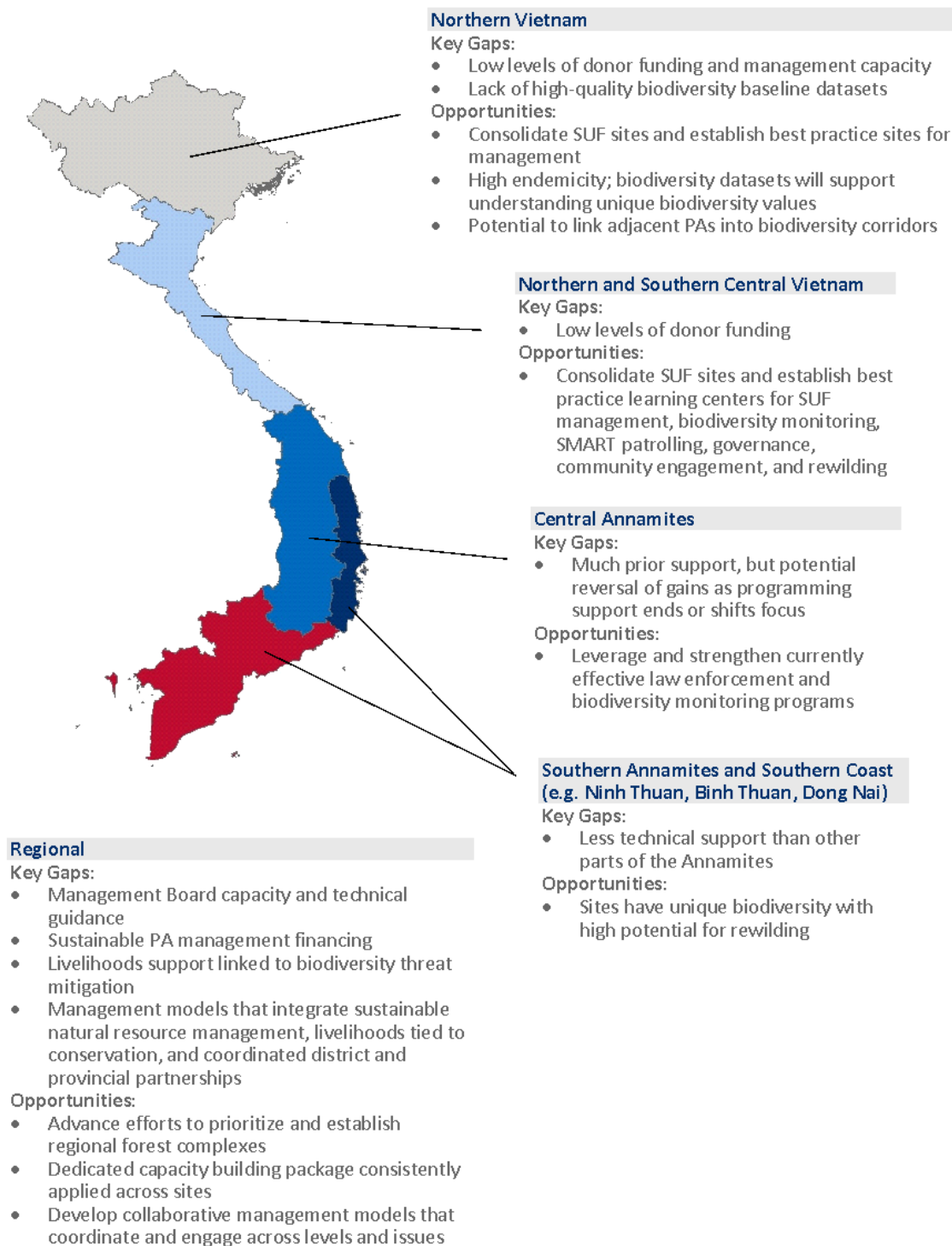
Other key bi-lateral donors in the biodiversity conservation space in Vietnam include KfW, GIZ, and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), as well as the Global Environment Facility and African Development Bank multi-laterals. Much of the recent donor support is broadly similarly aligned with USAID's, though the technical emphasis or degree of support may differ.

Much of the current and recent support of USAID and other donor assistance has been appropriately focused on stemming forest loss and fragmentation and reducing hunting and illegal logging by addressing protected area management challenges, building management capacity and standardizing practices at central and site levels, conducting and strengthening capacity to conduct biodiversity assessments and monitoring, and introducing activities to reduce specific key threats to biodiversity, such as SMART patrolling and mobilizing community patrol teams.

Programmatic Gaps and Opportunities

The assessment highlights multiple areas where future programming can help fill important gaps or further strengthen ongoing areas of weakness.

Key Biodiversity Support Gaps and Programming Opportunities by Geographic Region of Vietnam



OBJECTIVE 2 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEW STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Sustainable Finance and Ecotourism Development

Vietnam has experienced dramatic growth in tourism and ecotourism sectors in recent decades, and GoVN as well as many conservation organizations and bi/multi-lateral donors have recognized the potential for this trajectory to be more strongly harnessed in service of biodiversity objectives. SUFs in Vietnam are a central focus of ecotourism activities and revenue. More than one-third, or at least 61 SUFs, had some form of organized ecotourism by 2019, including at least 26 that were designated as National parks (the majority). In 2019, Vietnam received 2.4 million visitors to SUFs, more than double the number from 2015, and obtained VND 185 billion in revenue, a 140 percent increase over 2015. A strategic focus on ecotourism development that is embedded and well-integrated within a broader theory of change offers clear potential to increase the effectiveness of future USAID biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam.

However, each region of Vietnam exhibits different contexts and needs for ecotourism development, ranging from major capacity gaps at the PA level (particularly in North Vietnam, but also evident in each of the regions the team visited) to more tailored or advanced needs in PAs where past interventions have established a stronger foundation for effective ecotourism programming that is linked to reducing specific site-level biodiversity threats and the broader underlying drivers discussed above.

Stronger USAID engagement with ecotourism would likely require different approaches in each region. The assessment team recommends a phased approach for Northern Vietnam, focused initially on fundamental capacity gaps such as training and related technical assistance, and the establishment of tourism units. In other regions (e.g., North Central, Central and Southern Annamites, Southern Vietnam) ecotourism interventions may build on relatively solid foundations in some sites, including leveraging successful models in existing BCA sites. USAID can also consider new and innovative tools for ecotourism and sustainable financing, including tourism carrying capacity studies (currently not applied in Vietnam's PA network), models for self-generating tourism income, interactive use of mobile technology with visitors (noting the high level of smartphone use and of social media engagement in Vietnam society), and development and promotion of tourism "loops".

There is also an opportunity to strengthen connections between site-based ecotourism, livelihoods improvements and conservation threat reductions. A current lack of national standards, such as guidelines on ecotourism best practices and tourism development in PAs and conservation areas, creates further challenges for effective ecotourism development across the entire PA network. This presents an opportunity for future programming to include activities or support for the development of national guidelines, training manuals and nationally led trainings. Another potentially new and innovative intervention could be around Citizen Science applied with communities and tour operators that support data collection, which may have high potential to support ecotourism development linked to improved monitoring. Future programming could consider interventions around participatory community research that brings together community needs, scientific evidence, and decision-makers.

Rewilding Support

The Assessment confirmed there is an emerging foundation for rewilding in Vietnam, and reasonable likelihood that a rewilding program under USAID will increase effectiveness of its biodiversity conservation programming. However, the team also concludes that myriad challenges first need to be addressed, and enabling conditions achieved, before rewilding can be fully feasible. Removing threats such as snaring, hunting and wildlife trafficking will be essential to provide a foundation for successful rewilding under any future programming.

Indeed, in most sites threat levels may not yet be low enough to allow for reintroductions or population supplementation. Habitat management and restoration, villager buy-in and effective inter-relations with PAs, are also key enabling conditions for rewilding and which have largely not been achieved in the baseline scenario. Current deficiencies in Management Board and staff capacity – not just for rewilding but also with respect to threat reduction, buffer zone engagement and other enabling factors – is an overarching issue that needs to be prioritized in order to optimize future rewilding success.

Findings through site visits and desk review provide important examples that illustrate these challenges and the need to temper urgency with recognition of inherent limitations. For example, while BCA sites Phong Dien NR and Dakrong NR display significant improvements in MB and staff capacity, hunting is still a significant threat and it would be difficult to do rewilding at these and many other sites in the short-term. Historical evidence suggests that in lieu of dedicated rewilding such areas may be best served, at least for the short to medium term, through rescue and conservation breeding programs.

For potential support of conservation breeding facilities with long-term view of re-wilding, site selection criteria must be clear and determined in advance, and should also fully consider political will, including current investments and policies, as this will be crucial to long-term viability of a rewilding program. Selection should also consider the working linkages and efficiencies between conservation breeding facilities and the PAs in which they are located.

Zoos and NGOs have high levels of expertise in captive breeding of selected species, as well as sustainable funding streams to maintain high standards. While zoos and NGOs have a lengthy and generally effective track record in maintaining endangered species in captivity, breeding them, and in certain instances releasing them, overall, the historical context for rewilding is stark. The breeding centers managed by the government are basic, with limited budgets, vague mandates and narrow track records for conservation breeding.

While it will be important to verify rewilding feasibility through more comprehensive analysis, several initial suggestions for priority geographies are provided as a preliminary list that is intended as an early starting point, in Table 10 of the report body. The suggestions take into consideration sites where there is a known range of many endangered species, and where the PA has demonstrated good or improving conditions for threat reduction, has demonstrably engaged and committed Management Boards and/or strong political will locally, and have suitable available habitat. The recommendations section lists several suggested activities that would intentionally help to strengthen a foundation for rewilding locally and at national level.

Training and Capacity Building Support

The assessment team found strong potential for a targeted focus on specific elements of training and capacity building to strengthen the effectiveness of future biodiversity conservation programming to achieve overarching objectives. A USAID programming focus on training and capacity building support has immensely strong potential to increase the effectiveness of achieving USAID's biodiversity conservation, primarily because this is the basis of developing professional management programs within the targeted SUFs. The team's recommended capacity building interventions should be prioritized to optimize long-term funding streams to individual PAs and the SUF system, and will also help make the MBs more robust, sustainable entities. USAID is well positioned to assist GoVN to undergo a paradigm shift from a fortress approach to a collaborative management approach, and from a project-based mentality to a sustainable programmatic approach.

A national-level capacity building program, if implemented centrally and housed within a single technical department, will help to build and maintain institutional memory for integrated protected areas management and may also have the greatest influence at help to shift from a project-based geographic approach to a programmatic approach towards managing the SUF system, hence strengthening the ability to achieve systemic change for biodiversity conservation. Overall, the promotion of modern multi-functional protected area models through a diversified capacity building program is the best strategy to strengthen the profile of the SUF MBs within the provincial landscapes, and to strengthen their funding streams. This capacity building strategy can also contribute to the mitigation of park-people conflict, which that team also found some evidence for as a potentially widespread management concern.

The assessment team envisions that the same suite of training interventions be provided to all target SUFs or sites. As such, for capacity building support the team does not differentiate suggestions by priority geographies. The intent is that any new target SUFs receiving biodiversity programming support would be provided with the same suite of training interventions.

National and Provincial Policy and Regulatory Support

Overall, the various policy gaps, overlaps and inefficiencies documented for Capacity Building, Rewilding, Ecotourism and other important aspects of PA management strongly suggests that a programming component on Policy and Regulatory Support would maximize the potential of any future USAID program to support conservation programming effectiveness. An aim to develop modern multi-functional protected area models at USAID-supported sites establishes a firm basis for policy support in various aspects of SUF management. The involvement of district counterparts in the respective programs will assist policy formulation through the line agencies to provincial authorities. The modern multi-functional protected area models could be developed under the oversight of umbrella stakeholder forums (Management Advisory Committees) which would also assist to inform policy development.

The promotion of a centralized training program based upon the successful GIZ centralized training model focusing on SMART adoption would also help link the project-based field models to policy reform and best practice standardization. Support to prepare a standard, government endorsed set of guidelines

and field manuals will assist with standardizing management practices. A forum of national technical experts in the leading fields of PA management should also be established for sharing approaches and networking purposes. This would fill a gap in the absence of institutional memory at the central level. A number of PA laws, regulations and guidelines should be considered as the primary focus for a USAID programming focus on policy and regulatory support.

The key opportunities for USAID future programming consideration in this area are primarily at national level. The assessment also notes other types of support at the district or provincial level that would be important to implement or prioritize regardless of implementation geography (i.e., in any province where biodiversity programming support is taking place). The assessment team suggests that future USAID programming support in this area consider prioritizing the following laws, regulations and guidelines below as the primary focus of the Policy and Regulatory Support. This suggestion also takes into account the timelines needed for such types of policy support, fit with typical USAID programming cycle, and support opportunities that may be relatively more manageable over a 5-year program cycle:

- Development of National Rewilding plan to 2050 that is similar to a national biodiversity action plan and provides detailed and practical steps for each stage in the process, from planning to rewilding implementation to longer-term monitoring
- Development of National Plan/policy on engagement of private sector, NGO and public in biodiversity conservation
- Development of national guideline on biodiversity inventory and monitoring, and database management
- Development of national guidelines on environmentally and socially responsible ecotourism in PA and wilderness areas (i.e. ecotourism Best Practices guidelines)

OBJECTIVE 3 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: FOCAL GEOGRAPHIES AND PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

Strategic Focuses

The **law enforcement and biodiversity monitoring** agendas have been particularly strong under the BCA project and should be continued in priority BCA sites as well as in new geographic priorities, such as Northern Vietnam. In addition, biodiversity assessments (baselines) should be conducted on all the higher taxonomic groups (for example, mammals, birds and reptiles), as well as vegetation assessments in clinal montane vegetation types. Participatory NTFP research should also be conducted as an entry point for improved management, as well as participatory boundary demarcation. These biodiversity datasets will provide the basis of virtually all subsequent management planning and activities. SMART patrolling should be introduced into all targeted SUFs, with supporting capacity, equipment and databases. Community patrol teams and interagency enforcement teams should be trained and mobilized.

Rewilding readiness preparation activities should be promoted for selected sites and selected species. The success of rewilding release programs will be heavily linked to habitat restoration and mitigating threats to the wildlife populations by inducing changes in attitudes and behavior of the local

communities. Ex-situ breeding programs are encouraged to build upon the extensive experience with the existing wildlife rescue and breeding centers, which have been running sustainably and to international animal handling standards for 10-15 years.

A national-level **capacity building component**, if implemented centrally, may have the greatest influence at shifting from a project-based geographic approach to a programmatic approach to managing the SUF system and strengthening the ability to achieve systemic change for biodiversity conservation. Overall, the promotion of modern multi-functional protected area models is the best strategy to strengthen the profile of the SUF MBs within the provincial landscapes, and to strengthen their funding streams. This strategy will contribute to the mitigation of park-people conflict which seems a widespread management concern. USAID is well positioned to assist the Government of Vietnam to undergo a paradigm shift from the fortress approach to a collaborative management approach, and from a project-based mentality to a sustainable programmatic approach.

However, in terms of achieving sustainable financing goals, an **ecotourism component** warrants attention because it offers the greatest potential to maximize revenue inflows to the SUF system and also constitutes the largest current gap in donor assistance. Its current embryonic status means it requires dedicated technical support. The development of nature-based tourism models and responsible tourism should be promoted, through intensive technical assistance, and supported in selected PAs with high tourism potential.

An additional important consideration is a **livelihood development for conservation component**, which is also a prioritized program of work espoused within Vietnam's Ninth SEDP. Past experiences with this program of work have not succeeded in linking livelihood development specifically to threat mitigation, and thus the program has not become a mainstream conservation tool. That said, the government has recently increased government funding to 50 million VND per annum per village. USAID is encouraged to consider focusing on these livelihood programs, with the purpose of bringing about policy change linking livelihood development directly to threat mitigation and securing increased funding streams. A strengthened focus on livelihood development for conservation should be implemented in buffer zone communities at selected sites, prioritizing threat mitigation targeted to reducing snaring and hunting levels, establishing sustainable NTFP harvesting regimes, ex-situ NTFP cultivation, curtailing demands for illegal logging and stabilizing protected area boundaries. Environmental education programs should also include sustainable livelihoods as an entry point for promoting conservation values.

The above components can each be strengthened via a cross-cutting **policy support component** that engages at site, district, provincial and national levels, and that can also include establishing stakeholder forums to tackle emerging management issues and strengthen coordination across all entities. As highlighted in the previous chapter, these field models should in turn form a sound basis for program support that aims to contribute to developing or supporting needed gap-filling across a range of provincial and national policy support elements for many aspects of protected area management.

Geographic Focuses

Northern Vietnam

The assessment team recommends that USAID newly prioritize support to the Northern region of Vietnam because it encompasses SUFs that have received very low international support in recent decades but have several sites with high biological significance. These sites have unique values, high endemism and are of international importance. The team recommends that USAID select sites for support that show potential to be protected and managed as conservation complexes, to enhance long term viability of their associated threatened biodiversity. To maximize impact, fewer sites should be selected, but priority should be given to sites which connect to others or in internationally recognized landscapes and transboundary areas. The ecotourism potential of each site should also be a priority consideration, given its impact on strengthening the MB profile, increasing sustainable financing streams to the SUF system, and enhancing the protection of biodiversity.

South Central Vietnam

The assessment team recommends that USAID also prioritize sites in South Central Vietnam, to protect SUFs with unique biodiversity values and a diversity of important ecosystems. Similar to Northern Vietnam, this region has sites that connect with others to form a larger landscape with high numbers of endangered species. South Central Vietnam also contains sites that are strategically important, because they are situated close to heavily populated areas and have good potential for nature-based tourism recreation. Stronger protection will also enhance ecosystem services by securing water and energy. Finally, the region contains sites that enjoy high political will for biodiversity conservation, which will help optimize the sustainability of follow-up investments and thereby sustaining longer-term conservation outcomes and achievements.

Table 11 in the report body provides a comprehensive summary of the assessment team's key suggestions for recommended strategic directions and interventions that USAID should consider newly or continuing to prioritize for future programming, for each of five regional geographies, together with key reasons why.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment recommendations are disaggregated by overarching actions to address direct threats to biodiversity focal interests, and each of four areas of potential strategic focus: ecotourism, rewilding, training and capacity building, and national and provincial policy framework support.

Biodiversity Values and Threats

-
- **Recommendation 1:** The SUFs in the Northern Region and South-Central Region should be prioritized for USAID support, promoting forest complexes where feasible. These two regions support particularly high biodiversity values but have received little project support in recent years. Threats are deemed both diverse and intensive. Management capacities of the MBs in these two regions are particularly wanting. As the process moved forward criteria for site selection should be clear and developed in advance.
-
- **Recommendation 2:** Biodiversity assessments should be undertaken on all the higher taxonomic groups, NTFPs as well as vegetation surveys linked to altitudinal clines. On-site training should be conducted on mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians in all targeted reserves. Vegetation surveys should be conducted in montane SUFs to identify differences in vegetation and associated fauna. This will form sound foundations for subsequent systematic planning and management of the reserves.
-
- **Recommendation 3:** On-site training should be conducted on SMART and management of the associated databases in all targeted SUFs with no previous experience with managing these enforcement systems. These SMART enforcement trainings should target district partners (FPD and police) and community patrol team members. Tailor-made training should be developed for database management. Law enforcement staff will require adequate field equipment, including GPS systems, digital cameras, uniforms, camping equipment, and computers, printers and office furniture for database maintenance. Training should also be provided to the prosecutors' office.
-
- **Recommendation 4:** Conduct participatory research with staff from the MB, concerned district partners and villagers on NTFP utilization in selected buffer zone communities. NTFP harvesting was identified as one of the most significant threats to the 13 SUFs during the site consultations. Participatory research can be used as an entry point towards the merits of conducting village land use planning activities in all villages. Greater harmony between sustainable harvesting practices and proposed law enforcement practices should avoid social safeguard concerns.
-
- **Recommendation 5:** Promote livelihood development for conservation interventions in buffer zone villages to mitigate the most formidable threats to the SUF integrity. Village forums will identify the threats to the adjacent protected areas, rank them in terms of seriousness and then devise corresponding livelihood interventions to directly mitigate these threats. District livelihoods teams should be established to implement these livelihood programs. Village conservation agreements should be formulated between district, MBs and buffer zone villagers.
-
- **Recommendation 6:** Train MB staff and district partners in delivering environmental education (outreach) programs to villages, schools and law enforcement partners.
-
- **Recommendation 7:** Train MB staff, district partners and buffer zone villagers in selected SUFs in Northern Vietnam in forest fire prevention and management. Forest fires were reported by two MBs to be serious threats, both sites being characterized by large rehabilitation areas. These areas are linked to shifting agriculture lands and climatic change impacts.
-

Ecotourism and Sustainable Financing

- **Recommendation 1:** Establish working teams (ecotourism Units) in identified PAs with district and provincial partners – Such units will help ensure tourism development planning is consistent and aligned (i.e. with PA ecotourism plans). Working teams should also be mandated to demonstrably link tourism development to conservation and threat reduction.
- **Recommendation 2:** Develop ecotourism capacity-building programs targeting Management Boards and partners in Northern Vietnam. This implies further detailed assessments (including competencies to meet work requirements and training needs), capacity building for Management Board and stakeholders, and technical assistance provided by leading national and international experts. Training will focus on ecotourism development planning (sustainable tourism development plans; fee system; marketing etc.) including on-site training for PA staff, district partners and communities where relevant.
- **Recommendation 3:** Implement orientation study tours and embedded training to Best Practice ecotourism sites in Vietnam.
- **Recommendation 4:** Prepare Ecotourism Development Plans for identified sites (e.g. Hoang Lien; Ben En NP). These and any other sites that are lacking approved ecotourism development plans will realistically be unable to meet any ecotourism targets on the ground in the absence of an approved plan.
- **Recommendation 5:** Develop ecotourism programs in a few PAs for piloting, demonstration and applying learning - Field models should aim to demonstrate potential links between ecotourism and reduced threats. Ecotourism programs in relatively effective PAs (e.g. Phong Nha - Ke Bang; Bidoup – Nui Ba, Cat Tien and others) should be studied and training programs (including technical exchanges) suitable developed.
- **Recommendation 6:** Assist government in establishing provincial guidelines to help MBs implement relevant articles of Decrees 156 and 91 (and any subsequent revisions). All PA sites confirmed that current regulatory tools are too vague to support PA planning and management of tourism-related construction, land leasing etc. particularly in the context of overlapping/conflicting planning under other sectors (e.g. Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism).
- **Recommendation 7:** Develop national ecotourism standards and Best Practices that are instilled in centralized training and can be developed/modelled in pilot PA sites. This implies development of training manuals at the national level as well as onsite training and/or embedded training. To achieve consistent and systemic impacts, issuance of any guidelines for Best Practices should aim to be mandatory (e.g. through Circular or Decision) as opposed to discretionary.
- **Recommendation 8:** Develop sustainable financing mechanisms at selected sites to help MBs be financially self-sufficient (e.g. through payments for forest environmental services, carbon credits, ecotourism) and to model results. This includes building capacity and training on financial tools and mechanisms, and applying financial analysis into PA planning processes. Potential pilot PAs, where foundational level of readiness was noted, include Hoang Lien NP, Xuan Lien NR, Ben En NP, Nui Chua NP and Dong Nai.
- **Recommendation 9:** Consider exploring the establishment of a Biodiversity Trust Fund as a potential incentive-based mechanism for long-term sustainable financing for biodiversity conservation. While outside the scope of this assessment, national-level stakeholder consultations raised such a fund as a potentially innovative approach to support longer term financing for conservation efforts in Vietnam. Future work could aim to explore the potential and feasibility for this in more detail, including learning from previous or related efforts in Vietnam and elsewhere, how such a structure might work and be embedded within government, opportunities for leveraging funds and obtaining stakeholder buy-in, and related components.

Rewilding

- **Recommendation 1:** Complete comprehensive rewilding feasibility studies. Given the challenges and inherent limitations documented, any future interventions should be informed by comprehensive initial studies. These may build on outputs from BCA projects, applying the methodology in other geographies where the assessment team found some reasonable evidence of rewilding potential. The results would also support pinpointing priority sites and targets for conservation breeding programs, intensified training/programs for snare removal, enhancement of forest guard teams, and community patrols.
- **Recommendation 2:** Establish training programs at different levels (manager, technical staff, technician) on conservation breeding, habitat management and rewilding practices. Such a capacity building program could take from 5-10 years to ensure a foundation for effective rewilding.
- **Recommendation 3:** Extend the implementation of selected rewilding initiatives in BCA sites. As per the BCA rewilding report, three BCA sites (Hue Saola NR, Quang Nam Saola NR, and Pu Mat NP) have been shown to have demonstrable threat reduction and thus can be initially prioritized for rewilding efforts.
- **Recommendation 4:** Support GoVN in formulating a robust national Action Plan on rewilding that serves as a foundation for subsequent guidelines and protocols and includes specific targets on how rewilding should be initiated, regulated and monitored. This also implies supporting the development of relevant technical guidelines (e.g. conservation breeding; habitat restoration and management for rewilding).
- **Recommendation 5:** Support GoVN to formulate a long-term sustainable financing strategy for rewilding in Vietnam. Given the long timelines involved (20+ years) the GoVN will need to take up full ownership of a national program. This will require securing long-term sustainability of rewilding through facilitating engagement of multiple stakeholders and with a focus on engagement of the private sector, research institutions and NGOs to participate and guide rewilding efforts alongside GoVN.
- **Recommendation 6:** Compile and share best practices on successful rewilding programs, including its linkages to habitat restoration and threat reduction efforts. This includes study tours and exchanges with relevant sites, including BCA sites and regional or international sites. Targets should include not only technical staff (where peer-to-peer exchanges may be especially effective) but also government officials (study tours) with the aim of securing their buy-in and increasing political will for rewilding.

Training and Capacity Building

- **Recommendation 1:** Centralized training support should be provided through the long-term recruitment of leading national experts in most technical fields (collaborative management, biodiversity assessments and monitoring, law enforcement, including SMART adoption, environmental education, livelihood development and ecotourism). International experts might be selected to support collaborative management and ecotourism. They would provide on-site, short, duration, technical support to the SUF MB and district partners under the USAID initiative. This training approach was favored for MB staff because large numbers of staff could be trained and then could return to their routine fieldwork.
- **Recommendation 2:** In-country study tours to expose staff to working models and inspire staff to become motivated. These include SMART systems, rewilding activities, outreach programs, and ecotourism.
- **Recommendation 3:** International, tailor-made study tours to specific locations ideally within Asia that espouse international standard approaches to specific SUF management topics.
- **Recommendation 4:** Tailor-made short duration study tours for policy makers, SUF MBs and local development partners to strengthen support for SUF management objectives and to build working relations.

- **Recommendation 5:** Embedded training (2-4 weeks) for staff to work in better managed SUFs to build capacity and networking within the system.
- **Recommendation 6:** A buffer zone training center which specializes in NTFP research and management, village land use planning, conflict mitigation techniques, conservation agreements and village regulations formulation, livelihood development linked to threat mitigation, and the promotion of ex situ NTFP co-operatives. This center would target rural development NGOs and SUF MB staff. This training center could be located in Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park, which is already implementing some of these programs (environmental education and livelihoods).

National and Provincial Policy Frameworks

- **Recommendation 1:** Develop modern multi-functional protected area models in USAID sites to establish a firm basis for policy development in various aspects of SUF management. Nakai Nam Theun National Park in Laos is a potential learning example that borders Vietnam, and Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park on the Vietnam side is already adopting some of those management approaches. A study tour to Nakai Nam Theun is one potential opportunity to exchange experiences and learn how law enforcement approaches, village land use planning, community-based ecotourism, and buffer zone management linked to threat mitigation is being implemented in a similar relevant context.
- **Recommendation 2:** Promote the involvement of district counterparts in the respective programs similar to the involvement of district police and district FPD in the law enforcement agenda. Hence district staff could be involved in environmental education, livelihood development and tourism, which would then assist policy formulation through the line agencies to provincial authorities.
- **Recommendation 3:** Establish umbrella stakeholder forums (Management Advisory Committees) that would strengthen management coordination and also assist to inform policy development. These forums are reported to be established in endangered primate sites by FFI Vietnam, in Phong Nha Ke Bang NP and nine BCA project sites. Model PA sites could be located close to Hanoi-based policymakers, for improved exposure.
- **Recommendation 4:** Promote a centralized training program based upon the successful GIZ centralized training model focusing on SMART adoption. This provided an excellent example of how training implemented at the central level, and linked to project-based field models, led to policy reform, and best practice standardization leading to systemic change for biodiversity conservation. Such a model should aim to meet several criteria: (i) use of the best PA expertise in highly specialized PA management within the country ensuring highest standards of training; (ii) on-the-job training for centrally-based national-level government and project staff; (iii) on-site training within SUFs; (iv) understanding of field experiences to inform policy development; and (v) strengthening of institutional memory for developing long-term (10-30 year time horizon) capacity building programs.
- **Recommendation 5:** Prepare a standard, government endorsed set of guidelines and field manuals that are government approved documents linked to sections of government Circulars, if relevant. Other discretionary manuals can be prepared to support training.
- **Recommendation 6:** Establish a forum of national technical experts in the leading fields of protected area management for sharing approaches and networking purposes. This would fill a gap in the absence of institutional memory at the central level. This Technical Working Group should avert the “silo” approach to SUF management and assist policy formulation at all stages of development.
- **Recommendation 7:** Developing the following regulations and guidelines as a primary focus of national policy and regulatory support:
 - National Rewilding plan to 2050
 - National Plan/policy on engagement of private sector, NGO and public in biodiversity conservation
 - National guideline on biodiversity inventory and monitoring, and database management
 - National guidelines on environmentally and socially responsible ecotourism in PA and wildness areas (i.e. ecotourism Best Practices guidelines)

Introduction

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Under the Improving Design, Evidence, and Learning (IDEAL) activity, USAID/Vietnam has requested IDEAL to complete a biodiversity assessment to inform Mission biodiversity conservation programming decisions and new activity design. This assessment is conducted as part of a multi-year buy-in to the IDEAL activity. Under the buy-in scope of work, IDEAL will facilitate technical support and capacity building throughout the program cycle for biodiversity conservation and climate change, to support successful achievement of results in the highest priorities for these sectors in Vietnam.

ASSESSMENT PURPOSE, AUDIENCE, AND INTENDED USES

The purpose of the biodiversity assessment is to meet early-stage information needs and help to inform decisions regarding the potential direction(s) for a new biodiversity conservation activity to be designed in FY2025. The assessment will assess threats and opportunities to biodiversity in Vietnam and provide recommendations of interventions and geographies for future USAID biodiversity program design. To do so, the assessment will: take stock of biodiversity conservation threats and drivers; assess and identify opportunities across a range of potential strategic directions; and make specific recommendations regarding innovative strategies and interventions to address key threats that may increase the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation programming, and the priority geographies they should be implemented in.

The primary audiences for this biodiversity assessment include the Office of Climate Change, Energy and Environment within USAID/Vietnam (USAID/Vietnam/OCEE), the Biodiversity Division under the Center for Natural Environment within the Bureau of Resilience, Environment, and Food Security (USAID/REFS/CNE/BD), and government of Vietnam (GoVN) stakeholders. USAID/Vietnam intends to use the assessment to directly inform an upcoming new activity design process, including thinking and decisions regarding biodiversity focal interests, overarching activity description, strategic objectives, and situation model and theory of change development.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES AND KEY QUESTIONS

The assessment was designed to address three objectives:

Objective 1: Summarize current threats and drivers to biodiversity conservation in Vietnam, their trajectories, and assess the extent to which the current geographic and programming focus of USAID-supported and other biodiversity conservation programming is situated to address those threats and achieve substantial impact.

Objective 2: Take stock of the common types of strategic approaches and interventions USAID and other donors have supported over recent decades¹ in Vietnam and assess opportunities for USAID to consider investing in new or innovative additional strategies and interventions, to increase the effectiveness of its biodiversity conservation work. The assessment will focus on the following four strategic directions for new or additional programming support:

- *Ecotourism:* To what extent is support for ecotourism development likely to increase the effectiveness of USAID biodiversity conservation programming? Is ecotourism development feasible from a business standpoint? What specific types of ecotourism development strategies or interventions should USAID consider supporting, and where, geographically?
- *Rewilding:* To what extent is a focus on rewilding likely to increase the effectiveness of USAID biodiversity conservation programming? What key enabling conditions (such as: policy environment, national and local government capacity, scientific expertise, wildlife rescue and medicine services/expertise) are important for successful rewilding, and what is their current status? What specific types of rewilding strategies or interventions should USAID consider supporting, and where, geographically?
- *Training and capacity building:* To what extent is a focus on training and capacity building interventions likely to increase the effectiveness of USAID biodiversity conservation programming? What types of capacity building, and where or for whom, should USAID consider supporting to achieve maximum impact?
- *National and provincial policy framework:* To what extent should USAID advocate for policy development support to enhance the institutional and legal framework for protected area management and conservation activities at both national and provincial level. Specific focal areas within this include: national regulations and policies on snare hunting; efforts to control and gradually phase out wildlife farming; and efforts to address cultural and traditional factors that motivate wildlife hunting and consumption.

Objective 3: Advise on which geographies with related specific biodiversity focal interests USAID should consider for future biodiversity conservation programming and the most promising interventions within each of these, with clear recommendations and justifications.

Objective 1 draws on existing data and information to provide a gap analysis that maps and assesses the spatial overlap among: (1) areas of biological significance; (2) status and trajectories of key threats and drivers to biodiversity conservation; and (3) extent to which the current protected area network and USAID-supported and other biodiversity conservation programming is geographically situated to protect Vietnam's biodiversity.

¹ Approximate timeframe is 2010 to present. The focus for other donor-supported programming includes: UNDP, GIZ, World Bank, African Development Bank.

Objective 2 summarizes past and current USAID and other key donor-supported programming and interventions and includes a detailed exploration of opportunities that could leverage stronger impact across four strategic priorities, should USAID decide to expand its portfolio and intervention focus: ecotourism development, rewilding, training and capacity building, and national and provincial policy frameworks.

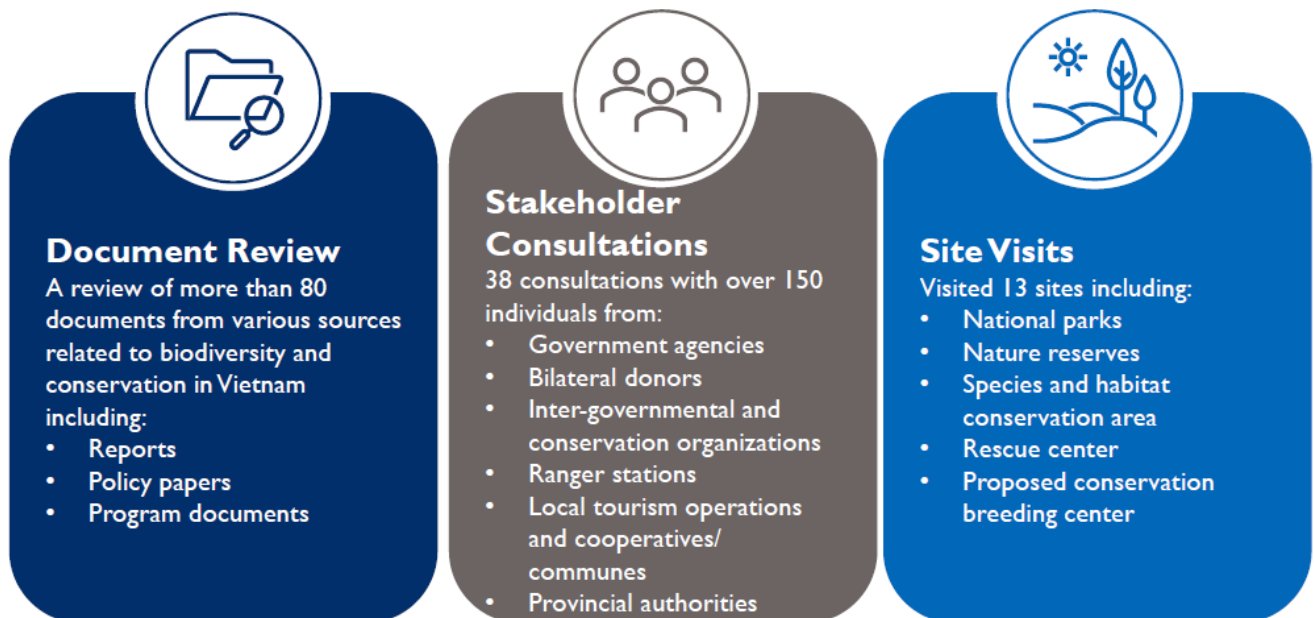
Objective 3 draws from findings under Objectives 1 and 2 above to summarize recommendations for programming and interventions across different sub-national units, and provides a concise justification tailored to the particular sub-national unit or geography.

Methodology

APPROACH

The assessment is based on analysis and synthesis of existing data and information coupled with in-country consultations, interviews and site visits. The assessment employs a mixed-methods approach to respond to the assessment objectives, drawing on analysis and synthesis of existing data via desk-based document review and integrating that with primary qualitative data collected via site visits and stakeholder consultations. In-country data collection for the assessment took place from May 28th-June 15th, 2024, beginning with an in-brief with USAID/Vietnam on May 28, 2024.

Figure 1. Overview of data collection



Site Visits

The assessment team worked together with USAID/Vietnam staff and GoVN counterparts in May 2024 to propose and finalize a list of stakeholders to consult and sites to visit during the field component of the assessment. The selection of sites aimed to meet the range of geographic and focal interests as outlined by USAID and GoVN for this assessment. The team aimed to hold consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, and iteratively updated the stakeholder list as the site list was finalized. The agenda took account of the limited total field visit duration, travel logistics, and the ease of permissions required for accessing each province and site. The site list was revised multiple times during May 14 – 28 in accordance with feedback received by USAID and GoVN, and approved by GoVN on June 5th, 2024.

The site visits enabled the team to conduct consultations with governing management boards and other site-based stakeholders and gain additional context on key biodiversity conservation issues in Vietnam. The focus for the site visits was to obtain information and perspectives on key issues from Management Board staff and other stakeholders including their perspectives on biodiversity values, the diversity, intensity and trajectory of prevailing threats, as well as management issues, capacities and strategies to address these threats within the different targeted regions of interest. The site visits also enabled the assessment team to gain additional insights regarding priority geographies and/or fit with potentially innovative or promising interventions across each of the four focal areas of support the team was tasked with considering.

The team visited a total of 13 sites distributed across 11 provinces and five regions of Vietnam during the field component, following a field itinerary developed with and approved by USAID and GoVN counterparts.² The site visits were distributed across northern Vietnam (six sites), north central (two sites; Thanh Hoa province), Annamites (two sites), Southern Annamites (two sites) and southern Vietnam (1 site). Site visits spanned a range of protected area types and management categories (Figure 2). Figure 2 summarizes distribution of site visits by geography, and Annex 4 provides the team's final daily itinerary for the field component.

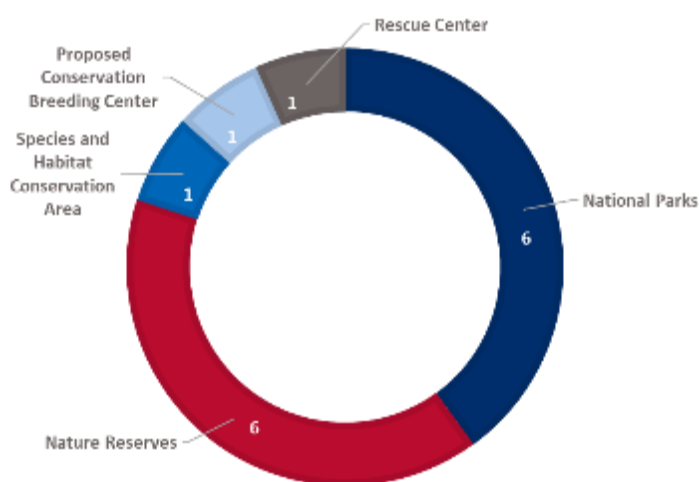


Figure 2. Protected areas visited by management category

List of Protected Areas

National Parks: Hoang Lien, Ben En, Du Gia, Nui Chua, Phia Oac-Phia Den and Phuoc Binh.

Nature Reserves: Dakrong, Dong Nai, Muong La, Na Hang, Phong Dien and Xuan Lien.

Species and habitat conservation area: Mu Cang Chai.

Rescue center at Hoang Lien NP and proposed **conservation breeding center** at Xuan Lien NR.

² Due to security concerns, the team ultimately was not granted permission to conduct planned site visits in Phu Tho province (Xuan Son National Park) or Dak Lak province. With USAID's approval, the team replaced these sites with a set of BCA sites.

Stakeholder Consultations

The assessment team conducted interviews in Hanoi and at each site using a semi-structured consultation guide the team developed for this assessment (Annex 5). The guide included basic information on respondents and a series of open-ended questions that are mapped to the assessment objectives. The guides covered a range of themes, including on: biodiversity threats, drivers, and trajectories; perceived effectiveness and suitability of past and current conservation programming, USAID-funded and those funded by other donors; opportunities for future USAID programming; potential for ecotourism, rewilding, training and capacity building, and policy and regulatory support; geographic priorities for biodiversity conservation; and innovative and impactful strategies for biodiversity conservation.



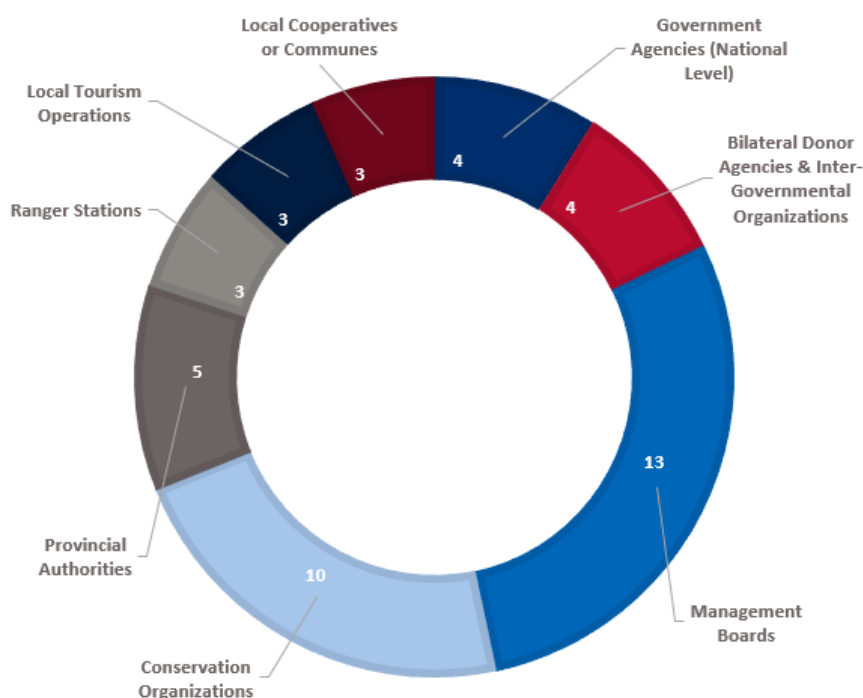
Caption: Stakeholder consultations with the Director and technical staff at Xuan Lien NR.

The assessment team prioritized questions from the guide to ask during each consultation based on the stakeholder type and their areas of expertise. The team conducted in-person interviews to the extent possible. This was supplemented with two virtual interviews with Hanoi-based respondents after the field component had concluded, to align with respondent availability.

The assessment team conducted 45 individual or small group consultations³ with over 150 individuals. The consultations were held with a range of stakeholder types that included GoVN, NGOs, CBOs, and other donors, provincial authorities, ranger stations, local tourism operations and local organizations, as detailed in Figure 3 below. Consultations with provincial authorities typically included a director, deputy director, head of Forest Protection Department (FPD), and heads of multiple divisions, such as conservation, tourism, administrative, planning and finance, forest ecosystem services, and science and biosphere reserve (varies by province). The team also met with ranger teams and members of patrolling and snare removal teams at several sites. Consultations with management boards within provinces typically included the MB director, coordinator, and multiple project officers. Per GoVN requirements, the assessment team was accompanied by one or two government counterparts and three local policemen at each site and consultation outside of Hanoi.

³ Small group consultations, primarily held at sites outside of Hanoi, typically included three to eight individuals per consultation.

Figure 3. Consultations by stakeholder type



List of Stakeholders Consulted

Government Agencies: Department of Forestry (DoF), FPD, Forest Inventory and Planning Institute, Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency.

Bilateral Agencies & Inter-Governmental Organizations: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Conservation Organizations: Cat Ba Langur Conservation Project, Conservation Vietnam, Fauna and Flora International (FFI), Helvetas, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), PanNature, Saola Foundation, Save Wildlife Vietnam, Vietnam Association of National Park and Protected Areas (VNPPA), World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

Provincial Authorities: Department of Agriculture and Rural Development DARD Hue, DARD Quang Tri, DARD Thanh Hoa, FPD Cao Bang and FPD Ha Giang.

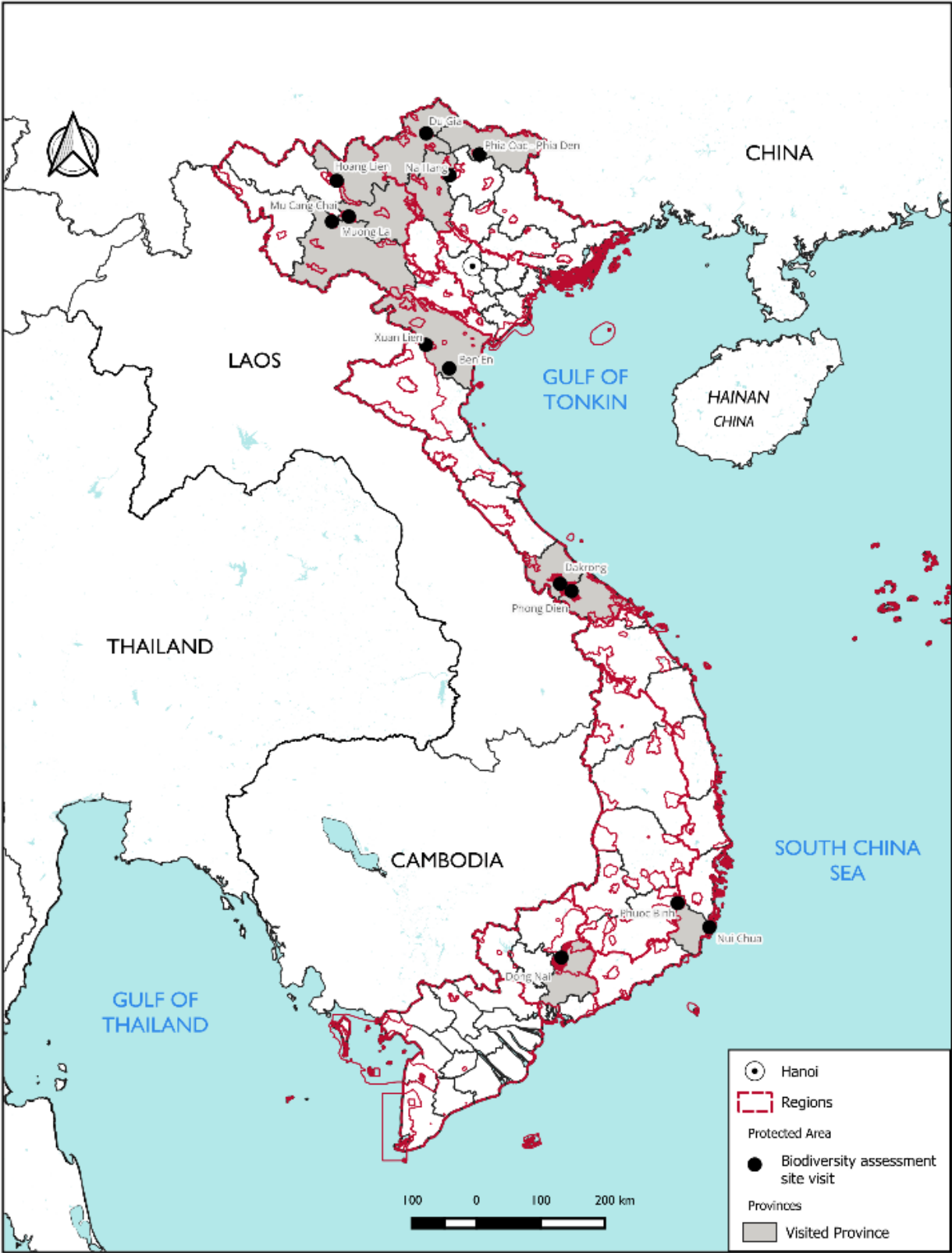
Management Boards: One per site.

Ranger Stations: Nui Cha, Na Hang.

Local Tourism Operations: Phuoc Binh, Ben En, Dong Nai.

Local Cooperatives or Communes: Nam Kat Commune, Mu Cang Chai District, Yen Bai; Tan Hop Cooperative, Huong Hoa District Quang Tri; Thac Lang, Van Xuan Commune, Thanh Hoa.

Figure 4. Map of Protected Areas and site visit locations for biodiversity assessment



Document Review

The assessment team reviewed more than 80 relevant documents as obtained from key stakeholders, their own sources and searches, and as provided by USAID/Vietnam. The team began compiling documents for desk review during the planning phase of the assessment, structured against assessment information needs, and added to these files over the course of the fieldwork and synthesis phases. The team particularly sought to review and draw on existing GoVN information and published studies and reports from Vietnam on each of the four focal areas for potential future support (ecotourism, rewilding, capacity building and trainings, and policy support), as well as recent and relevant national ecosystem and biodiversity assessments; SUF management board plans and annual reports; site- or species-level surveys or assessments; country laws, regulations and policies; and program documentation from recent or current USAID and other donor-supported biodiversity programs in Vietnam.

The desk-based document review and information analyzed informed the team's reporting against each of the assessment objectives in this report. This included drawing on document review to: synthesize current status and trajectories of threats and drivers of biodiversity loss, fit and potential gaps in USAID and other donor programming relative to these threats, past biodiversity conservation programming funded by USAID and other donors, identifying or drawing on examples of impactful or innovative programs, and recommendations for future USAID biodiversity conservation programming. The assessment team triangulated information across the desk review, consultations, and site visits to strengthen the report's findings and recommendations. A list of key documents reviewed is in Annex 3.

Information Synthesis and Analysis

During desk review, the assessment team reviewed information and mapped key details to assessment objectives. The assessment team also compiled their stakeholder consultation and site visit notes and used structured matrices by assessment objective or sub-objective, and priority geography, to take a holistic approach to synthesizing primary qualitative data obtained via consultations, and available secondary data or information, to respond to each of the assessment's objectives.

Objective I Findings and Conclusions: Mapping Current Biodiversity Conservation Programming to Trajectories of Threats and Drivers

Objective I: Summarize current threats and drivers to biodiversity conservation in Vietnam, their trajectories, and assess the extent to which the current geographic and programming focus of USAID-supported and other biodiversity conservation programming is situated to address those threats and achieve substantial impact.

BIODIVERSITY IMPORTANCE

Despite its relatively small land area, Vietnam spans 15 latitudes from north to south and has a corresponding breadth of biodiversity and natural ecosystems including forests, grasslands, inland

wetlands, dunes, inter-tidal mudflats, estuaries, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and marine areas. Vietnam has globally significant biodiversity, including a high number of species together with a high proportion of endemics. It is the fifteenth most biodiverse country in the world, with 355 known species of mammals, 866 species of birds, 537 species of reptiles, 279 species of amphibians, 2,608 species of fish, and 10,500 species of vascular plants recorded to date.^{4,5} Vietnam also has a high rate of endemism, including approximately 30 percent of terrestrial vascular plant species and 5 percent of bird species. According to World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) data, 8.2 percent of total species in the country are endemic to Vietnam and 8.0 percent are threatened.⁶

However, this biodiversity is also under immense threat. According to 2021 data from IUCN, 21 percent of mammals (75 species), 6 percent of birds (57 species), 19 percent of reptiles (75 species), 24 percent of amphibians (53 species) and 7 percent of fishes (136 species) are listed as threatened species (critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable categories). In terms of biodiversity status and decline, a recent WWF analysis⁷ drawing from best available species-level data sets for the country⁸ indicated declining population trends since 1992 for 33 percent of mammal species, 46 percent of bird species, 14 percent of reptiles, 61 percent of amphibians and 11 percent of fish species with available data.⁹

PROTECTED AREA NETWORK AND AREAS OF BIODIVERSITY SIGNIFICANCE

GoVN introduced its first National Conservation Strategy to develop protected areas in 1985, however the first Law on Biodiversity was not introduced until 2008.¹⁰ This law brought all previous biodiversity-related rulings together and attempted to “mainstream” international biodiversity agreements.¹¹ As of 2024, the government of Vietnam has designated a total of 172 protected areas, which includes 33 national parks, 65 nature reserves, 18 species and habitat conservation areas, and 56 landscape protected areas. According to the World Database on Protected Areas, Vietnam’s protected

⁴ Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment. “The Sixth National Report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity,” 2019. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/nr/nr-06/vn-nr-06-en.pdf>. Although not a focus for this assessment, Vietnam also has roughly 13,300 ha of coral reefs and more than 11,000 marine species.

⁵ Convention on Biological Diversity. “Viet Nam Country Profile.” Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, n.d. <https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile?country=vn>.

⁶ UN-REDD Vietnam Forest Facts and Figures, 2021. <https://www.un-redd.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Vietnam%20Forest%20Facts%20and%20Figures.pdf>

⁷ Thuairé B, Allanic Y, Hoang Viet A, Le Khac, Q, Luu Hong T, Nguyen The C, Nguyen Thi T (2021). Assessing the biodiversity in Viet Nam – Analysis of the impacts from the economic sectors. WWF-Viet Nam, Ha Noi, Viet Nam.

⁸ These were datasets available through IUCN and GBIF global databases.

⁹ Population trends were deemed stable or increasing for 25 percent, 44 percent, 31 percent, 12 percent and 16 percent of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes, respectively. In addition, available data was insufficient to assess population trends for a large proportion of species: 42 percent, 10 percent, 54 percent, 27 percent and 72 percent of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish species, respectively.

¹⁰ BioDev 2030, 2022. “Biodiversity Declining in Viet Nam Policy Brief.” <https://www.biodev2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/OB-Policy-brief-ENG-Nov-5-digi-1.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

area network covers 7.6 percent of the total land area and 0.6 percent of the country's total marine area.¹²

As of May 2024, Vietnam's protected area network included 168 Special-use Forests (SUFs) that cover approximately 2.4 million hectares (approximately 7.6 percent) of Vietnam's total land area. The country's protected area network consists mainly of terrestrial forest sites but also includes a small number of wetland and marine sites. GoVN has established four marine protected areas¹³ outside of the SUF network, while three wetland protected areas¹⁴ have been established recently at the provincial level under the Biodiversity Law.

The official terrestrial protected area system in Vietnam is thus primarily represented by a single forest management category, namely the SUFs as provided for under the 2017 Forestry Law,¹⁵ and only a small number of protected areas in Vietnam have been established outside this system.¹⁶ Over the past six decades, SUFs have been established throughout all the eight forestry ecological regions of Vietnam (see regional descriptions below).¹⁷ Over the same time frame, GoVN undertook several efforts to expand the country's protected areas, including through its commitments to the Aichi Targets and the post 2020 biodiversity framework. For example, the 2014 strategy for development of the special-use forest system in Vietnam¹⁸ set a goal of establishing 176 SUFs nationwide by 2020 with a total area of approximately 2.5 million hectares, and also called for establishing new marine and wetland protected areas. While the SUF goal has been nearly met, efforts to expand the Protected Area (PA) system have been constrained by limited funding and land availability, stemming from competing pressures to use land for economic

¹² UNEP-WCMC (2024). Protected Area Profile for Viet Nam from the World Database on Protected Areas, July 2024. Available at: www.protectedplanet.net. The World Database on Protected Areas lists a total of 209 PA sites for Vietnam, but this includes some double counting of sites with different designations.

¹³ On May 26, 2010, the Marine Protected Area System to 2020 plan was approved by the PM's Decision No. 742/QĐ-TTg. The plan proposed a list of 16 marine protected areas to be established by 2020. Since 2010 only eight MPAs have been formally established and operationalized. In addition, four National Parks with marine components are managed as MPAs in accordance with the provisions of the Forestry Law.

¹⁴ The Government of Vietnam committed to establishing a representative network of nationally important wetland protected areas, by ratifying the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1994. The Biodiversity Action Plan for Vietnam included a list of 61 important wetland areas (Government of SRV/GEF 1994), however wetlands remain notably under-represented within the national protected area system. Other notable wetlands have been incorporated into the national Special-use Forests network, including Bau Sau wetland in Cat Tien National Park as well as in Mui Ca Mau, Tram Chim, U Minh Thuong and Xuan Thuy National Parks. Recently, through the Biodiversity Law, a few provincial-level conservation areas were established under the decision of the Provincial People's Committees. Most are wetland areas such as Phu My Grassland Nature Reserve, Tam Giang-Cau Hai Wetland Nature Reserve and Thai Thuy Wetland Nature Reserve.

¹⁵ Special-Use Forests are a forest management designation, and defined as: "...forests that managed mainly for conserving natural forest ecosystems, forest biological genetic sources, scientific research, conservation of historical - cultural relics, beliefs, scenic spots combined with ecotourism; recreation, entertainment (except inside strictly protected areas of special-use forests); provision of forest environmental services..." (Article 5, Forestry Law, 2017).

¹⁶ There are several types of protected area designations recognized under the framework of the international treaties to which Vietnam is a signatory party. These include World Natural Heritages, Ramsar Sites, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, and ASEAN Heritage Parks. However, most of these designations have been applied to existing special-use forests or the core zones of special-use forests, or even provincial-level conservation areas (e.g. Biosphere Reserves).

¹⁷ There remains a comparative lack of representation of marine and wetland ecosystems.

¹⁸ Prime Minister's Decision No. 1976/QĐ-TTg dated October 30, 2014.

development. As a result, fewer than 10 new protected areas have been established over the last 20 years. Vietnam also has a number of areas of biodiversity significance that have been assessed by international organizations in recent decades, including 7 Endemic Bird Areas, 63 Important Bird Areas, and 122 Key Biodiversity Areas.^{19,20} The majority of these areas are located wholly or partly within the established protected areas in the GoVN system.

The SUF system, although relatively well developed, still has several shortcomings. Many SUFs are very small in area. Many reserves do not have a management board or only have part-time management boards.²¹ The full representation of terrestrial ecosystems is also inadequate. For example, there is very little representation of dry forest ecosystems or coastal dune forests within the protected area system.²²

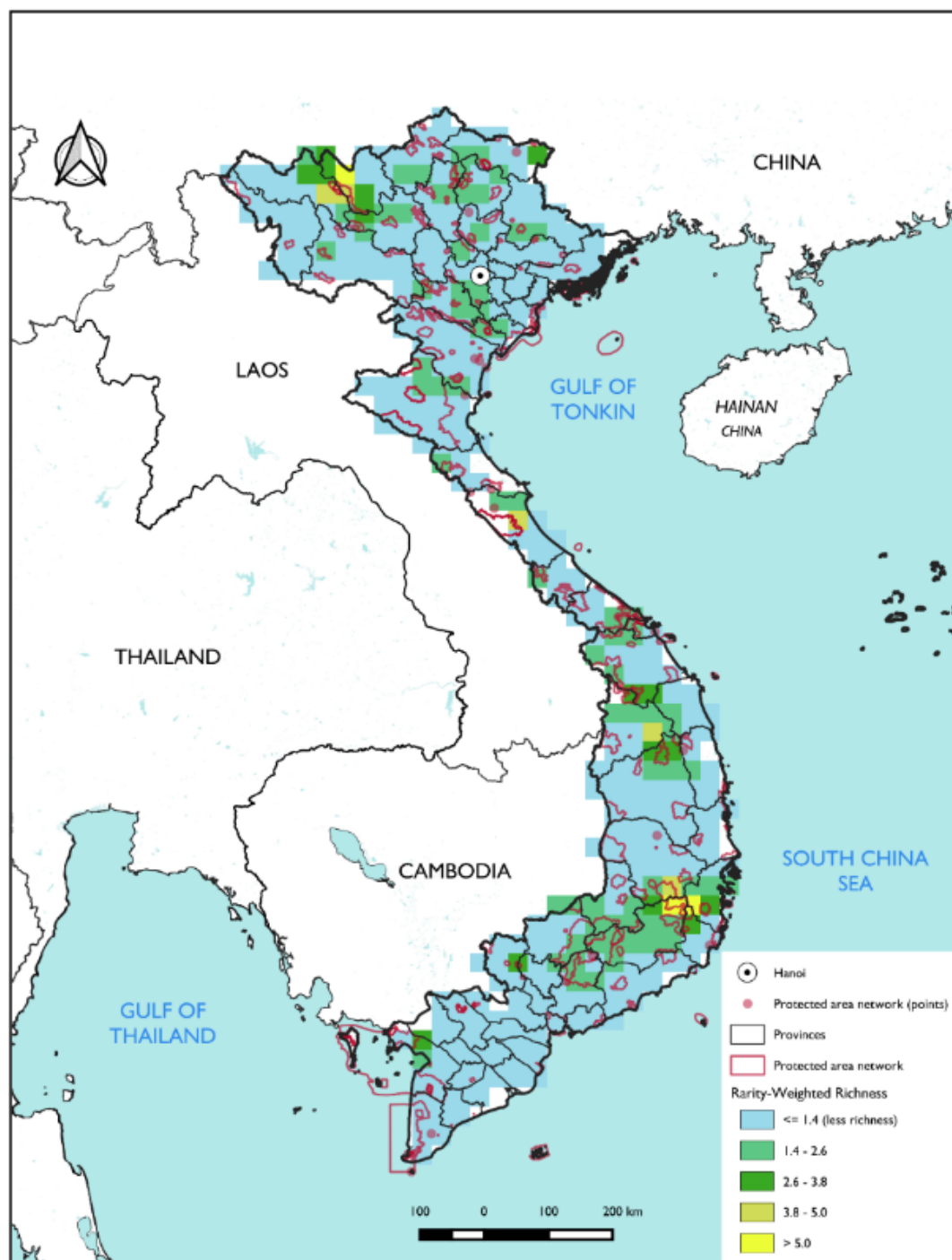
¹⁹ BirdLife Data Zone. “Vietnam.” BirdLife Data Zone, 2024. <https://datazone.birdlife.org/country/vietnam/species>.

²⁰ IUCN. “The ‘30x30’ Target and Opportunities for OECMs in Viet Nam - Story | IUCN,” April 10, 2023. <https://iucn.org/story/202304/30x30-target-and-opportunities-oecms-viet-nam>.

²¹ Parr, J.K.W. 2024. Analysis of the Institutional Arrangements for Special-Use Forest Management in Vietnam. IUCN.

²² Ibid.

Figure 5. Protected Area network and areas of higher relative biodiversity importance²³



²³ As indicated by IUCN Red List version 2023 rarity-weighted species richness data for Vietnam (30 km² gridded raster data for amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles). The data are biased towards vertebrates, and only cover terrestrial areas. The rarity-weighted richness value is unitless, but indicates areas of higher and lower relative importance. (Data Sources: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/other-spatial-downloads>)

Forest Cover and Loss

Forest ecosystems support the most significant biodiversity in Vietnam, providing important habitats for numerous wildlife species. Many of these species are of global and national conservation concern, including many that are endemic to Vietnam. However, Vietnam's natural forest ecosystems have also been severely degraded over the past half century, largely as a result of deforestation and shifting agriculture use that are driven primarily by underlying pressures of population growth and economic development.²⁴

In 1943, Vietnam had some 14.3 million hectares of forests, equivalent to 43 percent of the country's natural land area.²⁵ At that time, the entire forest area was natural and most of it was primary forest. By 1995, Vietnam's forest area had been reduced to 9.1 million hectares, or approximately 28 percent of the country's land area, due to impacts from wars²⁶, over-exploitation and forest land-use conversion to other production lands including agriculture, urbanization, infrastructure and industrial land. Recognizing the important role of forest ecosystems and responding to heightened visibility by the international community, GoVN undertook several dedicated afforestation and reforestation efforts through several programs, such as 327²⁷, 661²⁸ or the more recent 1 billion trees.²⁹ Over the past three decades, this has led to gradual increases in forest cover and extent, resulting in a return to forest cover comprising 42 percent of Vietnam's land area by 2021.³⁰

However, the quality and connectivity of natural forests in Vietnam has declined significantly over the same period, with only small patches of good primary forests remaining, and primarily located in remote areas within SUFs. By 2000, only 2.4 percent of Vietnam's tree cover was considered intact forest, comprising approximately 402,000 hectares.³¹ According to Global Forest Watch analysis, Vietnam lost 756,000 hectares of humid primary forest over the past two decades (2002-2023), representing an 11 percent decrease in the country's total humid primary forest area. The area of humid primary forest lost during that time also comprised 22 percent of Vietnam's total tree cover loss over that era. By 2020, although 47 percent of Vietnam's land cover was forested, only 0.6 percent (or approximately 80,000

²⁴ Global Forest Watch. "Vietnam Deforestation Rates & Statistics." Global Forest Watch.

<https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/VNM/?location=Wyljb3VudHJ5liwiVk5NI10%3D>.

²⁵ International Strategy and Policy for Natural Resources and Environment (ISPONRE) and Center for Biodiversity Conservation (CBC), 2022. *National Ecosystem Assessment Report of Vietnam: Summary for Policy Makers*. Institute of Strategy and Policy for Natural Resources, and Environment Center for Biodiversity Conservation, Hanoi, 2022.

²⁶ Forest clearance using chemical defoliants and followed by intensive napalm bombing during the Vietnam's War. Estimates place affected forest cover in the range from 14-44 percent, with the most severe damage on coastal mangrove forests. (<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/12/vietnams-forests-on-the-upswing-after-years-of-recovery/>)

²⁷ Chairman of Ministerial Council's Decision No. 327/CT dated September 15, 1992

²⁸ Prime Minister's Decision No. 661/QD-TTg, dated July 29, 1998

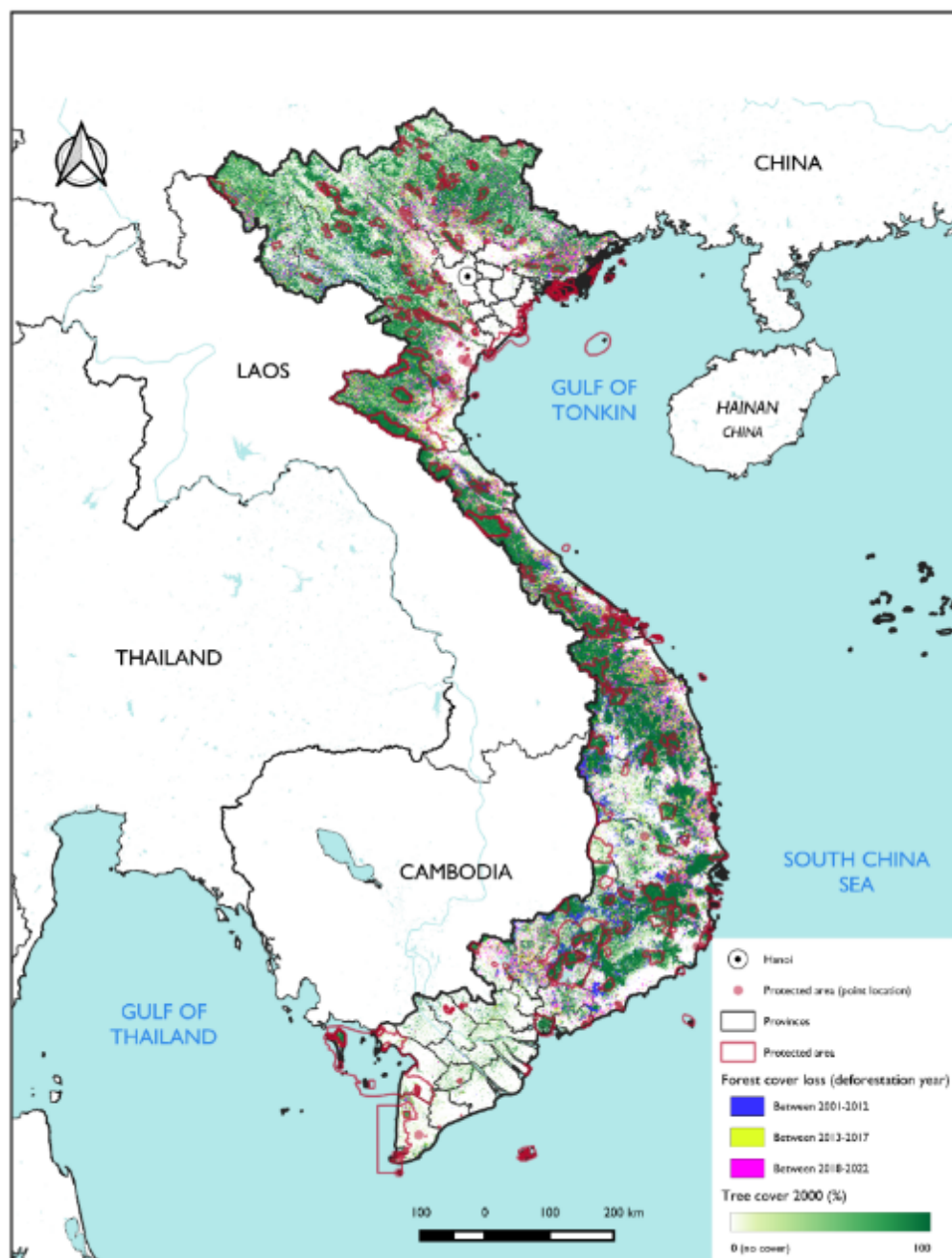
²⁹ Prime Minister's Decision No. 524/QD-TTg, dated April 1, 2021

³⁰ ISPONRE and CBC, 2022.

³¹ Global Forest Watch. "Intact forest in Vietnam". Accessed on 01/08/2024 from www.globalforestwatch.org. Note tree cover is defined as all vegetation taller than 5 meters in height as of 2010 and includes natural forests and plantations. Intact forest landscapes are "unbroken expanses of natural ecosystems within the zone of forest extent that show no signs of significant human activity and are large enough that all native biodiversity, including viable populations of wide-ranging species, could be maintained."

hectares) was considered primary forest.³² Remaining primary forest is also highly fragmented, consisting of small forest patches primarily scattered across the central highlands, southeastern and north-central Vietnam.³³

Figure 6. Protected Areas network overlap with forest cover and loss hotspots over 2000-2022³⁴



³² Global Forest Watch Vietnam Country dashboard, accessed 1 August 2024. FAO, 2015. "Forest cover in Vietnam." Last accessed through Global Forest Watch on 08/01/2024.

³³ Convention on Biological Diversity. Vietnam country profile, accessed 2 August 2024 <https://www.cbd.int/countries>

³⁴ Data sources: <https://data.globalforestwatch.org/>; <https://www.protectedplanet.net/>

Figure 7. Protected Areas network overlap with forest cover and loss hotspots in Northern, North Central, and Southern Vietnam over 2000-2022

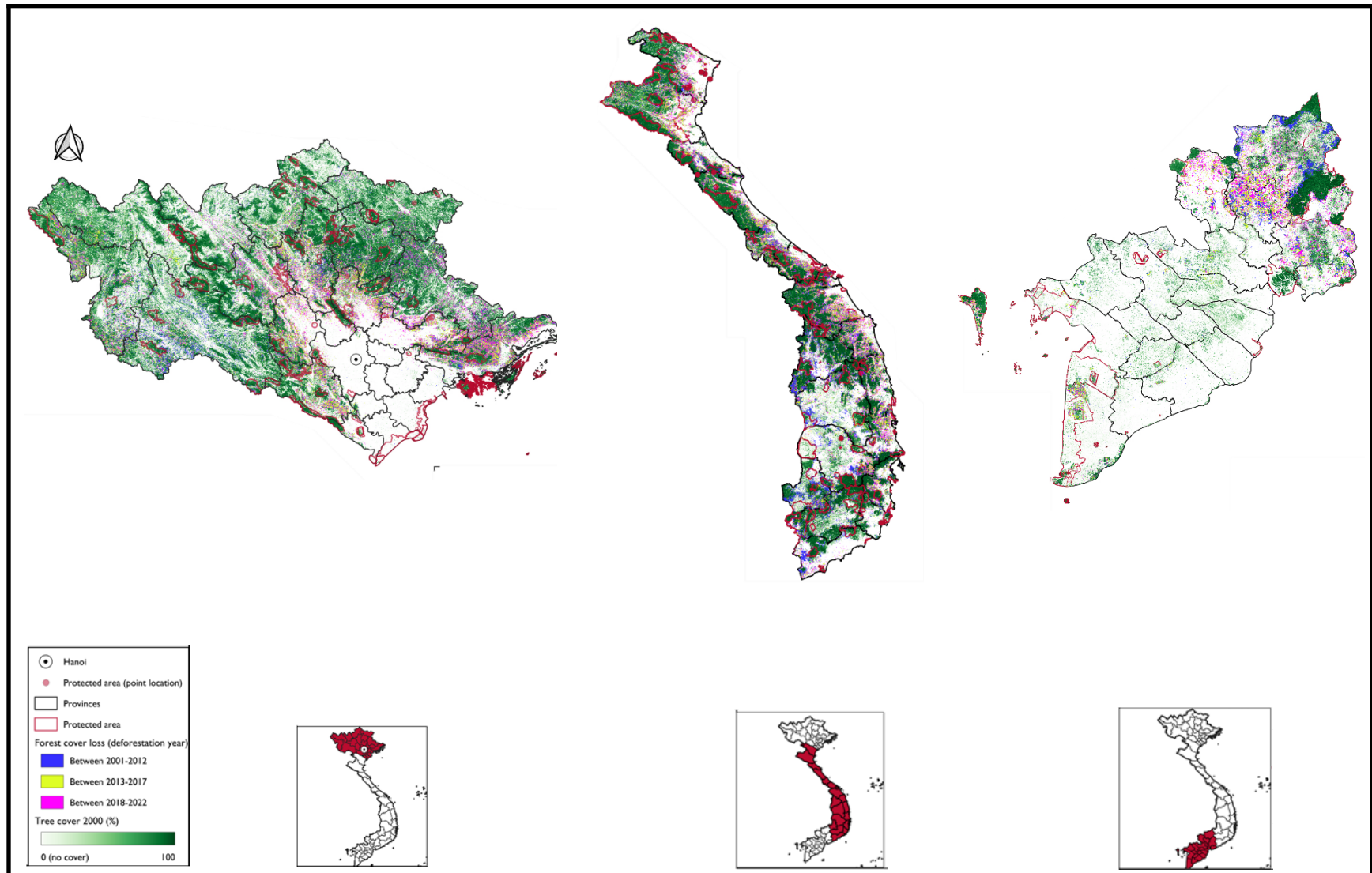


Table 1 below shows forest cover for natural and planted forests in the eight ecoregions of Vietnam, as of 2021. Forest cover is generally higher in the more mountainous areas of the country, and particularly the areas bordering Lao PDR. The Red River delta and the Mekong delta in the Southwest are the least forested ecoregions in the country. The largest remaining natural forest areas are in the Northwest, North Central and Central Highlands regions, accounting for more than 65 percent of the total natural forest area of the country. The region with the highest proportion of natural forests is the Central Highlands, where more than 80 percent of forest area is natural forest. The regions with the largest amount of forest cover are the Northeast, North Central and South Central. However, the proportion of planted forests in the Northeast and South-Central regions is quite high, accounting for 41 percent and 36 percent of the total forest area of each region, respectively.³⁵

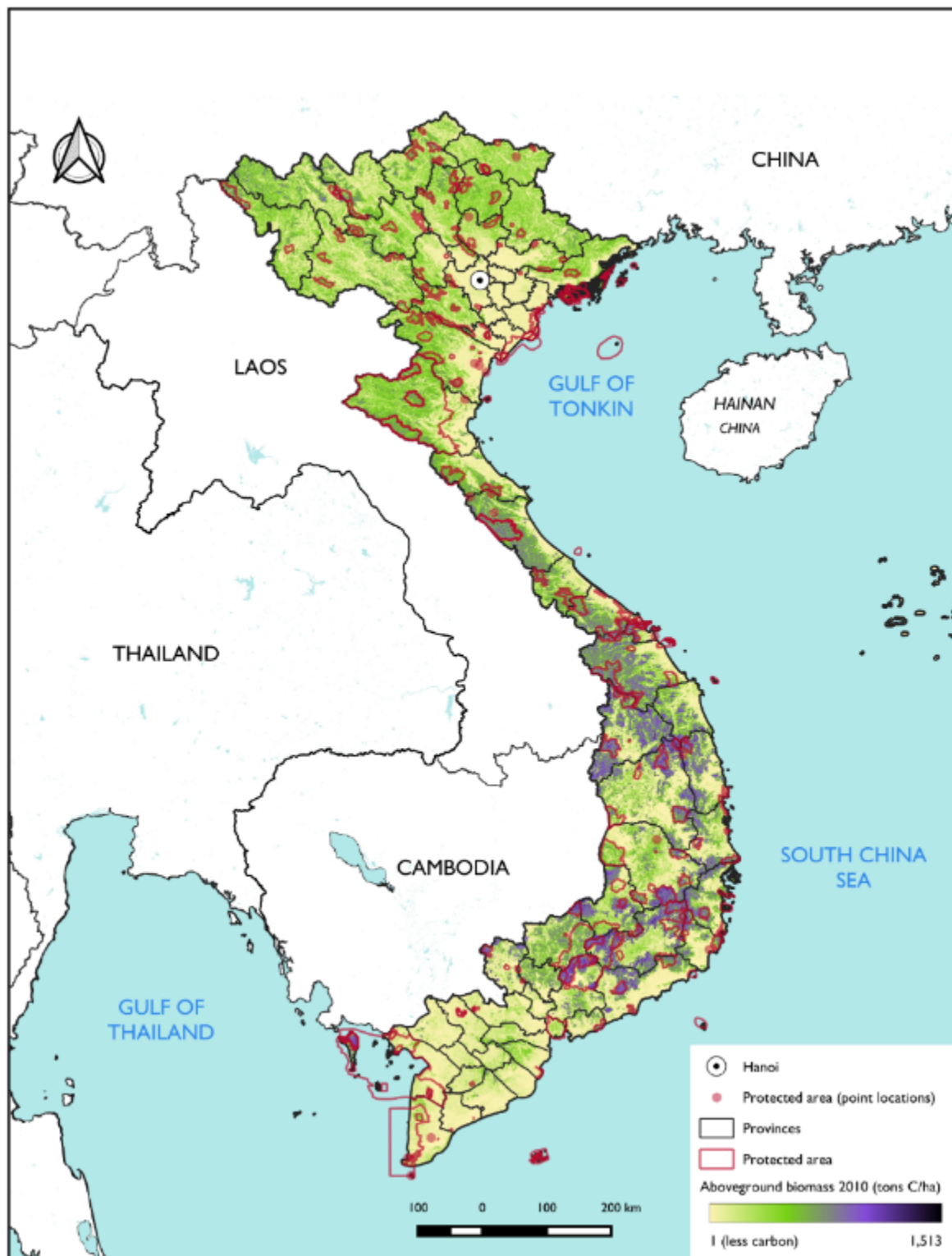
Table 1. Forest cover for natural and planted forests in eight ecoregions of Vietnam in 2021

Forest Ecoregion	Natural forest (ha)	Planted forest (ha)	Total forested land (ha)	Natural forest as proportion of total (%)
Northwest	1,584,974	223,310	1,808,285	47.0
Northeast	2,331,602	1,639,112	3,970,714	56.3
Red River Delta	46,326	37,000	83,326	6.2
North Central	2,201,435	929,625	3,131,061	57.4
South Central Coast	1,566,677	884,820	2,451,496	50.4
Central Highlands	2,104,097	468,604	2,572,701	45.9
Southeast	257,304	222,566	479,871	19.4
Southwest	79,341	168,407	247,748	5.4
Total area	10,171,757	4,573,444	14,745,201	42.0

Source: National Forest Cover Statistics 2021, MARD, 2022.

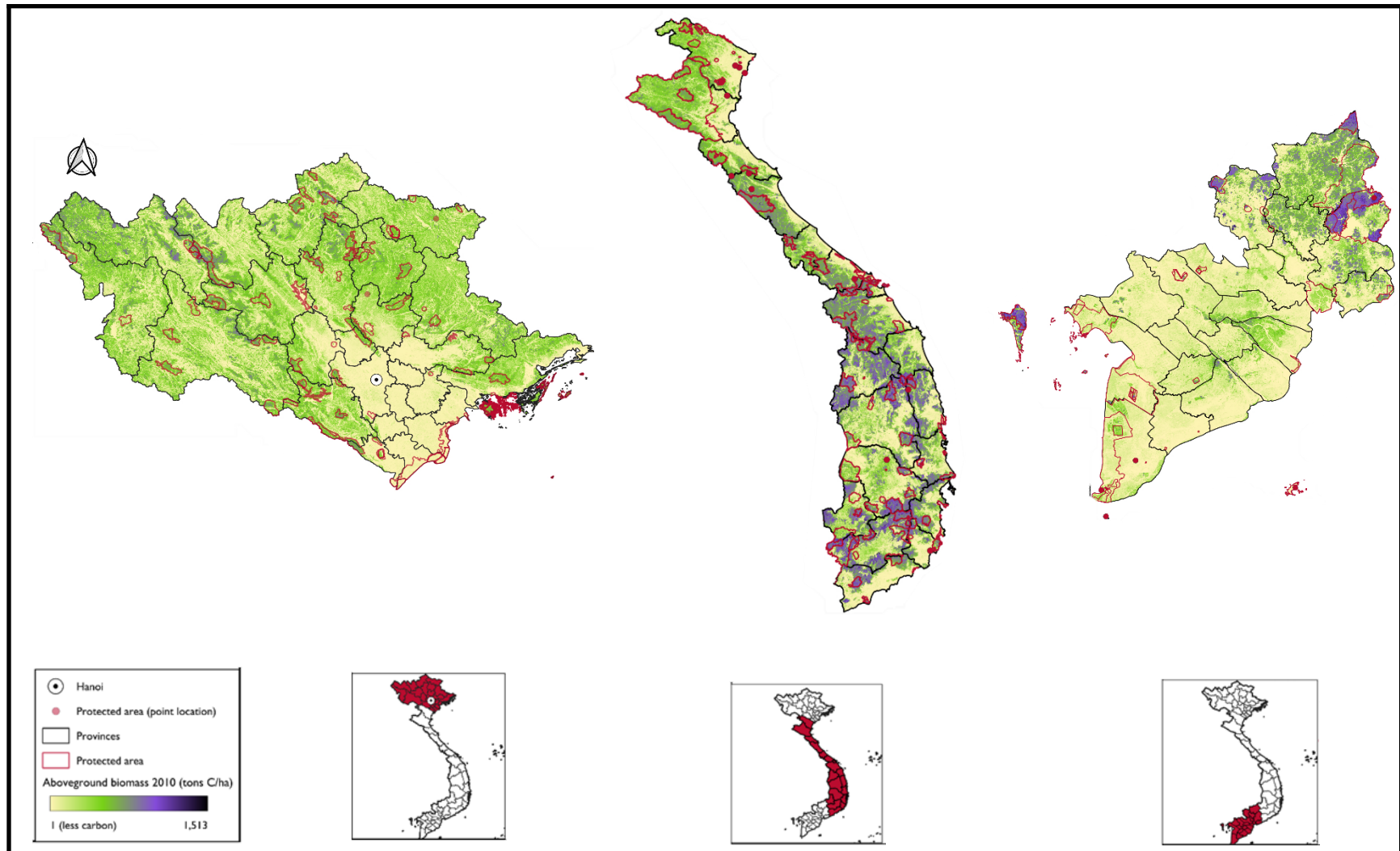
³⁵ MARD, 2022. National Forest Statistics.

Figure 8. Overlap of Protected Areas network and areas of high terrestrial carbon density in Vietnam³⁶



³⁶ Aboveground biomass data source: Spawn et al, 2020. Harmonized global maps of above and belowground biomass carbon density in the year 2010. Scientific Data, 7(1):1-22. <https://www.earthdata.nasa.gov/learn/articles/biomass-carbon-density>

Figure 9. Overlap of Protected Areas network and areas of high terrestrial carbon density in Northern, North Central, and Southern Vietnam



Special-use Forests and Vietnam's Protected Area Network

Vietnam has been developing its protected area system for over 60 years, beginning with its first protected forest, Cuc Phuong, established in 1962. The number of protected areas increased sharply from the 1980s until the early 2000s, reaching more than 160 special-use forests distributed throughout the country's ecological regions. Since then, the number of new special-use forests that have been established over the last 20 years has been significantly fewer. However, new types of protected areas have also been established, such as marine and wetland conservation areas.

In 2014, GoVN's strategy for development of the special-use forest system in Vietnam³⁷ set a goal of establishing 176 special-use forests nationwide by 2020 with a total area of about 2.46 million hectares. By 2019, 2,161,661 hectares of forested land were managed within the special-use forest system, and 96 percent of that area (2,075,091 hectares) was considered natural forest. In total, 4,646,138 ha (3,953,408 ha of natural forests) were designated as protection forests and 7,801,421 hectares were designated as production forests (of which approximately 64 percent was natural forest).^{38,39}

Currently, Vietnam's protected areas, largely encompassed by the special-use forest system, spans all forested eco-regions of the country. As of 2021, the SUF system was comprised of 34 national parks, 56 nature reserves, 14 habitat/species management areas, 54 protected landscapes, and 9 forests designated for scientific research.⁴⁰ Of the 176 sites, 13 sites are situated in the Northwest Region, 50 sites in the Northeast Region, 15 sites in the Red River Delta, 28 sites in the North Central Region, 19 sites in the South-Central Region, 16 sites in the Central Highlands, 16 sites in the Southeast Region, and 19 sites in the Southwest Region.

Vietnam's Special-use Forests are divided into different management sub-categories: national parks, nature reserves, species and habitat conservation areas, protected landscapes and forests for scientific research. Special-use Forests are usually terrestrial forest areas but, in some cases, they also include wetlands and/or marine areas. As of June 2024, only six SUFs (all national parks) are centrally-managed by FPD of MARD, and 162 SUFs are managed at the provincial level (by Public Private Collaboration, DARD or provincial FPD).

SUFs, hence PA management in Vietnam, is governed by a complex and decentralized institutional structure. The Department of Forestry is the national focal agency for the co-ordination of SUF management, but the planning and management for each SUF is entrusted to the province and districts. Each SUF is managed by a small number of officers from the provinces and districts in which the SUF is located. Most SUFs have a Management Board, headed by an official from the Department of Agricultural

³⁷ Prime Minister's Decision No. 1976/QĐ-TTg dated October 30, 2014, approving the plan for the special-use forest system to 2020, with a vision to 2030.

³⁸ VN Forest (2019), Status of Vietnam's Special-use Forest and Protection Forest in 2019. A report to GIZ. and DoPAM (2021) Special-use Forests of Vietnam.

³⁹ Protected forests are maintained to protect water streams and soils and to prevent soil erosion and mitigate natural disasters. Production forests are mainly used for supplying timber and nontimber forest products, but they also provide environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

⁴⁰ DoPAM, 2021. Special-use Forests of Vietnam. Department of Protected Areas Management. Hanoi, 2021.

and Rural Development. Prior work has suggested that the complex management structure for SUFs, together with insufficient staff, equipment and training, contributes to a lack of active management in SUFs that are not assisted by outside support.⁴¹

Figure 10. Number of Special Use Forests in Vietnam

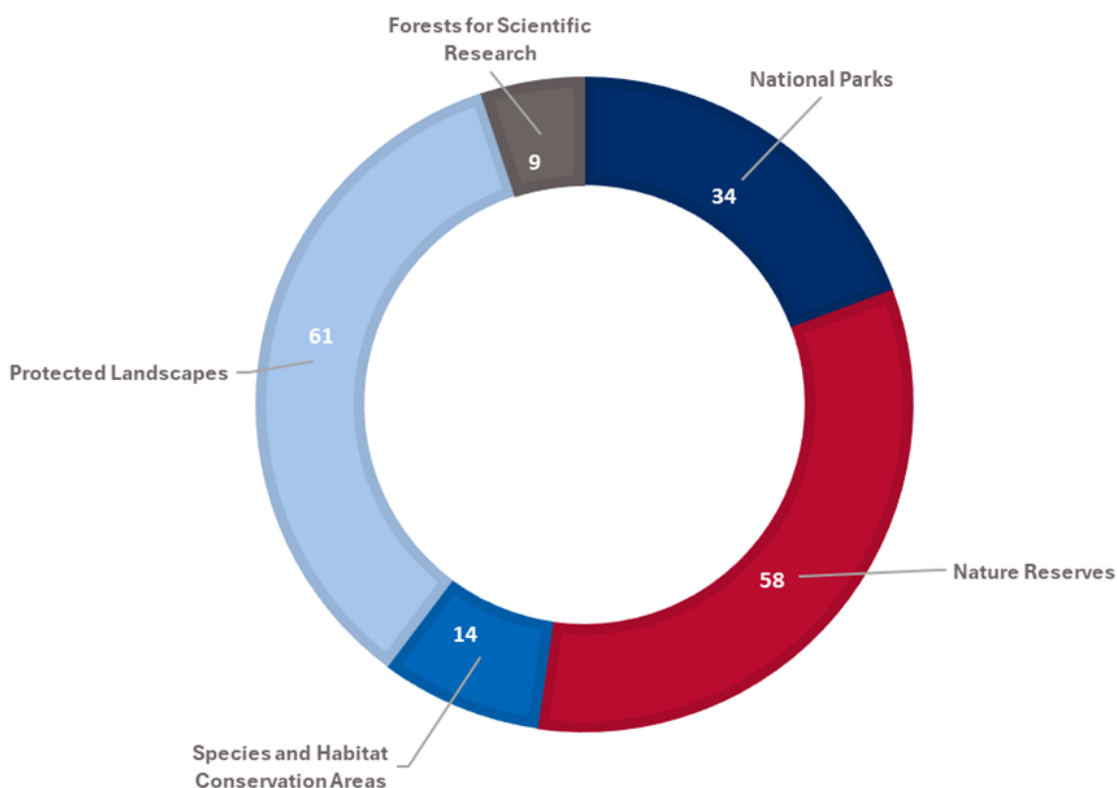


Table 2. Representation of the different Special-use forests in Vietnam (in 2019)⁴²

Category	Number	Total area (hectare)
National Parks	34	c. 1,274,519
Nature Reserves	58	c. 759,000
Species and Habitat Conservation Areas	14	c. 386,000
Protected Landscapes	61	c. 21,000
Forests for Scientific Research	9	c. 4,000
Total	176	c. 2,444,519

⁴¹ Parr, J.K.W. 2024. Analysis of the Institutional Arrangements for Special-Use Forest Management in Vietnam. IUCN.

⁴² VN Forest (2019), Status of Vietnam's Special-use Forest and Protection Forest in 2019. A report to GIZ, and DoPAM (2021) Special-use Forests of Vietnam.

Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)

As of May 2024, there were 121 sites designated as Key Biodiversity Areas⁴³ (KBAs) in Vietnam covering 34,307 km² land and marine area.⁴⁴ Of these KBAs, 63 sites are also recognized as Important Bird Areas (IBA) and 8 sites are also recognized as Alliance for Zero Extinction sites. The IBAs were assessed by BirdLife International under an IBA identification program in 2001⁴⁵ and information on them is relatively out of date. The vast majority of other KBAs were assessed in 2012 (6 were assessed in 2018 based on new data available on aquatic biodiversity). The majority (62 percent) of Vietnam's KBAs are already partially or nearly fully included in Vietnam's officially designated protected areas, although 40 of them have no protected area or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures Coverage.⁴⁶

Most of Vietnam's KBAs are located in terrestrial habitats (74 of 121 KBAs in total). As of 2024, approximately 40 percent of the extent a given terrestrial KBA is also under one of Vietnam's officially designated protected areas, on average, and the PA coverage is slightly higher for KBAs in mountainous areas, at 45 percent.⁴⁷ Among the 74 terrestrial KBAs, 28 have greater than 70 percent of their area within a designated protected area, 7 have between 51-70 percent protected area coverage, 4 have between 21-50 percent protected area coverage, and 14 have 1-20 percent of their area within a designated protected area. Nineteen of the 74 terrestrial KBAs have no protected area coverage while two of them have no data available on the extent of protected area coverage.⁴⁸ Figures 16 and 17 in Annex 5 show the point locations of Vietnam's terrestrial KBAs.

Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs)

Vietnam has an extraordinarily rich avifauna and supports the highest bird endemism in mainland South-East Asia. The country has a total of seven designated endemic bird areas, which span over 1.3 million hectares and together house at least 23 restricted range species (Table 15 in Annex 5). Key EBAs include the Annamese Lowlands EBA, the Da Lat Plateau EBA, South Vietnamese Lowlands EBA, and the Kon Tum Plateau EBA. Vietnam also contains part of the Lower Mekong Basin EBA, South-East Chinese Mountains EBA, and Fan Si Pan and Northern Laos Secondary Area.⁴⁹

BIODIVERSITY THREATS, DRIVERS AND TRAJECTORIES

Threats

⁴³ Key Biodiversity Areas are nationally identified sites that are established following a global set of criteria published by IUCN, and are deemed to contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity, in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. KBAs can include Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas; Important Plant Areas; Important Sites for Freshwater Biodiversity; and Alliance for Zero Extinction sites.

⁴⁴ Key Biodiversity Areas. "KBA Data," June 2024. <https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/kba-data>.

⁴⁵ Tordoff eds, 2001.

⁴⁶ Another 6 KBAs are missing PA coverage data.

⁴⁷ Vietnam IBAT country profile: https://app.ibat-alliance.org/country_profiles/VNM

⁴⁸ Key Biodiversity Areas. "KBA Data," June 2024. <https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/kba-data>.

⁴⁹ BirdLife Data Zone. "Endemic Bird Areas Summary." Accessed August 14, 2024. <https://datazone.birdlife.org/eba>.

Threats to Vietnam's biodiversity at the national level, and their underlying drivers, have been well documented across several recent analyses and national level assessments. Threats include illegal and excessive exploitation of biological resources (including hunting, illegal trade in wildlife, logging), illegal trade in wild animals and their products, natural systems modifications, environmental pollution, climate change, and the introduction of invasive alien species. Excessive exploitation of forest resources includes wild animals and timber, as well as trade in medicinal plants and other NTFPs.⁵⁰ The illegal trade in wildlife includes trade in species and in wildlife products and has been on an increasing trajectory over the past two decades.⁵¹

Threats to biodiversity and individual species occur across Vietnam, although the highest concentration of threatened species, particularly threatened plants and terrestrial vertebrates, is found in forests within mountainous areas of the northwest, northeast, southern Annamites and southeast regions of the country. Endangered mammals are primarily concentrated in forest landscapes in the central and southern regions of Vietnam.⁵²

Many of the stakeholders consulted for this assessment indicated in interviews that several of the key threats to biodiversity in Vietnam have been on somewhat positive or declining trajectory in recent years. However, the assessment team's review of available data makes clear that Vietnam's biodiversity is still deteriorating under the pressures of population growth and economic development. Despite stakeholders' somewhat positive outlook on the trajectory of threats at their sites, on net the assessment team's review of current documentation on overarching trends in threats at the national level suggest that Vietnam's biodiversity has become increasingly threatened in recent years.

For example, the number of threatened species in Vietnam has continued to increase, and the aggregate predicted survival estimate for Vietnam's known threatened species has also continued to decline in a steady downward trajectory over the past 25 years (Figure 11). The 2024 International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species lists 764 globally threatened species of plants and animals that occur in Vietnam.⁵³ Vietnam's current Red Book update contains a proposed total of 1,211 species, including 600 plant and 611 animal species. This is a significant, nearly 40 percent increase over the 882 species listed in the 2007 update.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ ISPONRE and CBC, 2022; Thuairé et al., 2021.

⁵¹ Examples include: trade in species such as pangolins and turtles, and products such as pangolin scales, bear limbs and rhino horn. (ISPONRE and CBC, 2022)

⁵² Thuairé et al., 2021.

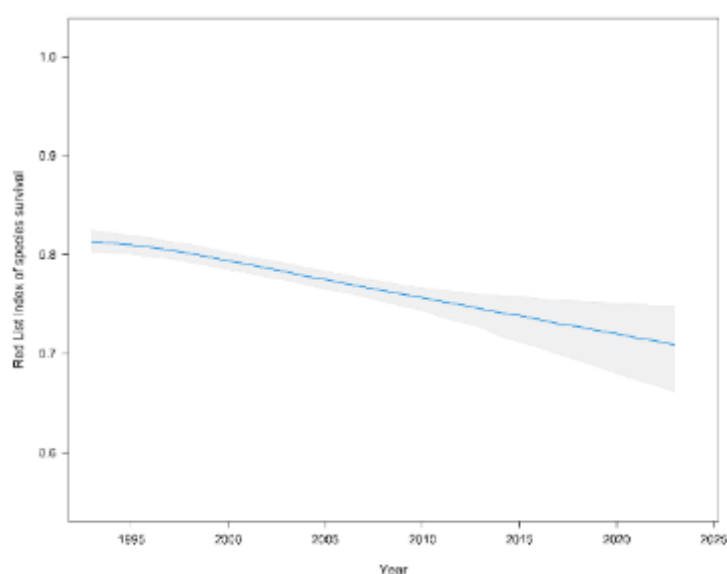
⁵³ https://www.ibat-alliance.org/country_profiles/VNM. The IUCN red lists or red data books provide key information on the status of a country's biodiversity, including information on rare, endangered and threatened species. The red list information follows standards set by IUCN and the World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC), and is used by countries to help connect conservation science to policy, guide and inform decisions about necessary conservation actions, as well as to assess achievements towards or actions taken under multilateral environmental agreements to which countries are signatories..

⁵⁴ MoNRE (2023) *National Biodiversity Report*. Hong Duc Publishing House. Hanoi: 2022.

Table 3. Globally threatened species listed in Vietnam per the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT)

Taxonomic group	Number of species assessed	Critically Endangered (CR)	Endangered (EN)	Vulnerable (VU)	Total (CR, EN & VU)
Vertebrates	3994	62	112	166	340
Mammals	391	20	23	24	67
Birds	923	11	18	28	57
Reptiles	434	11	23	36	70
Amphibians	235	2	23	20	45
Ray-finned fishes	1,888	10	13	38	61
Cartilaginous fishes	123	8	12	20	40
Invertebrates	1,331	14	30	114	158
Plants	1,903	58	96	112	266

Figure 11. Red List Index of species survival for Vietnam⁵⁵



Per the most recent IBAT assessment, which draws on IUCN red list species-level threat data,⁵⁶ the most significant threats to Vietnam's biodiversity are depicted in Figure 12 below, in order of significance (level of impact across the largest number of different species).⁵⁷ WWF's recent biodiversity assessment for Vietnam suggested that efforts that aim to reduce specific biodiversity threats are likely to contribute more to lowering species' risk of extinction than efforts focused more broadly on restoring habitats.⁵⁸

This largely aligns with the assessment team's analysis based on stakeholder consultations across sites, and review of national threat assessment reports and data. The most important threats to species biodiversity in Vietnam is still hunting and gathering of terrestrial and aquatic species, followed by habitat loss due to urbanization, and land conversion for different economic and production purposes.

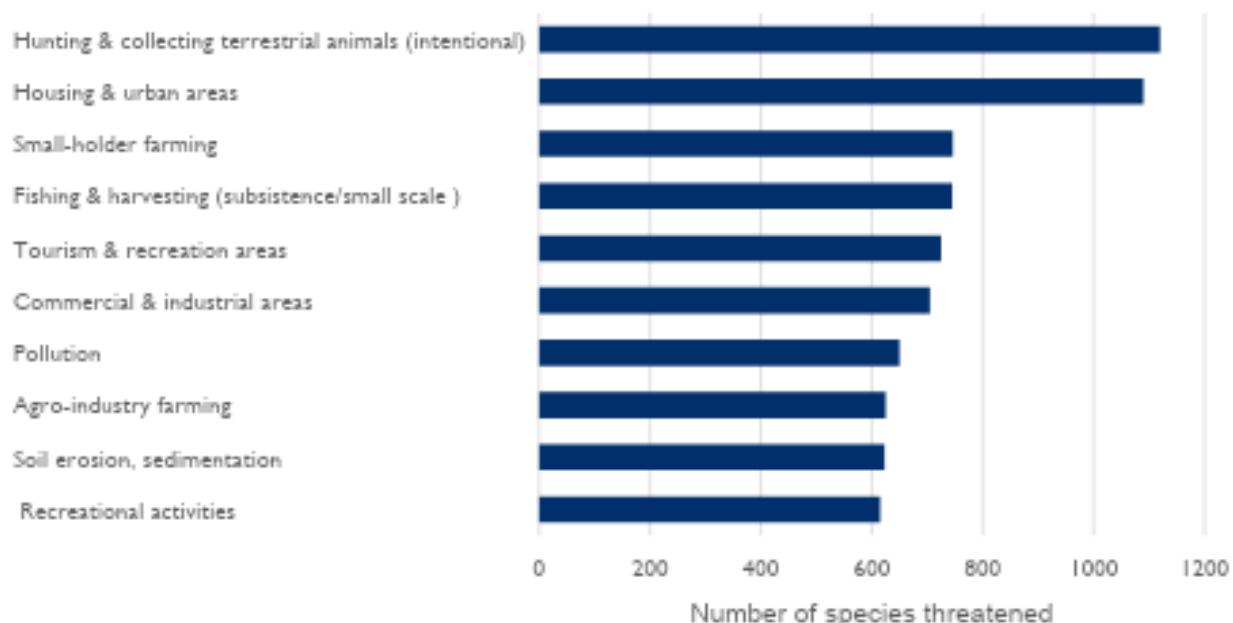
⁵⁵ Source: https://ibat-alliance.org/country_profiles/VNM. Figure shows the survival index weighted by the fraction of each species' distribution occurring within Vietnam. Per IBAT, a downward trend indicates declining aggregate survival probability of the country's species. The index is based on all mammals, birds, amphibians, reef-building corals and cycads native to Viet Nam.

⁵⁶ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/threat-classification-scheme> (version 3.3). The chart follows IUCN's threats classification scheme and highlights activities that have widest impacts across the largest numbers of threatened species, based on global data repositories for WDPA, KBA and IUCN red list data as well as country-level reporting.

⁵⁷ IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. "The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species." <https://www.iucnredlist.org/en>.

⁵⁸ Thuairé et al., 2021.

Figure 12. Most significant threats to biodiversity in Vietnam⁵⁹



At the site level, the majority of SUF managers consulted for this assessment considered the most important threats to biodiversity within their sites to be (in order from most common to least, coupled with level of threat): wildlife hunting and trapping, NTFP over-exploitation, illegal logging, forest encroachment, forest fires, land conversion, and invasive species.

There was general consensus across stakeholders from the majority of sites the team visited that hunting and trapping remain the strongest ongoing threat to biodiversity in SUFs. Recent studies have also provided evidence to confirm that many rare or threatened species are now primarily only concentrated inside SUFs, and often in the most remote areas, as a result of this prior overexploitation and particularly as a result of hunting and snaring. For example, a recent extraordinarily large-scale camera trapping effort focused on ground-dwelling mammals and ground-feeding birds across 21 SUFs found an absence of medium-sized or large carnivores, near-absence of large herbivores, and evidence that many endangered species, where still present, inhabited only the most remote forested areas.⁶⁰

Per stakeholder consultations, forest land encroachment has been relatively stable or unchanged over the past five years at several of the sites the team visited, as a result of improved law enforcement together with better awareness. There also appeared to be general consensus that illegal logging, though still important, had declined somewhat in recent years at many sites. Stakeholders variously attributed the reasons for that decline to improved capacity of forest rangers and staff including in use of investigation and surveillance equipment, efficiency of forest management, applying modern technology

⁵⁹ Source: https://ibat-alliance.org/country_profiles/VNM

⁶⁰ WWF-US, 2023. Results of biodiversity baseline surveys in 21 protected areas in Viet Nam. USAID BCA.

to forest patrols (e.g., use of SMART mobile software on smartphones as part of patrolling), improved law enforcement more generally and increased incomes among local community members that allowed them to access alternative materials and reduce their demands for timber and other forest products.

Table 4. Summary of key threats to biodiversity at 13 assessment sites per SUF managers

	Site name	Threats						
		Forest fire	Illegal logging	Forest encroachment	Land conversion	Hunting and trapping	Exploitation of NTFPs	Invasive species
NORTHERN VIETNAM								
1	Hoang Lien NP	H	M	M		M	M	
2	Mu Cang Chai SHCA	H	M	H		M		
3	Muong La NR		M	M	M	M	M	
4	Na Hang NR		L	L		H	M	
5	Du Gia NP		L	M	H	M		
6	Phia Oac-Phia Den NP		M	M		L	M	
NORTH CENTRAL								
7	Ben En NP		M	M		H	M	M
8	Xuan Lien NR		M			M	M	
CENTRAL ANNAMITES								
9	Phong Dien NR	M	M	M		H	M	
10	Dakrong NR	M	M			H	M	
SOUTHERN ANNAMITES								
11	Nui Chua NP		M			H	M	
12	Phuoc Binh NP			M	M	H	M	
SOUTHERN VIETNAM								
13	Dong Nai NR	H		M		M	M	

Key: H - High, M - Medium, and L - Low

Hunting and Trapping

The site visits conducted by the assessment team suggest that hunting⁶¹ and trapping were the highest threat concern for the integrity of biodiversity across the 13 sites the team visited. SUF site personnel reported the status to be high at six sites; six sites reported the status as medium and only one site reported the status as low. It is also notable that both Phong Dien NR and Dakrong NR Reserve reported that threats from hunting and snaring remained high, despite that these are two BCA sites that are relatively well-funded by USAID for several years to have trained Management Board staff and community patrol teams; and also have an operating Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART)

⁶¹ Hunters use a range of methods, and target a range of common or less common species at different sites, including civet, wild boar, deer and chevrotain.

patrolling system and database. This feedback suggests that even well-supported SUFs continue to face difficulties in controlling these illegal activities, given the nature and intensity of the threat.

The level of threat from hunting was assessed as somewhat lower by stakeholders consulted across some of the sites the team visited in Northern Vietnam, although there could be multiple reasons for this. A hunting gun collection program was launched by the Government in the early 1990s, focusing on the Northern mountainous areas, and has been maintained continuously until now. SUF managers consulted by the assessment team indicated this had helped to reduce hunting and led to positive impacts at sites in those areas. Some management board staff also suggested there may be less hunting among local populations because animals have become less abundant. There is still demand for bushmeat, but meat sources are also available from livestock. Stakeholders also felt that efforts to strengthen and improve patrolling and law enforcement has had an impact on reducing the intensity of snaring, especially in central Vietnam, albeit at a slow pace. At another site visited, in the south, stakeholders noted the effect that a high-profile criminal case from nearly 10 years ago still had on hunting in that reserve. However, the majority of stakeholders noted that hunting and trapping still remain a pervasive and substantial threat to Vietnam's biodiversity, especially in SUFs, which support the largest populations of wildlife.

Hunting is undertaken for both subsistence domestic use as well as for the illegal wildlife trade. Although the situation has improved significantly in recent years, birds and other animals are still widely hunted. Although wildlife trade and demand are decreasing in urban centres through intensive behavior change campaigns, and increased enforcement and penalties through the amended Penal Code of 2017, this market is still active and remains an important driver of hunting in many high biodiversity areas in Vietnam.⁶² A 2021 USAID-supported survey on wild meat consumption found that 90 percent of illegally hunted animals are to meet demand for wild meat consumption in Vietnam's urban centers.

Exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products

The second most serious threat reported in the 13 SUF sites was exploitation of non-timber forest products, which was deemed a medium threat. The concern here is that this threat necessitates accessing into the interior of the SUFs. The links between non-timber forest product harvesting may or may not be directly linked to hunting and snaring. NTFP exploitation activities take place all year round and are traditional activities in many SUFs. The types of NTFPs exploited are mainly rattan, medicinal herbs, orchids, rhododendrons, bamboo shoots, and honey. This NTFP exploitation is carried out by communities inside and outside of buffer zones. High market demands for forest products, especially high economic value woods and medicinal and ornamental plants create high pressures on the SUFs.

Nationally, NTFP exploitation takes place primarily at the household level but has been estimated to comprise over 20 percent of the total economic value of forestry production in the country. A 2020 study from Central Vietnam estimated annual NTFP harvest at 350 million bamboo plants, 4,500 tons of rattan, 1,500 tons of bamboo shoots, 300 tons of fruits, 5,000 tons of other food products, and 4,500

⁶² Olmedo, A., Verissimo, D., Challender, D. W., Dao, H. T. T., & Milner-Gulland, E. J. (2021). Who eats wild meat? Profiling consumers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. *People and Nature*, 3(3), 700-710.

tons of medicinal herbs.⁶³ Multiple stakeholders consulted for this assessment highlighted that NTFP overexploitation can be mitigated in part through the development of sustainable harvesting models.

Illegal Logging

Illegal logging was deemed a medium threat by stakeholders at nine SUFs visited by the assessment team, and a low threat in two SUFs, the latter two being limestone mountain habitats with limited access and limited tree species of high economic value. Many stakeholders indicated that illegal logging activities have been significantly reduced within the SUF system in recent years. However, they still occur sporadically on a small scale. Forest timbers are being exploited for both local housing and for the commercial timber markets. In some sites, local people enter the forest for timber to respond to local market demands. For example, senior staff consulted at Muong La NR reported an increased demand for homestay development (traditional stilt houses). The threat of illegal logging can be mitigated through SMART patrolling, (mobile) checkpoints and interagency cooperation along access roads.

Forest Encroachment

The level of threat from forest encroachment was reported to be high in one site the assessment team visited (Mu Cang Chai SHCA), medium in 8 sites, low in one site and absent in two sites. This land use conflict both on the periphery of the SUFs and in proximity to the enclave villages is caused by the lack of participatory village land use planning during which the traditional harvesting rights of the villagers should be recognized. Hence the villagers sometimes opt to ignore the government imposed SUF boundaries. The threat can be ameliorated by village land use planning and participatory boundary demarcation. According to stakeholder consultations, encroachment into SUF forests and illegal logging inside SUFs has been much reduced nationwide through committed enforcement efforts and political support. However, in many SUFs, people still live or have farmland inside the core zones. Encroachment on forest land to expand farming still occurs at different scales. In the Northern mountainous region, the cultivation of cardamom under the forest canopy is also a threat. Cardamom grows close to streams and particularly impacts species dependent upon upland wetland habitats. Aside from removing ground vegetation, the need for firewood⁶⁴ to dry cardamom after harvest both causes loss of biodiversity and can also be a cause of forest fires.

Forest Fires

Forest fires were reported to be serious in the northern sites the assessment team visited, which have a high level of shifting cultivation and rehabilitation zones, that in turn may be susceptible to extended periods of drought or higher temperatures. These threats can be mitigated by forest fire prevention and forest fire management. During the site consultations, forest fires were reported to be serious threats in both Hoang Lien NP and Mu Cang Chai SHCA. For example, in Hoang Lien NP, there were 17 forest

⁶³ Thanh V.N et al, 2020. Determinants of Non-Timber Forest Product Planting, Development, and Trading: Case Study in Central Viet Nam

⁶⁴ Community members collect firewood for a range of needs across forest sites, including local community use firewood for noodle (Arrowroot vermicelli) production, tobacco leaf drying, and tea production and household consumption and heating.

fires over the 10-year period between 2014 and 2024.⁶⁵ This threat occurs due to natural or human causes, intentionally or unintentionally. In Vietnam's SUFs, most forest fires are caused by local people entering the forest and carelessly causing fires. Forest fires cause significant loss of plant and animal species, affecting the biodiversity of the area. Forest fires also cause loss of habitat for many animal species and impact food chains and links in the ecosystem. The frequency and intensity of forest fires may also be linked to climate change impacts, notably extended drought periods as well as unusually high temperatures.

Land Conversion

Although the rate and area of forest loss has been declining in Vietnam in recent years⁶⁶, land use change remains one of the most significant pressures affecting Vietnam's natural ecosystems and especially forested areas⁶⁷, causing wildlife habitat isolation, fragmentation, and reduction or loss of wildlife populations, especially for large-ranged mammals and birds, thereby reducing biodiversity and degrading ecosystem services. Land conversion was reported by stakeholders across three of the SUFs sites the assessment team visited. For Du Gia, a hydropower development project planned to convert 45.6 hectares of special-use forest land. For Muong La and Phuoc Binh, there is a risk of land conversion for resort tourism projects being planned by local authorities.

At the national level, development-driven land conversion remains a substantial threat to Vietnam's forest biodiversity. According to Vietnam's annual monitoring report on forest coverage, about 2,430 hectares of natural forest were lost on average each year during the period 2016-2020.⁶⁸ Forest cover decline was concentrated mainly in the Central Coast and the Central Highlands regions, while positive forest cover change was largely from new and low biodiversity plantations in production forests.⁶⁹

Some forest cover declines are attributable to larger-scale forest land use conversion projects. These projects focused on hydropower development, mining, urbanization and tourism development, infrastructure development, industrial zones, and agricultural and forestry production. Between 2017 and 2020, at least 3,630 projects were proposed that converted land from forest to other purposes, covering a total area of 183,740 hectares. Of that total area, 39,133 hectares (21 percent) were natural forests and 74,242 hectares (40 percent) were planted forests.⁷⁰

Invasive Species

⁶⁵ According to stakeholders consulted at these sites, major fire events included: in 2014 two fire outbreaks caused 23.7 hectares of forest damage; in 2015 there was one notable outbreak causing 12.70 hectares of degradation; and in 2016 five outbreaks affected 12,475 hectares.

⁶⁶ In 2023, the area of primary forest lost was the lowest in 20 years, at 16.5 Kha. (GFW, 2024)

⁶⁷ Thuairé et al. 2021.

⁶⁸ ISPONRE and CBC, 2022.

⁶⁹ MoNRE (2023) *National Biodiversity Report*. Hong Duc Publishing House. Hanoi: 2022.

⁷⁰ Another 13,816 hectares were non-forested land, and 56,550 hectares were non-forestry land (MoNRE 2023).

While a potentially more minor threat, some of the stakeholders consulted for this assessment mentioned issues with invasive species. This was reported by interviewees at two sites: Ben En NP (with the invasion of *Mimosa pigra* on the lake), and Dong Nai NR.

Climate Change

None of the stakeholders consulted for this assessment mentioned climate change as a threat to biodiversity at the site level. One reason for this could be that areas most affected by climate change are often coastal areas, which the team did not visit. Another potential reason is that many direct and indirect effects of climate change on biodiversity take place through “slow-onset” processes that unfold over time and may not be perceptible until they reach more critical stages. More generally, Vietnam is highly affected by climate change, and the country’s highly fragmented natural ecosystems may inevitably lose species at a high rate, further exacerbated by climate variability and change. The increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as droughts and prolonged heat waves, can also have direct impacts on biodiversity, such as those stemming from an increased risk of forest fires. For example, in 2023 there were 310 forest fire cases that burned 674 ha of forest.⁷¹

Impacts of climate change and extreme weather events on biodiversity have not been widely studied in Vietnam explicitly, but there is strong global evidence for a range of direct and indirect pathways by which changing climate is predicted to affect biodiversity. This includes effects on environment and suitable habitat that are predicted to negatively affect species ranges and survivorship, as well as through human-driven changes in settlement, resource demand and land use that also exacerbates habitat fragmentation and loss and in turn further threaten biodiversity. A recent forecasting study that focused on climate change effects on avian biodiversity in Vietnam found that direct effects of climate change on habitat and range suitability are the stronger predicted driver of avian species loss in the country, but this will be further exacerbated by human-driven land use change, including an increase in urban land and continued closed forest decline. In that study, as the severity of climate change increases, 24 percent of the 1436 bird species assessed were predicted to lose more than 50 percent of their suitable range, substantially increasing their risk of extinction.⁷²

Drivers

The main underlying drivers of biodiversity loss in Vietnam are also well-documented and have been identified as population growth (which fuels increasing demand for natural resources and energy and drives overextraction and overexploitation of forest and other natural resources) and economic development.⁷³ Underlying drivers also include: overlapping management responsibilities for biodiversity conservation across GoVN agencies (primarily Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

⁷¹ Đức, Nhật. “Trong Năm 2023, Cả Nước Xảy Ra 310 vụ Cháy Rừng.” Thanh Niên, May 2024. <https://thanhnien.vn/trong-nam-2023-ca-nuoc-xay-ra-310-vu-chay-rung-185240505190641751.htm>.

⁷² Kapitza, S., Van Ha, P., Kompas, T. et al. (2021). Assessing biophysical and socio-economic impacts of climate change on regional avian biodiversity. *Nature Scientific Reports* 11, 3304. <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1038/s41598-021-82474-z>

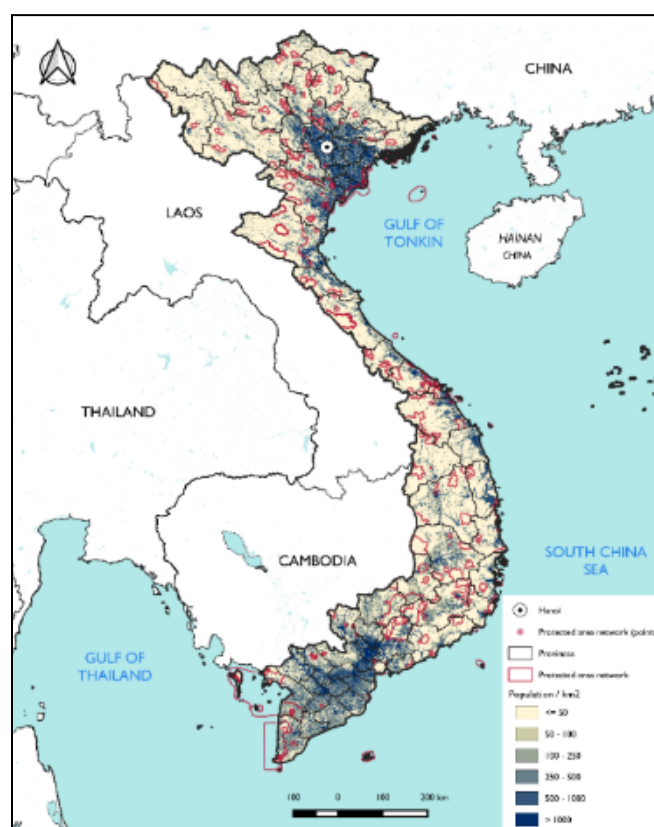
⁷³ ISONRE and CBC 2022.

(MONRE) and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)⁷⁴) and inadequate coordination between MONRE and line ministries; inconsistencies among various biodiversity conservation policy documents and governance that hinder effective implementation⁷⁵; insufficient communication, awareness and education at all levels; and insufficient resources and capacity for biodiversity conservation or investment among relevant agencies.⁷⁶ Per Vietnam's recent national ecosystem assessment, the trajectories of drivers are anticipated to remain largely unchanged in coming years, although the relative importance of some may shift (for example, with respect to population growth).⁷⁷

Population Growth

Figure 13. Population density in Vietnam⁷⁸

Vietnam has a relatively small land area, ranked 67th among countries globally, but has over 101 million people and ranks 16th among countries in terms of population. The current population growth rate is relatively low, but population density is high, at 326 people per square kilometer in 2024. Approximately 41 percent of the population, or nearly 41 million people, live in urban areas. The rate of population growth has been on a declining trend for several decades and is currently 0.63 percent. Similarly, the median age has risen over that time and is currently 33 years old. However, the country is also increasingly urbanizing. The share of the population living in urban areas has grown steadily over the past 20 years, from 25 percent in 2000, to 37 percent in 2020 and 40 percent in 2024.⁷⁹



⁷⁴ For example, the assignment of state management responsibility for biodiversity is unclear between MONRE and MARD as well as between local management agencies (ISPONRE and CBC 2022).

⁷⁵ For example, the major laws that set forth regulations for biodiversity conservation in Vietnam (the Biodiversity Law, and the Forestry and Fisheries Law) contain inconsistencies in their regulations and also in names, classifications, criteria and standards used for the protected area system. Since the passage of the Biodiversity Law in 2008, GoVN has issued more than 193 decrees, decisions, directives, and related policy documents and guidelines to guide biodiversity conservation in total (ISPONRE and CBC 2022).

⁷⁶ ISPONRE and CBC 2022.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Data source: <https://landscan.ornl.gov>

⁷⁹ Worldometer. "Vietnam Population," 2024.

https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/vietnam-population/#google_vignette.

Vietnam's population forecast over the next 20 years is projected to continue these trends, with the rate of population growth and population density continuing to incrementally moderate. By 2040, the population is projected at 108 million people, with a population density of 350 people / km² and 53 percent of the population concentrated in urban areas. By 2050, total population is projected to reach 110 million people, population density is anticipated to reach 355 people / km², and nearly 60 percent of the population will be urban. Most of that population will be located in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, but Vietnam currently has more than 55 urban centers with populations exceeding 100,000 people, including eight cities with half a million or more residents (HCMC, Hanoi, Da Nang, Haiphong, Bien Hoa, Can Tho, Thuan An and Di An).⁸⁰

Vietnam's population is unevenly distributed, with most people living in urban parts of the northern and southern delta regions, and coastal parts of the country's central regions. Although the country's most biodiverse and forested regions, also where its terrestrial network of PAs is located, are not generally in high population areas, populations that do live in these areas tend to be some of the country's most impoverished, which also presents challenges for biodiversity conservation and PA management in those areas. Population density in the forested mountainous areas of Vietnam, especially the northern mountainous areas, is relatively low. However, the poverty rate is disparately high, at 18.2 percent, compared to 5.7 percent nationwide.⁸¹

As human resources and capacity for biodiversity conservation are very thin, the pressure on the forest resources and forest land of the SUFs in this region is becoming increasingly intense. Projected population increase in coming decades is anticipated to lead to increased demand for land (for agriculture and other purposes), wood, fishery and water resources, energy use and production, and other biological resources such as NTFPs, aquatic resources and wildlife.⁸²

Economic Development

Economic development is the second key driver of biodiversity loss and habitation degradation in Vietnam. Vietnam is considered a global development success, having experienced a 6-fold increase in per capita GDP over a single generation, a rapid transition to a middle-income country, and decades of sustained growth. The country saw a massive 70 percent decline in the poverty rate over the last decade alone. The poverty rate was 4.2 percent in 2022, and 3.9 percent in 2023.⁸³ However, this growth across several economic sectors is also associated with negative impacts on biodiversity in the country, including from agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism and aquaculture. Among these, agriculture and forestry are seen as the two economic sectors that have had the greatest impacts on forest biodiversity.

In terms of pressures and anticipated trajectories related to economic development, Vietnam's per capita GDP growth has steadily increased over the past three decades, and was USD3,817 in 2023.⁸⁴ GDP is

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Decision 134/QĐ-BLĐTĐBXH of MoLISA dated January 31, 2024 announcing the results of reviewing poor and near-poor households in 2023 according to the multidimensional poverty norms for the period 2022 – 2025.

⁸² ISPONRE and CBC, 2022.

⁸³ World Bank, 2024. Macro Poverty Outlook for Viet Nam: April 2024 Datasheet.

⁸⁴ Constant 2015 US\$. World Bank economic indicator data, accessed on 8/9/2024. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/>

expected to reach 6.0 percent in 2024 and is forecasted to continue growing through the remainder of this decade. However, the pressures this growth has placed on Vietnam's natural resources and biodiversity are also widely recognized. Higher income levels are anticipated to continue driving increased demand for forest resources and land, hence continuing to degrade biodiversity. The conflicting nature of tradeoffs between economic growth and biodiversity conservation has been particularly salient in coastal zones, but also in the country's forested regions.

In consultations with national level agencies and SUF managers, many of the stakeholders consulted for this assessment believed that the most important drivers of pressures on biodiversity in Vietnam stem from increasing demands on natural resources, which is also linked to persisting poverty in communities near forests, who lack a range of viable livelihood options. Limited livelihood opportunities increase the rural population's dependency on forests, and contribute to market pressures on forest products. In turn, this helps drive and worsen overexploitation of wood, wildlife and NTFPs resources.

Stakeholders consulted for this assessment also highlighted negative impacts from a number of large-scale economic development projects at their sites. Those projects included infrastructure development, urbanization and industrialization, and development of tourism and recreation facilities. Forest land conversion is an especially serious threat in certain regions, due to pressure from hydroelectric development projects (Northern mountainous areas, Central Annamites, Central Highlands and Southeast), developing industrial crops such as cassava, rubber (Central Highlands and Southeast), and industrial zones (Southeast and Southwest).

Table 5. Forest land conversion from different infrastructure and development project types (2006-2016)

No	Different Types of Projects	Number of projects	Forest area converted (ha)
1	Hydropower projects	237	29,582
2	Mining projects	545	15,330
3	Rubber projects	460	327,205
4	Agricultural projects	211	61,964
5	Resettlement projects	57	5,244
6	National security and defense projects	99	4,228
7	Port and industrial zone projects	73	3,895
8	Tourism and service projects	122	4,603
9	Irrigation and channelization projects	80	5,100
10	Rural infrastructure development projects	1,107	19,190

Source: MARD (2016), Report summarizing the implementation of the Law on Forest Protection and Development and proposing directions for amending the Law.

Institutional overlap and insufficient coordination

Institutional overlap in biodiversity management between MONRE and MARD is recognized as an underlying driver of biodiversity loss in Vietnam's 2022 national ecosystem assessment and was also perceived to be an underlying driver of biodiversity loss by some of the stakeholders consulted for this

assessment. Per the Biodiversity Law (2008), MONRE is assigned to be the focal point for the state management of biodiversity, while under the Forestry Law (2017), MARD manages the special-use forest system and marine protected areas. This challenge related to overlapping functions in biodiversity and natural ecosystem management between these two ministries tasked with biodiversity-related mandates includes inadequate coordination between MONRE and MARD in policy development, as well as management and implementation at both central and local levels.⁸⁵ MoNRE is also promoting some other types of areas biodiversity significant such as biodiversity corridors⁸⁶, high-biodiversity areas⁸⁷ or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures. However, the team's consultations indicated these ideas are not always welcome by MARD and its line agencies.

Recent analyses of the SUF system have also suggested that investment in the special-use forest system is currently insufficient,⁸⁸ as was also validated during the assessment team's site visits and consultations with SUF management board members. Most management boards, especially for the nature reserves and species and habitat conservation areas, do not have enough staff and lack resources and equipment to carry out their tasks effectively. Meanwhile, these areas also face pressures from local community demands for natural resources, as well as from markets and other economic development activities. Under-resourced and lacking capacity, the SUF MBs are not able to implement a number of programs of work including biodiversity conservation, monitoring and research, environmental education, tourism and supporting buffer zone livelihoods. This lack of funding and institutional capacity is also an important underlying cause of biodiversity loss in Vietnam.

USAID AND OTHER DONOR PROGRAMMING SUPPORT

USAID Biodiversity Programmatic (Strategies and Interventions) and Geographic Focus

USAID's history of support for biodiversity programming in Vietnam is relatively short, but it has quickly become one of the largest funders in the sector. USAID has provided substantial support for biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam since at least 2016, including through the now closed Green Annamites Activity (GA; 2016-2020; \$24 Million; operated in 17 target areas across two provinces)⁸⁹ and the current Biodiversity Conservation Activity (BCA; 2020-2025; \$38 Million) that operates across 21 protected areas in seven provinces (14 SUFs and 7 protection forests).⁹⁰ Biodiversity co-benefits are also anticipated through USAID's countering wildlife trafficking activities, including the current Saving Threatened Wildlife activity (2021-2026; \$15 Million) and the precursory Saving Species (2016-2021; \$10 Million) and through its Sustainable Landscapes activities in Vietnam. Those activities include the current

⁸⁵ ISPONRE and CBC, 2022.

⁸⁶ Biodiversity Law 2008 (Article 3.8)

⁸⁷ Circular No. 02/2022/TT-BTNMT, dated January 10, 2022 of MoNRE detailing regulations on implementation of a number of articles of the Law on Environmental Protection

⁸⁸ Parr, J.K.W. 2024. Analysis of the Institutional Arrangements for Special-Use Forest Management in Vietnam. IUCN.

⁸⁹ Green Annamites operated in these provinces: Quang Nam, Thua Thien Hue.

⁹⁰ BCA implementation provinces: Dong Nai?, Ha Tinh, Lam Dong, Ninh Binh, Quang Binh, Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue.

Sustainable Forest Management Activity that operates in seven provinces⁹¹ (SFM; 2020-2025; \$36 Million), and the now closed Forest and Deltas Program that included focuses on climate-resilient livelihoods together with forest protection and payments for forest environmental services (VFD; 2012-2021; \$31 Million).⁹² Table 16 in Annex 5 presents a summary list of recent USAID biodiversity programs in Vietnam.

Geographically, USAID's biodiversity programming support has focused primarily in forested landscapes in the North Central Coast provinces and northernmost province of South Central Coast region.⁹³ The Green Annamites activity focused on highly threatened lowland, lowland hill forests, and lower montane forests, as well as somewhat less threatened montane and upper montane forests⁹⁴ in the Central Annamites region.⁹⁵ The current BCA project also includes sites in the Central Highlands, and works strategically in select protection forests and SUFs with an aim of reducing further forest fragmentation⁹⁶ and maintaining forest cover and habit connectivity in landscapes that house key threatened and endemic species (and in turn, help to stabilize key and threatened wildlife populations).

USAID's strategic focus for biodiversity programming in Vietnam, primarily through BCA but also elements of GA and SFM, has been oriented towards strengthening the management of SUFs and protection forests, increasing the functionality of law enforcement systems for forest and/or wildlife crimes, promoting conservation friendly enterprises in forest dependent communities, and reducing local demand for illicit wildlife and forest products. USAID biodiversity programming has typically been implemented across multiple levels, with a primary focus on site-based interventions in selected geographies that consist of selected protected areas (SUFs, production or protection forests) and communities in surrounding buffer zones. Activities typically partner with a range of relevant national (e.g., MARD), provincial (e.g., Provincial DARDs, FPD and FMBs) and local agencies and community partners, together with courts, police and other law enforcement institutions, as well as civil society organizations. At the community level, this has included support to local cooperatives, community patrolling groups and other community-based groups.

All three of these USAID programs have considerable overlap in their strategic focuses, as well as unique elements. Although the livelihoods focus of USAID biodiversity programming has typically been a relatively small subcomponent, each of the three activities have through various interventions worked to strengthen conservation-friendly value chains and livelihoods among local communities in protected area buffer zones, strengthen the foundation for and increase community engagement in forest management

⁹¹ SFM implementation provinces: Lao Cai, Son La, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Quang Tri, and Quang Nam.

⁹² USAID also supported a smaller Mekong Delta Coastal Habitat Conservation activity (2021-202; \$2.9 Million) focused on climate change mitigation/adaptation in Mekong delta.

⁹³ SFM is also implemented in select provinces in Viet Nam's Northwest region.

⁹⁴ By virtue of their location on primarily steep slopes and a greater proportion housed within existing protected areas.

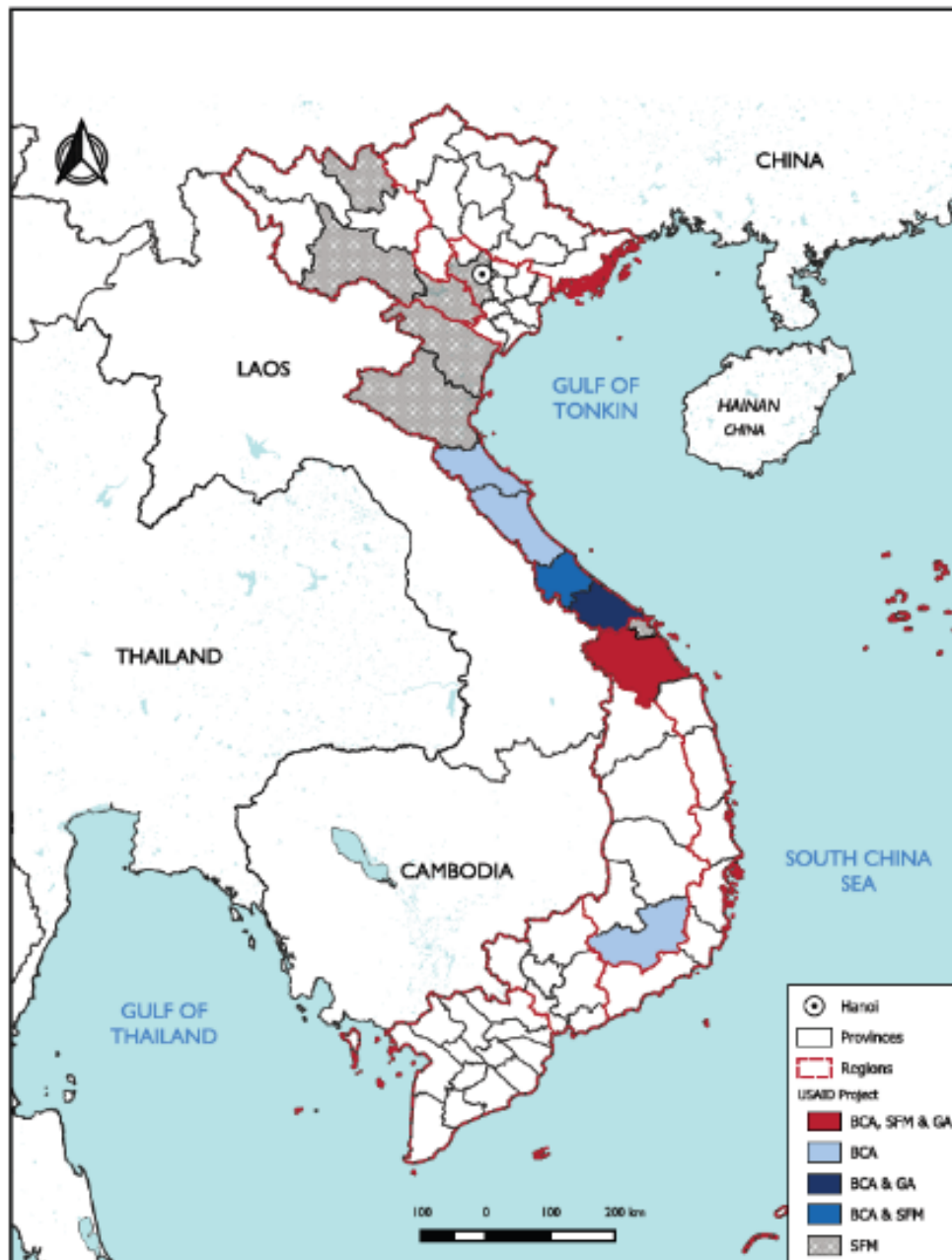
⁹⁵ USAID, 2017. USAID Green Annamites: Biodiversity Conservation Desk Review.

⁹⁶ A recent analysis of forest continuity across the BCA sites showed that all 21 of the BCA sites experienced substantial loss of forest connectivity during 2000-2022, although SUFs experienced a lower decline than PFs, on average. The corresponding provinces where BCA is implemented experience overall change in forest cover during the same time period, ranging from -7.26 percent (Ninh Binh) to -26.9 percent (Quang Tri) (BCA, 2023. Forest Continuity Monitoring in Twenty-One Forest Management Units under the BCA Activity. USAID.)

and monitoring, and engender stronger awareness of and interest in protecting forests and wildlife. The earlier Green Annamites activity and current BCA both had small ecotourism subcomponents that aim to strengthen the foundation for community-based ecotourism in select areas. Working in areas around its 21 PA sites, BCA has also aimed to provide vocational training and help develop or promote engagement in alternative livelihoods for those who engage in illicit hunting and logging.

BCA interventions at the community level include, among others, working with local cooperatives, developing livelihood models for crops and livestock, a range of capacity building, and upgrading ecotourism facilities. BCA is also unique in its expanded focus on national-level policy and institutional elements, and strengthening national as well as local biodiversity and forest monitoring systems and use of data to inform policies and conservation planning at national and local levels. These efforts have included support into revising and strengthening the national SMART data model and Vietnam's national forest and biodiversity monitoring systems. BCA has also focused on building CSO management and technical capacity to implement species conservation projects, with an aim to strengthen the engagement of CSOs and research organizations in in-situ and ex-situ species conservation actions. USAID's biodiversity support focus has also moved in new directions since earlier programming iterations. According to stakeholders consulted for this assessment, USAID's BCA project has had an immense impact on thinking and approaches towards threat mitigation inside the SUF system. The adoption of SMART patrolling systems with associated databases, combined with rigorous camera trapping monitoring provide high quality datasets on law enforcement efforts, the location and intensity of threats and the population trends of the threatened and endangered wildlife. The assessment team's consultation with a range of stakeholders indicated there is widespread belief in the value of continuing to promote and strengthen the SMART system, as a tool to improve effective protection and data management.

Figure 14. Map of provinces receiving USAID Biodiversity Programming Support (2016-2025)



Other Donor Programmatic (Strategies and Interventions) and Geographic Focus

Other key bi-lateral donors in the biodiversity conservation space in Vietnam include KfW, GIZ, and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), as well as the Global Environment Facility and African Development Bank multi-laterals. Over the past decade or so, other donor-funded projects in the biodiversity conservation space in Vietnam have tended to focus on addressing PA management challenges to build PA management capacity at both central and site level, reducing biodiversity threats, improving connectivity of PAs and reducing fragmentation. The multi-laterals do not have the same

species-level focus that USAID has, focusing instead on higher-level policy and technical support within MoNRE and other ministries. Much of the recent donor support is broadly similarly aligned with USAID's, though the technical emphasis or degree of support may differ. GIZ, for example, recently has supported site-level governance and equity assessments, SMART, and improving protected area financing and SUF performance.

Some projects have focused on standardizing practices, including on improving biodiversity baseline and monitoring, conservation, education, tourism and rescue-rewilding. These include the Strengthening Management of Protected Areas in Vietnam project (SPAM) and Removing Barriers Hindering Protected Area Management Effectiveness in Viet Nam. The Green Annamites activity supported biodiversity baselines in some PAs in Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam provinces, while more recently the Biodiversity Conservation Activity has improved biodiversity baselines in at least 21 PAs and Protection forests. In addition, Vietnamese NGOs such as GreenViet, Save Vietnam's Wildlife, and Center for Nature Conservation and Development and others also implement small scale biodiversity baseline projects in an effort to standardize baselines at PA level for conservation flagship species and groups of species. These NGOs have also begun some nascent work with GoVN to plan for rewilding in selected areas. Many of the projects have also aimed to promote standardized enforcement, capacity building and supervision across sites, and emphasized law enforcement, SMART adoption, and strengthening community patrol teams (particularly for snaring). Somewhat distinct from other donors, KfW projects have to a greater extent promoted livelihood development linked to threat mitigation in the buffer zones in all SUF projects.

The geographic focus for non-USAID biodiversity programming has been primarily in the Red River delta, the Central Highlands, the Southern Coast and the Mekong delta. A list of major recent USAID and other donor programming support for biodiversity conservation is provided in Table 18 of Annex 6.

Fit of Current Donor Assistance with Current Threats to Biodiversity

The assessment team's analysis suggests that the current focus of donor assistance for biodiversity conservation in Vietnam has been oriented to address current direct threats to biodiversity in the country. Much of the support has been appropriately focused on stemming forest loss and fragmentation and reducing hunting and illegal logging by addressing protected area management challenges, building management capacity and standardizing practices at central and site levels, conducting and strengthening capacity to conduct biodiversity assessments and monitoring, and introducing activities to reduce specific key threats to biodiversity, such as SMART patrolling and mobilizing community patrol teams.

According to GoVN and other stakeholders consulted, the focus on improving PA connectivity and reducing further fragmentation of Vietnam's forests, particularly by GEF and KfW funded projects as well as other donors, has also been important for addressing fragmentation and hunting threats. GIZ support has been important for promoting standardized enforcement capacity and supervision, while the emphasis on enforcement and SMART adoption, and promoting community patrol teams, has had some success in reducing snaring.

Current donor assistance for biodiversity conservation in Vietnam to mitigate biodiversity threats also reflects the emphasis of conservation approaches within the Asian region more generally over the last two decades, where a key approach for mitigating threats to biodiversity has been through the adoption of the SMART patrolling system. The adoption of SMART patrolling systems with associated databases, provides high quality datasets on law enforcement efforts, the location and intensity of threats and the population trends of the threatened and endangered wildlife. The generated maps on the spatial distribution of threats and the occupancy of wildlife species are visually impacting, and the data obtained helps to inform planning decisions and aligns well with national policy to maintain forest cover.

Recent programs have also helped to strengthen the country's enforcement agenda, including the notable wider promulgation of the SMART system in 2022⁹⁷ that emerged from MARD and GIZ joint cooperation on SUF management over the last 15 years.⁹⁸ To support the accessibility and use of data, an online reporting system for protected areas was introduced. SMART is designed to support the effective management of protected areas by providing a harmonized monitoring approach and tailored data collection and analysis. Many stakeholders consulted for this assessment agreed this has had an immense ongoing impact on reducing threats to biodiversity in Vietnam nationwide.

GIZ and other donor programming support has also focused on standardizing many conservation and management practices, such as introducing SMART, technical support to standardize biodiversity and baseline monitoring, and rescue practices. According to stakeholders consulted for this assessment, this has been particularly effective for achieving better forest patrolling and biodiversity monitoring, and better database system management (at the site level) that improves PA management and biodiversity conservation overall. Although much USAID and other donor programming has focused more tangentially on livelihoods improvements in conservation landscapes, KfW has promoted livelihoods development linked to threat mitigation in buffer zones around all SUF projects and there is opportunity to strengthen that model. Similarly, USAID's BCA has more explicitly aimed to engage hunters and loggers in patrolling and alternative livelihoods opportunities.

PROGRAMMATIC GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The assessment team's analysis of historical and ongoing programming support across USAID and other donors, fit with the current trajectory of threats and underlying drivers of biodiversity loss, emphasizes from broader document review, and stakeholder inputs across the range of consultations, highlighted multiple areas where future programming can help fill important gaps or strengthen areas of weakness. These gaps or weaknesses are discussed below, while Table 6 at the end of this section highlights six key areas that may constitute important opportunities for future programming consideration.

⁹⁷ On 7 July 2022, the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry issued the Decision No. 197 promulgating the Procedure for the standardized application of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) in protected forests in Vietnam. (Government of Vietnam (2022). Decision No. 197/QĐ-TCLN-ĐDPH. Procedure for the standardized application of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) in protected forests in Vietnam.)

⁹⁸ Under the GIZ funded "Conservation and Sustainable Use of Forest Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Viet Nam. (2014-2021)" there was a component on strengthening forest protection, delivered at the central level. Between 2014 and 2017, 10 out of 18 SMART sites in Viet Nam were supported by this project.

Multiple stakeholders at site, province and national levels called attention to the lack of sufficient or systematic species or site-level data. The data gaps vary across sites, but there was general consensus that north Vietnam is most data-poor in this respect.

Two additional opportunities identified by this assessment are around (1) additional work to increase the effectiveness of the SMART system, patrolling and community-based wildlife crime prevention to reduce snaring and hunting threats, which the assessment team found to still be at high level in most of the sites visited for this assessment, despite positive progress / downward trajectories; and (2) strengthening sustainable management of natural resources by forest dependent local communities, particularly for non-timber forest products, that is informed by targeted participatory research on the nature of local communities' natural resource use and dependence.

Consultations with the Management Boards of both Phong Dien NR and Dakrong NR were notable in that they both highlighted that snaring and hunting levels remained high in their areas, while NTFP harvesting by local communities was also intensive and widespread. Both of these SUFs are BCA sites and both sites have been trained in law enforcement, both sites utilize the SMART patrolling system and supporting database. As both of these sites (Phong Dien NR and Dakrong NR) are also identified as Tier 2 rewilding sites by the BCA project, this reinforces the opportunity, or perhaps important need, for future programming support to identify actions that can be taken to continue strengthening the effectiveness of the SMART and related systems introduced to date. Incidentally, stakeholders in all of the other 11 SUFs visited by the assessment team also reported that hunting and snaring remained significant, despite some downward trajectory.

The opportunity for future programming to strengthen sustainable management of natural resources by forest-dependent local communities stems from the second most serious threat reported by the 13 MBs of all the 13 SUF sites during the assessment consultations, which was the exploitation of non-timber forest products that was generally deemed to be a medium threat. Management Boards indicated they were aware that their ongoing patrolling efforts had some overlap with the legal rights of the forest dependent communities to access natural resources. A key concern here is that NTFP harvesting often necessitates individuals accessing the interior of the SUFs, which increases the potential for additional direct threats to forest species and habitat. The links between NTFP harvesting may, or may not, be directly linked to hunting and snaring.

Understanding the perspectives of the local communities and their dependence on natural resources is paramount for generating meaningful management responses through future programming. Thus, there is also an opportunity for future programs to conduct research via a participatory process with local communities, to obtain a detailed understanding of the nature of local community dependence and use of various forest products. This includes cataloging the different types of non-timber forest products harvested, including medicinal plants being collected, the location and density of these species, their economic value and the proportion of the livelihood' incomes generated, particularly for households with limited or no access to agricultural land. This participatory research should be conducted between the forest dependent communities, the respective Management Board and concerned district partners, and will also generate accurate natural resource maps linked to villagers' traditional land beliefs. In turn,

the information from these types of exercise can be used to inform programming decisions on activities and interventions to strengthen locally driven sustainable management of such resources.

Table 6. Key programming gaps and corresponding opportunities for future programming

Biodiversity Data	
	Lack of biodiversity datasets to inform management and planning. ⁹⁹ Most SUFs outside of the BCA sites had poor or largely absent biodiversity datasets upon which to base effective management of the protected areas, and to generate high quality and sustainable five-year Management Plans. Prior studies also highlight key data gaps and a lack of systematic monitoring of Vietnam's biodiversity, including on population size, distribution and conservation status. ¹⁰⁰
	Strengthen biodiversity datasets to inform management and planning. Quality biodiversity assessments and baselines at the site level constitute an essential foundation for programming investments within targeted SUFs. These assessments should target different taxonomic groups (mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians), and complimentary vegetation surveys should also be undertaken, particularly in sites with high altitudinal clines or localized flora. In addition, biodiversity assessments that focus on NTFPs and medicinal plants should be done in parallel. This research should assist in promoting ex-situ cultivation of high value products.
SUF Management Board Capacity	
	Weak capacities of SUF MBs were raised as a serious management constraint during the assessment team's consultations with representatives from GoVN national agencies and by Management Board representatives. All SUF MBs interviewed indicated a strong need for dedicated capacity building program. The management skills required to undertake various field programs for protected area management are extremely specialized and are applied to management decisions operating within complex landscapes. For MBs to become effective they require the highest standards of training available in the country, through on-site training programs that take into account the complex landscapes and diverse skills required of individuals in these professions. There is also a need for a human resources policy for SUF management on staffing levels, capacity building, competencies, monitoring and evaluation and PA promotion.
	Strengthen capacity across a broad range of SUF management-related fields of expertise. MBs should be trained by leading national and international experts in technical fields of PA management (e.g., biodiversity research and monitoring, law enforcement, environment education, village land use planning, livelihood development for conservation, and tourism) to the highest standards in country. This should be attained through on-site training programs, augmented by a suite of diverse capacity building approaches. Human resources policy for SUF management should be prepared on staffing issues highlighted above.
Sustainable Long-term Law Enforcement System	
	Absence of long-term effective law enforcement programs. Among all Management Boards consulted by the assessment team, those that reported lacking resources also faced constraints in initiating SMART patrolling systems and with supporting databases. They reported filling out reports in their notebooks or other formats. Consequently, monitoring their performance efforts and the location and intensity of threats remained problematic. Even relatively well-supported Management Boards, such as those at the two BCA sites visited, expressed concerns regarding the sustainability of their ongoing and effective law enforcement programs. While they perceived the level of threats to have declined as a result of their efforts, they were still present at some level. Considerable gains in populations of endangered and threatened wildlife species could be

⁹⁹ Note that MONRE has a JICA funded biodiversity database, but it is not fully institutionalized with MARD and SUFs.

¹⁰⁰ Thuai et al., 2021. Noting that USAID has substantially contributed to filling this gap in a number of SUFs via BCA.

lost if their programs are terminated as donor-supported activities come to a close. Community patrol team members who are currently important mobilizers for behavioral change within their respective communities could also in essence become “unemployed”.



Establish and maintain effective law enforcement programs. MBs at most of the BCA sites should be supported to continue their ongoing long-term, and highly effective law enforcement programs to protect populations of endangered and threatened endemic wildlife species present in the evergreen forests and related forest ecosystems of the Annamites. Community patrol team members should be funded for their low cost, but highly productive endeavours, as mobilizers for behavioural change within their respective communities. Meanwhile SMART patrolling systems and supporting databases should be initiated in all other targeted SUFs.

Livelihoods Support Linked to Threat Mitigation



Weak linkages to threat mitigation in ongoing livelihood programs. Given the importance of the long-term vision that buffer zone villagers become guardians of biodiversity values within SUFs, there is a need to accelerate bridge building between MBs and communities, and to increase their role in threat mitigation. Current efforts by Helvetas, KfW8 and KfW10 did not make institutional linkages to the Management Boards, and the livelihoods interventions ultimately did not prioritize threat mitigation. It is important that livelihood interventions are targeted towards reducing snaring and hunting levels, establishing sustainable NTFP harvesting regimes, ex-situ NTFP cultivation, curtailing demands for illegal logging and stabilizing protected area boundaries.



Strengthen livelihood development for conservation programs linked directly to threat mitigation. There is an immense opportunity to generate modern multi-functional protected areas¹⁰¹ with livelihood development for conservation (ecodevelopment) components that demonstrate sustainable livelihoods funding streams. These interventions will support the long-term objective of buffer zone villagers as guardians of biodiversity values within SUFs. It will accelerate bridge building between MBs and communities themselves to play a prominent role in threat mitigation. There is an opportunity for future programming to improve on prior models to link threat mitigation to livelihoods improvements, as well as to strengthen the policy orientation of GoVN agencies and the conservation community more broadly to this.

District and Provincial Institutional Linkages



Weak institutional linkages between Management Boards and districts and provinces. *District partnerships:* Currently, MBs have agreements with district police and FPD to implement interagency programs on law enforcement. When asked about district collaboration, many MBs consulted by the assessment team stated they had general agreements of cooperation, but nothing specific to specialized areas of PA work. Yet there are many district officers whose mandates overlap with aspects of MB objectives and work programs. The team’s consultations suggested functional cooperation has been established in at least some sites (for example, Na Hang NP and Xuan Lien NR). There is great potential to train district partners and to develop more robust field programs.

Provincial MB stakeholder forums: Stakeholder consultations indicated gaps in technical support and weaknesses in provincial-level mandates, modes of operation, and institutional coordination. Provincial MB forums can be established and strengthened through dedicated technical support to review membership, mandates and modes of operation.



Strengthen institutional linkages with districts and provinces. *District partnerships:* District partners, whose mandates overlap with similar MB objectives and programs of work, should be trained

¹⁰¹ As described by Appleton et al. 2011

alongside their SUF MB counterparts during on-site training programs. This will facilitate the development of more robust field programs on environmental education involving the district Education Department and the Youth Union; to develop livelihood development for conservation programs with the district rural development extension officers, and to develop tourism programs in collaboration with the district tourism counterparts. These collaborative management mechanisms should introduce more sustainability in terms of trained manpower, more impact and a greater sense of socializing the protected areas both with the government officials and with the villagers.

Provincial MB stakeholder forums: There is an opportunity to further support and strengthen provincial MB forums, including through district working partnerships and linked livelihoods and sustainable natural management interventions. Stakeholder consultations with FFI highlighted an innovative and potentially promising model to strengthen provincial-level institutional discussions and coordination that FFI has implemented with Management Advisory Committees within its endangered primate sites.¹⁰² This stakeholder forum has also been adopted more recently in Phong Nha-Ke Bang NP and nine other BCA sites.¹⁰³

SUF Management Board Guidance



Lack of guidance on SUF MB organization and employment technical positions. There is a lack of clear guidance on SUF MB organization, including senior level staffing arrangements and the staffing levels required in the different technical fields of specialization. There is also no reference to the backgrounds or required work experience linked to Terms of Reference.



Provide clear guidance on SUF MB organization and employment positions. A regulation should be prepared to give clear guidance on SUF MB organization, including senior level staffing arrangements and the staffing levels required in the different technical fields of specialization. The indicative staffing levels might be different between national parks and other management categories. The backgrounds or required work experience should be linked to Terms of Reference.

Geographic Gaps and Opportunities

The assessment team's analysis also called attention to some key gaps and opportunities that vary by geography, taking into account the focus of prior and current USAID and other donor-supported biodiversity programming. These are highlighted in Figure 15 below. The most obvious geographic gap is biodiversity support in forested landscapes in northern Vietnam. There was consensus among stakeholders that northern Vietnam has received much less biodiversity programming support in general, has lower management and protection capacity and less or less recent relevant data to inform management, while forests are to some extent more fragmented. Most national level GoVN and international stakeholders consulted agreed that focusing some effort there is warranted. But, would likely require a different focus and approach than for the Central Annamites, Central Highlands and similar areas with more historical support, where the ability to build from existing foundations present different immediate needs and offer different opportunities to increase programming effectiveness.

¹⁰² These comprise Trung Khanh SHCA in Cao Bang province, Khu Ca SHCA in Ha Giang province and Mu Cang Chai SHCA in Yen Bai province. Note the Mu Cang Chai MAC was reported to have collapsed through poor provincial logistical support, some 180 km away.

¹⁰³ BCA has established Multi-Stakeholder Management Committees at some sites, using a model that aims to connect local communities with Management Boards and promote participation in PA management. In future, these committees could also consider attention to livelihoods support together with the current PA management focus.

Figure 15. Key Biodiversity Support Gaps and Programming Opportunities by Geographic Region

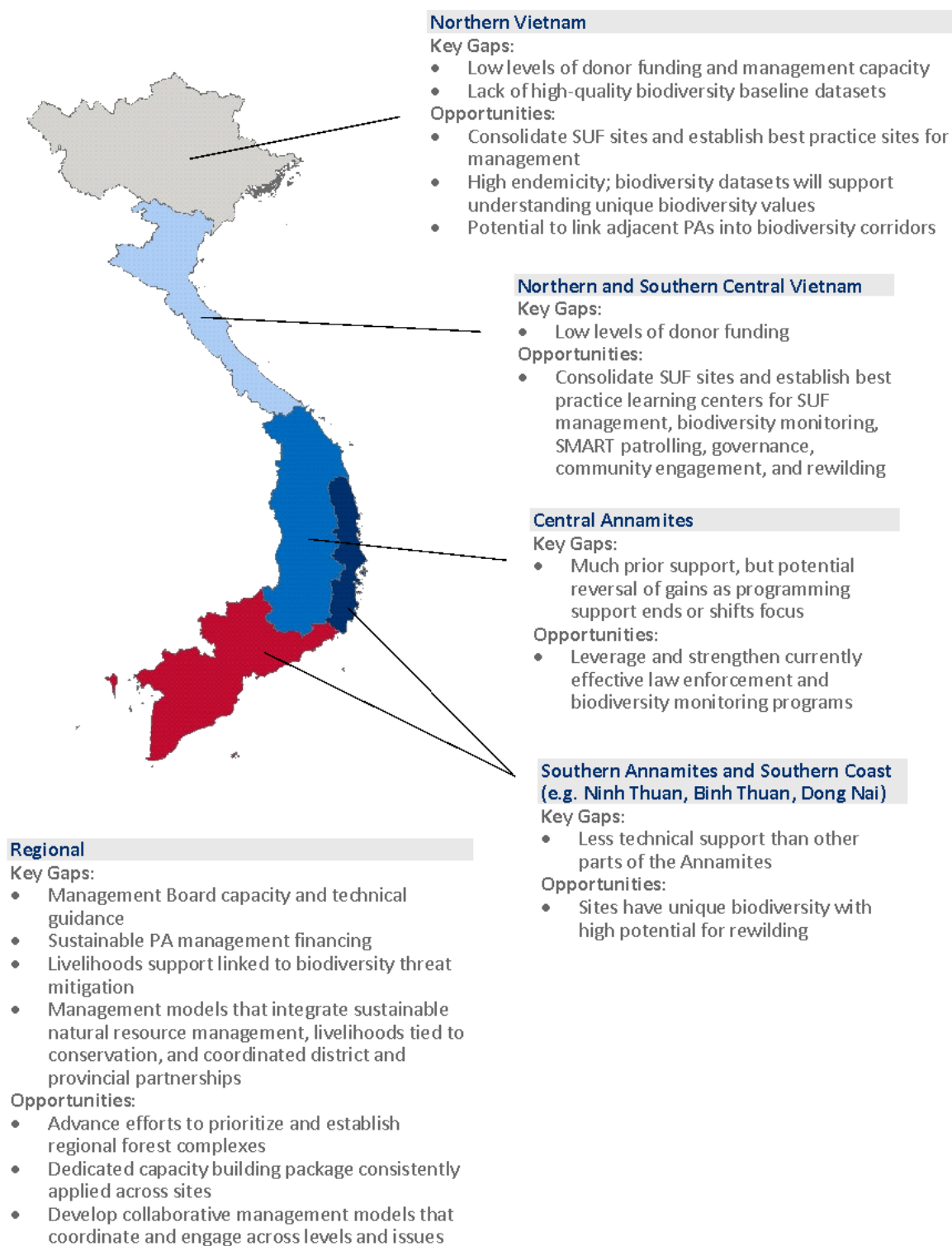


Figure Notes:**Northern Vietnam**

- SUFs in this region had received low levels of funding from all donors over the previous decade or so. Northern Vietnam has outdated/poor biodiversity baseline datasets, upon which to support upgrading or re-delineation of forest areas. The datasets for the biodiversity values in the major taxonomic groups were either absent or outdated, providing a poor foundation on which to implement management programs. Threats to all reserves were deemed diverse, intensive and severely impacting the internationally significant populations of flora and fauna.
- Some SUF sites in Northern Vietnam are prescribed in the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy in the period 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050. These sites are described in the Strategy as follows: the national parks of Ba Be, Bai Tu Long, Du Gia – Dong Van Stone highland, Hoang Lien, Phia Oac-Phia Den mountain, Tam Dao, Xuan Son, etc.; nature reserves, species and habitat conservation areas, as well as historical and landscape forests. Northern Vietnam has not established any best practice sites for SUF management, aside from Cuc Phuong National Park.
- Northern Vietnam has the most numerous and diversity of PA's types (park, reserve, Species and Habitat conservation area, landscape and historical site, scientific experimental area); they were also the earlier established ones and having a good representing of most of the typical ecosystems and holding most of the threatened and endemic species in the region. However, Most of the SUFs in the north Vietnam are small but they are relatively connected or close to each other therefore area still important area for globally important and endemic species such as the Tonkin Snub-nosed monkey, Franciosi langur, Black gibbon and Caovit gibbon, and many endemic bird, bats and amphibian and reptile that represent the unique limestone landscape of the northern provinces.

Northern and Southern Central Vietnam

- South Central region has some of the rarest and most important habitat types in Vietnam, especially the coastal dry forests and sand dunes. But, this region has not had significant project support to date.
- In Northern Central Vietnam, some SUF sites in Central Vietnam show potential for being promoted as best practice learning centers on biodiversity monitoring and SMART patrolling (e.g., Xuan Lien NR, Pu Mat NP). These are sites that have good facilities for hosting and access to learning such as their community patrol and PFES finance mechanism. Ben En National Park, Xuan Lien NR, Pu Hu NR and Pu Luong NR in Thanh Hoa province have relatively high biodiversity values, and show potential as a learning center on governance, community engagement and rewilding (e.g., dark muntjac, northern white-cheeked gibbon, otter and Owston's palm civet).
- In Southern Central Vietnam, protecting and strengthening certain existing SUF sites in Southern Central Vietnam are specifically prescribed in the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy in the period 2021-2030, with a vision to 2050. These sites are described in the Strategy as: the national parks of Phuoc Binh, Nui Chua, Song Thanh, etc.; and, to continue with the establishment of special-use forests located in the South of the Annamite Mountains.

Central Annamites

- Currently, the BCA project is providing support to 21 PAs largely concentrated in the Central Annamites. Once BCA closes in 2025, the region and the protected areas within the Central Annamites region will experience a funding management gap in ensuing years in the absence of future project support. The potential funding gap has been somewhat exacerbated by the strong focus on core zone agenda, and limited focus on the two priority government economic agendas of ecotourism and livelihood development in the buffer zones.

Southern Annamites and Southern Coast (e.g. Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, Dong Nai)

- For example, Dong Nai NR could be an excellent model with strong political support and financial commitment of the provincial authority toward conservation efforts as PAs has been given strong autonomy and good investment to achieve conservation goals. Examples includes for elephant, gibbon and douc langur population recovery and future rewilding initiatives. Protected areas in Binh Thuan and Ninh

Thuan are a potential focus for the protection and rewilding of typical ecosystems and species of dry and coastal forests of South Coastal province, with many globally important animal and plant species.

Regional Level

- Vietnam's Forestry Strategy does promote the concept of establishing forest complexes. There is an opportunity to move forward efforts to consider options and identify priorities, from a regional perspective, and move forward with the work to establish these forest complexes. Protected Areas in Northern, North Central and Southern Annamite are relatively close to each other and therefore could be a good geographical area for establishing a forest complex or a PA cluster approach to promote landscape management and cluster capacity building and experience exchanges to improve conservation effectiveness and best practices.
 - On collaborative management models, currently there are no priority geographies linking (i) the sustainable natural resource management component, (ii) the livelihood development for conservation program; and (iii) the promotion of district partnerships and the provincial stakeholder forums.¹⁰⁴ These integrated agendas need high quality technical support and evaluation. Consider locating these modern multi-functional management models close to Hanoi, so policy makers can become aware of the mechanism and evaluate for themselves the merits of adopting some of the approaches nationwide. Geographically, the northern PAs would also be relevant based on the cultural and economic conditions. They have a diversity of ethnic minority groups but they are all relatively connected with good collaboration.
-

Objective 2 Findings and Conclusions: Opportunities and Considerations for New Strategic Directions

Objective 2: Take stock of the common types of strategic approaches and interventions USAID and other donors have supported over recent decades in Vietnam and assess opportunities for USAID to consider investing in new or innovative additional strategies and interventions, to increase the effectiveness of its biodiversity conservation work.

Taking account of the common strategic approaches and interventions that USAID and other donors have supported, the assessment SOW called for the team to consider and assess opportunities across four different potential strategic priorities for future USAID biodiversity programming consideration:

- Sustainable Finance and Ecotourism Development;
- Rewilding;
- Training and Capacity Building; and
- National and Provincial Policy Frameworks.

We highlight key findings for each of these broad areas in the ensuing subsections, focusing for each of the four strategic priorities on: summarizing USAID and Vietnam's historical programming focus on this issue, the potential it has to substantially increase biodiversity conservation programming effectiveness, key challenges and enabling conditions, and then turning to discussion of specific strategies and interventions that USAID might consider and why.

SUSTAINABLE FINANCE AND ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

¹⁰⁴ Based on the team's data collection, Phong Nha Ke Bang NP in Quang Binh province is one potential example where this development may be in progress.

Vietnam has experienced dramatic growth in tourism and ecotourism sectors in recent decades, and GoVN as well as many conservation organizations and bi/multi-lateral donors have recognized the potential for this trajectory to be more strongly harnessed in service of biodiversity objectives. Per GoVN statistics, tourism revenue in Vietnam increased more than 40-fold during 2000-2010, from VND 17 to 726 trillion, and was VND 755 trillion by 2019.¹⁰⁵ In 2024, tourism is projected to account for seven percent of Vietnam's GDP, while one in nine jobs in the country are estimated to be supported by the travel and tourism sector. By 2034, the sector is forecasted to employ nearly 8 million people.¹⁰⁶

SUFs in Vietnam are a central focus of ecotourism activities and revenue. More than one-third, or at least 61 SUFs, had some form of organized ecotourism by 2019, including at least 26 that were designated as National parks (the majority). In 2019, Vietnam received 2.4 million visitors to SUFs, more than double the number from 2015, and obtained VND 185 billion in revenue, a 140 percent increase over 2015. Nearly 98 percent of ecotourism visitors in 2019 visited a national park.¹⁰⁷

A strategic focus on ecotourism development that is embedded and well-integrated within a broader theory of change offers clear potential to increase the effectiveness of future USAID biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam. This statement is made against the backdrop of remarkable current and projected growth in the sector in Vietnam, including a growing market share of “ecotourists” within the sector, and bolstered by strong prioritization by various Government strategies and the geographic focus and potential for ecotourism that is largely in forested landscapes and PAs.

As confirmed by nearly all stakeholders consulted on this issue, and via the assessment team's site visits, **each region of Vietnam exhibits different contexts and needs for ecotourism development**, ranging from major capacity gaps at the PA level (particularly in North Vietnam, but also evident in each of the regions the team visited) to more tailored or advanced needs in PAs where past interventions have established a stronger foundation for effective ecotourism programming that is linked to reducing specific site-level biodiversity threats and the broader underlying drivers discussed above. Several stakeholders consulted by the team also highlighted the need to ensure that ecotourism is done well and in ways that move away from a mass tourism model, ensuring it is linked with community and livelihoods needs in buffer zones. Although they are separate issues and each important on its own, three of the five provincial level consultations, together with interviews with multi-laterals and conservation organizations also highlighted the potential, at least in some sites¹⁰⁸, for a more explicitly integrated ecotourism and rewilding-oriented strategy and messaging that links ecotourism opportunities and benefits with rewilding objectives and activities.

¹⁰⁵ We report 2019 data, given significant global travel and tourism disruptions after 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹⁰⁶ World Travel and Tourism Council's 2024 Economic Impact Research. <https://wtcc.org/research/economic-impact>

¹⁰⁷ Thuairé et al, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Based on natural conditions and ecotourism advantage, the most relevant potential sites where rewilding could work well with eco-tourism might include: Na Hang NR, Ba Be NP, Xuan Lien, Pu Luong NR and Vu Quang NP, Phong Nha NP, and the Dong Nai NR.

Multiple stakeholders also highlighted that **a stronger USAID engagement with ecotourism would likely require different approaches in each region**. The assessment team recommends a phased approach for Northern Vietnam, focused initially on fundamental capacity gaps such as training and related technical assistance, and the establishment of tourism units. Reflecting issues highlighted by several stakeholders consulted for this assessment, priorities for more tailored ecotourism interventions should be informed by a comprehensive site inventory of tourism values and products and site capacity assessment to identify gaps for ecotourism. In other regions (e.g., North Central, Central and Southern Annamites, Southern Vietnam) ecotourism interventions may build on relatively solid foundations in some sites,¹⁰⁹ including leveraging successful models in existing BCA sites. USAID can also consider new and innovative tools for ecotourism and sustainable financing, including tourism carrying capacity studies (currently not applied in Vietnam's PA network), models for self-generating tourism income, interactive use of mobile technology with visitors (noting the high level of smartphone use and of social media engagement in Vietnam society), and development and promotion of tourism "loops".¹¹⁰

The assessment team found that **most PAs lack a legal system, require clarification on its use, or have capacity gaps in implementing a system for collecting entrance fees or generating other forms of revenue, such as concession fees**. This was particularly prevalent in North Vietnam where most of the PAs do not have an ecotourism management plan. There is an opportunity here for USAID to consider improving these systems at the local level. In terms of sustainable financing for ecotourism, consultations suggest that for most PAs this level of capacity is fully lacking; most PAs have little or no financial analysis of tourism (i.e. revenue generation from tourism) applied to PA management and planning processes. Moreover, the assessment found that Management Boards in all sites require stronger technical guidance on how tourism should be implemented within the PA system, which may be another potential entry point (i.e. effective modeling and implementation of new policy guidelines at local levels).

There is also a lack of educational awareness and communication programs at most PAs.

However, the assessment team found that some individual PAs (including BCA sites such as Bidoup – Nui Ba and Phong Nha – Ke Bang) have been relatively successful in developing initial ecotourism programs and financing mechanisms,¹¹¹ and therefore are relevant to become potential learning models for ecotourism under future programs. At the same time, the park should have a clear and transparent plan that regulates how that revenue would be used, especially to improve conservation effort on the ground, and it would need a national regulation on how tourism revenue from the PA system would be used to improve conservation of biodiversity and restoration of natural habitats. Similarly, **specific models for effective investment and community engagement could be promoted and learned from**, including but not limited to sites such as Dong Nai NR (model for long-term province-level PA

¹⁰⁹ For example: Phong Nha – Ke Bang, Bidoup – Nui Ba, Bach Ma, Cat Tien.

¹¹⁰ This was raised by multiple stakeholders. The concept is to promote multi-site tourism itineraries/routes that reflect landscape-level natural and human environmental characteristics as a means to motivate stakeholders and attract ecotourists.

¹¹¹ For example, Phong Nha – Ke Bang Tourism Center is a self-financing enterprise unit under the Management Board. These site and others (e.g. Cat Tien; Bi Doup – Nui Ba) have key affiliated institutions, such as a Center for Ecotourism and Environmental Education.

investment), Xuan Lien NR (decentralized financial governance model) and Phong Nha-Ke Bang NP (private sector engagement in tourism investment).

There is also an opportunity to strengthen connections between site-based ecotourism, livelihoods improvements and conservation threat reductions. Based on PA, GoVN and NGO consultations, the assessment team found some evidence that ecotourism in PA buffer zones has been used as a tool to improve local livelihoods and engage communities more effectively in supporting conservation efforts as a means of sustaining their income through ecotourism.¹¹² For example, the team's consultations found evidence of this for some local communities in BCA project sites and Muong La NR, where communities engaged in ecotourism activities such as homestays during peak periods, and that these positive experiences had led to their greater engagement in community patrols and overall increased buy-in for conservation objectives.

Finally, the **lack of national standards**, such as guidelines on ecotourism best practices and tourism development in PAs and conservation areas, creates further challenges for effective ecotourism development across the entire PA network. This **presents an opportunity for future programming to include activities or support for the development of national guidelines, training manuals and nationally led training.**

Historical programming focus

Ecotourism began to gain prominence in Vietnam in the early 2000s, in particular through the adoption of the Law on Forest Protection and Development (2004). Significant progress in mainstreaming ecotourism activities was made in a number of individual PAs during this time, but progress was mostly linked to specific project initiatives at those sites. Ecotourism was not prescribed within the management responsibilities of the SUF MB until 2010, through Decree 117, and consequently had not been considered by Management Boards and national decision-makers as a mainstream activity compared to other PA fields such as enforcement.

Vietnam's ecotourism agenda was revitalized through the passage of the 2017 Forestry Law. Ecotourism is described in Decree 156 (2018) as a Management Board responsibility. However, the assessment team's consultations with Management Boards, MARD (Forestry Department) and NGOs pointed to a strong consensus view that management prescriptions for Management Boards are vague and lack detailed guidance. Stakeholders consulted for this assessment noted that Vietnam's ecotourism development has not progressed substantially since the Forestry Law went into force. As such, ecotourism development in protected areas should be viewed as a relatively new economic activity in Vietnam, and especially in SUFs outside of the designated national parks.

As highlighted in some PA sites (e.g. Phong Nha-Ke Bang; Cat Tien; Pu Luong) where project supported ecotourism interventions have led to demonstrable benefits,¹¹³ a PA-focused ecotourism agenda can be

¹¹² This was particularly evident in visits to Nui Chua, Bao Cang FPD, Xuan Lien and Dong Nai, as well as in consultations with Helvetas, Save Vietnam's Wildlife and WWF.

¹¹³ Self-financed programs, expanded visitor educational centers, and improved quality of ecotourism products and services.

important for increasing biodiversity conservation effectiveness at sites. The focus of such a set of activities should include Management Board, provincial authorities and relevant staff to ensure that activities are site-focused and tailored to the needs of a given site. A similar program for MARD at the level of National Parks could also be developed. It is also important to increase awareness of PA managers, staff, policy-makers and the general public on the merits of ecotourism in contrast to mass tourism and distinguishing it from “quasi-ecotourism” that is increasingly prevalent in Vietnam.¹¹⁴ Ecotourism’s innovative methods and potential to generate much needed funds for biodiversity conservation, and as a source of income for local communities and individuals that can support threat reduction when implemented properly – was recognized by stakeholders at the majority of PA sites the assessment team visited. However, the consultations also revealed that direct experience has been limited and most PAs exhibit key capacity, infrastructure and policy gaps that are hindering its effective implementation.

Outside of USAID support, at least three prior donor-funded programs have had a notable focus on sustainable finance and ecotourism in recent years:¹¹⁵

- **JICA-funded “Training on Community-based eco-tourism” project (2010-2011):** Implemented by Vietnam National Park and Protected Area Association represented the first training and effort to facilitate ecotourism within Vietnam’s PA system.
- **GIZ-funded “Programme on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Forest Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Vietnam” (2014-2021):** Focused on strengthening management capacity of PAs for data and information management, SMART adoption and establishing sustainable financing strategies.
- **German government funded (BMB IKI) “PA solution project” (2016-2021):** Focused on PA governance, IUCN Green List¹¹⁶ and ecotourism in the context of climate change and COVID-19.

Current USAID programming has also had some ecotourism emphasis across at least two activities.

- **USAID-funded BCA project:** Supports sustainable value chain development, including ecotourism values chains, led by Helvetas Vietnam. Training courses were organized for about 1,200 ethnic minorities in the ecotourism chains in Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Quang Nam, and Thua Thien – Hue to improve livelihoods for communities living in the buffer zones of national parks and nature reserves in Vietnam.
- **USAID-funded SFM project:** Supports conservation-friendly enterprise models and training, including related to tourism value chains in priority sites (e.g. Pu Luong Nature Reserve, Thanh Hoa).
- **USAID-funded Green Annamites project:** Livelihood tasks included some limited activities on ecotourism.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ See Dang, T.K.P (2023). Green Nature or Green Fantasies: Representations of Ecotourism in Vietnam; Sustainability 2023, 15(5), 4601; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15054601>

¹¹⁵ A fourth project, currently undergoing GoVN approval, is a UNDP-supported activity in Ninh Thuan and Phong Nha Ke Bang that focuses on ecotourism and will involve local organizations as well as the Tourism Department Ministry of Sports, Culture, and Tourism.

¹¹⁶ The Green List is a PA performance standard.

¹¹⁷ Specifically: promotion products for marketing community-based ecotourism sites in 2 villages; familiarization trip along "Legendary Green Annamites Route" for tour operators, tourist companies, and travel bloggers to introduce products and services.

However, the current and recent prior USAID activities (BCA, SFM, and Green Annamites) have not addressed the development of ecotourism systematically or comprehensively. Activities in this domain have primarily consisted of a small number of site-level interventions on value-chain development under livelihood or co-management sub-components.

Potential to increase conservation programming effectiveness and feasibility

A future USAID programming focus that includes ecotourism development activities has strong potential to increase the overall effectiveness of USAID's conservation programming. An ecotourism program would heighten the public perception for strengthened MBs and protected area management, particularly in the eyes of national, provincial and district agencies. It would also boost much needed funding streams to the PAs and contribute to enhancing the conservation of biodiversity within the tourism recreational areas themselves. Finally, it would instill a sense of pride among PA staff.

There is significant potential for ecotourism development within the SUF system, which has remained underdeveloped for much of the last two decades. Vietnam's PA system holds substantial ecotourism potential as they contain many of the country's most important and iconic landscapes and nature amenities that could be developed as ecotourism destinations to support sustainable management. These PAs offer attractive landscapes, rich cultural heritage, some (qualified) opportunities for wildlife viewing, and a diversity of possible tourism products and experiences. Nascent tourist attractions can also be embedded within the broader tourism networks. Specifically, this might include the development of geographically clustered sites in both Northern Vietnam and Central Southern Vietnam. Potential sites for tourism development in northern Vietnam comprise sites linked to Hanoi, including Fanzipan (within Hoang Lien NP), and the golden rice terraces near to Mu Cang Chai SHCA.

As of 2023, at least 67 management boards (61 overseeing Special Use Forests, and six overseeing protection forests) reported having tourism activities within their PAs.¹¹⁸ In 2023, there were 2.4 million visitors (an increase of 124 percent compared with 2019), with tourism revenue reaching Vietnamese Dong (VND) 323.5 billion (an increase of 175 percent compared with 2019).¹¹⁹ These statistics indicate that ecotourism could have immense potential to generate substantial revenues which could be invested to implement more conservation activities.

However, current management capacities within the MBs are extremely wanting, if present at all. It will be imperative to appoint dedicated tourism staff within the MBs of SUFs with optimal tourism potential. These staff, together with district tourism (and district Women's Union staff) should receive on-site nature-based tourism training from international and national tourism experts. This on-site capacity building could be augmented by study tours to some of the best managed PAs for tourism, including Cuc Phuong NP, Cat Ba NP, Bach Ma NP, Son Tra NR, Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP and Cat Tien NP.

The assessment team's document review and the site consultations shed light on several important factors which need to be considered when assessing ecotourism feasibility. Key among these is: the

¹¹⁸ Department of Forestry (2023). Annual report on SUF and Protection Forest. MARD: 2023

¹¹⁹ Dang 2023.

proximity of the PAs to large cities are/or tourism hubs that are easier to access, and the extent to which there is supportive infrastructure in place (e.g. good roads, accommodation, visitor centers and qualified human resources). Indeed, as evidenced through sites the team visited or reviewed for this assessment, such as Phong Nha – Ke Bang, Cuc Phuong and Cat Tien, “brand” establishment and strength of supportive communication programs and environmental education programs are also closely associated with potential to attract tourists.

The team’s document review and consultations (e.g. with Thanh Hoa DARD and Xuan Lien NR Management Board) also revealed that tourism development in the buffer zones of Pu Luong NP, Xuan Lien NR, Van Long NR, and Phong Nha-Ke Bang NP has positively impacted the local economy. However, the assessment team noted that the opportunities for effective tourism development varied considerably across the sites the team visited, and in all cases will need substantial investment from both the state and the private sector in addition to the types of support that USAID can provide via its own programming. Activities such as wildlife viewing, trekking, homestays, kayaking, nature photography and interpretative nature tours could improve PA and biodiversity management and engage community participation more effectively, while also reducing their dependency on forest resources and positively impacting PAs in the long-term.

The emergence of Citizen Science, where community members and PA visitors may participate in a variety of platform-based (i.e. smartphone; web) projects on data collection and networking of information, provides another innovative and potentially effective area of support in the ecotourism space. Review of the literature indicates that considerable Citizen Science projects, observations and photo-documentation of wildlife is already occurring in Vietnam, with no visible linkages with PA management (nor local community engagement).¹²⁰ Given the growing interest and current foundation, and considering the rapid growth of digital technology in Vietnam as well as general popularity of Smartphones in the country, this may be a very feasible tool with potential to contribute to biodiversity conservation in PAs with visitors serving as real-time witnesses to sustainability initiatives within sites. By uploading data and providing qualitative observations such platforms may not only be useful to managers, but also allow communities to develop a stronger sense of stewardship and to change perspectives around tourism so that they more suitably reflect a “nature based” approach as opposed to “mass tourism” mindsets.

The above process also has potential to be linked to MARD’s ongoing National Park Passport Initiative. There would be a need for dedicated tourism staff in the PA who would liaise with individual tourists and also tourism guides, to promote and expand the Citizen Science and crowdsourcing approach. Two general approaches could be: (1) The NP develops their own app that they own and manage, but with portals for input from the public. The app would include some educational information, information on zones and regulations, and also some capability for ecotourists to upload time stamped and geo-referenced photos from their phone or camera. Depending on the sophistication, the app could also use artificial intelligence to identify the species or the NP could confirm species once the data is

¹²⁰ For example, iNature (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>) includes numerous observations and photo-documentation of wildlife in Dong Nai NR, Cat Tien NP and many other Vietnam PAs. However, these are uploaded by individual members and there are no apparent projects or linkages with PA management currently.

uploaded. (2) Park staff could set up projects on popular Citizen Science websites such as www.inaturalist.org and use their own photos, including what they can collect from tourists formally or informally, to expand observational data for the PA.

Key challenges and enabling conditions

The assessment team's document review, stakeholder consultations and site visits called attention to several key challenges that new programming may either be able to help address or will need to consider, and several enabling conditions that are important to have in place to optimally develop ecotourism and secure tourism-related sustainable financing. Key challenges include:

- **Low current capacity of MB staff and partners.** The Assessment found that almost all protected area Management Boards in Vietnam, and especially in Northern Vietnam, have a negligible tourism development experience, and associated skills and competencies. PA staff likewise lack adequate training in all aspects of ecotourism programming. Nature Reserves and Species and Habitat Conservation Areas in particular have very low capacity for ecotourism development. Most PAs in Vietnam, and all sites that were visited, lacked dedicated tourism departments and tourism centers, reflecting the overall lack of specialized programs and staff in PAs (for example, on conservation, communication). The assessment team also noted that the capacities of key district tourism partners were also low.
- **Limited international and national expertise in nature-based tourism** – as a direct consequence of the limited focus on nature-based tourism development over the past two decades in Vietnam, there is a dearth of international and national expertise in this highly specialized field of PA management. These experts will be essential to select the optimal SUF sites for dedicated tourism development, identifying the potential for tourism products, and the marketing approaches required.
- **Lack of clear guidance on ecotourism development and sustainable financing.** All sites visited confirmed that the current legal framework for tourism development, and Decree 156 in particular, provides insufficient guidance on how tourism can be implemented (particularly with respect to investments and land leasing). These regulatory gaps also negatively impact the potential for private sector investment, as businesses are currently uncertain of the legality of their investment and their long-term outlook.
- **Lack of PA tourism management planning.** Field visits and desk research found that very few PAs (and none in the North) have approved tourism management plans. Approved planning would be needed for MBs to move forward on ecotourism development and sustainable financing strategically and legally comply with current policies. Closely linked to this challenge is the poor coordination of PA tourism planning with the provincial planning process, which leads to a lack of overall clarity for PA managers and often exacerbates local land-use conflicts with local communities. It is important to raise awareness among provincial authorities and related stakeholders, and to strengthen incorporation of PA tourism planning into provincial planning, including through the provincial socioeconomic development planning (SEDP) process.

- **Low quality and standards.** Suitable infrastructure (e.g. road access, physical facilities, trail network) are lacking at many of the visited sites, particularly in Northern Vietnam, as well as quality ecotourism products and services. With the exception of more advanced sites (e.g. Cat Tien, Phong Nha-Ke Bang and Bidoup - Nui Ba) tourism centers, nature interpretation materials, signboards and other public communications (such as websites and social media accounts) are generally weak. Travel companies – both national and international - have limited access to information on the environmental values and conservation objectives (i.e. to communicate ecotourism potential to visitors) of national parks and nature reserves.
- **Complicated and entrenched budgeting procedures in PAs.** Consultations revealed that the budgeting process in PAs is subject to frequent delays and readjustments, further challenging PA managers to plan and implement a coherent set of activities, including those related to ecotourism development. Review of PA annual reports and other outputs found that allocations are directly tied to investment plans (prepared when a PA is first established) and may be inflexible to changing management needs and new priorities, including for ecotourism.
- **Heavy reliance on (limited) state budgets and low revenue from tourism.** The assessment found that, depending on the site, only 1 to 4 percent of funding is raised from self-generated sources of the PA (i.e. tourism fees and concessions).¹²¹ The central government contributes up to 78 percent of revenue for national parks including investment for infrastructure, subcontracts for forest protection and, to a much smaller extent, funds for community development. Among current sites in the PA system, with examples of direct tourism revenue, 37 sites were self-organized, 13 were leased resources, and eight were joint ventures.¹²² In total, revenue in Vietnam's PA system in 2018 was VND 180 billion, with revenue from entrance tickets representing 64 percent of this figure. PA entrance fees are a fixed rate nationally (60,000 VND for adults; 20,000 VND for children/students) and have remained largely unchanged since the Decree on Fees and Payments in 2001, despite studies that demonstrate a willingness-to-pay among tourists of at least 2.5 times this rate.¹²³
- **Lack of carrying capacity and other analyses conducted or informing PA management.** Site consultations and further review confirmed that carry capacity is not considered or applied in PAs, nor is it a mainstream management practice in the tourism sector. In addition, the traditional Environmental Impact Assessment approach that is relevant to typical construction projects in Vietnam according to Vietnamese law is not applied for tourism infrastructure development in PAs.

Key enabling conditions that are already in place or important for new programs to consider include:

¹²¹ Long, H. Pham and Huong, T. Bui (2020).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

- Select several **clusters of SUFs with good infrastructure** (road access, physical facilities) located close to tourism hubs; having good tourism products to promote and demonstrate strong political will at district and provincial levels for ecotourism development.¹²⁴
- Appoint **dedicated ecotourism staff within MBs** to act as the focal point for future tourism development within the selected SUFs.¹²⁵
- **Provide capacity building to tourism staff and district counterparts** through study tours, and on-site training by professional tourism experts.
- **Facilitate or require preparation of a tourism development plan**, site inventories, plans and subsequent development of tourism centers, nature interpretation materials, signboards and other public communications (websites and social media).
- **Support the establishment and functioning of a provincial tourism stakeholders forum** involving the private sector (tour companies, hotels associations, tour guides) and concerned government agencies to brainstorm nature-based interventions.

Discussion on specific strategies and interventions

While historically under-developed, there is significant potential for ecotourism development to support conservation effectiveness in Vietnam's PA system. Ecotourism activities are currently primarily confined to the well-known and better-established National Parks, especially those with easy access (i.e., close to main population centers and other famous tourism destinations). These include Cuc Phuong NP, Cat Ba NP, Bach Ma NP, Son Tra NR, Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP and Cat Tien NP.

In contrast, the assessment team's field visits and consultations at sites in more remote and less accessible locations in Northern Vietnam (e.g. Na Hang NR, Muong La NR, Phia Oac-Phia Den NP and Du Gia NP) and Southern Annamites (e.g. Phuoc Binh NP) suggested these areas have limited tourism activities at present and have currently no budget to promote ecotourism. However, the team noted a number of potential sites in Northern Vietnam that, while exhibiting major capacity gaps for sustainable ecotourism development and financing, offer attractive landscapes, rich cultural heritage, some (qualified) opportunities for wildlife viewing, and a diversity of possible tourism products and experiences. Other potential sites in Northern Vietnam could include Hoang Lien NP and Mu Cang Chai SHCA, which are located in proximity to Sapa / Fanzipan and the rice terraces respectively.

Strategies and interventions for future programs may cross a range of more traditional capacity building activities (especially for the North, where basic building blocks for ecotourism are required), to more new and innovative interventions. For example, visitor centers, infrastructure, trail networks and public communications could be supported as steps to establish essential enabling conditions in

¹²⁴ Potential sites demonstrating this include SUFs in Quang Binh and Thua Thien Hue province (North Central), Dong Nai, and Xuan Lien in Thanh Hoa province.

¹²⁵ Noting that while many National Parks currently have Tourism Units, Nature Reserves and SHCAs do not. Under this recommendation, there would be dedicated ecotourism staff together with district tourism counterparts who together would have leading expertise on ecotourism development within the protected areas. To do so, they need skills to identify tourism products, prepare site development plans and to manage them. Initially such a team would likely need tourism technical assistance support.

under-developed sites. The documented gaps and poor implementation of Decree 156 highlights the importance of monitoring this issue and for specific support of Management Boards (i.e. clearer guidance on arranging tourism activities, leasing and forming joint ventures or associations).

Ecotourism interventions should not necessarily be targeted within all project sites. Priority sites should comprise SUFs with (1) strong Management Board capacity, (2) reasonable evidence that implementing tourism would not adversely affect the biodiversity values and the natural landscape of the site; (3) located close to tourism hubs; (4) having good tourism to promote, and; (5) demonstrate strong political will and district and provincial levels for ecotourism development. Ideally these PA sites should be clustered to facilitate added marketing impact.

Training should also be provided to PA tourism staff, district counterparts, and private sector representatives where appropriate. Orientation may be best achieved through study tours to well-managed nature-based tourism sites (for inspiration and visioning). On-site training should be provided on a continual supporting basis by a team of international and national tourism experts. These experts could be based within the Department of Forestry (DoF) to enhance capacity building at the central level, and national level strategic support.

Overall, a phased approach is recommended, focused initially on fundamental capacity gaps, and building progressively into more nuanced or sophisticated areas of ecotourism. Priorities for more tailored ecotourism interventions should be informed by a comprehensive site inventory and capacity assessment, and will differ across regions. Because all **Northern** sites exhibit major capacity gaps for sustainable ecotourism development, they would benefit most from intensive technical assistance and investments aimed primarily at establishing foundational ecotourism capacity within Management Boards and staff. This implies further detailed assessments, technical assistance and training (on site and in demonstration sites) from top experts in areas such as ecotourism best practices, sustainable financing and creating functional tourism units. In **North Central** Vietnam, the PA network in Thanh Hoa Province offers relatively feasible opportunities in ecotourism development. Provincially, three tourism units are functional, and two more are imminent¹²⁶, which may be leveraged in conservation programming. The assessment found that sites in **Central Highlands** provide good potential for building on current USAID investment (BCA sites) through ecotourism-focused interventions, as well as utilizing some sites as models for developing training (e.g. Best Practices) and technical exchanges related to sustainable financing and tourism development. In the **Southern Annamites**, there are also a variety of entry points. Some PAs already have approved Ecotourism Plans that may be leveraged. However, consultations and desk research confirmed that all sites require stronger technical guidance and functional working Units to implement ecotourism management. Bidoup – Nui Ba NP may provide a useful Best Practices model for training and learning, building on BCA outputs and on demonstrable good models for ecotourism product and service delivery (e.g. Center for Ecotourism and

¹²⁶ The Management Board of the Nature Conservation Area: Xuan Lien, Pu Luong and Lang Chanh Protection Forest Management Board) established and submitted for approval and approved by the Chairman of the Provincial People's Committee for implementation • 02 units (Pu Hu Nature Reserve Management Board and Ben En National Park Management Board) are completing dossiers and procedures to submit for approval.

Environmental Education; PA website and communications). While the assessment team only visited Dong Nai Culture and Nature Reserve in Southern Vietnam, the team also found strong potential for advanced eco-tourism in this PA by virtue of its flat terrain, well-developed trail network, close proximity to HCMC, extensive primary forest and strong political support (and provincial investment).

In terms of newer and innovative approaches, interventions that may adopt a “provincial landscape” approach not only in terms of biodiversity, but also ecotourism including cultural values, may potentially leverage higher impacts. This may involve promotion and marketing of tourism clusters or “loops”, wherein Management Board and staff may engage with tourism working groups also comprised of the private sector and implemented at local community levels.

Another potentially new and innovative intervention could be around Citizen Science applied with communities and tour operators, that support data collection, which as described above may have high potential to support ecotourism development linked to improved monitoring. Future programming could consider interventions around participatory community research that brings together community needs, scientific evidence, and decision-makers. This could include support for PAs to develop tourism apps – established and managed by the Management Board - that can serve as platforms for data collection and other tools (e.g. environmental education, species lists and information on biodiversity conservation). It could also include piloting of projects that use free data-collection and mapping apps like iNaturalist.org and Fieldscope.



Caption: Rice paddy field in the buffer zone of Du Gia National Park, Ha Giang province

Table 7. Key considerations and types of support for future ecotourism-focused programming

	Northern Vietnam Examples of specific sites: Na Hang NR; Hoang Lien NP; Du Gia NP; Phia Oac-Phia Den NP Key reasons to consider potential support: • Extremely low capacity for managing tourism • High biodiversity values but also highly vulnerable • Some established tourism hubs (e.g. Sapa) and growth opportunities (Cao Bang; Ha Giang) Examples of specific types of interventions or support: • Establishment of ecotourism capacity within the SUF MB (development plans; fee system) • On-site technical support from international and national experts on ecotourism development planning, for PA staff, district partners and communities • Orientation study tours and embedded training. Promote inter-connected tourism routes (e.g. Lao Cai) that reflect landscape-level natural and human environmental characteristics as a means to motivate stakeholders and attract ecotourists • Prepare ecotourism development plans in relevant sites, including Infrastructure and EE support (tourist routes; signboards; center) • Establish synchronous information systems between NP/NRs and tourist centers • Training and application of Eco-tourism Best Practices guidelines • Promote inter-connected tourism routes (e.g. Lao Cai) that reflect landscape-level natural and human environmental characteristics as a means to motivate stakeholders and attract ecotourists; this could include establishing business platforms (tour operators; hospitality and communities) at landscape levels, identifying multi-site itineraries, as well as participation of private sector and communities in ecotourism Best Practices training • Establish synchronous information systems between NP/NRs and tourist centers
	North Central Examples of specific sites: PA network in Thanh Hoa Province offers relatively feasible opportunities in ecotourism development Key reasons to consider potential support: • Strong political will and innovative decentralized (DARD) finance model in Thanh Hoa • Excellent facilities at Xuan Lien for hosting training and learning exchanges Examples of specific types of interventions or support: • Tourism site inventory • Develop provincial-level guidelines for implementing Decree 156 (or its revisions) especially on leasing contracts and infrastructure • Tourism-based livelihood interventions (e.g. Village(s) in Xuan Lien with effective payments for forest environmental services and community buy-in) • Pilot Eco-Tourism Best Practices guidelines • Pu Luong Nature Reserve intervention • Study tours for MBs and provincial government to Thanh Hoa to learn about institutional models (financing), tourism planning, functional tourism units • Establish ecotourism working teams at individual PAs with district and provincial partners



Central Highlands

Examples of specific sites: Not a priority for new ecotourism activities but can leverage "learning sites" for ecotourism such as Bi Doup, Cat Tien, Cuc Phuong.

Key reasons to consider potential support:

- Can be models for developing training (Best Practices) and technical exchanges related to sustainable financing and tourism development
- Potential for tourism loops; landscape-level tourism development planning
- Continued development of ecotourism plans (BCA sites) so that ecotourism planning is programmatically linked to measures for sustainable financing of the PA and other relevant elements (and are aligned with provincial-level decisions on tourism development)

Examples of specific types of interventions or support:

- Learning exchanges and training materials related to sustainable financing and tourism development
- Promote inter-connected tourism routes (e.g. TT Hue – Quang Tri) that reflect landscape-level natural and human environmental characteristics as a means to motivate stakeholders and attract ecotourists; this could include establishing business platforms (tour operators; hospitality and communities) at landscape levels, identifying multi-site itineraries, as well as participation of private sector and communities in ecotourism Best Practices training
- Establish synchronous information systems between NP/NRs and tourist centers



Southern Annamites

Examples of specific sites: Nui Chua, Phuoc Binh, Bidoup – Nui Ba, Hon Ba NR, and Chu Yan Sin NP

Key reasons to consider potential support:

- Have approved tourism plans
- Good potential for tourism loops (landscape planning)
- Relatively active management/interest on ecotourism and heritage tourism

Examples of specific types of interventions or support:

- Tourism site inventory and carrying capacity studies applied to Ecotourism plans in sites including Nui Chua and Phuoc Binh
- Establishment of ecotourism working team with district and provincial partners
- Tourism-based livelihood interventions that establish employment opportunities
- Training and application of Eco-Tourism Best Practices guidelines in Nui Chia NP, Phuoc Binh NP and others
- Technical support for ecotourism development planning, including on-site and online training for PA staff and community where relevant
- Orientation study tours and embedded training to best practice ecotourism sites in Vietnam
- Establish synchronous information systems between NP/NRs and tourist centers
- Promote tourism routes (e.g., Phong Nai – Bidoup – Nui Ba – Hon Ba Chu Yan Sin) that reflect landscape-level natural and human-environment characteristics as a means to motivate and attract ecotourists; could include establishing business platforms (tour operators, hospitality and communities) at landscape levels, identifying multi-site itineraries, and private sector and community participation in ecotourism Best Practices training

Conclusions

Ecotourism development in Vietnam offers some clear potential to increase the effectiveness of USAID biodiversity conservation programming. This potential is qualified in that different regions exhibit variable context and needs with ecotourism development, ranging from major capacity gaps at the PA level (as can be found in all regions but particularly in the North), to more tailored or advanced needs in some PAs where past interventions have established a stronger foundation for effective ecotourism programming.

The assessment team's findings highlight that sustainable financing of ecotourism inside all PAs fundamentally requires a base level of capacity among PA managers and staff with respect to their awareness and skills. It also requires suitable infrastructure, robust educational and communication programs, effective use of national standards and best practices, and enabling legislation and policy for on-the-ground implementation. Therefore, future program support targeting sustainable financing and ecotourism development should recognize the need for building capacity and competencies across a spectrum of specialty areas, and for the application of centralized training and guidance (i.e. Best Practices) and to address gaps in policy guidance.

As was highlighted repeatedly in stakeholder consultations, effective ecotourism will hinge on the support of local communities. Therefore, avoiding negative impacts on the social system is essential to its optimal operations in those areas. This implies more direct engagement from Management Boards and staff with local groups on community-based tourism, development of sustainable tourism/heritage products and value chains. Tourism site development plans should be prepared by the Management Boards in consultation with the local communities. These plans should stipulate the roles of the local communities and the benefit sharing mechanism to be implemented in consultation with the investors.

The assessment also found that most PAs (and all in Northern Vietnam) lack any system for tourism revenue (fees; concessions) and most in the North do not have a tourism management plan. Moreover, the assessment found that Management Boards in all sites require stronger technical guidance on how tourism should be implemented within the PA system. Current legal regulations are not clear enough to optimize investment in tourism infrastructure. Further legal guidance is required to specify how ecotourism is formulated, managed and monitored. Decree 156 in particular was universally identified at site levels as a hindrance to sustainable financing and ecotourism development.

Some individual PAs have been relatively successful in developing ecotourism programs, including sustainable financing of ecotourism. For example, Phong Nha – Ke Bang Tourism Center is a self-financing enterprise unit under the Management Board. These sites and others (e.g. Cat Tien; Bi Doup – Nui Ba) have key affiliated institutions, such as a Center for Ecotourism and Environmental Education. As such, these sites have the potential to become learning models for ecotourism under a future program. Similarly, specific models for effective investment and community engagement (including but limited to Dong Nai NR, Xuan Lien NR, Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP and Bach Ma NP) should be promoted and learned from when developing training and guidelines.

The assessment unveiled opportunities for a future program to apply new and innovative tools for ecotourism and sustainable financing, including application of tourism carrying capacity studies, conservation concessions and other forms of self-generating income for PAs, interactive use of mobile technology by visitors (noting the high level of smartphone use and of social media engagement in Vietnam society), and development and promotion of tourism routes (i.e. "loops" that reflect landscape-level natural and human environmental characteristics as a means to motivate stakeholders and attract ecotourists). Such newer approaches have strong potential to augment conservation impact.

REWILDING SUPPORT

Overall, **the assessment team confirmed there is a good foundation for USAID to support rewilding activities in Vietnam. However, the approach will need to have a long-term focus, with the near-term (next 5-10 years) focused on strengthening the foundations and enabling conditions for rewilding to be successful, as many challenges need to be addressed and enabling conditions achieved before rewilding can be fully feasible.** Consultations at PA sites with notable experience in wildlife rescue and more ambitious interest for conservation breeding and future rewilding (e.g. Hoang Lien NP,¹²⁷ Xuan Lien NR, Phuoc Binh NP), as well as the team's literature review and discussions with WWF, FFI, IUCN, Save Vietnam's Wildlife, BCA project and others, confirm that **wildlife populations are not yet suitably protected to realistically consider rewilding in the near-term.** Moreover, habitat restoration is also an essential component of a successful rewilding program and will need concomitant attention. Findings from site visits and desk-based document review provide important examples that illustrate challenges and inherent limitations. For example, while BCA sites Phong Dien NR and Dakrong NR display significant improvements in MB and staff capacity, hunting is still significant, and it would be difficult to do rewilding at these (and many other) sites in the short-term and achieve success.

In addition to consideration of the nature and intensity of ongoing threats, **habitat management and restoration is also a key enabling condition for rewilding, as is management and staff capacity. Thus, a near-term future program strategic focus that holistically addresses threat reduction (especially snaring), habitat protection, and capacity building would help to optimize the potential success for rewilding efforts.** Even still, while the need for a long-term approach is evident, the assessment team found that some populations are so alarmingly low in numbers that actions must be taken now to secure viable populations (i.e. for conservation breeding¹²⁸) and ensure that future rewilding will be possible. While challenging, this may also provide important impetus and momentum to initiate bold conservation measures as a matter of urgency.

Historical programming focus

Vietnam's Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, published in 2021, listed rewilding as a key target, and rewilding was also listed as a key target in GoVN's 2024 Vision to 2050. GoVN has not yet formulated a concrete

¹²⁷ Including the rescue center in the NP managed by the Centre for Wildlife Conservation and Development.

¹²⁸ The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) is the international organization for coordinating conservation breeding of endangered wildlife. Within the region, the Singapore Zoo is an active member.

action plan on conservation breeding and rewilding and USAID has not directly supported or engaged in conservation breeding and rewilding efforts in Vietnam. However, the USAID-supported BCA project is supporting MARD to prepare a terrestrial species conservation plan, and it is expected that this action plan will have rewilding as an important objective and strategic wildlife conservation direction for the next 50 years. BCA has also recently produced a draft report focused on opportunities and potential for rewilding initiatives in the 21 BCA sites.¹²⁹ The report outlines priority sites for rewilding to occur, actions needed to move other sites towards rewilding, and species-specific actions necessary to enhance the success of long-term rewilding initiatives. The BCA report included a list of fourteen species¹³⁰ selected as ideal candidates for rewilding based on their level of threat, endemism, and the expected ease of securing ex-situ populations. These initial guidelines are very useful in setting the stage for long-term rewilding initiatives, including under a future USAID program.¹³¹

While there have not been many rewilding programs implemented by GoVN, the assessment team's consultations and document review highlight that Vietnam has considerable practice in breeding endangered mammal and reptile species. This experience is intimately linked to zoos, which have considerable technical experience in breeding and veterinary care, and primate reintroductions, as well as NGOs working on turtles, pangolins and small carnivores. By comparison, the government agencies, and the SUF MBs in particular, have exceedingly limited practical experience, focusing on maintaining basic rescue centres and simple wildlife releases.

Initial efforts for conservation breeding for rewilding in Vietnam date to the early 1980s with the capture, breeding and rewilding of Kouprey (*Bos sauveli*).¹³² Local rewilding was implemented in Cat Tien National Park between 2001-2005 by reintroducing 60 adult Siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) into Bau Sau lake, where the crocodile historically inhabited before being wiped out by the 1990s.¹³³ The introduction was a success and the crocodiles developed into a stable population by 2005. There have also been efforts to reintroduce other species to their known habitats, such as the reintroduction of a handful of Delacour langur (*Trachypithecus delacouri*) to Trang An UNESCO Heritage Site, where numbers have increased from five to seven animals.¹³⁴

There have also been a variety of historical programs in Vietnam on conservation breeding, some of which were visited during the team's field consultations and all programs reviewed via available

¹²⁹ UASID Biodiversity Conservation, (2024). (Draft) Re-wilding Viet Nam: understanding the potential for recovering species and ecosystems.

¹³⁰ Specifically: Saola; Large-antlered muntjac; Annamite dark muntjac; Owston's civet; Annamite striped rabbit; Viet Nam pheasant; Crested argus; Impressed tortoise; Bourett's box turtle; Keeled box turtle; Eastern black; ridged leaf turtle; Big-headed turtle; Four-eyed turtle; Wattle-necked soft-shelled turtle

¹³¹ It should be noted that the BCA report focuses on BCA sites only, based on their level of threat, endemism, and the expected ease of securing ex-situ populations. However, the BCA process can be applied for any site in Vietnam and adopted to a range of other taxa.

¹³² Mackinnon R. J. and Stuart N. S. (1989). The Kouprey An action plan for its conservation. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland .

¹³³ Successful rewilding Siamese Crocodiles in Bau Sau Ramsar Site, Cat Tien National Park See:

<https://panorama.solutions/en/solution/successful-rewilding-siamese-crocodiles-bau-sau-ramsar-site-cat-tien-national-park>

¹³⁴ Nadler, Tilo and Rabett, Ryan and O'Donnell, Shawn and Mai Huong, Nguyen. (2020). Delacour's langur (*Trachypithecus delacouri*) reintroduction program: A preliminary report on the trial release into the Trang An UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam. 3. 39-48.

literature. While these programs do not focus directly on rewilding, their historical context is relevant to understand when considering potential interventions and their alignment with USAID priorities. These are summarized in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Historical conservation breeding programs in Vietnam

Endangered Primate Rescue Center. Started in 1993 in Cuc Phuong National Park, the center is one of the first animal rescue centers in Vietnam and one of the largest primate rescue centers in Southeast Asia. This center is supported financially and technically by several international funders including Frankfurt Zoological Society and Munster Zoo. It has enclosures and semi-wild areas, and works on rescue and research programs.
Dao Tien Endangered Primate Species Center. Dao Tien is a purpose-built primate rescue center located in Cat Tien National Park. The center was founded in 2008 by Cat Tien National Park and Monkey World Ape-Rescue UK and consists of a quarantine area, veterinary room and staff house. In the core area, quarantine/socialization cages enable close monitoring of primates through quarantine and socialization. Nearly 30 hectares of the island's forests are now enclosed in semi-forested enclosures, providing areas for tree training in preparation for full release.
Cat Ba Langur Conservation Project. Consultations convened with the Cat Ba Langur Conservation Project in May 2024 found that the endangered Cat Ba Langur has a global population of about 70 animals all confined to Cat Ba National Park, fragmented in different isolated sub-populations. The successful translocation¹³⁵ in 2012 of two females into the Sanctuary represented a major conservation achievement.¹³⁶
Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program. Dedicated to the conservation of small carnivores (linsangs, weasels, civets, small cats, otters, badgers, and pangolins), this program has been operating since 1995. Initial focus was on the endangered Owston's civet, and later expanded to include all species of small carnivores.
Asian Turtle Program. The Asian Turtle Program,¹³⁷ established in 1998, has concentrated its efforts on Vietnam's priority species including those which are critically endangered or endemic.¹³⁸ Document review confirmed the program remains active and important, implementing strategic conservation interventions, organizing training events for forest rangers throughout Vietnam, and developing training for young researchers to expand their skills and knowledge in carrying out conservation and research activities.
Saola and endangered ungulates. Since 2016, the Saola Working Group launched the "One Plan Approach" for conservation of Saola and started to lobby the Governments of Vietnam and Lao PDR for adopting an <i>ex-situ</i> conservation plan for Saola and endangered ungulates. Preparatory activities from 2016 to 2020 included species detection, capacity building and a feasibility study for establishment of a captive breeding centre in Bach Ma National Park. In 2018, IUCN representing the Saola Working Group signed a memorandum of understanding with MARD on the conservation of Saola and endangered ungulates. However, due to COVID-19, the committed funding from European zoos (via European Association of Zoos and Aquaria) was not distributed. The development of the Centre is currently canceled. Other preparation work, especially

¹³⁵ This translocation involved the tranquilizing of the animals in the sleeping cave and then transporting them across the island for release. A follow-up translocation attempt failed involving the isolated group of five females in the Hang Cai area, within Cat Ba National Park.

¹³⁶ Parr J.W.K. (2014). An Assessment of Management at Cat Ba National Park to Strengthen Conservation of the Critically Endangered Cat Ba Langur *Trachypithecus poliocephalus*. Cat Ba Langur Conservation Project in collaboration with the Cat Ba National Park Management Board, Cat Hai District, Hai Phong Province. 56 pp.

¹³⁷ The Asian Turtle Program originated with the Turtle Conservation Centre at Cuc Phuong National Park and has been incorporated into the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo/Cleveland Zoological Society's Asia regional program since 2003. Together with NGO partner Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV), The Asian Turtle Program works on conservation of 15 Critically Endangered, 9 Endangered and one (1) Vulnerable species of tortoises and freshwater turtles in Vietnam.

¹³⁸ Such as the endemic Vietnamese Pond Turtle (*Mauremys a*); Box Turtles of central Vietnam (*Cuora bourreti* and *Cuora picturata*), and the Hoan Kiem Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) in northern Vietnam, largely recognized as the most endangered turtle species in the world.

relating to species detection are now continuing with support from both the Saola Working Group and the Saola Foundation. and the Saving saola from extinction project in Vietnam (implemented by WWF and MBFP).

Vietnam's Pheasant. A plan for rewilding Vietnam's Pheasant was initiated by BirdLife International in the late 2000s, later continued by VietNature. In 2015, Vietnam Edwards's Pheasant Working Group was established “to secure, maintain and restore the genetic resources and safe, suitable habitat for a long-term persistence of Edwards's Pheasant in the wild.” An Edwards's Pheasant Action Plan was developed with the captive breeding and rewilding component. The conservation breeding facility is built in Dong Chau-Khe Nuoc Trong NR. The program could be an opportunity for USAID to consider as part of an enabling rewilding process in Vietnam.

Government rescue centers. Following the 2010 Decree No. 117/2010/ND-CP on the organization and management of the SUF system,¹³⁹ rescue centers have been established in many protected areas in Vietnam. The assessment team found there are 20 rescue facilities established by GoVN in the country, most of them situated in PAs or in big cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Consultations with PAs revealed they also operate rescue and rehabilitation activities (e.g. Xuan Lien, Ben En, Hoang Lien, Dong Nai, Phuoc Binh); however, all PAs regularly receive confiscated animals from enforcement bodies or wildlife that were returned by local communities for release back into the wild.¹⁴⁰

Ex situ rewilding efforts

The track record for developing wildlife rescue centers and breeding centers for threatened and endangered wildlife in Vietnam is impressive. The six centers show a number of similar characteristics. All are supported by international zoo organizations or IUCN Working Groups on selected taxonomic groups. Several centers focus on charismatic primates. Others have been supported by motivated individuals. **Many of these centers have been running for 15-20 years, and all of them are supported by external funding streams.** A notable exception is the Saola and endangered ungulates captive breeding centre in Bach Ma NP, which had an IUCN SSC Working Group and zoo organization backing. This center is now on hold, suggesting marketing issues surrounding the continued survival of the Saola.

In sharp contrast, **however, the government track record for maintaining a national network of animal rescue centers is relatively poor. Government funding streams are modest, facilities are modest and key skill sets in animal handling and veterinary science are low or absent.** The team's consultation field visit to Hoang Lien NP (Lao Cai province) found that their rescue centre held 100 individuals of 30 species, including bears, loris, leopard cat, civets, peafowl and other species. The rescue centre receives confiscated animals from the region, with some demonstrable successes in animal habituation, including the effective release of 21 macaques in Vu Quang NP. While the value of these releases to a national rewilding programme was deemed relatively small, there are key lessons learned from this site and others on the value of rescue centres to potential rewilding programs. Some key concerns, which translate to needs or potential emphases for future programming, were sustainable funding streams over a 15-20 years' time horizon, and training needs in specialized animal husbandry and veterinary skills.

In-situ rewilding efforts

¹³⁹ GoVN Decree No. 117/2010/ND-CP on the organization and management of the SUF System dated 24 December 2010.

¹⁴⁰ While the value of such releases to a national rewilding programme was deemed relatively small, there are key lessons learned from this site and others on the value of rescue centers to potential rewilding programs.

The adoption of **SMART** patrolling combined with increased understanding of the biodiversity values within the **SUF** system have made some good progress towards the implementation of a **rewilding program**. The SMART patrolling system has supported a clear understanding of the location, the types of threats and the intensity of threats. However, the data suggest caution with respect in-situ rewilding in the near term. For example, statistical datasets on snaring in the Annamites under the BCA project are at best alarming. SMART has also simultaneously provided a spatial understanding of enforcement effort in individual SUFs. Meanwhile, the focus on biodiversity assessments and biodiversity monitoring has shed further light on the status of biodiversity in the SUF system, and in particular, the endemic fauna of the Annamites. The data show that the population numbers for species of key interest are generally severely depressed.

Potential to increase conservation programming effectiveness and feasibility

The assessment team's consultations with national management agencies, NGOs and 13 PAs confirmed that **most Management Boards view rewilding as a useful conservation approach**, and that conservation breeding, reintroduction and/or supplemental release of wildlife would benefit biodiversity conservation in Vietnam. Consultations also confirmed a key finding from the recent BCA study, namely that **while there is limited historical precedent for rewilding in Vietnam, the existence of multiple rescue centers and conservation breeding initiatives in the country provides an important foundation for conceptualizing, and ultimately actualizing, the wider rewilding process**.

However, effective rewilding will require focused support to strengthen important enabling conditions, political will and investment, and extensive timelines beyond those of a typical five-year program cycle. For example, based on population viability assessments undertaken for BCA by the Conservation Planning Specialist Group, most species will require between 5 and 15 years after release, depending on the species and effectiveness of the breeding program, to see the impacts of rewilding. **The long-term potential for rewilding to support effective conservation programming will also rest heavily on various enabling factors, including site security (i.e. reduced threats from hunting; snare removal, quality of monitoring), habitat suitability, population status and prey availability.**

Nevertheless, the team's consultations revealed a general agreement among PA managers, Forestry Department, FPD and conservation experts, that **in addition to supporting long-term biodiversity conservation, a comprehensive rewilding program would also evidence a strengthened commitment of GoVN by investing substantial resources to improve habitat protection, removal of snares, reduce hunting and other threats to ensure a safer haven for species.** A focus on finalizing a national rewilding Action Plan would help to provide important detail currently missing from national strategies (e.g. Biodiversity Strategy to 2030) and sectoral priorities (e.g. Forestry Sector Development Plan to 2030), that together would further enable successful rewilding. The policy and plan will in turn provide key entry points for implementation on the ground. These strategies will need to go one step further to include a solid plan, including target species and priority locations for rewilding.

Key challenges

The assessment team's document review, stakeholder consultations and site visits called attention to the importance of several enabling conditions that are important to have in place to optimally develop rewilding support, as well key challenges that are likely to impede a rewilding agenda. These challenges and related enabling conditions reflect issues that a future USAID program focus on rewilding can either help address or will need to consider:

- **Continued hunting and snaring.** Hunting, especially snaring, remains the key threat to terrestrial wildlife species, and therefore the greatest challenge for rewilding. While hunting appears to be reduced in most PAs in Vietnam, snares remain a confounding problem and threat, with populations of deer, pheasants, and rabbit estimated to have declined by more than 90 percent in recent decades. Trafficking of wildlife and consumption of bushmeat continues throughout Vietnam, representing a serious challenge to biodiversity protection efforts.¹⁴¹
- **Increased habitat degradation and fragmentation.** Most of Vietnam's PAs – and particularly those in the north – are relatively small and disconnected and have all been negatively impacted by logging and NTPF collection. Moreover, as illustrated in Dong Nai, a strong forestry orientation (tree planting/reforestation approach) in managing natural habitats is also a challenge, as most of the grasslands and open areas, which are important for many large herbivores, carnivores and raptors, have been re-planted with trees, reducing the potential of these areas for rewilding. In fact, such an approach led to the disappearance of many grasslands and open forest and bamboo forest areas in many of Vietnam's PAs. This includes grassland and shrub forest in the northern provinces, grassland and open areas in the Central and South-Central provinces, grassland and dry dipterocarp forest in the Central Highlands and South-East provinces, and grassland and open waterbodies in the Mekong delta. Habitat restoration is an essential component of a successful rewilding strategy that will also need attention.
- **Lack of management and staff capacity for wildlife conservation and rewilding.** Most of the PA Management Boards and staff come from a forestry background with limited training, knowledge and experience in animal handling, rewilding, conservation and habitat management. Addressing such capacity gaps will be an additional important part of any rewilding strategy.
- **Lack of sustainable funding streams** represent the greatest challenge to a successful rewilding program. Each individual captive breeding center requires substantial investments over a 15–20-year period, including the training of manpower with specialized skills sets, the construction and maintenance of facilities as well as upkeep of captive animals. Meanwhile, the in-situ component of rewilding will require sustained funding streams to maintain the law enforcement regimes, incorporating the SMART patrolling regimes. During the field consultations, Hue DARD and Quang Tri DARD raised concerns about sustaining the SMART

¹⁴¹ Tilker, A., Abrams, J.F., Mohamed, A., Nguyen, A., Wong, S.T., Sollmann, R., Niedballa, J., Bhagwat, T., Gray, T.N., Rawson, B.M., Guegan, F., Sollmann, R., & Wilting, A. (2019). Habitat degradation and indiscriminate hunting differentially impact faunal communities in the Southeast Asian tropical biodiversity hotspot. *Communications Biology*, 2(1), 396.

systems and patrolling beyond the BCA project's termination in December 2025. These financing streams concerns are placed against a historical backdrop that the SUF system has been dependent upon project-based funding (region by region support) as opposed to nationwide programmatic funding. A further issue to consider is whether USAID should invest in conservation breeding centers as opposed to investing in strengthening ecotourism, with more immediate tangible benefits.

The assessment team also noted there has been little attention to date in the rewilding agenda on understanding the attitudes of the local ethnic and forest dependent villagers residing in the buffer zones towards the protected areas themselves, their access to their traditional natural resources inside the PAs nor to the current conflicts between parks and local people. This aspect is also absent from draft or nascent rewilding guidelines. The evidence from the team's field consultations confirmed that the most serious threats to the 13 SUF sites were snaring and hunting, NFTP harvesting, illegal logging and encroachment, which were all generated to a significant extent by local villagers. A clear understanding of the underlying causes and motivations for these threats is an essential component of a rewilding focus. This will help determine which sites can implement rewilding and the subsequent timing thereof.

Discussion on specific strategies and interventions

As highlighted above, rewilding is gaining attention from GoVN, with both MARD and MONRE adopting rewilding policies as a key strategy and approach for the next 50 years. There is therefore a clear opportunity to support the preparation of a national strategy on rewilding that defines a standardized approach, protocols, and priorities for rewilding. In such a scenario, rewilding plans would help encourage GoVN to take proactive measures to save threatened animals as a foundation for conservation breeding, which would help improve overall wildlife protection (including efforts to counter wildlife trafficking) and prevent further extinction. The assessment team saw several opportunities where USAID programming support can help strengthen rewilding enabling conditions, with an explicit intent for those program activities to support future rewilding efforts.

In practical terms, sites will have varying readiness for rewilding of a given focal species, depending on site security, habitat conditions and species population status. The BCA rewilding study proposed a variety of readiness criteria and scoring methodology, and this approach would be very useful to replicate for other sites and focal species that may be considered under future programming. Likewise, a future USAID program should consider advancing a range of strategic actions, including actions that focus on strengthening rewilding enabling conditions as well as nearer-term rewilding (e.g. securing conservation breeding for species on brink of extinction such as muntjac or chevrotain), and strategic actions with a longer-term horizon (i.e. investments for site security, habitat management and associated capacity building) that would be needed before rewilding could be considered.

Future USAID programming could thus consider focusing on a range of technical support packages, potentially including but not limited to:

- Rewilding feasibility study or site-specific studies;

- Providing training programs at different levels (manager, technical staff, technician) on conservation breeding, habitat management and rewilding practices (capacity building program could take from 5-10 years to ensure a foundation for effective rewilding);¹⁴²
- Extending the implementation of selected rewilding initiatives in BCA sites. As per the BCA rewilding report, three BCA sites (Hue Saola NR, Quang Nam Saola NR, and Pu Mat NP) have been shown to have demonstrable threat reduction and thus were initially prioritized for rewilding efforts;¹⁴³
- Formulating a suitably robust national strategy/action plan on rewilding that includes a roadmap on how rewilding should be initiated, regulated and monitored;
- Identifying resources for long-term financing of rewilding by facilitating the engagement of multiple stakeholders (PPP approach) with a focus on engagement of the private sector, research institutions and NGOs to participate and guide rewilding efforts alongside GoVN; and
- Compiling and sharing best practices on successful rewilding programs (including study tours and exchanges with relevant sites, including BCA sites).

As implied above, proposed activities at the site level would be strongly focused on capacity building. It is recommended that such immediate actions would foremost include:

- Establishing conservation breeding programs for selected species for wild population supplementation in identified priority sites that show readiness based on feasibility studies;
- Programs to reduce snaring pressure in identified priority sites (verified through robust monitoring), and establishment/enhancement of forest guard teams to find and remove snares and serve as a deterrent to illegal hunting;
- Programs to improve law enforcement effectiveness (implies training, where pertinent, in enforcement, evidence gathering and monitoring);
- Expanding community-based patrols with PA staff, as a further means to discourage snaring in priority sites and in parallel to improve local livelihoods (through payment for community participants);
- Establishing comprehensive awareness and Environmental Education programs that support buy-in from the community on rewilding efforts;
- Establishing/enhancing SMART monitoring programs that collect and analyze data using appropriate statistical methods (i.e. occupancy), including radiotelemetry studies that monitor the status of individual animals/groups;
- Formulating associated legal tools and guidelines e.g. for wild capture, sourcing, breeding, and for moving snared animals to conservation breeding facilities (the process to secure permissions for species captures of identified priority species should begin as soon as possible), and;
- Completing taxonomic and genetic diversity studies for priority species (e.g. muntjacs).

¹⁴² Capacity-building programs on law enforcement effectiveness and species monitoring are also intimately linked to such rewilding training programs

¹⁴³ Note there was some marked disagreement among PAs during the BCA rewilding consultations with respect to prioritizing based solely on demonstrable and intensive patrolling. Nevertheless, we suggest that any future USAID program on rewilding aim to extend rewilding activities from BCA as well as using the methodologies developed under the BCA study to further assess other geographies.

The program could thus provide critical, foundational technical support whereas the investment would come from GoVN and from resources mobilized by engaging the private sector, NGOs, research institutes and other key actors. Similarly, since long-term sustainability of any rewilding program would require the government to take on threat reduction activities, it is important to recognize that any support a future USAID program could provide to this agenda (e.g. capacity building for threat reduction) would have major implications to rewilding.

Priority geographies

While it will be important to verify rewilding feasibility through targeted comprehensive analysis, including through applying the methodology used in the BCA rewilding study, as appropriate, the assessment team can provide several initial suggestions for priority geographies. Table 10 suggests example sites, potential priority species and types of interventions or actions that could be prioritized for each of regional geographies assessed. This takes into consideration sites where there is a known range of many endangered species, and where the PA has demonstrated good (or improving) conditions for threat reduction, has demonstrably engaged and committed Management Boards (and/or strong political will locally), and there is suitable available habitat. The assessment team notes that the list of sites and species of interest in Table 10 is preliminary only, and stresses the need for enabling conditions to be improved in these PAs. However, these findings may offer an initial shortlist that is useful for consideration of program activities supporting rewilding.

The team also notes the Central Highland areas may offer the highest likelihood of timely success, through building on the current BCA activities and outputs (i.e. Rewilding study and the three “Tier 1” sites of Hue Saola NR, Quang Nam Saola NR, and Pu Mat NP). For sites outside of BCA and under consideration for future programming, feasibility studies should be conducted - building from the recent outputs from BCA project and applying these methodologies in other geographies where the assessment team found some reasonable evidence of rewilding potential¹⁴⁴.

Program activities that would intentionally support rewilding at sites indicated in Table 10 include:

- Conservation breeding programs at the site level
- Programs to reduce threats at sites, including associated enhancement of forest guard teams to find and remove snares and serve as a deterrent to illegal hunting, as well as expanded community-based patrols with PA staff, and awareness and Environmental Education programs that support buy-in from the community
- SMART monitoring programs at individual sites that collect and analyze data using appropriate statistical methods (i.e. occupancy), and including radiotelemetry studies that monitor status of individual animals

Associated programmatic support at the national level includes:

- Rewilding feasibility study

¹⁴⁴ Including presence of endangered species, threat status, MB interest/experience and political will.

- Formulating a suitably robust national strategy and action plan on rewilding that includes a roadmap on how rewilding should be initiated, sustained and monitored in the long term (including required regulatory and technical guidelines)
- Centralized training with a focus on training programs at different levels (manager, technical staff, technician) on conservation breeding, habitat management and rewilding practices (such a capacity building program could take from 5-10 years to ensure a foundation for effective rewilding)
- Compiling and sharing best practices on successful rewilding programs (including study tours and exchanges with relevant sites, including BCA sites)
- Taxonomic and genetic diversity studies for priority species (e.g. muntjacs)



Caption: Community forest patrol members at Bac Vang Floating ranger station, Na Hang Nature Reserve, Tuyen Quang Province

Table 9. Key considerations and types of support for future rewilding-focused programming

	Northern Vietnam Examples of specific sites: Na Hang Nature Reserve, Mu Cang Chai SHCA, Ba Be, Cuc Phuong, and Hoang Lien Potential species: Black Gibbon, Cao vit gibbon, Northern white-cheeked gibbon, Francois' langur, Tonkin snub-nosed monkey, caovit gibbon, small carnivores, Vietnam pheasant, Chinese pangolin Examples of specific types of interventions or support: • Capacity building • Specific technical guidance on conservation breeding and rewilding • Habitat management and restoration • Threat removal include effective forest protection patrol • Technical support for selected models for specific species conservation breeding (Cuc Phuong and Na Hang)
	North Central Examples of specific sites: Pu Hu, Pu Luong, Xuan Lien Nature Reserve, Ben En National Park, Pu Hoat, Pu Mat National Park, Vu Quang Nature Reserve, and South Quang Binh complex Potential species: Gibbon, phayrei' langur, sambar deer, small carnivores, muntjac and other ungulates, pheasant, Chinese pangolin, bears Examples of specific types of interventions or support: • Capacity building • Specific technical guidance on conservation breeding and rewilding • Habitat management and restoration • Threat removal include effective forest protection patrol • Technical support for Selected models for specific species conservation breeding (Xuan Lien, Vu Quang, Dong Chau-Khe Nuoc Trong)
	Central Annamites Examples of specific sites: Dakrong-Phong Dien, Bac Huong Hoa, Hue Saola Nature Reserve, Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserve, and Song Thanh Elephant SHCA Potential species: Gibbon, douc langur, sambar deer, small carnivores, saola, muntjac, pheasant, crested argus Sunda pangolin, otters Examples of specific types of interventions or support: • Capacity building • Specific technical guidance on conservation breeding and rewilding • Habitat management and restoration • Threat removal include effective forest protection patrol • Technical support for selected models for specific species conservation breeding (Song Thanh, Saola Hue, Bach Ma)



Central Highlands

Examples of specific sites: Yok Don National Park, Ea So Nature Reserve, Chu Yan Sinh National Park, Kon Chu Rang National Park, Kon Ka Kinh, Chu Mom Ray, and Ta Dung and Nam Nung

Potential species: Silvered langur, large and small carnivores, hog deer, Eld's deer, large antler muntjac, chevrotain, gaur, banteng, wild water buffalo, pheasant and green peafowl, stork, vulture

Examples of specific types of interventions or support:

- Capacity building
- Specific technical guidance on conservation breeding and rewilding
- Habitat management and restoration
- Threat removal include effective forest protection patrol
- Technical support for selected models for specific species conservation breeding (Yok Don, Kon Ka Kinh and Chu Mom Ray)



Southern Annamites

Examples of specific sites: Hon Ba Nature Reserve, Phuoc Binh National Park, Ta Kou Nature Reserve, Dong Nai Culture and Nature Reserve, and Bu Gia Map

Potential species: Large and small carnivores, hog deer, Eld's deer, large antler muntjac, gaur, banteng, green peafowl, Sunda pangolin

Examples of specific types of interventions or support:

- Capacity building
- Specific technical guidance on conservation breeding and rewilding
- Habitat management and restoration
- Threat removal include effective forest protection patrol
- Technical support for Selected models for specific species conservation breeding (Phuoc Binh, Dong Nai)

Southern Vietnam



Examples of specific sites: Tram Chim, U Minh Ha, U Minh Thuong, Mui Ca Mau, Kien Luong, Lung Ngoc Hoang, Cat Tien, and Dong Nai.

Potential species: Sunda pangolin, sambar, small cats, otter, civet, sarus crane, other endangered water bird and crocodiles

Examples of specific types of interventions or support:

- Capacity building
- Specific technical guidance on conservation breeding and rewilding
- Habitat management and restoration
- Threat removal include effective forest protection patrol
- Technical support for Selected models for specific species conservation breeding (Tram Chim, U Minh Thuong)

Conclusions

The Assessment confirmed there is an emerging foundation for rewilding in Vietnam, and reasonable likelihood that a rewilding program under USAID will increase effectiveness of its biodiversity conservation programming. However, we also conclude that myriad challenges first need to be addressed, and enabling conditions achieved, before rewilding can be fully feasible. Removing threats such as snaring, hunting and wildlife trafficking will be essential to provide a foundation for successful rewilding under any future programming. Indeed, in most sites threat levels may not yet be low enough to allow for reintroductions or population supplementation (for example, see Table 4 threats matrix across the 13 sites the assessment team visited). Habitat management and restoration, villager buy-in and effective inter-relations with PAs, are also key enabling conditions for rewilding (and which have largely not been achieved in the baseline scenario). Current deficiencies in Management Board and staff capacity – not just for rewilding (as a specific activity) but also with respect to threat reduction, buffer zone engagement and other enabling factors – is an overarching issue that needs to be prioritized in order to optimize future rewilding success.

Findings through site visits and desk review provide important examples that illustrate these challenges and the need to temper urgency with recognition of inherent limitations. For example, while BCA sites Phong Dien NR and Dakrong NR display significant improvements in MB and staff capacity, hunting is still a significant threat and it would be difficult to do rewilding at these (and many other) sites in the short-term. Historical evidence suggests that in lieu of dedicated rewilding such areas may be best served, at least for the short- to medium-term, through rescue and conservation breeding programs.

For potential support of conservation breeding facilities with long-term view of re-wilding, site selection criteria must be clear and determined in advance, and should also fully consider political will, including current investments and policies, as this will be crucial to long-term viability of a rewilding program. Selection should also consider the working linkages and efficiencies between conservation breeding facilities and the PAs in which they are located.

The lessons learned from the historical focus are that zoos and NGOs have high levels of expertise in captive breeding of selected species, as well as sustainable funding streams to maintain high standards. While zoos and NGOs have a lengthy and generally effective track record in maintaining endangered species in captivity, breeding them, and in certain instances releasing them, overall, the historical context for rewilding is stark. The breeding centers managed by the government are basic, with limited budgets, vague mandates and narrow track records for conservation breeding.

While it will be important to verify rewilding feasibility through more comprehensive analysis, several initial suggestions for priority geographies can be provided. In consideration of sites where there is a known range of many endangered species, and where the PA has demonstrated good (or improving) conditions for threat reduction, has demonstrably engaged and committed Management Boards (and/or strong political will locally), and have suitable available habitat.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT

The assessment team found strong potential for a targeted focus on specific elements of training and capacity building to strengthen the effectiveness of future biodiversity conservation programming to achieve overarching objectives. A USAID programming focus on training and capacity building support has immensely strong potential to increase the effectiveness of achieving USAID's biodiversity conservation, primarily because this is the basis of developing professional management programs within the targeted SUFs. We elaborate on the reasons for this in more detail below. The team's site visits and consultations revealed that management capacities of the MBs, in Northern regions particularly, were found to be extremely wanting. The law enforcement and biodiversity monitoring agendas have been particularly strong under the BCA project and in those sites, and should also be implemented in any new region that USAID might support.

The team's recommended capacity building interventions should be prioritized to optimize long-term funding streams to individual PAs and the SUF system, and will also help make the MBs more robust, sustainable entities. USAID is well positioned to assist GoVN to undergo a paradigm shift from a fortress approach to a collaborative management approach, and from a project-based mentality to a sustainable programmatic approach. A national-level capacity building program, if implemented centrally and housed within a single technical department, will help to build and maintain institutional memory for integrated protected areas management and may also have the greatest influence at help to shift from a project-based geographic approach to a programmatic approach towards managing the SUF system, hence strengthening the ability to achieve systemic change for biodiversity conservation. Overall, the promotion of modern multi-functional protected area models through a diversified capacity building program is the best strategy to strengthen the profile of the SUF MBs within the provincial landscapes, and to strengthen their funding streams. This capacity building strategy can also contribute to the mitigation of park-people conflict, which that team also found some evidence for as a potentially widespread management concern.

Historical focus

A national training needs assessment was conducted in 2011 with GIZ,¹⁴⁵ as part of their ongoing joint program supporting policy development and strengthening of SUF management. The overall recommendations arising from that study highlighted a need to “*professionalize protected area management*” and address the demands of modern multi-functional protected area management to manage protected areas according to recommended international and required national standards.

In 2023, USAID commissioned a comprehensive institutional assessment for building management capacity within the PAs in Vietnam under the USAID-funded Biodiversity Conservation Activity.¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴⁵ Appleton, M.R., Tran Chi Trung, and Vu Minh Hoa (2011). Capacity needs assessment for management of protected areas in Vietnam and proposals for key protected area positions. A report prepared under the Preservation of Biodiversity in Forest Ecosystems in Vietnam Project, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development German Technical Cooperation/GIZ. 66 pp.

¹⁴⁶ Biodiversity Conservation Activity (2023). Institutional assessment of Special-Use Forests and Protection Forest focused in the functional adequacy of their management institutions. This report was prepared by WWF-US under the USAID Biodiversity Conservation Project. March 2023.

study assessed the capacity of 18 SUFs and protection forests, with a specific focus on the function and composition of staff in their management boards. A competency-based framework was used to evaluate the skills and knowledge required for individual positions. The results showed that most staff have a background and expertise in traditional subjects such as forestry, forest resource management, accounting and finance. However, most of them lacked skills and knowledge in biodiversity conservation, especially wildlife management and biodiversity monitoring, ecotourism development and management, sustainable financing, and technical skills in planning, and private sector engagement.

The institutional assessment identified more than 70 customized training courses to help the staff of SUF and protection forests improve essential knowledge and skills. A few high-priority courses will be implemented during the remainder of the VFBC project, the recommended training courses will be relevant for building capacity of Vietnam's Protected Areas as part of the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy 2021-2030, vision to 2050.¹⁴⁷ A second recent study evaluated 19 sustainable forest management plans (SFMPs) in the context of international best practices.¹⁴⁸ The study revealed a notable dearth of adequate training for forest management boards.

The “Capacity Building for Biodiversity Conservation Project” incorporated an extensive training needs assessment, and developed several training modules, supported by textbooks and other materials for basic rangers, technical rangers, and middle management courses. The textbooks were published as standard reference documents for the forestry sector. The modules and materials were piloted in three northern provinces. The Forest Protection Department, Vietnam Administration of Forestry, led the preparation of materials and subsequent training.

Drawing from consultations the assessment team conducted with MARD officials in Hanoi, combined with field consultations with the provincial authorities and the MBs, there are four institutional layers relating to SUF management that should be addressed. At the central level, the DoF and the Forest Protection Department (FPD) have shared management responsibilities for SUF management, including six centrally managed national parks. At the provincial level, the 53 provincial administrations have a supervisory and technical role over the remaining 168 SUFs. At the field level are the SUF MBs with their own organizational arrangements. However, the historical focus for capacity building has been strongly slanted towards the MBs and the technical units only.

The consultations with the SUF MBs also identified a range of other stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in SUF management. The partner agencies at the district level were often involved in field activities, notably the law enforcement (district FPD, police) as well as district education, district agriculture and district culture staff. Consultations with three communes during the field visits also identified Commune People's Committees as key stakeholders given their dependence on forest resources within the SUFs, as well as having conflicts with MBs. They were deemed a primary instigator

¹⁴⁷ Government of Vietnam (2021). Prime Minister's Decision 523/QĐ-TTg approving the Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy in the 2021-2030 period, with a vision to 2050 dated 1 April 2021.

¹⁴⁸ Biodiversity Conservation Activity (2023). Gap assessment of Sustainable Forest Management Plans of 20 protected areas. This report was prepared by WWF-US under the USAID Biodiversity Conservation Project. March 2023.

of threats to the biodiversity values within the SUFs. Policy makers at the provincial and district level were deemed important stakeholders, because of their influence on provincial financial streams and government staff allocations as well as promoting wise ecotourism development.

Project-based capacity building versus programmatic capacity building programs

Consultations with other bilateral donors and NGOs confirm that training focuses to date have been primarily site-based and strongly linked to project design, and the aspirations of the donor body. The only notable exception has been GIZ, who has been assisting MARD with SUF management for the last 15 years, with policy development. For example, the GIZ funded “Conservation and Sustainable Use of Forest Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Vietnam. (2014-2021)” had a component on strengthening forest protection, delivered at the central level. Between 2014 and 2017, 10 out of 18 SMART sites in Vietnam were supported by the project. To support the accessibility and use of data, an online reporting system for protected areas was introduced. On 7 July 2022, Vietnam Administration of Forestry issued the Decision No. 197¹⁴⁹ promulgating the Procedure for the standardized application of SMART in protected forests in Vietnam.

Another example is the “Removing Barriers Hindering Protected Area Management Effectiveness in Vietnam” project implemented a training needs assessments, the design of training modules, and carried out “a training of trainers,” conducted series of training courses for ranger, PA staff and institutionalized training modules and training material as standard training material for PA staff. The material preparation and subsequent training was led by the Department of Nature Conservation, Vietnam Administration of Forestry.

Role of capacity building in linking priority threats to biodiversity and management responses

The team’s consultations with the 13 SUF MBs identified several threats to the biodiversity values amongst their highest priority management concerns. These comprised unsustainable NTFP utilization, including medicinal plants, illegal hunting and snaring, and encroachment. When the team delved with stakeholders into management responses to address these challenges and the capacity building gaps required to mitigate these priority threats, the MBs offered limited management solutions. Many MBs emphasized re-enforcing the fortress approach. An increased understanding of villagers’ perspectives on their forest dependence was not specified, even when the legislation has expanded to modern, multi-functional, protected area management approaches.

Project based capacity building versus programmatic capacity building approaches

Capacity building within the SUF system has been almost entirely project based. SUF site selection itself has been strongly linked to selection of project regions. These project designs are usually clustered in specific regions under the oversight of project-specific Provincial Project Management Units, with management oversight costs. The training component then becomes a secondary integrated part of project design, which ensures that the project meets its project objectives. In sharp contrast, the GIZ

¹⁴⁹ Government of Vietnam (2022). Decision No. 197/QĐ-TCLN-ĐDPH. Procedure for the standardized application of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) in protected forests in Vietnam.

centralized training model focusing on SMART adoption provided an excellent example of how training implemented at the central level, and linked to project-based field models, led to policy reform, and best practice standardization. This training model fulfilled several criteria: (i) use of the best PA expertise in highly specialized PA management within the country ensuring high standards of training; (ii) on-the-job training for centrally-based government and project staff; (iii) on-site training within the SUFs requested by the majority of MB senior staff; (iv) understanding of field experiences to inform policy development; and (v) strengthening of institutional memory for developing long-term capacity building programs (10-30 year time horizon).

Promoting modern multi-functional protected area management. Capacity building should encompass the full remit of fields of protected area specialization, as described in the “Institutional assessment of Special-Use Forests and Protection Forest focused on the functional adequacy of their management institutions”, and as recommended in the training needs assessment conducted in 2011. The capacity building should continue to prioritize core competency themes linked to biodiversity values – comprising biodiversity assessments (baselines), biodiversity monitoring and threat mitigation through SMART patrolling and community patrol teams. Moreover, the capacity building agenda should expand to encompass competences that can strengthen the overall management capacity of the MBs, notably governance (stakeholder forums), non-timber forest product research and management, and nature-based ecotourism. Nature-based ecotourism, given its current weak profile, potential to protect biodiversity and reduce threats if properly managed, its potential economic benefits to the SUF system, and its potential to strengthen the profile of MBs within the provincial landscape, may require increased capacity building support.

Broadening participatory training programs to optimize field program impact and sustainability. Most training has focused on the MBs themselves. However, many staff in the District Peoples Committees have similar legal mandates with the SUF MB. E.g. district tourism staff on tourism development; district education staff on informal education; and district livelihood development with districts. However, the consultations with the MBs revealed that district cooperation seemed confined to the law enforcement agenda only. There is great potential both to increase capacity building impact and the sustainability of field programs if district partners of a SUF MB work together and are trained simultaneously on tailor-made training courses. The consultations recognized that the socializing of protected areas is an important factor both in terms of enabling great district and provincial political will, as well as greater acceptance by forest dependent villagers of government-led field programs.

Diversity of capacity building approaches

All of the MBs the team consulted, without exception, favored on-site training. They cited small numbers of MB staff and using their own situations as reasons for this training approach. Study tours were deemed valuable if they provided opportunities to see working models elsewhere in the country.

Equipment and furniture needs

The SUF MBs the team met with that had not received recent project support reported a dearth of both office and field equipment. Office equipment includes computers, photocopiers, printers, as well as office

furniture (bookshelves). Field equipment includes camera traps, digital cameras, GPS, as well as overnight camping (sleeping bags, hammocks, etc.) and cooking items, but also devices and software needed for SMART. At some sites, stakeholders also mentioned a need for technical monitoring equipment such as collar tags. This complimentary equipment is essential for implementing effective training programs and subsequent field work.

Key challenges and enabling conditions

The assessment team's document review, stakeholder consultations and site visits called attention to the importance of several enabling conditions that are important to have in place to optimally develop training and capacity building support, as well as key challenges that the new program may either be able to help address or will need to take into account. These key challenges include:

- **Lack of overall capacity building plan and budget.** The National Capacity Development Plan for the PA Management System to 2025, with a Vision to 2030, is nearly 10 years old and should be updated to take account of the revised Forestry Law (2017), and other new legislation relating to SUF management. The revised plan should have a complimentary budget.
- **Institutional memory concerns.** The consultations with the DoF and FPD, and the NGOs identified institutional memory of best practice approaches in some technical fields, as seriously wanting. The USAID BCA project has achieved much success towards standardizing biodiversity monitoring and law enforcement to international standards. However, there appears to remain a dearth of expertise in environmental education, livelihood development and ecotourism.
- **Lack of MB organization and staffing.** The consultations revealed that most SUF MBs currently have low staffing levels, whilst the number of required competencies is quite broad. At the same time, the Government of Vietnam has recently introduced a policy to downsize government staffing levels.¹⁵⁰ This suggests that MARD needs to give clear direction on MB organization, and indicative staffing levels in relation to the different PA competencies. Priority staffing allocations should be awarded to competences that optimize economic benefit to the MB integrity while at the same time ensuring effective protection of the biodiversity values; precise staffing allocations might vary according to the individual values of specific SUF sites.
- **Weak MB capacities.** The consultations with the MBs showed that the workforce is generally well educated and there has been significant, if patchy, access to training. However, competence levels appeared to be very low for many of the specific technical skills required for modern, multi-functional protected area management. The overall impression from the team's consultations was that there is a very large gap between the aspirations for multi-functional protected area management set out in recent legislation, and the reality of the current competence levels of protected area staff. Most of the job descriptions that existed were quite generic, emphasizing multi-tasking. The working relationships described in all the district working

¹⁵⁰ Government of Vietnam. (2023). Decree No. 29/2023/ND-CP on downsizing policies dated 3 June 2023.

agreements were also consequently highly generic, and captured in a single working agreement. The consultations also showed that prior training was very unevenly distributed. Some PAs had been beneficiaries of quite a lot of training in some SUFs implementing projects, or in SUFs with NGOs providing technical support, but far less in other PAs.

- **Limited pool of national and international expertise in PA management:** The different fields of PA management are highly specialized and, in some cases, fairly unique to the management of the special-use forest system. The different technical fields of expertise are described below, with indicative indicators of expertise in the country:
 - Biodiversity assessment methodologies (including baselines) and biodiversity monitoring to inform planning and management (high)
 - SMART patrolling and database management, including strengthening community patrol teams and community engagement (high)
 - Forest rehabilitation (medium)
 - Enable and prepare rewilding readiness for selected site and species (medium)
 - Collaborative management including stakeholder forums (low)
 - Participatory SUF management planning (low)
 - Forest fire prevention (low)
 - Wildlife rescue and handling (low)
 - NTFP research and management (low)
 - Environmental education, including sustainable livelihoods (low)
 - Livelihood development in buffer zone communities linked to threat mitigation (low)
 - Development of nature-based tourism models and responsible tourism (low)

Many high-quality experts are already tied to contracts or senior positions within institutes and NGOs. Their availability for long-term capacity building assignments may be a constraining factor.

- **Lack of good training facilities and training curriculum.** Many of the training curriculum are linked to projects of limited impact. The preparation of a standard, government endorsed set of guidelines and field manuals is badly required in all the technical fields of PA management. These are not project outputs, but instead government approved documents, sometimes issued at the Ministerial level (i.e. for discretionary items such as manuals and not requiring an additional legal document) although often linked to government Decree or Circulars (i.e. for mandatory guidelines). Programming support can work with the government to develop these guidelines and manuals.

Discussion on specific strategies and interventions

Centralized training program. The GIZ centralized training model focusing on SMART adoption provided an excellent example of how training implemented at the central level, and linked to project-based field models, led to policy reform, and best practice standardization. The provision of training to the SUF system should employ diverse approaches, and target diverse audiences. The GIZ

model of providing central-level capacity building to 10 SUFs on SMART adoption led to a policy outcome – namely Decision No 197. The provision of a training capacity capability within DOF/DFPM would ensure training and subsequent SUF management is standardized. It would link the implementation of field activities and lessons learned from field practice with policy making. This approach would facilitate on-site training in selected specialized fields of SUF management. It would facilitate longer term programmatic support by DOF/DFPM beyond the end of the project. Capacities of government staff would be strengthened as opposed to NGO staff and national consultants.

Capacity building topics. Capacity building program to deliver modern multi-functional protected area management. The core program of capacity building topics to be supported might broadly address the technical fields prescribed in the SUF legislation, some of which the MBs expressed that they have some experience with, whilst others are comparatively weak or new fields of management. These technical fields comprise:

- Collaborative management including stakeholder forums
- Participatory SUF management planning
- Biodiversity assessment methodologies (including baselines) and biodiversity monitoring to inform planning and management
- SMART patrolling and database management, including strengthening community patrol teams and community engagement
- Forest fire prevention
- Forest rehabilitation
- Enable and prepare rewilding readiness for selected site and species
- Wildlife rescue and handling
- NTFP research and management
- Environmental education, including sustainable livelihoods
- Livelihood development in buffer zone communities linked to threat mitigation
- Development of nature-based tourism models and responsible tourism

The goal of the capacity building program should be to address the demands of modern multi-functional protected area management and to manage protected areas according to recommended international and required national standards.

Capacity building approaches:

- Centralized training support that is institutionalized at the national level, through the long-term recruitment of leading national experts in most technical fields (collaborative management, biodiversity assessments and monitoring, law enforcement, including SMART adoption, environmental education, livelihood development and ecotourism). International experts might be selected to support collaborative management and ecotourism. They would provide one site, short, duration, technical support to the SUF MB and district partners under the USAID initiative. This training approach was favored for MB staff because large numbers of staff could be trained and then could return to their routine fieldwork.
- Preparation of a standard, government endorsed set of guidelines and field manuals. These are not project outputs but government approved documents, sometimes issued at the Minister

level (i.e. for discretionary items such as manuals and not requiring an additional legal document) although often linked to government Decree or Circulars (i.e. for mandatory guidelines).

- In-country study tours to expose staff to working models and inspire staff to become motivated. These include SMART systems, rewilding activities, outreach programs, and ecotourism. (12-15 persons).
- International, tailor-made study tours to specific locations (ideally within Asia) that espouse international standard approaches to specific SUF management topics.
- Tailor-made short duration study tours for policy makers, SUF MBs and local development partners to strengthen support for SUF management objectives and to build working relations.
- Embedded training (2-4 weeks) for staff to work in better managed SUFs to build capacity and networking within the SUF system.
- A buffer zone training center which specializes in NTFP research and management, village land use planning, conflict mitigation techniques, conservation agreements and village regulations formulation, livelihood development linked to threat mitigation, and the promotion of ex situ NTFP co-operatives. This center would target rural development NGOs and SUF MB staff. This training center could be in Phong Nha-Ke Bang NP, which is already implementing some of these programs (environmental education and livelihoods).
- Development of a best practice SUF management model in Northern Vietnam.
- Trainees need a suitable environment and sufficient incentives to be able to practice their skills after training courses.

Priority geographies

The assessment team envisions that the same suite of training interventions be provided to all target SUFs or sites. As such, the team does not differentiate suggestions by priority geographies for capacity building support. The intent is that any new target SUFs receiving biodiversity programming support would be provided with the same suite of training interventions.

In terms of overall priority geographies, a future capacity building agenda should be largely based upon several other criteria. At the regional level, the sentiments prescribed with the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy in the 2021-2030 period, with a vision to 2050 will be one of the overriding criteria for priority geography on sites selected for assistance, and thence the sites selected for technical support. Most sites in northern Vietnam and in South Central Vietnam have received little project support and hence little capacity development support in the last decade or so.

An additional consideration for geographies is that it may be beneficial to have some quality multi-functional PA management models located close to high-level decision makers. This will enable



Caption: GoVN, USAID MB, and NORC staff outside the MB office at Phia Oac-Phia Den National Park

polymakers, SUF MB staff as well as interested NGOs to visit these sites and understand how these protected areas operate. In addition, a buffer zone training center could be located in a high-profile site like Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. This national park has very strong management capacity, existing training and accommodation facilities, and also implements many components for effective buffer zone management.

NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL POLICY AND REGULATORY SUPPORT

An aim to develop modern multi-functional protected area models at USAID-supported sites establishes a firm basis for policy support in various aspects of SUF management. The involvement of district counterparts in the respective programs will assist policy formulation through the line agencies to provincial authorities. The modern multi-functional protected area models could be developed under the oversight of umbrella stakeholder forums (Management Advisory Committees) which would also assist to inform policy development. The promotion of a centralized training program based upon the successful GIZ centralized training model focusing on SMART adoption would also help link the project-based field models to policy reform and best practice standardization. Support to prepare a standard, government endorsed set of guidelines and field manuals will assist with standardizing management practices. A forum of national technical experts in the leading fields of PA management should also be established for sharing approaches and networking purposes. This would fill a gap in the absence of institutional memory at the central level. A number of PA laws, regulations and guidelines should be considered as the primary focus for a USAID programming focus on policy and regulatory support.

Historical focus

Vietnam issued its first national regulation on wildlife protection in 1963.¹⁵¹ This was followed by the Law on Forest Protection Development in 1991 and 2004 strengthening national regulations on forest protection, nature and wildlife conservation, and with subsequent implementation Government Decrees (Decree no. 18-HDBT, Decree no. 8/2002/NĐ-CP, and Decree no. 32/2006/NĐ-CP); the issuance of the Law on Biodiversity (2008) further strengthened national regulations on biodiversity management, together with its associated implementation Decrees (Decree 65/2010/NĐ-CP and Decree no. 160/2013/ND-CP, Decree no. 64/2019/NĐ-CP).

More recently the issuance of the Law on Forestry in 2017 has further consolidated the national regulation on the protection and conservation of Vietnam's protected area system, especially with respect to biodiversity management through subsequent Decrees (Decree no. 156/2018/ND-CP; Decree no. 06/2019/NĐ-CP, Decree no. 84/2021/NĐ-CP). Nevertheless, the current policy framework and legal instruments have numerous loopholes, overlaps and inconsistencies that hinder the effective management of biodiversity in SUFs. As the assessment team's consultations with DOF, FPD and PAs confirmed, there is incoherence between sectoral mandates that create confusion and administrative gaps on roles and reporting mechanisms both from the site to provincial levels and from the site and provincial departments to relevant ministries. Therefore, further work on refinement of the legal

¹⁵¹ Decree no. 39-CP of Government Council dated 5 April 1963 on Provisional regulation for hunting of forest bird and animal.

instruments associated with biodiversity protection in protected areas, including improved implementation and performance, is crucial to ensure effective forest protection and biodiversity conservation that secure and facilitate the recovery of Vietnam's threatened habitat and species.

USAID has been recently involved in strengthening the law and regulatory measures on forest management and biodiversity conservation, especially to counter wildlife trafficking in Vietnam. The USAID Governance for Inclusive Growth program (GIG) program (2014-2018) has supported the revision of various Articles related to wildlife crime under Penal Code 2015 (amended in 2017), and the Resolution of the Supreme Judge's Council's no. 05/2018/NQ-HĐTP as well as Articles related to biodiversity, protected areas, and wildlife protection in the Law on Forestry 2017. Under USAID's Saving Species Vietnam, the project supported the drafting and issuance of subsequent Government Decrees including Decree no. 06/2019/NĐ-CP on management of forest fauna and flora, Decree no. 35/2019/NĐ-CP on handling administrative violations in forestry sector and Circular no. 29/2019/TT-BNNPTNT on handling of forest animals as exhibits; and forest animals voluntarily submitted to the state by organizations and individuals. Under USAID's BCA, Sustainable Forest management (SFM), and Save Threatened Wildlife, the Agency is supporting the review of related laws in forestry, wildlife protection and wildlife trafficking, including revising Decree no. 156/2018/ND-CP, various Circulars (under MARD) and the Politburo's Resolution on forest development. The BCA project is supporting the revision of Decree 01/2018/ND-CP, drafting a National Action Plan on endangered forest wildlife, and advocacy of institutionalized biodiversity monitoring and assessment protocols.

In this way, USAID has been progressively engaged in policy development at the national level with an increased focus in the forestry sector and protected area and wildlife management. Based on this history and current work, a future program can take advantage of this growing knowledge and momentum to continue and optimize technical support for the refinement of national laws and regulation to help reduce threats to biodiversity in the protected area system, including in areas such as rewilding, ecotourism and stakeholder engagement.

Potential to increase conservation programming effectiveness and feasibility

Overall, the various policy gaps, overlaps and inefficiencies documented for Capacity Building, Rewilding, Ecotourism and other important aspects of PA management strongly suggests that a programming component on Policy and Regulatory Support would maximize the potential of any future USAID program to support conservation programming effectiveness. The team's consultations with bilateral donors and USAID-supported projects made evident that different donors engage in different approaches to promote effective SUF management. Most strikingly, the BCA Project is strongly focused on the core zone activities, namely biodiversity monitoring, SMART adoption and community patrol teams, and environmental education focusing on a conservation agenda and mitigating illegal wildlife trade.¹⁵² In sharp contrast, Helvetas and KfW promoted livelihood development in buffer zones, with very limited relationship to mitigating threats to the biodiversity inside the SUFs.

¹⁵² Biodiversity Conservation Activity (2023). Institutional assessment of Special-Use Forests and Protection Forest focused in the functional adequacy of their management institutions. This report was prepared by WWF-US under the USAID Biodiversity Conservation Project. March 2023.

Furthermore, the team's analysis of direct threats across the 13 SUFs visited shone a spotlight on the NTFP harvesting, illegal hunting and snaring, and to a lesser extent, the unstable boundaries linked to the encroachment. There are policy-related opportunities to conduct research on NTFP utilization and on wildlife products including fish (protein-related) inside protected areas. This would assist to identify how external hunting threats and pressures are infiltrating the buffer zone communities.

The role and responsibilities of a Livelihoods Development for Conservation capacity has been described in the Forestry Law (2017), Circular No. 28 (2018) and Decision No. 208 (2024).¹⁵³ Article 54 of the Forestry Law (2017) states that “the special-use forest management board is responsible for formulating investment programs and projects for the development of buffer zones; organize the implementation of investment programs and projects in the buffer zone with the participation of local communities; coordinate with local authorities in reviewing and formulating management plans for residential land and production land interspersed in special-use forests and submit them to competent state agencies for approval.”

During the site visits, the team also gained insights into livelihood capacities within individual SUF MBs who were implementing livelihood programs into buffer zone communities through Decision 24.¹⁵⁴ This Decision states that the MBs should support each village with 40 million VND each year. Note in Decree 58¹⁵⁵ issued in May 2024, the value of this livelihood development assistance increased to 50 million VND/village/year, perhaps indicating the willingness of GoVN to do more to assist PA buffer zone communities. These legislative frameworks offer an opportunity to pilot livelihood development (ecodevelopment) linked to threat mitigation wherever the resources would be available.¹⁵⁶

In addition, a rewilding program and a nature-based ecotourism agenda also both offer substantial opportunities to inform and help fill national policy needs, based on practical experiences at the field level. This type of support would help Vietnam to complete their policy framework for PA management, especially on rewilding and ecotourism, both of which are currently lacking. The involvement of district counterparts in the respective programs on law enforcement, environmental education, livelihood development and tourism would also help strengthen policy formulation through line agencies to provincial authorities.

The development of modern multi-stakeholders' engagement in protected area management models would also enable broader participation in PA management, especially for the private sector and NGOs. Future USAID programming support in this direction could also help Vietnam to explore and consider newer approaches that enable multi-stakeholders' engagement to mobilize talent and resources in

¹⁵³ Government of Vietnam (2024). Prime Minister Decision No. 208/QĐ-TTg approving the project on development of multi-use values of the forest ecosystems to 2030, vision to 2050, dated 29 March 2024.

¹⁵⁴ Government of Vietnam. (2012c). Prime Minister Decision No. 24/2012/QĐ-TTg on investment policy for the development of SUFs in 2011-2020, dated 1 June 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Government of Vietnam. (2024). Decree No. 58/2024/ND-CP about some investment policies in forestry dated 24 May 2024.

¹⁵⁶ The key gaps in Decision 24 and Decree 58 implementation is that they assign the investment burden to provincial authorities. As such, they are only likely to be done in wealthier provinces.

innovative PA management and sustainable financing. These forums can also provide regulatory support and oversee sustainable financing.

In the context of USAID's current engagement in law and regulatory development related to forest, biodiversity and wildlife, and based on the findings of this assessment, including through consultations with DOF, FPD and PAs, it is clear that certain policy gaps are compromising the optimal implementation of conservation programming in the PA system. This is therefore a key potential entry point for a new USAID-supported programming focus to engage more effectively on improving national regulation related to biodiversity, protected area and counter wildlife trafficking to enable effective rewilding, ecotourism and other measures that help increase conservation effectiveness.

As Vietnam has a highly centralized policy development system, the potential for a future program to improve policy, and indeed its feasibility for success, likewise rests on the central level. Therefore, such support should be focused at ministry levels. At the provincial level, support could best be considered as technical support to pilot the implementation of national policies or legal instruments, in order to demonstrate best practices or studying specific effective implementation models that provide learning, support specialized training and encourage replication at broader scale where relevant.

Vietnam is currently reviewing the implementation of the Forestry Law and the Biodiversity Law, and will develop proposed amendments. This presents a very relevant opportunity for future USAID support to engage in and support the comprehensive review of gaps related to biodiversity protection and threat reduction in protected areas, and support revisions to these laws through collaboration with existing GoVN partners such as MARD and MONRE. In addition to high-level policy and regulation support, other support to institutionalize, standardize national guidelines and protocol for capacity building, biodiversity baselines and monitoring and responsible tourism management practices should be a priority under the Policy and Regulatory Support.

Key challenges

The assessment team's document review, stakeholder consultations and site visits called attention to the importance of several enabling conditions that are important to have in place in order to optimally develop national and provincial policy and regulatory support, as well as key challenges that future USAID support may either be able to help address or will need to take into account. Key challenges include:

- **Constraints of the current approach to SUF management.** The constraints of a project approach as opposed to a programmatic approach to SUF Management have had major repercussions on national policy formulation. Projects often implement contrasting approaches, which inhibits clear policy identification. The second issue relates to project duration and site faithfulness where projects tend to shift location within the country. The constraints of decentralized management of the SUF system also inhibit effective policy development. DoF and FPD have shared national level responsibilities over six national parks, while the 63 provincial administrations share responsibilities over the remaining more than 168 SUFs. The mixed and

complicated PA management level requires a complex policy framework to be developed at both national and provincial level.

- **Gaps in communication between national and local policymakers.** There is a gap in communication and consultation process between the site level and central level that inhibits effective policy formulation. The central conservation agencies in Hanoi have extremely limited staffing levels, and consequently have generalized, multi-tasking terms of reference. Furthermore, the involvement of 63 provincial authorities with their policy formulation mandates mean the SUF legislation is unstandardized, overlapping and technically substandard. For example, the team's consultations found that Decree 01/2018/ND-CP on the role of forest rangers and forest protection force and Decree 156/2018/ND-CP had numerous complaints regarding its vague and impractical promulgations. The communication gap between the field level and central level could be reduced by having expert trainers in the specialized fields of protected area management being based in the Central level, catalyzing effective policy formulation
- **Need for capacity building on topics for policy reform.** There are capacity building needs for a number of new topics related to enabling the participation of multiple stakeholders and sustainable financing that has the potential to support policy reform. These topics include rewilding, ecotourism, land use planning, and livelihood development to make a completed policy system for PA management.

Enabling Conditions and Additional Considerations

Future USAID support in this domain that offers a more comprehensive, participatory and thorough approach to policy development would not only help to ensure proper analysis, consultation process and produce proper policy that supports biodiversity conservation in protected areas, but also create important precedents for good practices that may offer lessons and support other USAID policy development processes or programs.

However, Policy and Regulatory support can be a sensitive issue for internationally supported projects. The team highlights a need for careful planning and programming in close collaboration with GoVN partners, to ensure relevance and alignment with national and sectoral policy and regulatory development agendas. Capacity gaps and a lack of proper comprehensive analyses and multi-sector collaboration often hinder the effectiveness of policy development. Rapidly organized and poorly implemented consultation processes result in short-life policies or inapplicable regulations with many inconsistencies, gaps and overlaps. Supporting reviews and refining the current laws, and regulatory framework on biodiversity and protected area management should be a high priority for future USAID support. The support should consider focusing its policy-related support on protected area management, standardizing biodiversity inventory and monitoring; multi-stakeholder involvement in PA management and biodiversity conservation, livelihood development for conservation, ecotourism and sustainable financing.

Villager dependence upon natural resources within the SUFs seems one of the most poorly understood fields of PA management in Vietnam. Research and studies on villagers' perspectives on natural resource

use would prove an important first step towards policy formulation on one of the most pervading threats, according to the team's consultations, to the majority of the SUF system.

Strong coordination among sectors to achieve consensus on a common approach for PA management and biodiversity conservation will be critical and will take time. Accordingly, future USAID programming support should consider a policy coordination platform for three sectors (Forestry, Fishery and Environment) to harmonize collaboration and ensure effective amendment of existing policy as well as formulating new ones. The Collaboration could be facilitated by a consultative platform to share policy and regulatory development among the sectors, to reduce duplication and ensure coherence during policy development.

Traditionally, MARD, MONRE and other sectors (e.g. Tourism) often have different concepts and approaches for biodiversity conservation and protected area management, and this sectoral approach presents a key risk to any future biodiversity programming focused on effective application of policy and regulatory support. Therefore, improving sectoral collaboration and coordination in the policy development process to ensure coherence and a better cross-sectoral approach will be very important.

Discussion on specific strategies and interventions

Support in this domain should not only focus on Laws, Decrees, Circulars and similar, but also give priority to technical guidance and guidelines to ensure effective application and improved management. Technical guidance can also be issued more quickly to accommodate changes and emerging management issues, compared to traditional legal instruments such as Decrees, Circulars. Promoting new PA management that enables multiple sectors and stakeholders' participation should be considered as well.¹⁵⁷ Support in this domain can also focus on preparation of a standard, government endorsed set of guidelines and field manuals. Where appropriate, these are government approved documents linked to sections of government Circulars.

In the absence of an advisory mechanism at the central level, a forum of leading national experts in the different technical fields of PA management should be established both for sharing approaches and networking purposes. This Technical Working Group should avert the "silo" approach to SUF management, and assist policy formulation at all stages of development.

The assessment team suggests that future USAID programming support in this area consider prioritizing the following laws, regulations and guidelines below as the primary focus of the Policy and Regulatory Support.¹⁵⁸ This suggestion also takes into account the timelines needed for such types of policy support, fit with typical USAID programming cycle, and support opportunities that may be relatively more manageable over a 5-year program cycle:

¹⁵⁷ This can also help traditionally forestry-focused Management Boards have capacity to effectively manage the multiple ecosystems they are sometimes mandated with, including for PAs where wetlands, mangrove and marine ecosystems are prevailing habitats.

¹⁵⁸ The team highlights that amendments to major laws or decrees are also needed, but likely outside the scope of USAID biodiversity programming support. This includes amendments to the 2017 Forestry Law, 2008 Biodiversity Law, and to Decree 01/2019/ND-CP – specifically the Article on forest ranger in PA and forest protection force and community patrol.

- Development of National Rewilding plan to 2050 that is similar to a national biodiversity action plan and provides detailed and practical steps for each stage in the process, from planning, rewilding implementation, to monitoring
- Development of National Plan/policy on engagement of private sector, NGO and public in biodiversity conservation
- Development of national guideline on biodiversity inventory and monitoring, and database management
- Development of national guidelines on environmentally and socially responsible ecotourism in PA and wilderness areas (i.e. ecotourism Best Practices guidelines)

Priority geographies

The assessment team suggests that the key opportunities for USAID future programming consideration in this area are primarily at national level. Other types of support mentioned in the sections above, for example at the district or provincial level, would be important to implement or prioritize regardless of implementation geography (i.e., in any province where biodiversity programming support is taking place).

Objective 3 Findings and Conclusions: Focal Geographies and Promising Interventions

Advise on which geographies with related specific biodiversity focal interests USAID should consider for future biodiversity conservation programming and the most promising interventions within each of these, with clear recommendations and justifications.

RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS, GEOGRAPHIES AND FIT WITH FOCAL INTERESTS

Strategic Focuses

One of the overriding critical issues affecting the SUF system, and the recommended interventions, geographies and fit with focal interests under a future USAID intervention, is sustainable funding streams. The current management of the SUF system depends on external donor support, which is project-based rather than programmatic. This project-based approach is itself influenced by the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy (2021-2030), promoting a regional breakdown to SUF support. The Strategy directs that the programs of field work are liable to be influenced by project cycles, and thus face periods without external funding. On this basis, the assessment team's recommended interventions for field programs of work are also prioritized to help optimize long-term funding streams to individual PAs and the SUF system, and actions that can help make the MBs more robust, sustainable entities.

The **law enforcement and biodiversity monitoring** agendas have been particularly strong under the BCA project and should be continued in priority BCA sites as well as in new geographic priorities, such as Northern Vietnam. In addition, biodiversity assessments (baselines) should be conducted on all the higher taxonomic groups (for example, mammals, birds, and reptiles), as well as vegetation assessments

in clinal montane vegetation types. Participatory NTFP research should also be conducted as an entry point for improved management, as well as participatory boundary demarcation. These biodiversity datasets will provide the basis of virtually all subsequent management planning and activities. SMART patrolling should be introduced into all targeted SUFs, with supporting capacity, equipment and databases. Community patrol teams and interagency enforcement teams should be trained and mobilized.

Rewilding readiness preparation activities should be promoted for selected sites and selected species. The success of rewilding release programs will be heavily linked to habitat restoration and mitigating threats to the wildlife populations by inducing changes in attitudes and behavior of the local communities. Ex-situ breeding programs are encouraged to build upon the extensive experience with the existing wildlife rescue and breeding centers, which have been running sustainably and to international animal handling standards for 10-15 years.

A national-level **capacity building component**, if implemented centrally, may have the greatest influence at shifting from a project-based geographic approach to a programmatic approach to managing the SUF system and strengthening the ability to achieve systemic change for biodiversity conservation. Overall, the promotion of modern multi-functional protected area models is the best strategy to strengthen the profile of the SUF MBs within the provincial landscapes, and to strengthen their funding streams. This strategy will contribute to the mitigation of park-people conflict which seems a widespread management concern. USAID is well positioned to assist the Government of Vietnam to undergo a paradigm shift from the fortress approach to a collaborative management approach, and from a project-based mentality to a sustainable programmatic approach.

Most sites the assessment team visited had low staffing levels and low management capacities. A strong capacity building program is paramount to the development of modern, multi-functional protected areas, and can comprise a targeted component of future support. On-site training in the different technical fields of protected area management should form the main thrust of the capacity building agenda. National experts (and international expertise for tourism) should deliver training to each of the selected SUFs. Ideally this expertise should be based within DoF to optimize internal SUF capacity building, to assist the development of standardized field approaches and to strengthen policy development.

However, in terms of achieving sustainable financing goals, an **ecotourism component** warrants attention because it offers the greatest potential to maximize revenue inflows to the SUF system and also constitutes the largest current gap in donor assistance. Its current embryonic status means it requires dedicated technical support. The development of nature-based tourism models and responsible tourism should be promoted, through intensive technical assistance, and supported in selected PAs with high tourism potential.

An additional important consideration is a **livelihoods development for conservation component**, which is also a prioritized program of work espoused within Vietnam's Ninth SEDP. Past experiences with this program of work have not succeeded in linking livelihoods development specifically to threat mitigation, and thus the program has not become a mainstream conservation tool. That said, the

government has recently increased government funding to 50 million VND per annum per village. USAID is encouraged to consider focusing on these livelihood programs, with the purpose of bringing about policy change linking livelihood development directly to threat mitigation and securing increased funding streams. A strengthened focus on livelihood development for conservation should be implemented in buffer zone communities at selected sites, prioritizing threat mitigation targeted to reducing snaring and hunting levels, establishing sustainable NTFP harvesting regimes, ex-situ NTFP cultivation, curtailing demands for illegal logging and stabilizing protected area boundaries. Environmental education programs should also include sustainable livelihoods as an entry point for promoting conservation values.

The above components can each be strengthened via a cross-cutting **policy support component** that engages at site, district, provincial and national levels, and that can also include establishing stakeholder forums to tackle emerging management issues and strengthen coordination across all entities. As highlighted in the previous chapter, these field models should in turn form a sound basis for program support that aims to contribute to developing or supporting needed gap-filling across a range of provincial and national policy support elements for many aspects of protected area management.

Geographic Focuses

Northern Vietnam

The assessment team recommends that USAID newly prioritize support to the Northern region of Vietnam because it encompasses SUFs that have received very low international support in recent decades, but have several sites with high biological significance. These sites have unique values, high endemism and are of international importance. The team recommends that USAID select sites for support that show potential to be protected and managed as conservation complexes, to enhance long term viability of their associated threatened biodiversity. To maximize impact, fewer sites should be selected, but priority should be given to sites which connect to others or in internationally recognized landscapes and transboundary areas.¹⁵⁹ The ecotourism potential of each site should also be a priority consideration, given its impact on strengthening the MB profile, increasing sustainable financing streams to the SUF system, and enhancing the protection of biodiversity.

South Central Vietnam

The assessment team recommends that USAID also prioritize sites in South Central Vietnam, to protect SUFs with unique biodiversity values and a diversity of important ecosystems. Similar to Northern Vietnam, this region has sites that connect with others to form a larger landscape with high numbers of endangered species. South Central Vietnam also contains sites that are strategically important, because they are situated close to heavily populated areas and have good potential for nature-based tourism recreation. Stronger protection will also enhance ecosystem services by securing water and energy. Finally, the region contains sites that enjoy high political will for biodiversity conservation, which will help

¹⁵⁹ Such sites could include the Mu Cang Chai/Muong La forest landscape, the recently established Du Gia National Park, as well as Trung Khanh SHCA linked to China (Cao Vit gibbon conservation).

optimize the sustainability of follow-up investments and thereby sustaining longer-term conservation outcomes and achievements.

Table II below summarizes the assessment team’s key suggestions for recommended strategic directions and interventions that USAID should consider newly or continuing to prioritize for future programming, for each of five regional geographies, together with key reasons why.

Table 11. Summary of recommended activities across different strategic directions USAID should consider newly or continuing to prioritize, in Northern, North Central, Central Annamites, Southern Annamites and Southern Vietnam

NORTHERN VIETNAM	
TYPES OF INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT	KEY REASONS / JUSTIFICATIONS
CAPACITY BUILDING	
- Develop systematic programs for SMART patrol and species surveys (baselines and database management) for managers and staff at all northern SUFs. - Implies on-site training from experts and embedded training. - Standardize capacity building module and material for PA manager, ranger, technical staff, community patrol team, and local partners on various skills - Establish an embedded training program for northern PA group in a specific location e.g. Ba Be NP or Cuc Phuong NP - Design and implement study tours/exchange visits to other PAs in Vietnam and region	- High biodiversity values and high pressure from buffer zone. - Potential to support priority conservation species - Across-the-board gaps in training/skills/programming for SMART patrols and species surveys. - Most of the northern PAs share similar challenges, context and issues so it would be helpful and strategic to organize training in groups to facilitate peer-to-peer information flow and experience exchange
Equipment upgrade (camera traps, poacher cam, PCs and other biodiversity monitoring equipment).	SMART equipment and Biodiversity baseline equipment and database management systems are essential for sustainable outcomes.
Establishment of ecotourism capacity within the MBs of all northern PAs (development plans; fee system). This entails on-site technical support from experts; orientation study tours and embedded training.	High potential for ecotourism (see Ecotourism below); however, major capacity gaps and lack of fundamentals (master plans; fee system etc.).
EE program for mass organizations; households, schools at all northern PAs.	EE will be a vital complementary activity for all capacity-building (and rewilding, ecotourism) programming in the north.
Improve collaborative management arrangements wherever possible.	Essential management tool that has already been established in 8 BCA sites (learning opportunities).
ECOTOURISM	
Technical support package for ecotourism development in Na Hang, Hoang Lien, Mu Cang Chai, Muong La including: infrastructure and EE support (tourist routes; signboards; tourist center); training and application of Ecotourism Best Practices guidelines (national guidelines)	- Moderate to high ecotourism potential - Some established tourism hubs (e.g. Sapa) and growth opportunities (Cao Bang; Ha Giang) - See above (Capacity Building)



- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish tourism concession mechanism at Na Hang NR, Du Gia and Xuan Son NPs (<i>Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP as learning model / embedded training / technical exchanges</i>) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High ecotourism potential Willingness and political support |
|---|--|

REWILDING

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical support packages for rewilding programs at: Na Hang NR, Mu Cang Chai SHCA, Ba Be and Cuc Phuong NPs Exact conservation and research priorities should be informed by feasibility studies (incl. population viability assessment).¹⁶⁰ Priority species as per Table 10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing capacity and technical expertise incl. external support (NGOs; zoos) Population status and threat levels etc. improving (although all remain currently unsecure) Historical range and habitat availability for priority species. Many species have been locally extirpated and need to be reintroduced |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical support for developing/enhancing species conservation breeding centers at Cuc Phuong NP and Na Hang NR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a gap in planning and design for conservation breeding facilities that need to be supported and have technical guidance There are gaps among staff and inefficiencies with equipment and tools The connection with experiences and facilities outside Vietnam is not yet established |

And continue:

- Developing/expanding species conservation breeding at Cuc Phuong NP and Hanoi Wildlife rescue center
- Support expanding the semi-wild areas in Cuc Phuong (e.g. for Delacour's langur)

And continue:

- Logistical ease (connection and transportation access to northern / north central PAs)
- Already have suitable facilities and good conditions to commence conservation breeding (can support future program e.g. in North)
- Relatively high capacity and political will

POLICY

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study tours for provincial leaders to help open their minds and see the benefits | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of enabling political support i.e. at provincial level, often leading to PAs being a lower priority for PPC (e.g. low support for optimizing PFES, ecotourism planning in PA etc.) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support provincial authorities to be more confident and flexible in using PFES revenue in directly supporting conservation activities (e.g. payment for CPT members) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PFES money is left unspent in the provincial funds in some provinces, but SUF MBs have no budget for many crucial activities. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical support to establish provincial ecotourism regulations for PAs including Protection Forests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no provincial regulations on PA and tourism management; it would be essential to develop these local guidelines to address identified gaps in implementing/interpreting national regulations (e.g. Decree 156, Decree 01 or its next replacement) |

¹⁶⁰ Generally, implies site-level activities on: Enhance programs for forest protection and threat control (SMART patrols; snare removal); Baseline surveys and database management; Habitat management and restoration; Environmental Education and awareness programs with local communities.

LIVELIHOODS

- Capacity building (training) for PA managers to support other actors (e.g. local govt. on buffer zone development projects) to ensure alignment with conservation efforts and demonstrate threat reduction
- Establish local coordination mechanism (e.g. district coordination body) to manage and promote local livelihood at PAs
- Support pilot buffer-zone livelihood interventions that link with threat reduction
- Promote to use PFES wherever possible to improve livelihood as part of threat mitigation (learning models from Xuan Lien or PNKB).
- Current development projects in the buffer-zone are often independent from conservation efforts in the PAs.
- Most PA managers understand and highlight the importance of local livelihoods to the effective management of their sites, however, they have no capacity (technical and resource) as well as no (or little) mandate to intervene in buffer-zone economic activities.
- Xuan Lien NR is useful learning model to show how PFES has been mobilized to improve community investment in the buffer zone; Phong Nha-Ke Bang NR is learning model on buffer zone community fund is managed and used to reduce threats

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

- Improving database management and establishing baselines at site level to improve planning and management.
- Create central PA database system include online reporting from PAs to ministry to ensure national database to inform policy making and regulation issuance
- Most of Vietnam PA do not have BD databases or they are poorly developed and managed. The database and baselines will be particularly important for northern PAs, and the new program can help PAs to standardize their baselines then integrated them with SMART information into the powerful, centralized/linked databases that improve data management to inform planning and management
- There is no PA and BD database at central level to inform policy development and support regulatory issuance that hinder effective policy development.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Promote biodiversity conservation effectiveness as a standard for evaluating PAs
- Innovative policy to provide incentives for “high-performing” PA staff
- Vietnam’s PAs are struggling in recruiting new and young staff because of low wages and hardworking conditions; the underlying cause was that Vietnam does not have a specific promotion policy to motivate people to work in PAs and conservation sector
- Improve understanding and knowledge climate change and impact of CC on biodiversity and PA management
- There is little research on the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and PA management. Such research will be important for understanding the impacts and mitigating threats such as species extinction or forest fires and other emerging threats that are not yet known and identified.

NORTH CENTRAL		
TYPES OF INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT	KEY REASONS / JUSTIFICATIONS	
CAPACITY BUILDING		
- Expand programs for SMART patrol and species surveys (baselines and database management) for managers and staff at Pu Luong, Xuan Lien and Ben En, Vu Quang - Implies on-site training from experts and embedded training incl. exchanges with BCA sites - Standardize capacity building module and material for PA manager, ranger, technical staff, community patrol team, and local partner on various skills	- High biodiversity values - Potential to support priority conservation species - Capacity was focused on in previous projects supported by USAID and other donors - Most of the Thanh Hoa PAs share similar challenges, context and issues so it would be helpful and strategic to organize training in groups to facilitate peer-to-peer information flow and experience exchange	
ECOTOURISM		
Establish tourism concession mechanism at Xuan Lien, Ben En, Vu Quang NP, Dong Chau NR (<i>Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP as learning model / embedded training / technical exchanges</i>)	- Ecotourism plan has been approved – concession mechanism would directly support actioning this plan while also promoting awareness and public response on ecotourism - Strong political will and PA-level financing model (MB has decentralized authority to work directly with Dept of Finance on budget issues = more streamlined and efficient programming)	
And continue:	And continue:	
- Pu Luong NR as a learning site/model for community-based ecotourism program in other sites - Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP as learning model / embedded training / technical exchanges	- SFM supported Pu Luong NR to prepare community-based tourism plan for SUF; site has become a good model for integrating ecotourism and livelihoods for ethnic minority groups - Strong political support in Thanh Hoa (= learning opportunities)	
REWILDING		
- Technical support packages for rewilding programs at: Pu Hu NR, Pu Luong NR, Xuan Lien NR, Ben En NP, Pu Hoat NR, Pu Mat NP, Vu Quang NR and South Quang Binh complex - Exact conservation and research priorities should be informed by feasibility studies (incl. population viability	- There is a gap in planning and design for conservation breeding facilities that need to be supported and have technical guidance - There are gaps among staff and inefficiencies around equipment and tools - The connection with experiences and facilities outside Vietnam is not yet established	

assessment).¹⁶¹

- Priority species as per Table 10

And continue:

- Extend BCA rewilding initiative in Pu Mat NP

And continue:

- One of 3 sites shown in BCA rewilding studies to have “Tier 1” readiness i.e.:
 - Threats null or negligible due to strong and holistic enforcement, crime prevention efforts, and community support
 - Habitat optimal for species based on available knowledge
 - Habitat large enough to hold a viable population over the long-term
- Species present and population at natural densities based on available knowledge.

POLICY

- Xuan Lien NR as a learning model for PA autonomy (links of autonomy policy with community engagement, PFES and political support) this would be a good lesson learn for most Vietnam’s PAs, especially for northern provinces (e.g. Na Hang, Hoang Lien)
- Support to create provincial ecotourism regulation for PAs including Protection Forests (e.g. Thanh Hoa province)

- NR’s community engagement on patrols, threat reduction and community development is demonstrably effective; entirely funded by PFES and sustainable, well supported
 - Very strong political will in Thanh Hoa (can influence leadership of other provinces e.g. in north)
 - Excellent facilities at Xuan Lien for hosting/learning
 - There are no provincial regulations on PA and tourism management; it would be essential to develop these local guidelines to address identified gaps in implementing/interpreting national regulations (e.g. Decree 156 or its next replacement)
-

¹⁶¹ Generally, implies site level activities on: Enhance programs for forest protection and threat control (SMART patrols; snare removal); Baseline surveys and database management; Habitat management and restoration; Environmental Education and awareness programs with local communities.



CENTRAL ANNAMITES

TYPES OF INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT

KEY REASONS / JUSTIFICATIONS

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Next round investment in CA can consider ongoing support :
 - Capacity building (including essential facilities) in wildlife rescue and rewilding
 - Preparedness for rewilding of key species, i.e. feasibility studies, habitat/prey/forage surveys
 - Continue support to enhancing law enforcement, especially to maintain the Community Patrol Team
 - Database management and integration of the SMART tool in long-term management
- Most serious threats to wildlife populations are partly controlled and being gradually reduced in BCA SUFs, creating a basic condition for further intervention, especially for the rewilding of some key species.
- However, for sustained long-term outcomes some continued support especially for SMART / community patrols, database management etc. can be considered, in selected sites (i.e. based also on BCA project evaluations)

ECOTOURISM

- Establish tourism concession mechanism at Saola Hue, Saola Quang Nam, Song Thanh NR and Elephant SHCA
- Support replicable model(s) of community tourism
- Pu Luong NR as a learning site/model for community-based ecotourism program
- Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP as learning model / embedded training / technical exchanges
- BCA sites as learning model for ecotourism centers; establishment of tourism units (e.g. PNKB, Cat Tien, and Bidoup Nui Ba)
- High ecotourism potential and eagerness of the PA and provincial authority, however, in most of the SUFs in the region, ecotourism is either under-developed or fragmented (putting even more pressure on SUFs' resources). Exceptions include a good example from *Phong Nha-Ke Bang NP*
- Ecotourism can be an effective tool to improve PA sustainable financing and reduce threats (*Phong Nha-Ke Bang* experience)
- Build on ecotourism master plans developed / under development at these sites
- As described in other areas of tables, there are good learning models in BCA that can be applied for various Ecotourism programming in other geographies, incl. documentation of Best Practices, hub for embedded training, peer-to-peer exchanges

REWILDING

- Establish dedicated rewilding programs Dakrong, Huong Hoa, Bach Ma, Phong Dien, Song Thanh NR and Elephant SHCA
- Priority species as per Table 10
- Sites are “Tier 2”- identified in BCA studies as high potential for species recovery and supplementation if threat reduction can be demonstrated (additional investment needed, especially in site security to elevate to Tier 1)

And continue:

And continue:

- Extend the implementation of rewilding initiatives in Hue Saola NR and Quang Nam Saola NR (Priority species per Table 10)
- Two Saola sites shown in BCA rewilding studies to have “Tier 1” readiness i.e.:
 - Threats null or negligible due to strong and holistic enforcement, crime prevention efforts, and community support

Activities detailed in BCA Rewilding report and the draft threatened Species conservation plan	- Habitat optimal for species based on available knowledge - Habitat large enough to hold a viable population over the long-term - Species present and population at natural densities based on available knowledge.
Technical support for species conservation breeding centers at Song Thanh, Saola Hue and Bach Ma	- There are capacity and existing facilities - Logistical ease (connection and transportation access to regional PAs)
POLICY	
- Improving PA legal framework and regulations over ranger and forest protection forces (revise Circular 01) - Detailed guidelines on tourism management in PA (local guidelines to implement Decree 156) - National legislation and Best Practices guidelines on ecotourism development in the SUFs - Specific policy to eliminate snaring - National legislation (guidelines) on wildlife rescue/ captive breeding and rewilding	- Separation of ranger and forest protection forces universally identified by PAs as a major challenge for effective conservation - Decree 156 contains insufficient details to allow practical application at PA levels i.e. guidance on decisions for investments, land leasing etc.; local (i.e. provincial) level guidance would help support more effective and consistent implementation of Decree 156 (or its replacement) - VN does not have national ecotourism best practices guidelines and standards that could support systematic and consistent application of ecotourism in support of conservation - VN does not yet have detailed guidelines on wildlife rescue / captive breeding that would support systematic and consistent implementation of rewilding agenda
LIVELIHOODS	
Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam	Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam
INFORMATION SYSTEMS	
Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam	Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam
OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam	Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam
Adapting IUCN Green List to be used as a nationally-recognized standard for PA performance in Vietnam	Green List widely recognized as a useful incentive for PAs to improve PA management and sustain these improvements; Some sites (e.g. Cat Tien) already achieved Green List certification, which can help motivate other PAs and provide a learning model

SOUTHERN ANNAMITES

TYPES OF INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT

KEY REASONS / JUSTIFICATIONS

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Expand programs for SMART patrol and species surveys (baselines and database management) for managers and staff at Nui Chua NP, Phuoc Binh NP, Hon Ba, Ta Kou, Nui Ong and Bu Gia Map, Dong Nai. Implies suite of activities including:
 - on-site training from experts and embedded training in SMART; biodiversity assessments
 - occupancy surveys and camera trap arrays as required
 - centralized database management
 - training in enforcement: evidence collection and record-keeping etc.
- Standardize capacity building module and material for PA manager, ranger, technical staff, community patrol team, and local partners on various skills

- High biodiversity values; high vulnerability
- Potential to support priority conservation species
- Critical to know the status of priority species in relation to threats
- Nature-based tourism potential in these sites
- Most of the Southern Annamites PAs share similar challenges, context and issues so it would be helpful and strategic to organize training in groups to facilitate peer-to-peer information flow and experience exchange



- Establish collaborative management arrangements with MBs

- Essential management tool already established in 8 BCA sites

ECOTOURISM

- Establish tourism concession mechanism at Nui Chua NP (*Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP as learning model / embedded training / technical exchanges*)

- Tourism is a key development strategy and high potential in this PA
- Enabling conditions: approved tourism plan; fee mechanism in place
- High potential for ecotourism in the buffer zone linked to ethnic community livelihoods (reduced threats)
- Likely to attract increased tourism with growth of Phan Rang as tourism hub
- Synergies with development partners (e.g. GEF-UNDP Nature-based Tourism)

- Establish tourism concession mechanism at Phuoc Binh NP, Dong Nai (*Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP as learning model / embedded training / technical exchanges*)

- The PAs all have good potential, good opportunity (easy to assess and next to tourism hub)
- There are several investors who are interested however, there is no clear concession policy and mechanism
- Lacking clear guidance from the laws and decrees

REWILDING

- Technical support packages for rewilding programs at Hon Ba NR, Phuoc Binh NP, Ta Kou NR, Dong Nai CNR, Bu Gia Map NP

- Build on the existing rewilding pilot sites and the lessons learned from their development
- Large area of habitats (most of the PA in this region is connected) and already have good example of success rewilding

- Exact conservation and research priorities should be informed by feasibility studies (incl. population viability assessment)¹⁶² - Priority species as per Table 10	
Technical support to establish species conservation breeding centers at Phuoc Binh NP and Dong Nai CNR	- These PAs are relatively suitable for rewilding initiatives based on current population status, PA capacity and interest in breeding and rewilding - Successful rewilding will require effective conservation breeding facilities supported by external experts and well-trained PA staff, developed over lengthy timeframes

POLICY

Same recommendations as for Central Annamites	There is a good national legal framework but still some incoherence and lack of detail that needs to be revised/updated, including new issuances
---	--

LIVELIHOODS

Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam	Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam
--	---

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam	Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam
--	---

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam	Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam
Adapting IUCN Green List to be used as a nationally-recognized standard for PA performance in Vietnam	Green List widely recognized as a useful incentive for PAs to improve PA management and sustain these improvements; Some sites (e.g. Cat Tien) already achieved Green List certification, which can help motivate other PAs and provide a learning model

LIVELIHOODS

No recommendations	- Should not be a focus in the next investment round - Some SUFs, e.g. Cat Tien and Dong Nai NR (can be demonstration and exchange sites), are receiving substantial support from both donor projects and national/provincial programs for their socio-economic development interventions
--	--

¹⁶² Generally implies site level activities on: Enhance programs for forest protection and threat control (SMART patrols; snare removal); Baseline surveys and database management; Habitat management and restoration; Environmental Education and awareness programs with local communities.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

- Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam
- Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Same recommendations as for Northern Vietnam
- Given limited resources, priority should be given to implementation in Northern Vietnam

SOUTHERN VIETNAM

TYPES OF INTERVENTION OR SUPPORT

KEY REASONS / JUSTIFICATIONS

CAPACITY BUILDING

- Expand programs for SMART patrol and species surveys (baselines and database management) for managers and staff at
- Implies suite of activities including:
 - on-site training from experts and embedded training in SMART; biodiversity assessments
 - occupancy surveys and camera trap arrays as required
 - centralized database management
- Training in enforcement: evidence collection and record-keeping etc.

- High biodiversity values; high vulnerability
- Potential to support priority conservation species
- Critical to know the status of priority species in relation to threats
- High potential for elephant monitoring (GPS collars or wireless LoRaWAN technology) = charismatic species
- High potential for ecotourism; habitat restoration for rewilding etc. that will require advanced capacity



And continue:

- Continue CB support for rewilding and ecotourism in Cat Tien NP

And continue:

- A wide range of capacity has been built in Cat Tien National Park (supported by international and national projects/programs including USAID BCA).
- Cat Tien is recently listed as a Green List Site by IUCN, meaning it is performing “good governance”, “sound design and planning”, “effective management”, and achieving “sustainable conservation outcomes”. The site therefore should be used as a good model for future technical exchanges and learning in a new project cycle.

ECOTOURISM

- Establish tourism concession mechanism at Dong Nai NR (Phong Nha – Ke Bang NP as learning model / embedded training / technical exchanges)
- Approved tourism plan approved in 2023
- Very strong potential for eco-tourism: close to HCMC; flat terrain; well-developed trail network (including bicycle trails); primary forest
- The area is high potential for both community-based tourism and wildlife watching (including elephants)

Support improving high-quality community tourism and wildlife tourism (e.g., Cat Tien NP and Dong Nai NR)	- Potential for replicable community-based tourism models - Very strong political commitment and investment support from the PPC - Strong biophysical and socio-economic connectivity between these 2 sites
And continue: Support improving high-quality community tourism and wildlife tourism in Cat Tien NP	And continue: - The area is high potential for both community-based tourism and wildlife watching (including elephants) - Strong biophysical and socio-economic connectivity between Cat Tien and Dong Nai (i.e. if Dong Nai to be included)
REWILDING	
- Technical support package for rewilding program at Dong Nai CNR - Exact conservation and research priorities should be informed by feasibility studies (incl. population viability assessment).¹⁶³ - Priority species as per Table 10	- High potential as a USAID “showcase” site – easy access from HCMC - Very strong political will and long-term investment prognosis
And continue: Extend the implementation of rewilding initiatives in Cat Tien (Priority species per Table 10)	And continue: - There is existing facility and relatively easier to assess and lower threats - Species presence and population at natural densities based on available knowledge.
POLICY	
Same recommendations as for Central Annamites	There is a good legal framework but still some incoherence and lack of detail that needs to be revised/updated, including new issuances

¹⁶³ Generally implies site level activities on: Enhance programs for forest protection and threat control (SMART patrols; snare removal); Baseline surveys and database management; Habitat management and restoration; Environmental Education and awareness programs with local communities.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Fit with historical USAID programming and biodiversity funding requirements

The key synergies between the assessment team's recommendations and USAID main historical programming focus for biodiversity conservation comprise the law enforcement program and the biodiversity monitoring program. These two programs have been particularly successful in raising the national standards in these two fields of management. The recommendations also suggest keeping priority SUF sites like Cat Tien NP, Bidoup Nui Ba NP, Phong Nha-Ke Bang NP and Cuc Phuong NP in the portfolio of target SUFs because of their advanced management, their potential to provide capacity building to the rest of SUF system, and their high levels of technical expertise.

However, the recommendations respond to an understanding of the threats to biodiversity as well as some long-term sustainable financing considerations. The assessment team highlights ecotourism as a win-win agenda for USAID to engage in but requires intense technical assistance. A second agenda piggybacks on the recent Decree No 58 on buffer zone investments issued on 24 May 2024 which increases the amount of support for each community up to 50 million VND. The team's recommendations include examining how these funds can be best utilized to mitigate the priority threats to biodiversity (reducing snaring and hunting levels, establishing sustainable NTFP harvesting regimes, ex-situ NTFP cultivation, curtailing demands for illegal logging and stabilizing protected area boundaries) through conservation agreements. The environmental education agenda should also be expanded accordingly. Lastly, the team recommends USAID consider stronger orientation towards a multi-functional protected area management approach¹⁶⁴ that operates under strengthened collaborative management institutional arrangements.

Alignment with GoVN priorities

The team's recommendations strongly align with the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy for 2021-2030, with a Vision to 2050, the Sustainable Forestry Development Program for the period 2021-2025, and the Sustainable Forestry Development Program for 2026-2030, which will determine the development direction for Vietnam's forestry sector in the coming decades. The SUFs should play an extremely important role in realizing this goal. The strategy emphasizes the management, protection, development and sustainable use of biodiversity and forest ecology systems for SUFs to perform this role effectively.

The Vietnam Forest Development Strategy also prioritizes the Northern areas and Southern Annamites. The Strategy also prioritizes promoting effective forest complexes and landscapes management. There is also strong alignment with the Vietnam Biodiversity Action Plan to 2030 vision to 2050. This Plan

¹⁶⁴ This term follows Appleton 2012 and refers to management of a protected area to serve many purposes simultaneously, including biodiversity conservation but also tourism, sustainable livelihoods, and other ecosystem services. In this sense, it also aligns with national socio-economic development plan priorities.

promotes rewilding (conservation interventions to stop extinction and facilitate recovery), as well as facilitation of sustainable and responsible tourism in PAs.

The proposed interventions also support Resolution No. 16/2021/QH15 in July 2021 on the Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) for the period 2021-2025 passed by the GoVN National Assembly. In relation to maintaining the integrity of the SUF system, one of the environmental targets is that forest coverage rate will not be lower than 42 percent. Several of the 12 major tasks and solutions of this plan are addressed through the management of the SUF system. Support to the SUF system is uniquely positioned to support multiple SEDP tasks, including 3.9 especially, but also others listed below:

3.9 Strengthening resource management and environmental protection; proactively preventing, combating and limiting the impacts of natural disasters, and adapting to climate change.

3.8. Promoting the cultural values, the human strength of Vietnamese people and the strength of the all-people national unity, the social progress and justice, improving the people's life, ensuring the harmonious connection between economic development and cultural or social development

4.4. Strongly develop service industries, especially services with high value, great potential and competitiveness. Develop service areas to reach a higher growth rate than that of manufacturing sectors. Concentrate on developing advantageous service industries that have a high density of knowledge and technology such as: tourism.

DISCUSSION ON SITE-BASED VS LANDSCAPE APPROACHES

There are two types of landscape approaches to consider. The first involves the clustering of SUFs together as forest complexes; the second type involves landscape approaches crossing multiple land uses and management types. They need to be treated and reviewed separately. The promotion of landscape approaches involving SUFs as forest complexes may seem an appropriate conservation strategy in a country like Vietnam, noted for the small size of its protected areas and generally fragmented protected area estate. The clumping of protected areas also offers the potential for an upgrade to a higher IUCN category. The forest complex landscape approach may also permit management priorities and management prescriptions to be reset at a higher level.

However, the clustering of protected areas as forest complexes may also have several downsides. Firstly, if a new national park is established, management priorities may be reset to focus on tourism development and tourism-related funding streams. Sometimes Species and Habitat Conservation Areas (e.g. Khau Ca SHCA) get incorporated into larger national parks (e.g. Du Gia NP). Species specific management prescriptions formulated to protect critically endangered fauna within SHCAs might get diluted and lost to broader landscape management agendas. Secondly, both budgets and manpower become less focused and more broadly spread across the protected area forest complex landscapes. Thirdly, the number of stakeholders within these landscapes to be engaged also increases, including buffer zone villages, district partners and even provincial partners. Working relations between stakeholders become less intimate and more distant. Inter-provincial competition for funds can also impact management harmony. Each forest complex needs to be evaluated on its own merits.

The immediate concern of site-based approaches is that Vietnam is still struggling to integrate the protected areas with buffer zone management. While the recent Decree No 58 on buffer zone investments issued on 24 May 2024 increases the amount of support for each community up to VND50 million, there is uncertainty whether the MB is mandated to play a role in delivering these interventions, and whether these investments are linked to mitigating the priority threats. Given these uncertainties, the team recommends that a landscape approach aims for all parties to recognize the discrete landscape defined by a protected area and its associated buffer zone management when embracing broader landscape connectivity or transboundary interventions..

DISCUSSION ON BALANCE OF NEW DIRECTIONS VS MAINTAINING HISTORICAL FOCUSES

The assessment team's recommendations include a mix of staying the course or elevating certain components of USAID's historical strategic focuses, but also expanding into new strategic directions. Sustainable financing is an important overarching factor to consider in the balance of exploring new directions. Adopting a multi-functional protected area approach can diversify potential sources of income. However, Vietnam still applies a project-based approach towards supporting the development of its SUF system as opposed to a programmatic approach. A five-year project duration is quite a short time period in which to generate meaningful outcomes, particularly considering long approval and startup timeframes, which could range from 18-24 months, typically followed by a period of intensive capacity building over the subsequent 18–24 months. This can have immense consequences regarding the potential sustainability of anticipated outcomes and suggests a merit to considering how a strategic focus that elevates longer-term capacity and financing potential can contribute.

It is also useful to consider the SUF management scenario without any external funding at all, and the perspectives of the provincial officials and MB staff from the BCA sites on the achievements of the BCA project sites, the longer-term potential benefits of maintaining the historical focus, and issues that could impede sustainability after activity close. During the assessment team's field consultations, the two DARDS in Hue and Quang Tri provinces as well as the MBs in Phong Dien NR and Dakrong NR all expressed concerns regarding the maintenance of the SMART patrolling systems, the community patrol teams and the biodiversity monitoring programs after the termination of the BCA project in December 2025. Both DARDS also emphasized a need for a livelihood development component linked to sustaining gains in threat reduction, as well as funds to maintain community patrols.

More broadly, the team's document review and field consultations drew attention to the high tourism potential of the SUF system and its ability to contribute sustainable financing into management, combined with the extremely weak management capacity of most MBs to develop high quality tourism products and market them effectively. It is therefore recommended that a potential ecotourism agenda consider special technical assistance to ensure some quality nature-based tourism programs are developed in selected SUFs. The team recommends focusing ecotourism development on fewer sites with high tourism development potential rather than broadscale ecotourism of lower quality, and that these SUFs are selected by tourism technical staff in consultation with government counterparts and following clearly articulated selection criteria that is developed in advance.

A related topic to consider is the merits of strengthening or expanding a livelihoods development component to biodiversity conservation programming. The field consultations unambiguously identified the main threats to the SUF system to comprise mitigating snaring and hunting levels, establishing sustainable NTFP harvesting regimes, ex-situ NTFP cultivation, curtailing demands for illegal logging and stabilizing protected area boundaries. Current law enforcement modalities are not solving these deeply entrenched social problems. Indeed, in some places they may be exacerbating conflict between MB authorities and ethnic villagers themselves.

Recommendations

The assessment team's recommendations summarize prioritized actions highlighted above and aim to help the Mission consider a range of strategic directions and potential innovations for future programming, as well as the specific geographies where they can be implemented. The recommendations are disaggregated by overarching actions to address more direct threats to biodiversity focal interests, and each of the four areas of potential areas for future strategic focus: ecotourism, rewilding, training and capacity building, and national and provincial policy framework support.

BIODIVERSITY VALUES AND THREATS

-
- **Recommendation 1:** The SUFs in the Northern Region and South-Central Region should be prioritized for USAID support, promoting forest complexes where feasible. These two regions support particularly high biodiversity values but have received little project support in recent years. Threats are deemed both diverse and intensive. Management capacities of the MBs in these two regions are particularly wanting. As the process moves forward criteria for site selection should be clear and developed in advance.
-
- **Recommendation 2:** Biodiversity assessments should be undertaken on all the higher taxonomic groups, NTFPs as well as vegetation surveys linked to altitudinal clines. On-site training should be conducted on mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians in all targeted reserves. Vegetation surveys should be conducted in montane SUFs to identify differences in vegetation and associated fauna. This will form sound foundations for subsequent systematic planning and management of the reserves.
-
- **Recommendation 3:** On-site training should be conducted on SMART and management of the associated databases in all targeted SUFs with no previous experience with managing these enforcement systems. These SMART enforcement trainings should target district partners (FPD and police) and community patrol team members. Tailor-made training should be developed for database management. Law enforcement staff will require adequate field equipment, including GPS systems, digital cameras, uniforms, camping equipment, and computers, printers and office furniture for database maintenance. Training should also be provided to the prosecutors' office.
-
- **Recommendation 4:** Conduct participatory research with staff from the MB, concerned district partners and villagers on NTFP utilization in selected buffer zone communities. NTFP harvesting was identified as one of the most significant threats to the 13 SUFs during the site consultations. Participatory research can be used as an entry point towards the merits of conducting village land use planning activities in all villages. Greater harmony between sustainable harvesting practices and proposed law enforcement practices should avoid social safeguard concerns.
-
- **Recommendation 5:** Promote livelihood development for conservation interventions in buffer zone villages to mitigate the most formidable threats to the SUF integrity. Village forums will identify the threats to the adjacent protected areas, rank them in terms of seriousness and then devise corresponding
-

livelihood interventions to directly mitigate these threats. District livelihoods teams should be established to implement these livelihood programs. Village conservation agreements should be formulated between district, MBs and buffer zone villagers.

- **Recommendation 6:** Train MB staff and district partners in delivering environmental education (outreach) programs to villages, schools and law enforcement partners.
 - **Recommendation 7:** Train MB staff, district partners and buffer zone villagers in selected SUFs in Northern Vietnam in forest fire prevention and management. Forest fires were reported by two MBs to be serious threats, both sites being characterized by large rehabilitation areas. These areas are linked to shifting agricultural lands and climatic change impacts.
-

ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE FINANCING

- **Recommendation 1:** Establish working teams (ecotourism Units) in identified PAs with district and provincial partners – Such units will help ensure tourism development planning is consistent and aligned (i.e. with PA ecotourism plans). Working teams should also be mandated to demonstrably link tourism development to conservation and threat reduction.
 - **Recommendation 2:** Develop ecotourism capacity-building programs targeting Management Boards and partners in Northern Vietnam. This implies further detailed assessments (including competencies to meet work requirements and training needs), capacity building for Management Board and stakeholders, and technical assistance provided by leading national and international experts. Training will focus on ecotourism development planning (sustainable tourism development plans; fee system; marketing etc.) including on-site training for PA staff, district partners and communities where relevant.
 - **Recommendation 3:** Implement orientation study tours and embedded training to Best Practice ecotourism sites in Vietnam.
 - **Recommendation 4:** Prepare Ecotourism Development Plans for identified sites (e.g. Hoang Lien; Ben En NP). These and any other sites that are lacking approved ecotourism development plans will realistically be unable to meet any ecotourism targets on the ground in the absence of an approved plan.
 - **Recommendation 5:** Develop ecotourism programs in a few PAs for piloting, demonstration and applying learning - Field models should aim to demonstrate potential links between ecotourism and reduced threats. Ecotourism programs in relatively effective PAs (e.g. Phong Nha - Ke Bang; Bidoup – Nui Ba, Cat Tien and others) should be studied and training programs (including technical exchanges) suitable developed.
 - **Recommendation 6:** Assist government in establishing provincial guidelines to help MBs implement relevant articles of Decrees 156 and 91 (and any subsequent revisions). All PA sites confirmed that current regulatory tools are too vague to support PA planning and management of tourism-related construction, land leasing etc. particularly in the context of overlapping/conflicting planning under other sectors (e.g. Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism).
 - **Recommendation 7:** Develop national ecotourism standards and best practices that are instilled in centralized training and can be developed/modelled in pilot PA sites. This implies development of training manuals at the national level as well as onsite training and/or embedded training. To achieve consistent and systemic impacts, issuance of any guidelines for Best Practices should aim to be mandatory (e.g. through Circular or Decision) as opposed to discretionary.
 - **Recommendation 8:** Develop sustainable financing mechanisms at selected sites to help MBs be financially self-sufficient (e.g. through payments for forest environmental services, carbon credits, ecotourism) and to model results. This includes building capacity and training on financial tools and mechanisms, and applying financial analysis into PA planning processes. Potential pilot PAs, where
-

foundational level of readiness was noted, include Hoang Lien NP, Xuan Lien NR, Ben En NP, Nui Chua NP and Dong Nai.

- **Recommendation 9:** Consider exploring the establishment of a Biodiversity Trust Fund as a potential incentive-based mechanism for long-term sustainable financing for biodiversity conservation. While outside the scope of this assessment, national-level stakeholder consultations raised such a fund as a potentially innovative approach to support longer term financing for conservation efforts in Vietnam. Future work could aim to explore the potential and feasibility for this in more detail, including learning from previous or related efforts in Vietnam and elsewhere, how such a structure might work and be embedded within government, opportunities for leveraging funds and obtaining stakeholder buy-in, and related components.
-

REWILDING

- **Recommendation 1:** Complete comprehensive rewilding feasibility studies. Given the challenges and inherent limitations documented, any future interventions should be informed by comprehensive initial studies. These may build on outputs from BCA projects, applying the methodology in other geographies where the assessment team found some reasonable evidence of rewilding potential. The results would also support pinpointing priority sites and targets for conservation breeding programs, intensified training/programs for snare removal, enhancement of forest guard teams, community patrols etc.
 - **Recommendation 2:** Establish training programs at different levels (manager, technical staff, technician) on conservation breeding, habitat management and rewilding practices. Such a capacity building program could take from 5-10 years to ensure a foundation for effective rewilding.
 - **Recommendation 3:** Extend the implementation of selected rewilding initiatives in BCA sites. As per the BCA rewilding report, three BCA sites (Hue Saola NR, Quang Nam Saola NR, and Pu Mat NP) have been shown to have demonstrable threat reduction and thus can be initially prioritized for rewilding efforts.
 - **Recommendation 4:** Support GoVN in formulating a robust national Action Plan on rewilding that serves as a foundation for subsequent guidelines and protocols and includes specific targets on how rewilding should be initiated, regulated and monitored. This also implies supporting the development of relevant technical guidelines (e.g. conservation breeding; habitat restoration and management for rewilding).
 - **Recommendation 5:** Support GoVN to formulate a long-term sustainable financing strategy for rewilding in Vietnam. Given the long timelines involved (20+ years) the GoVN will need to take up full ownership of a national program. This will require securing long-term sustainability of rewilding through facilitating engagement of multiple stakeholders and with a focus on engagement of the private sector, research institutions and NGOs to participate and guide rewilding efforts alongside GoVN.
 - **Recommendation 6:** Compile and share best practices on successful rewilding programs, including its linkages to habitat restoration and threat reduction efforts. This includes study tours and exchanges with relevant sites, including BCA sites and regional or international sites. Targets should include not only technical staff (where peer-to-peer exchanges may be especially effective) but also government officials (study tours) with the aim of securing their buy-in and increasing political will for rewilding.
-

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

- **Recommendation 1:** Centralized training support should be provided through the long-term recruitment of leading national experts in most technical fields (collaborative management, biodiversity assessments and monitoring, law enforcement, including SMART adoption, environmental education, livelihood development and ecotourism). International experts might be selected to support collaborative management and ecotourism. They would provide on-site, short, duration, technical support to the SUF MB and district partners under the USAID initiative. This training approach was favored for MB staff because large numbers of staff could be trained and then could return to their routine fieldwork.
-

-
- **Recommendation 2:** In-country study tours to expose staff to working models and inspire staff to become motivated. These include SMART systems, rewilding activities, outreach programs, and ecotourism.
-
- **Recommendation 3:** International, tailor-made study tours to specific locations ideally within Asia that espouse international standard approaches to specific SUF management topics.
-
- **Recommendation 4:** Tailor-made short duration study tours for policy makers, SUF MBs and local development partners to strengthen support for SUF management objectives and to build working relations.
-
- **Recommendation 5:** Embedded training (2-4 weeks) for staff to work in better managed SUFs to build capacity and networking within the SUF system.
-
- **Recommendation 6:** A buffer zone training center which specializes in NTFP research and management, village land use planning, conflict mitigation techniques, conservation agreements and village regulations formulation, livelihood development linked to threat mitigation, and the promotion of ex situ NTFP co-operatives. This center would target rural development NGOs and SUF MB staff. This training center could be located in Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park, which is already implementing some of these programs (environmental education and livelihoods).
-

NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

-
- **Recommendation 1:** Develop modern multi-functional protected area models in USAID sites to establish a firm basis for policy development in various aspects of SUF management. Nakai Nam Theun National Park in Laos is a potential learning example that borders Vietnam, and Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park on the Vietnam side is already adopting some of those management approaches. A study tour to Nakai Nam Theun is one potential opportunity to exchange experiences and learn how law enforcement approaches, village land use planning, community-based ecotourism, and buffer zone management linked to threat mitigation is being implemented in a similar relevant context.
-
- **Recommendation 2:** Promote the involvement of district counterparts in the respective programs similar to the involvement of district police and district FPD in the law enforcement agenda. Hence district staff could be involved in environmental education, livelihood development and tourism, which would then assist policy formulation through the line agencies to provincial authorities.
-
- **Recommendation 3:** Establish umbrella stakeholder forums (Management Advisory Committees) that would strengthen management coordination and also assist to inform policy development. These forums are reported to be established in endangered primate sites by FFI Vietnam, in Phong Nha Ke Bang NP and nine BCA project sites. Model PA sites could be located close to Hanoi-based policymakers, for improved exposure.
-
- **Recommendation 4:** Promote a centralized training program based upon the successful GIZ centralized training model focusing on SMART adoption. This provided an excellent example of how training implemented at the central level, and linked to project-based field models, led to policy reform, and best practice standardization leading to systemic change for biodiversity conservation. Such a model should aim to meet several criteria: (i) use of the best PA expertise in highly specialized PA management within the country ensuring highest standards of training; (ii) on-the-job training for centrally-based national-level government and project staff; (iii) on-site training within SUFs; (iv) understanding of field experiences to inform policy development; and (v) strengthening of institutional memory for developing long-term (10-30 year time horizon) capacity building programs.
-
- **Recommendation 5:** Prepare a standard, government endorsed set of guidelines and field manuals that are government approved documents linked to sections of government Circulars, if relevant. Other discretionary manuals can be prepared to support training.
-
- **Recommendation 6:** Establish a forum of national technical experts in the leading fields of protected area management for sharing approaches and networking purposes. This would fill a gap in the absence of
-

institutional memory at the central level. This Technical Working Group should avert the “silo” approach to SUF management and assist policy formulation at all stages of development.

- **Recommendation 7:** The following regulations and guidelines should be considered as the primary focus of national policy and regulatory support:
 - Development of National Rewilding plan to 2050
 - Development of National Plan/policy on engagement of private sector, NGO and public in biodiversity conservation
 - Development of national guideline on biodiversity inventory and monitoring, and database management
 - Development of national guidelines on environmentally and socially responsible ecotourism in PA and wildness areas (i.e. ecotourism Best Practices guidelines)
-

References

- Appleton, M.R., Tran Chi Trung, and Vu Minh Hoa (2011). Capacity needs assessment for management of protected areas in Vietnam and proposals for key protected area positions. A report prepared under the Preservation of Biodiversity in Forest Ecosystems in Vietnam Project, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development German Technical Cooperation/GIZ. 66 pp.
- Biodiversity Conservation Activity (2023a). Institutional assessment of Special-Use Forests and Protection Forest focused on the functional adequacy of their management institutions. This report was prepared by WWF-US under the USAID Biodiversity Conservation Project. March 2023.
- Biodiversity Conservation Activity (2023b). Gap assessment of Sustainable Forest Management Plans of 20 protected areas. This report was prepared by WWF-US under the USAID Biodiversity Conservation Project. March 2023.
- Department of SUF and Protection Forest Management. (2021). The status of Special-Use and Protection Forests in Vietnam in 2019. Vietnam Administration of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. 52 pp.
- Government. (2010). Decree No. 99/2010/ND-CP on the policy for Payment for Forest Environmental Services dated 24 September 2010.
- Government. (2010). Decree No. 117/2010/ND-CP on the organization and management of the SUF System dated 24 December 2010.
- Government. (2012a). Prime Minister Decision No. 126/2012/QĐ-TTg on pilot policy on benefit-sharing mechanisms (BSM) in the management, protection and development of SUFs dated 2 February 2012.
- Government. (2012b). Prime Minister Decision No. 07/2012/QĐ-TTg issuing several policies to strengthen forest protection dated 8 February 2012.
- Government of Vietnam. (2012c). Prime Minister Decision No. 24/2012/QĐ-TTg on investment policy for the development of SUFs in 2011-2020, dated 1 June 2012.
- Government of Vietnam. (2017). Prime Minister Decision No.626/QĐ-TTg on the National Capacity Development Plan for the PA Management System to 2025, with a Vision to 2030, dated 10 May 2017.
- Government of Vietnam. (2018). Decree No.156/2018/ND-CP on enforcement of several articles of the law on forestry dated 16 November 2018.
- Government of Vietnam. (2019). Decree No. 01/2019/ND-CP on forest rangers and forest protection forces of forest owners dated 1 January 2019.
- Government of Vietnam. (2021) Prime Minister's Decision 523/QĐ-TTg approving the Vietnam Forestry Development Strategy in the 2021-2030 period, with a vision to 2050 dated 1 April 2021.
- Government of Vietnam. (2023). Decree No. 29/2023/ND-CP on downsizing policies dated 3 June 2023.
- Government of Vietnam (2024). Prime Minister Decision No. 208/QĐ-TTg approving the project on development of multi-use values of the forest ecosystems to 2030, vision to 2050, dated 29 March 2024.
- Government of Vietnam. (2024). Decree No. 58/2024/ND-CP about some investment policies in forestry dated 24 May 2024.

Ha. N.M. and Truong B. X. (2011). Review of and proposed improvements to the information system for PA management and biodiversity conservation. A consultancy report prepared for GIZ.

IUCN and the World Commission on PAs (WCPA) (2017). IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas, Standard, Version 1.1. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. (2018). Circular No. 28/2018/BNNPTNT on sustainable forest management dated 16 November 2018.

National Assembly. (2004). Law No. 29/2004/QH11 on Forest Protection and Development, dated 3 December 2004.

National Assembly. (2015). Law No. 77/2015/QH13 on the Organization of the Local Governments dated 19 June 2015.

National Assembly. (2017). Forestry Law No 16/2017/QH14 dated 15 November 2017.

National Assembly. (2021). Resolution No. 16/2021/QH15 on the Five-year Socio-Economic Development Plan for the period 2021-2025, dated 27 July 2021.

Annexes

ANNEX 1. ASSESSMENT SCOPE OF WORK

[To be added as part of final PDF report]

ANNEX 2. LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

USAID project documents (activity work plans, annual reports, assessments, evaluations and related documents as available on USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse or shared by USAID/Vietnam):

- USAID Biodiversity Conservation Re-wilding Vietnam: understanding the potential for recovering species and ecosystems (2024)
- USAID Biodiversity Conservation: Forest Continuity Monitoring in Twenty-One Forest Management Units under the USAID Biodiversity Conservation Activity (2023)
- USAID Biodiversity Conservation Activity Annual Report FY23 (2023)
- USAID Biodiversity Conservation: Institutional Assessment Of Special-Use Forests And Protection Forests Focused On The Functional Adequacy Of Their Management Institutions (2023)
- USAID Biodiversity Conservation: Results Of Biodiversity Baseline Surveys In 21 Protected Areas In Vietnam (2023)
- Gap Assessment of Sustainable Forest Management Plans of 20 Protected Areas (USAID, 2023)
- USAID Biodiversity Conservation Project: Institutional Analysis of Special-use and Protection Forest Management Boards and Recommendations for the Project (2022)
- USAID Biodiversity Conservation: Report on Assessment of Provincial Institutions of Special Use Forest and Protection Forest Management (2021)
- USAID Biodiversity Conservation: Study Report on Barriers to Improvements in Law Enforcement of Forest Crime and Illegal Wildlife Trade (2021)
- Vietnam Sustainable Forest Management Activity Scope Of Work: Assessment Of Sustainable Forest Management Barriers And Opportunities In Seven Target Provinces (USAID, 2021)
- Vietnam Sustainable Forest Management Activity Year I Annual Work Plan (USAID, 2020)
- Vietnam Forests and Deltas Activity II Evaluation: Final Report (USAID, 2021)
- Sustainable Mekong Portfolio Evaluation (USAID, 2017)
- Mid-Term Evaluation of Vietnam Forests and Deltas Program (USAID, 2016)

Other donor or GoVN documents and reports:

- Promote Wildlife Conservation and Responsible Nature Based Tourism for Sustainable Development in Vietnam (Global Environment Facility, 2023)
- National Ecosystem Assessment Report of Vietnam: Support to Develop Capacities to Address Science-Policy-Practice Interface Project (Center for Biodiversity Conservation, 2022)
- Assessing the Biodiversity in Vietnam – Analysis of the Impacts from the Economic Sectors (WWF-Vietnam, 2021)
- Threatened Ecosystems of Myanmar. An IUCN Red List of Ecosystems Assessment (2020)
- Vietnam Forest Development Strategy: Implementation Results for 2006-2020 and Recommendations for the 2021-2030 Strategy (CIFOR, 2020)
- Sixth National Report to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (GoVN, 2019)
- Strengthening Partnerships To Protect Endangered Wildlife in Vietnam Proposal (World Bank, 2017)

- Biodiversity Small Grants Programme in the ASEAN region in cooperation with ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity - Vietnam (German Financial Cooperation, 2015)
- Vietnam National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020, Vision to 2030 (3rd biodiversity strategy) (GoVN, 2015)
- Feasibility Study for "Sustainable Forest Management and Biodiversity as a Measure to Decrease CO2 Emissions" (GFA, 2013)
- Capacity Needs Assessment For Management Of Protected Areas In Vietnam And Proposals For Job Descriptions For Key Protected Area Management Positions (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2011)
- Protected Area Staff Training Guidelines for Planning and Management (IUCN, 2011)
- Competence Standards for Protected Area Jobs in Southeast Asia (ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, 2003)
- Creating Protected Areas For Resource Conservation (PARC) In Vietnam Using A Landscape Ecology Approach Proposal (Global Environment Facility, 1994)
- Vietnam Conservation Training and Biodiversity Action Plan (Global Environment Facility, 1992)

Laws, regulations, policies (relevant laws, decisions, decrees and circulars related to forestry, protected areas, and biodiversity):

- Vietnam Forestry Law (2017)
- Vietnam Biodiversity Law (2008)
- Vietnam Forest Protection and Development Law (2004)
- Decree 117/2010/ND-CP: On Organization and Management of the Special-Use Forest System (2010) and various circulars (2011, 2014, 2019, 2022)
- Decree 99/2010/ND-CP: on the Policy for Payment for Forest Environmental Services (2010)
- Decision 126: Pilot Policy on Benefit Sharing Mechanism (BSM) in Management, Protection and Development of Special-Use Forests (SUFs) (2012)
- Decision 24: On Investment Policy for Development of Special-Use Forests in 2011-2020 (2012)

ANNEX 3. FINAL DAILY ITINERARY AND GOVERNMENT APPROVALS FOR FIELD COMPONENT

Table 12. List of sites and locations

TABLE 4. LIST OF SITES AND LOCATIONS		
	SITE	LOCATION
Team 1		
1	Hoang Lien National Park	Lao Cai
2	Mu Cang Chai (Che Tao) Conservation Area	Yen Bai
3	Muong La (Nam Don) Conservation Area	Son La
4	Phong Dien Nature Reserve	Thua Thien Hue
5	Dakrong Nature Reserve	Quang Tri
Team 2		
6	Na Hang Nature Reserve	Tuyen Quang
7	Du Gia National Park	Ha Giang
8	Phia Oac-Phia Den National Park	Cao Bang
9	Nui Chua National Park	Ninh Thuan
10	Phuoc Binh National Park	Ninh Thuan
11	Dong Nai Nature and Culture Reserve	Dong Nai
12	Ben En National Park	Thanh Hoa
13	Xuan Lien Nature Reserve	Thanh Hoa

Table 13 below presents the schedule of the assessment team's day to day activities during the three-week field component of the work. This schedule was approved by GoVN on May 24, 2024. During the field component, the assessment team will divide into two sub-teams, each with separate itineraries, to accomplish the site visits on the list. Each sub-team will be accompanied by one to two GoVN counterparts and one to two staff members from USAID/Vietnam, together with police escorts and other personnel as may be required by GoVN.

Table 13. Filed Component Daily Itinerary

	DAY	DATE	ACTIVITY – TEAM 1	ACTIVITY – TEAM 2
0	Sun	May 26	Team evening arrival in Hanoi	
1	Mon	May 27	In-brief preparations, finalize consultation guide, begin consultations (Helvetas, FFI, IUCN) (*USAID holiday)	
2	Tues	May 28	Mission in-brief; Hanoi-based consultations (Department of Forestry, Forestry Protection Department)	
3	Wed	May 29	Hanoi-based consultations (National Biodiversity Conservation Agency, Forest Inventory and Planning Institute, WWF)	
4	Thurs	May 30	Cat Ba Langur Conservation Project (Day trip)	Hanoi-based consultations (UNDP); finalize travel logistics
5	Fri	May 31	Hanoi-based consultations (Conservation Vietnam, GIZ, Vietnam National Parks and Protected Areas Association)	Depart for field: Travel to Cuc Phuong NP and Save Vietnam's Wildlife
6	Sat	June 1	Preparations for site visits	Preparations for site visits
7	Sun	June 2	Rest day; consolidate notes	Rest day; consolidate notes
8	Mon	June 3	Travel Hanoi - Sapa, Lao Cai; Afternoon site visit to Hoang Lien National Park, Lao Cai	Travel to Tuyen Quang; Afternoon Working with Na Hang Nature Reserve
9	Tues	June 4	Site visit at Hoang Lien National Park, Lao Cai; Afternoon travel to Mu Cang Chai, Yen Bai province	Site visit at Na Hang Nature Reserve; Afternoon travel to Ha Giang
10	Wed	June 5	Site visits to Mu Cang Chai Conservation Area, Yen Bai; Late afternoon travel to Muong La, Son La	Meeting with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Ha Giang province; Afternoon site visit with Du Gia National Park, Ha Giang
11	Thurs	June 6	Site visits to Muong La Conservation Area, Son La	Travel to Cao Bang
12	Fri	June 7	Travel Hanoi	Meeting with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Cao Bang province; afternoon site visit with Phia Oac-Phia Den National Park, Cao Bang
13	Sat	June 8	Site visit at Xuan Son National Park, Phu Tho; Afternoon, the group returns to Hanoi; Team meeting	Site visit at Phia Oac-Phia Den National Park, Cao Bang; Afternoon Move back to Hanoi; Team meeting
14	Sun	June 9	Travel to Dak Lak	Travel to Ninh Thuan (via Nha Trang)
15	Mon	June 10	Meeting with DARD/FPD, Consultation with Phong Dien Nature Reserve	Meeting with Nui Chua National Park, Ninh Thuan; Afternoon Site visit at Nui Chua National Park, Ninh Thuan
16	Tues	June 11	Meeting with DARD/FPD, Consultation with passion Fruit Cooperative, Huong Hoa District	Meeting with Phuoc Binh National Park, Ninh Thuan; Afternoon Site visit in Phuoc Binh National Park, Ninh Thuan

17	Wed	June 12	Dakrong Nature Reserve consultation	Travel to Dong Nai; Afternoon Working with Dong Nai Nature and Culture Reserve
18	Thurs	June 13	Return to Hanoi	Site visit at Dong Nai Nature and Culture Reserve; Afternoon Travel HCM - Thanh Hoa
19	Fri	June 14	Hanoi-based consultations; Team Lead evening departure. End of field component for Team 1.	Meeting with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Thanh Hoa province; afternoon site visit with Ben En National Park, Thanh Hoa
20	Sat	June 15		Meeting with Xuan Lien Nature Reserve, Thanh Hoa; Afternoon Site visit at Xuan Lien Nature Reserve, Thanh Hoa
21	Sun	June 16		Return to Hanoi. End of field component for Team 2.

**BỘ NÔNG NGHIỆP
VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN NÔNG THÔN
BAN QUẢN LÝ
CÁC DỰ ÁN LÂM NGHIỆP**

**CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Độc lập – Tự do – Hạnh phúc**

Số: 468 /DALN-QLTV
V/v thu thập thông tin về công tác bảo
vệ rừng, bảo tồn ĐDSH

Hà Nội, ngày 24 tháng 5 năm 2024

Kính gửi:

- Cục Kiểm lâm và Cục Lâm nghiệp;
- Cục Bảo tồn thiên nhiên và Đa dạng sinh học – Bộ TN&MT;
- Viện Điều tra và Quy hoạch rừng.

Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp (Ban) được Bộ Nông nghiệp và Phát triển nông thôn (Bộ) giao làm Chủ dự án hỗ trợ kỹ thuật “Quản lý rừng bền vững và Bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học (VFBC)” do USAID tài trợ. Trong khuôn khổ Kế hoạch hoạt động năm 2024 của Dự án được Bộ phê duyệt tại Quyết định số 5125/QĐ-BNN-HTQT ngày 04/12/2023; Để có cơ sở đề xuất Bộ và Nhà tài trợ về định hướng dự án mới trong tương lai về bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học, Ban phối hợp với Cơ quan USAID tại Việt Nam và các chuyên gia về bảo tồn đến làm việc với các Cơ quan, đơn vị cụ thể như sau:

1. Thành phần: Có danh sách kèm theo.

2. Nội dung: Trao đổi và thu thập thông tin về công tác bảo vệ rừng; bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học; phục hồi các hệ sinh thái, loài; quản lý các khu rừng đặc dụng nhằm đánh giá các hướng ưu tiên để xây dựng dự án mới trong tương lai để tổng hợp đề xuất Bộ.

3. Thời gian:

- Cục Lâm nghiệp: Từ 08:30 - 10:00 ngày 28/5/2024.
- Cục Kiểm lâm: Từ 10:00 - 11:30 ngày 28/5/2024.
- Cục Bảo tồn Thiên nhiên và ĐDSH: Từ 09:00 - 10:30 ngày 29/5/2024;
- Viện Điều tra và Quy hoạch rừng: Từ 14:00 - 15:30 ngày 29/5/2024.

Mọi thông tin cần thiết xin liên hệ: ông Hoàng Văn Mát - SĐT: 0912707882 và ông Nguyễn Mạnh Hà - Tư vấn theo SĐT: 0982.9994.468.

Rất mong nhận được sự hợp tác chặt chẽ của Quý Cơ quan./.

Nơi nhận:

- Như trên;
- Trưởng ban (để b/c);
- Lưu: VT, QLTV.



Vũ Văn Hưng

THÀNH PHẦN VÀ NỘI DUNG TRAO ĐỔI

(Ban hành kèm Công văn số: /DALN-QLTV ngày tháng 5 năm 2024 của Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp)

I. Thành phần Đoàn công tác:

TT	Thành phần	Chức vụ/Vị trí
1	Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp	Đại diện
2	Cơ quan USAID tại Việt Nam	Đại diện
3	Nhóm tư vấn	
-	Ông John William Keneth PARR	Tư vấn của USAID
-	Ông Keith Andrew SYMINGTON	
-	Ông Nguyễn Đức Tú	
-	Ông Nguyễn Mạnh Hà	

II. Nội dung trao đổi:

Ngày	Thời gian	Nơi làm việc	Nội dung trao đổi
28/5/2024 Thứ ba	08:30-10:00	Cục Lâm nghiệp	- Công tác bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học và quản lý rừng đặc dụng của Việt Nam: các thuận lợi, khó khăn và định hướng quản lý - Quy hoạch phát triển và mở rộng các khu bảo tồn - Các định hướng về phục hồi, tái hoang dã các loài nguy cấp, tuyệt chủng - Các định hướng nâng cao năng lực, đào tạo cho cán bộ các khu bảo tồn - Quản lý và thúc đẩy các hoạt động du lịch sinh thái, phát triển cộng đồng ở vùng đệm
	10:00-11:30	Cục Kiểm lâm	- Các hoạt động bảo tồn và quản lý các Vườn quốc gia trực thuộc trung ương - Định hướng hoạt động của Kiểm lâm và các lực lượng bảo vệ rừng chuyên trách - Các định hướng nâng cao năng lực cho kiểm lâm và các lực lượng bảo vệ rừng

Ngày	Thời gian	Nơi làm việc	Nội dung trao đổi
29/5/2024 Thứ tư	09:00- 10:30	Cục Bảo tồn Thiên nhiên và Đa dạng sinh học	- Các ưu tiên của NBCA về bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học và khu bảo tồn - Các định hướng về quy hoạch và phát triển, mở rộng hệ thống khu bảo tồn, các loại hình bảo tồn - Các chương trình, dự án bảo tồn mà NCBC đang thực hiện hoặc định hướng thực hiện - Định hướng về quản lý các hệ thống khu bảo tồn cho Việt nam trong thời gian tới. - Các định hướng về phát triển du lịch gắn với đa dạng sinh học.
	14:00- 15:30	Viện điều tra và Quy hoạch rừng	- Các chương trình, dự án bảo tồn mà Viện đang thực hiện hoặc định hướng xây dựng - Các thuận lợi, khó khăn trong công tác quản lý các dự án/chương trình dự án về mảng bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học, hỗ trợ quản lý các khu bảo tồn/rừng đặc dụng - Các định hướng của Viện trong việc hỗ trợ kỹ thuật, nâng cao năng lực cho các khu bảo tồn/rừng đặc dụng - Các đề xuất của Viện cho các chương trình/dự án bảo tồn, quản lý Khu bảo tồn sẽ thực hiện ở Việt Nam trong tương lai

**BỘ NÔNG NGHIỆP
VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN NÔNG THÔN
BAN QUẢN LÝ
CÁC DỰ ÁN LÂM NGHIỆP**

**CỘNG HÒA XÃ HỘI CHỦ NGHĨA VIỆT NAM
Độc lập – Tự do – Hạnh phúc**

Số: 467 /DALN-QLTV
V/v khảo sát và thu thập thông tin về
công tác bảo vệ rừng, bảo tồn ĐDSH

Hà Nội, ngày 24 tháng 5 năm 2024

Kính gửi:

- Sở Nông nghiệp và Phát triển nông thôn các tỉnh:
Sơn La, Yên Bái, Phú Thọ, Tuyên Quang, Cao
Bằng, Hà Giang, Thanh Hóa, Ninh Thuận, Đồng
Nai và Đắk Lắk;
- Vườn quốc gia Hoàng Liên và Yok Đôn.

Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp (Ban) được Bộ Nông nghiệp và Phát triển nông thôn (Bộ) giao làm Chủ dự án hỗ trợ kỹ thuật “Quản lý rừng bền vững và Bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học (VFBC)” do USAID tài trợ. Trong khuôn khổ Kế hoạch hoạt động năm 2024 của Dự án được Bộ phê duyệt tại Quyết định số 5125/QĐ-BNN-HTQT ngày 04/12/2023; Để có cơ sở đề xuất Bộ có những giải pháp tác động trong lai về công tác bảo tồn đa dạng sinh học (ĐDSH), Ban phối hợp với Cơ quan USAID tại Việt Nam và các chuyên gia về bảo tồn đến làm việc với các Cơ quan, đơn vị cụ thể như sau:

1. Thành phần Đoàn công tác: Có danh sách kèm theo.

2. Mục đích của Đoàn công tác:

- Trao đổi và tìm hiểu thông tin liên quan đến: hoạt động bảo tồn ĐDSH đang thực hiện tại các Vườn quốc gia/Khu bảo tồn; cơ hội tái thả, tái hoang dã các loài nguy cấp; thuận lợi, khó khăn và định hướng trong công tác quản lý, bảo tồn, phục hồi hệ sinh thái, các loài động vật hoang dã; các hoạt động tuần tra, bảo vệ có sự tham gia của cộng đồng; hoạt động du lịch sinh thái; hoạt động phát triển cộng đồng ở vùng đệm; các định hướng, đề xuất nâng cao hiệu quả công tác bảo tồn.

- Thăm hiện trường rừng các Vườn quốc gia/Khu bảo tồn để trao đổi với một số trạm Kiểm lâm, nhóm tuần tra cộng đồng, các mô hình du lịch sinh thái, các mô hình bảo tồn ở các đơn vị.

3. Thời gian:

3.1. Đoàn 1:

- Tỉnh Lào Cai: Từ ngày 03/6 - 04/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Yên Bái: Từ ngày 05/6 - 06/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Sơn La: Ngày 06/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Phú Thọ: Từ ngày 07/6 - 08/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Đắk Lắk: Từ ngày 10/6 - 12/6/2024.

3.2. Đoàn 2:

- Tỉnh Tuyên Quang: Từ ngày 03/6 - 04/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Hà Giang: Từ ngày 05/6 - 06/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Cao Bằng: Từ ngày 07/6 - 08/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Ninh Thuận: Từ ngày 10/6 - 11/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Đồng Nai: Từ ngày 12/6 - 13/6/2024.
- Tỉnh Thanh Hóa: Từ ngày 14/6 - 15/6/2024

(Có chương trình chi tiết gửi kèm)

Mọi thông tin cần thiết xin liên hệ: ông Nguyễn Đình Duy - Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp theo SĐT: 0986.995.646, email: dinhduy0403@gmail.com và ông Nguyễn Mạnh Hà - Tư vấn theo SĐT: 0982.9994.468, email: ha.nguyen@ccd.org.vn.

Trên cơ sở đó, Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp đề nghị Quý Cơ quan hỗ trợ, tạo điều kiện thuận lợi, thông báo cho các cơ quan/đơn vị biết và bố trí làm việc để Đoàn công tác hoàn thành nhiệm vụ.

Rất mong nhận được sự hợp tác chặt chẽ của Quý Cơ quan./.

Nơi nhận:

- Như trên;
- Trưởng ban (để b/c);
- Sở NN&PTNT tỉnh Lào Cai;
- Lưu: VT, QLTV.

**KT. TRƯỞNG BAN
PHÓ TRƯỞNG BAN**



Vũ Văn Hưng

THÀNH PHẦN ĐOÀN CÔNG TÁC

(Ban hành kèm Công văn số: /DALN-QLTV ngày tháng 5 năm 2024 của Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp)

TT	Thành phần	Chức vụ/Vị trí	Ghi chú
1	Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp/Dự án VFBC Trung ương		
-	Ông Vũ Văn Hưng	Phó Trưởng ban	Đoàn 2 (Từ 09/6-13/6)
-	Ông Phạm Vũ Thắng	Chuyên viên Phòng QLTV	Đoàn 1
-	Ông Vũ Quang Vinh	Phó trưởng phòng KHKT	Đoàn 1 (từ 09/6-13/6)
-	Ông Nguyễn Trung Kiên	Điều phối viên Dự án VFBC	Đoàn 1 (Từ ngày 03/6-08/6)
-	Ông Nguyễn Đình Duy	Cán bộ kỹ thuật dự án VFBC	Đoàn 2
2	Cơ quan USAID tại Việt Nam		
-	Ông Nguyễn Ngọc Thắng	Chuyên gia môi trường	Đoàn 2
-	Bà Nguyễn Thanh Hà	Phụ trách chương trình	Đoàn 1
3	Nhóm tư vấn		
-	Ông John William Keneth PARR (có hộ chiếu kèm theo)	Tư vấn do USAID thuê tuyển	Đoàn 1
-	Ông Keith Andrew SYMINGTON (có hộ chiếu kèm theo)		Đoàn 2
-	Ông Nguyễn Đức Tú		Đoàn 1
-	Ông Nguyễn Mạnh Hà		Đoàn 2

CHƯƠNG TRÌNH VÀ NỘI DUNG LÀM VIỆC CỦA ĐOÀN 1

(Ban hành kèm Công văn số: /DALN-QLTV ngày tháng 5 năm 2024
của Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp)

Ngày	Thời gian	Địa điểm/Nơi làm việc
03/6/2024 Thứ hai	Buổi sáng	Di chuyển Hà Nội - Sapa, Lào Cai
	Buổi chiều	Làm việc và thăm hiện trường VQG Hoàng Liên, Lào Cai.
04/6/2024 Thứ ba	Buổi sáng	Thăm hiện trường VQG Hoàng Liên, Lào Cai
	Buổi chiều	Di chuyển đi Mù Căng Chải, tỉnh Yên Bái
05/6/2024 Thứ tư	Cả ngày	Làm việc và thăm hiện trường Khu Bảo tồn Mù Căng Chải, Yên Bái.
	Cuối chiều	Di chuyển đi Mường La, Sơn La
06/6/2024 Thứ năm	Cả ngày	Làm việc và thăm hiện trường Khu bảo tồn Mường La, Sơn La
07/6/2024 Thứ sáu	Buổi sáng	Di chuyển đi Vườn Quốc gia Xuân Sơn, Phú Thọ
	Buổi chiều	Làm Việc với VQG Xuân Sơn, Phú Thọ
08/6/2024 Thứ bảy	Buổi sáng	Thăm hiện trường VQG Xuân Sơn, Phú Thọ
	Buổi chiều	Đoàn về Hà Nội
09/6/2024 (Chủ nhật): Đoàn di chuyển đi Đắk Lắk		
10/6/2024 Thứ hai	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với VQG Yok Đôn, Đắk Lắk
	Buổi chiều	Thăm hiện trường VQG Yok Đôn, Đắk Lắk
11/6/2024 Thứ ba	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với VQG Chư Yang Sin, Đắk Lắk
	Buổi chiều	Thăm hiện trường VQG Chư Yan Sin, Đắk Lắk
12/6/2024 Thứ tư	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với KBT Ea Sô, Đắk Lắk
	Buổi chiều	Thăm hiện trường KBT Ea Sô, Đắk Lắk
13/6/2024 (Thứ năm): Di chuyển về Hà Nội, kết thúc chuyến công tác.		

CHƯƠNG TRÌNH VÀ NỘI DUNG LÀM VIỆC CỦA ĐOÀN 2

(Ban hành kèm Công văn số: /DALN-QLTV ngày tháng 5 năm 2024
của Ban quản lý các dự án Lâm nghiệp)

Ngày	Thời gian	Địa điểm/Nơi làm việc
03/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Di chuyển đi Tuyên Quang
Thứ hai	Buổi chiều	Làm việc với KBT Nà Hang, Tuyên Quang
04/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Thăm hiện trường KBT Nà Hang, Tuyên Quang
Thứ ba	Buổi chiều	Di chuyển đi Hà Giang
05/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với Sở NN&PTNT tỉnh Hà Giang
Thứ tư	Buổi chiều	Làm việc với VQG Du Già, Hà Giang
06/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Thăm hiện trường VQG Du Già, Hà Giang.
Thứ năm	Buổi chiều	Di chuyển Cao Bằng.
07/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với Sở NN&PTNT tỉnh Cao Bằng
Thứ sáu	Buổi chiều	Làm việc với VQG Phia Oắc-Phia Đen, Cao Bằng.
08/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Thăm hiện trường VQG Phia Oắc-Phia Đen, Cao Bằng.
Thứ bảy	Buổi chiều	Di chuyển về Hà Nội
09/6/2024 (Chủ nhật): Đoàn di chuyển đi Ninh Thuận		
10/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với VQG Núi Chúa, Ninh Thuận
Thứ hai	Buổi chiều	Thăm hiện trường VQG Núi Chúa, Ninh Thuận
11/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với VQG Phước Bình, Ninh Thuận
Thứ ba	Buổi chiều	Thăm hiện trường VQG Phước Bình, Ninh Thuận
12/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Di chuyển đi Đồng Nai
Thứ tư	Buổi chiều	Làm việc với KBT Thiên nhiên và Văn Hóa Đồng Nai
13/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Thăm hiện trường KBT Thiên nhiên và Văn Hóa Đồng Nai
Thứ năm	Buổi chiều	Di chuyển HCM-Thanh Hóa
14/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với Sở NN&PTNT tỉnh Thanh Hóa
Thứ sáu	Buổi chiều	Làm việc với VQG Bến En, Thanh Hóa
15/6/2024	Buổi sáng	Làm việc với KBT Xuân Liên, Thanh Hóa
Thứ bảy	Buổi chiều	Thăm hiện trường KBT Xuân Liên, Thanh Hóa
16/6/2024 (Chủ nhật): Di chuyển về Hà Nội, kết thúc chuyến công tác		

ANNEX 4. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION GUIDE

VIETNAM BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT DRAFT STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION GUIDE (VERSION OF 5/29/2024)

INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT

Facilitator: Please read the following consent script prior to the start of the interview:

Hello and thank you for agreeing to talk with us today. My name is [name of interviewer] and here is my colleague(s) _____ who will take notes during our conversation. We work for the Improving Design, Evidence and Learning (IDEAL) activity, a USAID Funded project.

USAID has tasked our team with conducting a biodiversity assessment to help inform future USAID biodiversity conservation programming. The assessment will take stock of biodiversity conservation threats and drivers, help to inform the Mission as it considers a range of strategic programming directions, and identify opportunities for future interventions in Vietnam. You have been suggested as a key stakeholder that can help inform aspects of our assessment.

The aim of this discussion is to learn about your experiences with a range of biodiversity conservation issues. Our role here is to ask questions and listen to your opinions and experiences. We will take notes during our interview to help our team recall what was said. Please note that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers in this discussion. We would like you to share their experience and give feedback, either positive or negative.

Confidentiality:

We ask that everyone here respect each person’s privacy and confidentiality. In our assessment report, we will not use any names of individuals and it will not be possible to tie information in the report to specific individuals who were interviewed as part of the assessment.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You can choose to not answer any questions or stop participating at any time. You are not obligated to answer any question, for any reason. This discussion will last between 60-90 minutes. If you have any questions about the study or concerns at a later stage, please send them to any members of our team copied on our scheduling email for this interview.

Do you agree to participate in today’s discussion? (oral consent)

[IF YES, CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

May we begin?

[Facilitator: Remember to fill out the KII note-taking form for each stakeholder interview].

RESPONDENT REGISTRATION FORM

Field Control	
Interview date: Location: Province: District (if applicable): Commune (if applicable) Site or Protected Area Name:	Interviewer name: Notetaker name: Start time: xx::xx AM/PM (circle one)

		End time: xx:xx AM/PM (circle one)
Respondent category: • Bi / Multi-Lateral • GoVN – National • GoVN - Provincial • Private Sector • Academic / Universities • International NGOs / CSOs (e.g., IUCN, WWF, FFI, FZS, SNV, Helvetas, CARE, Oxfam) • Local NGOs / CSOs (e.g., PanNature, Save Vietnam's Wildlife, GreenVit, CCD, VietNature) • USAID Implementing Partner, Local Partner, or Sub-Awardee • USAID/Vietnam • Other Donor Projects • Others (Specify as needed: x) • Others (Specify as needed: x)		
Respondent Name	Title / Organizational Role	Gender (M/F)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

List other interview participants here:

- USAID Staff:
- GoVN staff:
- Others:

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION GUIDE: VIETNAM BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT

This guide should be used for all respondent types.

I. Assessment Objective #1 Themes and Questions

I. BIODIVERSITY THREATS, DRIVERS AND TRAJECTORIES

1. In your view, what are the most critical (important) threats or pressures on biodiversity in Vietnam / this province / site?
 - a. What is the trajectory of each of the threats here in this province / site?
 - b. In your view, are the main root causes (underlying drivers) of each of these different threats?
2. What are the most important conservation issues that need to be addressed in Vietnam / this province / site?
 - a. Which actors and types of stakeholders are best situated to address these issues, or to address them most effectively? Why?
3. What types or strategies and interventions would be able to achieve substantial improvements, in your view? Why?
4. In your experience, what are the main challenges that conservation programs face in Vietnam / this province / site?

2. USAID-SUPPORTED PROGRAMMING: GEOGRAPHIC AND PROGRAMMATIC FIT TO ADDRESS CONSERVATION THREATS AND ACHIEVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT

As you may know, much of the USAID biodiversity programming over the past 10 years has focused on [ADD common strategies, interventions and geographies] and [add types of contexts] in Vietnam.

1. To what extent do you think current or past USAID programs in Vietnam are focused on the most important biodiversity threats / conservation issues in the country / this province / site?
2. Is this programming likely to substantially reduce biodiversity threats and their underlying drivers? Why or why not? What are the key factors that would be needed to achieve this?
3. Is this programming likely to lead to sustained impacts over time? Why or why not? What are the key factors that would be needed to achieve this?
4. What other types of programming or conservation interventions do you think would be needed to increase the effectiveness of USAID-supported biodiversity programming in Vietnam / this province / site?
5. In your view, are there any key gaps in the geographies or types of contexts where USAID biodiversity programs have focused in the last 10 years or so (in the country / this province / site)?
 - a. What are the important geographies or types of contexts that USAID programs have not focused on?
6. Among the current geographies or types of contexts where USAID has supported biodiversity programming, are there any that you see as lower priority in future? Why or why not?
7. Are there any new geographies or different types of contexts that USAID programs should prioritize for biodiversity conservation programming in future? Why? *[probe on different types of coverage gaps, for example: with respect to species representation, habitat integrity, functional connectivity, funding and management support; and relative importance.]*
8. Taking into account USAID's current and prior programming focuses, what other types of strategies or interventions would most help to increase the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation efforts in Vietnam? Why?

3. OTHER DONOR-SUPPORTED PROGRAMMING: GEOGRAPHIC AND PROGRAMMATIC FIT TO ADDRESS CONSERVATION THREATS AND ACHIEVE SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT

1. To the extent you are familiar with other donor-supported biodiversity programs in Vietnam (outside of USAID support), are there any key differences that you see in terms of the geographies where those programs are focused (relative to USAID programming focus) (*the types of contexts or geographies where those programs are implemented*)? Please explain.
2. Are there any key differences that you see in terms of the overarching strategies and types of interventions/activities those programs focus on? Please explain.
3. To what extent is other donor-supported programming in Vietnam / this province / site situated to address the most important biodiversity threats and achieve impacts? Why or why not?
4. In your view, what are the most important / most effective non-USAID biodiversity programs in Vietnam / this province / site? What makes them effective, in your view? What are the main challenges they face?
 - a. We will appreciate any key documents you can share with our team on this, or that provide insights into your current programs. Could you please share those with us by email after our interview?

II. Assessment Objective #2 Themes and Questions

I. STRATEGIC APPROACHES (HIGH-LEVEL), INTERVENTIONS (SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES) AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

1. Thinking about a range of donor-supported programs, strategies and interventions you are familiar with, are there any new or different types of strategies or interventions you think donors like USAID should consider investing in Vietnam to improve / strengthen conservation programs and sustainability of impacts over time? Why? [*Probe for specific strategies and types of interventions, and the reasoning behind these recommendations*]

I. ECOTOURISM

1. Turning specifically to ecotourism as a potential strategy to reduce biodiversity conservation threats, are there any specific types of ecotourism development strategies or interventions USAID or other donors should consider supporting? What are they and why, specifically? Where should these be focused geographically, and why?
2. What aspects or types of ecotourism support is most effective for reducing conservation threats, in your experience? Why?
 - a. In your experience, what are the key aspects of this type of programming that help to make it successful?

- b. How should these types of support / programs be implemented to help improve the likelihood they will be successful? *[probe on reason why, actors and stakeholders to involve, etc]*
3. Do you think that supporting ecotourism development is likely to help strengthen the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam / this province / site? Why or why not?
4. [If yes to above] What aspects of ecotourism development or support in this province / site most need attention or strengthening, in your view? Why / how would this link to improving biodiversity conservation here?

2. REWILDING

1. Turning to rewilding as a potential strategy to reduce biodiversity conservation threats, do you think that a focus on rewilding efforts is likely to help strengthen the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam / this province / site? Why or why not?
2. What specific types of rewilding strategies or interventions should donors like USAID consider supporting, and why?
 - a. What are the specific geographies or types of contexts where these strategies or interventions should be implemented? Why?
 - b. What species should be the highest priority (ies) for rewilding efforts? Why?
3. In your experience, what are the key enabling conditions that are important to have in place for rewilding efforts to be successful? What is the current status of these in Vietnam / this province / site? *[Examples of enabling conditions include policy environment, national and local government capacity, scientific expertise, wildlife rescue and medicine services/expertise]*
4. How should rewilding support / programs be implemented to help improve the likelihood they will be successful? *[probe on specific considerations, actors and stakeholders to involve, etc]*

3. TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

1. Turning to training and capacity building as a potential strategy to reduce biodiversity conservation threats, do think a focus on this is likely to help strengthen the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam / this province / site? Why or why not?
2. What specific types of training and capacity building interventions should donors like USAID consider supporting, and why?
 - a. What are the specific geographies or types of contexts where these strategies or interventions should be implemented? Why?
3. In your experience, what are the key enabling conditions that are important to have in place for training and capacity efforts to be successful? What is the current status of these in Vietnam / this province / site?

4. How should training and capacity building support be implemented to help improve the likelihood they will be successful? *[probe on specific considerations, actors and stakeholders to involve, etc]*
5. In your view, is a continued focus on training and capacity building interventions likely to increase the effectiveness of [USAID/general] biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam / this province / site? Please be specific in explaining why or why not?
6. What specific types of capacity building, where or for whom, should USAID consider supporting to achieve maximum impact?

4. NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL POLICY AND REGULATORY SUPPORT

1. Turning specifically to policy and regulatory support as a potential strategy to reduce biodiversity conservation threats, do think a focus on this is likely to help strengthen the effectiveness of biodiversity conservation programming in Vietnam / this province / site? Why or why not?
2. What specific types of policy and regulatory support should donors like USAID consider supporting, and why?
 - a. What are the specific geographies or types of contexts where this support should be focused?
 - b. What are the specific issues this support should be focused on?
 - c. What specific types of strategies or interventions should be implemented? Why?
3. How should policy and regulatory support be implemented to help improve the likelihood these interventions will be successful? *[probe on specific considerations, actors and stakeholders to involve, etc]*

III. Assessment Objective #3 Themes and Questions

I. FOCAL GEOGRAPHIES AND PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

1. Outside of the provinces and sites where your work / your organization's work is focused, what are the most important geographic areas (provinces, sites, or types of contexts) that future conservation efforts should focus on in Vietnam? Why?
 - a. What are the most important biodiversity focal interests (individuals species or ecosystems) that conservation programs should focus on in those geographic areas? Why?
 - b. In each of the sites or types of sites you mentioned above, what are the most important activities (interventions) that conservation programs should prioritize? Why? *(If your answer is different for different sites, please answer for each one in turn)*
 - i. Province/Site/Context type # 1:
 - ii. Province/Site/Context type # 2:
 - iii. Province/Site/Context type # 3:
 - iv. All provinces/sites/contexts mentioned (if applicable):

2. Are there any new types of strategies, activities or innovations you think USAID or other donors should consider trying or expanding in Vietnam? Why?
 - a. In which regions of the country, or in what types of contexts or sites do you think these innovations should be tried?
 - b. Why do you think they might be promising to increase the effectiveness of conservation programming in Vietnam?
3. Taking a step back, what are the most important strategies, activities or steps that future biodiversity programs should focus on? How should those be implemented to maximize effectiveness, in your view?
4. What are the most important activities or strategies you think USAID could take in future to increase the effectiveness of its biodiversity programming and achieve key conservation objectives in Vietnam? Why?
 - a. For what types of species, ecosystem or contexts, specifically, and why?

IV. Stakeholder-Specific Add-on Questions (to be developed as needed by team)

1. Add list of questions here
2. Add list of questions here
3. Add list of questions here

V. Conclusion

Thank you for discussing these issues with us today. We asked a lot of questions and learned a lot from you. Is there anything that you want to add, or would like to ask us?

Closing: This concludes our discussion. Thank you for your time today and your participation. Your comments will be invaluable for this assessment. Our team will be working to analyze the information we collect and write the draft report during July and August this month. We expect the final version of the report will be available on USAID's website late this year, after it goes through standard revisions and USAID approval processes.

ANNEX 5. SUPPLEMENTAL TABLES, CHARTS, AND MAPS

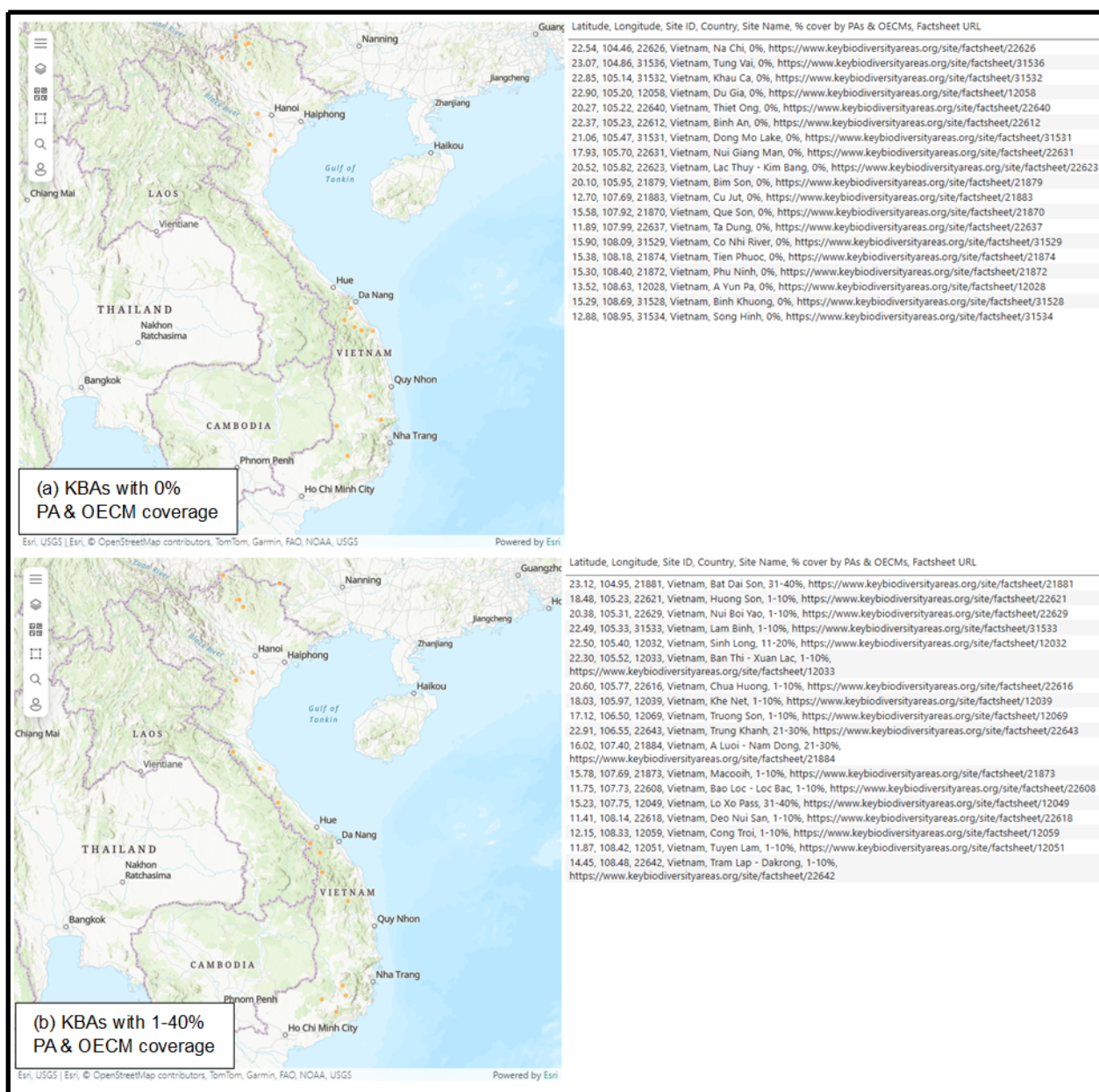
Table 14. A list of Protected Areas assigned with international designations (as of May 2024)

International Designation	Site name	Province	Area (ha)
Natural World Heritage Site (3 sites)	Ha Long Bay-Cat Ba Archipelago	Quang Ninh and Hai Phong	65,650
	Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park	Quang Binh	85,754
	Trang An Landscape Complex (Mixed)	Ninh Binh	6,172
Ramsar Site (9 sites)	Ba Be National Park	Bac Kan	10,048
	Bau Sau Wetlands and Seasonal Floodplain	Dong Nai	13,759
	Con Dao National Park	Ba Ria-Vung Tau	19,991
	Lang Sen Wetland Reserve	Long An	4,802
	Mui Ca Mau National Park	Ca Mau	41,862
	Tram Chim National Park	Dong Thap	7,313
	U Minh Thuong National Park	Kien Giang	8,038
	Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve	Ninh Binh	2,736
	Xuan Thuy Natural Wetland Reserve	Nam Dinh	12,000
UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (11 sites)	Can Gio Mangrove Forest	Ho Chi Minh City	75,740
	Dong Nai Biosphere Reserve (former Cat Tien, 2001 - extended in 2011)	Dong Nai	966,563
	Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve	Hai Phong	26,241
	Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve	Thai Binh and Nam Dinh	105,558
	Kien Giang Biosphere Reserve	Kien Giang	1,100,000
	Western Nghe An	Nghe An	1,303,285
	Mui Ca Mau National Park	Ca Mau	371,506
	Cu Lao Cham Marine Park	Quang Nam	33,475
	Langbiang Biosphere Reserve	Lam Dong	275,439
	Nui Chua National Park	Ninh Thuan	106,646
	Kon Ha Nung Biosphere Reserve	Gia Lai	413,511
ASEAN Heritage Parks (11 sites)	Ba Be National Park	Bac Kan	10,048
	Chư Mom Ray National Park	Kon Tum	56,621
	Hoàng Liên Sa Pa National Park	Lao Cai	28,509
	Kon Ka Kinh National Park	Gia Lai	42,057
	U Minh Thượng National Park	Kien Giang	21,107
	Bái Tử Long National Park	Quang Ninh	15,7883
	Bidoup Núi Bà National Park	Lam Dong	64,703
	Vu Quang National Park	Ha Tinh	56,647
	Lò Gò-Xa Mát National Park	Tay Ninh	18,806
	Ngọc Linh Nature Reserve	Kon Tum	421,439
	Côn Đảo National Park	Ba Ria-Vung Tau	19,991 ha

Table 15. List of Endemic Bird Areas and Secondary Areas located in Vietnam

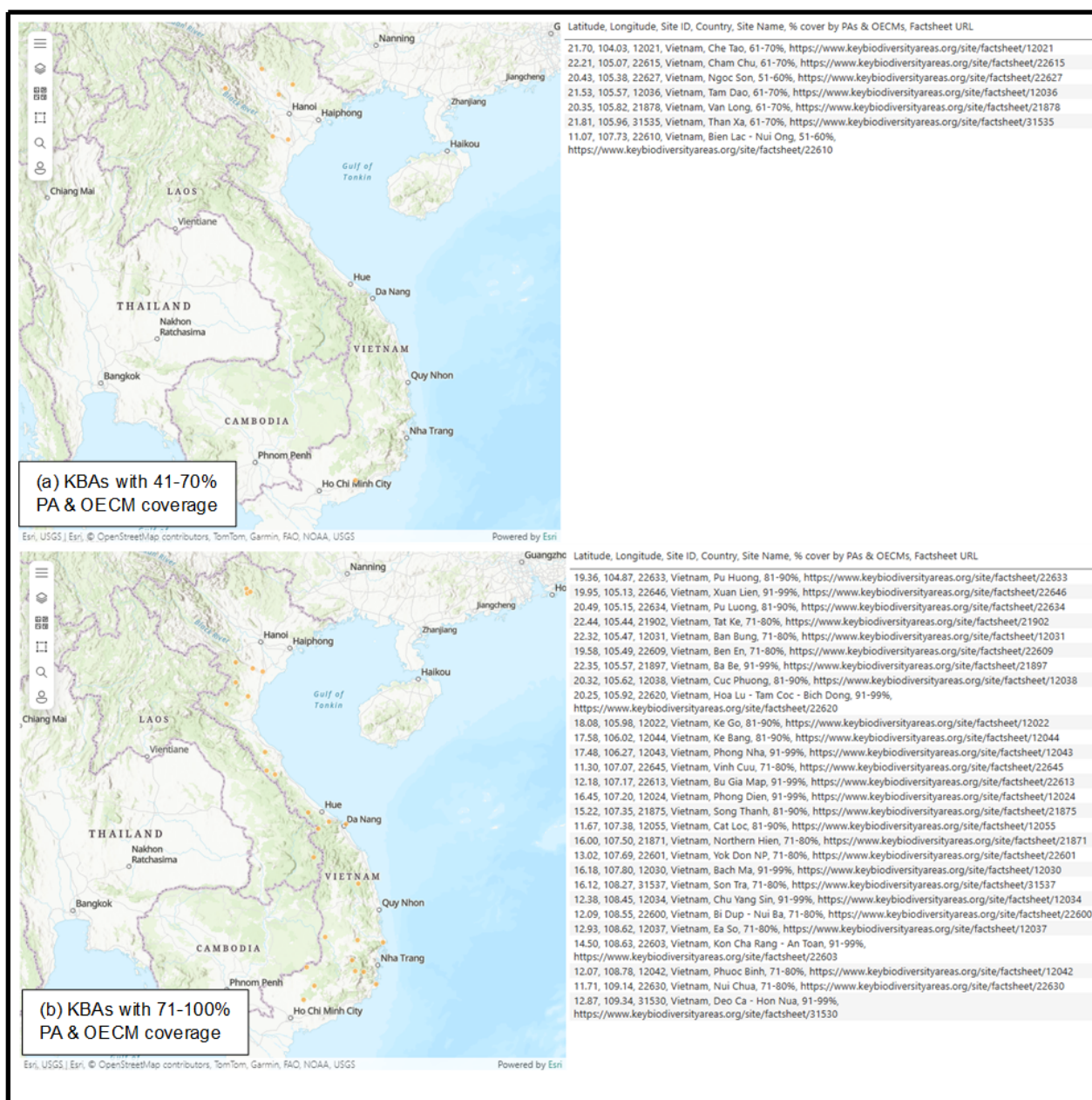
Name of the EBA	Area	Restricted ranged species	Names of the IBAs located inside the EBA
Annamese lowlands	51,000 km ² (VN and Laos)	Vietnam's Pheasant, Annamite Crested Argus, Sooty Babbler, Grey-faced Tit-babbler, Indochinese Wren-babbler, and White-cheeked Laughingthrush	Bach Ma, Cuc Phuong, Dakrong, Ke Bang, Ke Go, Khe Net, Phong Dien, Phong Nha, Pu Mat, Truong Son, and Vu Quang
Da Lat plateau	6,000 km ² (VN and Cambodia)	Crested Argus, Black-hooded Laughingthrush, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Collared Laughingthrush, Grey-crowned Crocias, Yellow-billed Nuthatch, and Vietnamese Greenfinch	Bi Doup, Chu Yang Sin, Cong Troi, Lang Bian, Phuoc Binh, and Tuyen Lam
Fan-Si-Pan and northern Laos (Secondary Area)	31 km ² (VN and Laos)	Ward's Trogon, Broad-billed Warbler, Red-winged Laughingthrush, and Yellow-billed Nuthatch	Che Tao, Fan Si Pan, and Van Ban
Kontum plateau	39,900 km ² (VN and Laos)	Crested Argus, Grey-faced Tit-babbler, Indochinese Wren-babbler, Black-hooded Laughingthrush, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, and Yellow-billed Nuthatch	Kon Cha Rang, Kon Ka Kinh, Kon Plong, Lo Xo Pass, and Ngoc Linh
Lower Mekong Basin	597,000 (VN, Cambodia and Laos)	Mekong Wagtail	Yok Don
South Vietnamese lowlands	30,000 km ² (VN and Cambodia)	Orange-necked Partridge, Germain's Peacock-pheasant, and Grey-faced Tit-babbler	Cat Loc, Dak Dam, Lo Go - Xa Mat, and Nam Cat Tien
South-east Chinese mountains	610,000 km ² (VN and China)	White-eared Night-heron	Ban Thi - Xuan Lac

Figure 16. Point locations of terrestrial KBAs with (a) 0 percent or (b) 1 – 40 percent PA and OECM coverage¹⁶⁵



¹⁶⁵ Key Biodiversity Areas. “KBA Data,” June 2024. <https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/kba-data>. Maps show the point locations of terrestrial KBAs, for the corresponding range of PA and OECM coverage listed in the map title. Accompanying tables for each map list for each KBA on the map: the KBA’s latitude and longitude, site ID, country, site name, the percent PA & OECM coverage (data are only available as ranges), and a URL for a factsheet of additional information for the site as compiled by the Key Biodiversity Areas Partnership.

Figure 17. Point locations of terrestrial KBAs with (a) 41- 70 or (b) 71-100 percent PA and OECM coverage¹⁶⁶



¹⁶⁶ Key Biodiversity Areas. “KBA Data,” June 2024. <https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/kba-data>. Maps show the point locations of terrestrial KBAs, for the corresponding range of PA and OECM coverage listed in the map title. Accompanying tables for each map list for each KBA on the map: the KBA’s latitude and longitude, site ID, country, site name, the percent PA & OECM coverage (data are only available as ranges), and a URL for a factsheet of additional information for the site as compiled by the Key Biodiversity Areas Partnership.

Description of Forestry Ecoregions¹⁶⁷

The topographical and climatic conditions of Vietnam have created a rich diversity of tropical and sub-tropical forest ecosystems, which include: (i) evergreen forests in different elevations found mainly in the Northern mountainous region, the North and South Central region and the Central Highlands; (ii) evergreen forest, deciduous and semi-deciduous forests in the Central Highlands and Southern Vietnam; (iii) limestone evergreen forests mainly distributed in the Northern mountainous region extending eastwards into Ha Long Bay, in Phong Kha Ke Bang National Park and small patches in Mekong Delta (Kien Giang province); (iv) coniferous forests in Northern Vietnam and the Central Highlands; (v) dry forests along the South Central Coast; (vi) freshwater swamp mostly found in the Mekong Delta; and (vii) mangrove forests distributed along the coastline.¹⁶⁸

I Northwest

- Including 4 provinces: Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Son La, and Hoa Binh
- 13 SUFs, 2 KBAs

Landform: High, medium and low massif mountains develop on many types of rocks, interspersed with valleys of the Da and Ma rivers, in which the majority of the area is medium and low mountains. The terrain is strongly dissected, with large slopes.

Forest vegetation: Due to the strong terrain fragmentation and high climate differentiation, the forest vegetation in the Northwest region is very diverse. The main forest types in the region are closed, mixed, evergreen broadleaf humid forests, semi-deciduous mixed forests, coniferous forests, mixed broadleaf and coniferous forests, bamboo forests and mixed tree-bamboo forests and planted forests. In general, the forests in the Northwest region have been strongly impacted, the primary forests are almost gone, mainly anthropogenic secondary vegetations. The forests in the region play a very important role in protecting watersheds, the greatest value of the forests is environmental services and non-timber forest products.

Key animals: Gaur *Bos gaurus*, Black Crested Gibbon *Nomascus concolor*, Northern White-cheeked Gibbon *Nomascus leucogenys*, Indochinese grey langur *Trachypithecus crepusculus*, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Austen's Brown Hornbill *Anorrhinus austeni* etc.

II Northeast

- Including 12 provinces: Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Phu Tho, Vinh Phuc, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Bac Kan, Thai Nguyen, Quang Ninh, and Bac Giang
- 25 SUFs, 47 KBAs, South-east Chinese mountains EBA and Fan-Si-Pan and northern Laos Secondary Area

¹⁶⁷ Adapted from Vu Tan Phuong, Hoang Viet Anh, Nguyen Ngoc Lung, Do Dinh Sam, Nguyen Dinh Ky, Tran Viet Lien (2012). *Forestry ecological zoning in Vietnam*. Hanoi.

¹⁶⁸ ISPONRE and CBC (2022) National Ecosystem Assessment Report of Vietnam. A report to IKI-funded BES-Net Initiative. Hanoi: 2022

Landform: Medium and low massif mountains develop on a variety of rocks. A series of arc-shaped mountain ranges, steep-sided, and strongly dissected.

Forest vegetation: The typical forest types for the region are closed, mixed, broad-leaved evergreen forests in lowland humid areas below 700m with representative species such as *Hopea* spp., *Vatica* spp., *Canarium alba*; closed, mixed, broad-leaved evergreen forests in low and medium mountains at 500-1500m with species such as *Castanopsis* spp., *Lithocarpus* spp., *Quercus* spp., *Eberhardtia tonkinensis* and especially coniferous, mixed broad-leaved and coniferous forests with *Pinus kesiya*. The planted forests in the area are mainly *Cunningamia lanceolata*, *Mangleitia* spp., *Acacia* spp., *Eucalyptus* spp., *Styrax tonkinensis* with the aim of providing mine pole wood, and wood chips...

Key animals: Endangered primates include Tonkin Snub-nosed Monkey *Rhinopithecus avunculus*, Francois' Langur *Trachypithecus francoisi*, the restricted-range bird White-eared Night-heron *Gorsachius magnificus*, and high-economical fish species such as *Bangana lemasoni* and *Semilabeo notabilis*.

III Red River Delta

- Including 9 provinces: Hai Phong, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Bac Ninh, Hanoi, Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, Ha Nam, and Ninh Binh
- 14 SUFs, 12 KBAs

Landform: Low hills in the northwest and a large river delta.

Forest vegetation: Mainly closed, mixed, broad-leaved evergreen rainforest forests in the northwest; some limestone hill in the southwest, bamboo forests and mixed tree-bamboo forests intersected; planted forests in the delta and coastal mangrove forests in the northeast.

Key animals: Delacour's Langur *Trachypithecus delacouri*, water birds and migratory shorebirds include Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, and Saunders' Gull *Saundersilarus saundersi* etc.

IV North Central

- Including 6 provinces: Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue
- 27 SUFs, 18 KBAs, Annamese lowlands EBA

Landform: The terrain is clearly graded from west to east. The west is low mountain massif developed on many types of rock, moving down to the hilly area and finally the plains and coastal sand strips. The mountains and terrain are strongly dissected, with steep slopes.

Forest vegetation: Typical forest types include closed, mixed, broad-leaved evergreen humid lowland forests below 700m and closed, mixed, broad-leaved evergreen humid hilly and lowland and medium mountain forests at 500-1500m with high biodiversity values in the SUFs such as in Pu Mat, Vu Quang, and Phong Nha-Ke Bang national parks. Semi-deciduous mixed forest with representative species of the

Lytraceae, Combretaceae, Magnoliaceae, and Sapindaceae families in the arid areas. The focus of forestry development is to consolidate the system of upstream protection forests, coastal sand-proof forests, and develop timber and non-timber forest product areas.

Key animals: Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, [Tiger *Panthera tigris*], Sao la *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*, Annamite Muntjac *Muntiacus truongsongensis*, Annamite Striped Rabbit *Nesolagus timminsi*, Owston's Civet *Chrotogale owstoni*, Sun Bear *Helarctos malayanus*, Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus*, Javan Pangolin *Manis javanica*, Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla*, Ha Tinh's Langur *Trachypithecus hatinhensis*, Red-shanked Douc *Pygathrix nemaeus*, Northern White-cheeked Gibbon *Nomascus leucogenys*, Large-antlered Muntjac *Muntiacus vuquangensis*, Crested Argus *Rheinardia ocellata*, and Vietnam's Pheasant *Lophura edwardsi* etc.

V South Central

- Including 8 provinces: Da Nang, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, and Binh Thuan
- 17 SUFs, 14 KBAs

Landform: The terrain is clearly graded from west to east. The west is low mountain massif developed on many types of rock, moving down to the hilly area and finally the plain and coastal sand strips. The coastal plain is strongly dissected by mountain ranges jutting out to the sea. Mountains, terrain is strongly dissected, steep slopes.

Forest vegetation: Closed, mixed, evergreen broadleaf forests with variable rainfall, low and medium mountains 700-2000m mainly distributed in the mountainous sub-region of western Quang Nam-Quang Ngai. Open, dry, deciduous broadleaf forests with dominant trees of Dipterocarpaceae appear in the hilly areas of the southern coast adjacent to the arid zone. In addition, the sub-region also distributes drought-resistant shrublands. The focus of forestry development is on upstream protection forests, protection against blowing sand and protection against desertification in arid zones.

Key animals: Sao la *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*, Red-shanked Douc *Pygathrix nemaeus*, Black-shanked Douc *Pygathrix nigripes*, Large-antlered Muntjac *Muntiacus vuquangensis*, Annamite Muntjac *Muntiacus truongsongensis*, Red-cheeked Gibbon *Nomascus gabriellae*, Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus*, Silver-backed Chevrotain *Tragulus versicolor*, Crested Argus *Rheinardia ocellata*, the coastal and marine area support very high biodiversity of coral reefs and seagrass beds, and the breeding grounds for Hawksbill Turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata*, Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas*, and Olive Ridley Turtle *Lepidochelys olivacea*.

VI Central Highlands

- Including 5 provinces: Lam Dong, Dak Nong, Dak Lak, Gia Lai, and Kon Tum
- 16 SUFs, 29 KBAs, Da Lat plateau EBA, Kontum plateau EBA, Lower Mekong Basin EBA

Landform: The terrain is a combination of medium and low mountains interspersed with basalt plateaus and lowlands and semi-plains.

Forest vegetation: This is the region with the most natural forests and the highest forest richness ratio in the Vietnam. The main forest types are closed, mixed, evergreen broadleaf forests in lowland humid areas below 1,000m; hills, low and medium mountains in 700-2,000m and high mountains in upper 2,000m with very high biodiversity concentrated in Chu Yang Sin, Bidoup-Nui Ba, Kon Ka Kinh, Chu Mom Ray, and Ngoc Linh (Kon Tum) National Parks etc., and the places where support dipterocarp forest ecosystem dominated by species such as *Dipterocarpus obtusifolius*, *D. tuberculatus*, *Shorea roxburghii* and *Shorea siamensis* represented by Yok Don National Park. Coniferous forests, mixed broadleaf and coniferous forests with three-leaf pine as representative are concentrated in the Da Lat plateau and Komplong, Dak Gley. The focus of forestry development in the region is biodiversity conservation, watershed protection and is an important area for large-scale timber production.

Key animals: Key mammals species include Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, Gaur *Bos javanicus*, Banteng *Bos gaurus*, Large-antlered Muntjac *Megamuntiacus vuquangensis*, *Muntiacus truongsongensis*, Red-cheeked Gibbon *Nomascus gabriellae*, Grey-shanked Douc *Pygathrix cinerea*, Red-shanked Douc *Pygathrix nemaeus*, Javan Pangolin *Manis javanica*, Dhole *Cuon alpinus*, and Binturong *Arctictis binturong*, and endemic and globally-threatened birds such as Collared Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron yersini*, Vietnamese Cutia *Cutia legalleni*, Black-hooded Laughingthrush *Garrulax miletti*, Grey-crowned Crocias *Laniellus langbianis*, Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush *Lanthocincla konkakinhensis*, Vietnamese Greenfinch *Chloris monguilloti*, Crest Argus *Rheinardia ocellata*, and Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* etc.

VII Southeast

- Including 6 provinces: Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Dong Nai, Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, and Ho Chi Minh City
- 16 SUFs, 6KBAs, South Vietnamese lowlands EBA

Landform: The terrain is clearly graded with low mountains in the north, transitioning to hills and finally the Dong Nai-Saigon River deltas.

Forest vegetation: Characterized by closed, mixed, broad-leaved evergreen forests in lowland areas below 1000m with the predominance of lowland Dipterocarpaceae species represented by *Dipterocarpus alatus*, *Dipterocarpus dyeri*, *Hopea odorata*, and *Anisoptera costata*, with very high timber volume and productivity. In the lowland sub-region of the Southeast. Coastal mangrove forests with typical with Rhizophoraceae species. Planted forests with main species are *Acacia* spp., *Eucalyptus* spp., *Tectona grandis*, and *Dipterocarpus* spp. with higher productivity than those in other regions. The focus of forestry development in the region is to consolidate the system of upstream protection forests, urban protection forests, and develop raw material areas for paper and sawn timber to serve processing industrial clusters in the region.

Key animals: Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, Gaur *Bos gaurus*, Javan pangoline *Manis javanica*, Black-shanked Douc *Pygathrix nigripes*, Sun Bear *Helarctos malayanus*, and Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus*

thibetanus, key birds such as Orange-necked Partridge *Arborophila davidi*, Germain's Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron germaini*, and Great Hornbill *Rhyticeros undulatus*, and a population of rewilded Siamese Crocodile *Crocodylus siamensis* in Bau Sau of Cat Tien National Park.

VIII Southwest

- Including 13 provinces: Long An, Ben Tre, Dong Thap, Soc Trang, Vinh Long, Can Tho, Hau Giang, Tien Giang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, Kien Giang, An Giang, and Tra Vinh.
- 18 SUFs, 15 KBAs

Landform: Delta, flat terrain, divided by rivers and canals, elevation under 10m. Few small hilly areas in the southwest section of the region.

Forest vegetation: Mainly coastal mangrove forests and swampy forests on acid sulfate soils (*Melaleuca* forests). The forestry focus is to develop a coastal wave-blocking forest system.

Key animals: Some small carnivores still inhabit SUFs in the south of the delta (Mui Ca Mau, U Minh Thuong, and U Minh Ha) include Fishing Cat *Prionailurus viverrinus*, Asian Small-clawed Otter *Aonyx cinereus*, Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata*, and Hairy-nosed Otter *Lutra sumatrana*. The region is extremely important for waterbirds and migratory birds, key bird species include Saurus Crane *Grus antigone sharpii*, Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*.

Other ecosystems

Vietnam also supports very diverse wetland and marine ecosystems including grasslands, freshwater and brackish lakes, swamps and marshes, coral reefs and seagrass beds. During the last five decades, the area of natural habitats declined under the pressure of rapid economic development, due to land use conversion and human disturbance, the biodiversity decreased and were confined into a few main strongholds, the most important of those were the protected areas themselves. In the marine realm, eight marine protected areas (MPAs)¹⁶⁹ have been declared;¹⁷⁰ four National Parks with marine components (established in accordance with the Forestry Law) also contribute to Vietnam's MPA network. In addition, there are a few provincial-level conservation areas established under decisions of the respective Provincial People's Committees; most of these sites encompass wetland areas.

Organizational arrangements of a SUF Management Board

The roles and responsibilities of the senior staff and the different technical units require describing in relation to capacity building agenda, as they represent primary target audiences for capacity building. These technical fields of work comprise:

¹⁶⁹ MPAs can be established in Vietnam through national or provincial-level processes; MARD is the focal point agency. Establishment follows Article 22 and 23 of the Biodiversity Law as well as implementation guidelines of the Fisheries Law (Decree 26). The legal basis to establish provincial MPAs is regulated by Circular No 19/2018/TT-BNNPTNT of MARD (2018), mirroring the national approach, with an additional step for Provincial approval

¹⁷⁰ Including Co To – Dao Tran; Bach Long Vi; Con Co; Cu Lao Cham; Ly Son; Hon Mun, Hon Cau and Phu Quoc MPAs. Four National Parks with marine components include Bai Tu Long, Cat Ba, Nui Chua and Con Dao

- collaborative management (as prescribed in Article 4 of PM Decision No. 07/2012/QĐ-TTg)¹⁷¹
- sustainable forest management planning (as prescribed in Articles 5 and 6 of the Circular No. 28/2018/TT-BNNPTNT¹⁷² dated 16 November 2018)
- general responsibilities of an Administration Division
- general responsibilities of a Finance Division
- scientific research, training and practice (as prescribed in Article 13 of Decree No. 156)¹⁷³
- forest protection (as prescribed in Article 37 of the Forestry Law). Note that in January 2019, Decree No. 01/2019/ND-CP¹⁷⁴ was introduced on forest rangers and forest protection forces of forest owners. This Decree stipulated that forest rangers should no longer be involved in SUF management, with their role being taken over by forest guards, with reduced enforcement powers.
- forest fire safety (as prescribed in Article 56 of Decree No. 156/2018/ND-CP),
- ecosystem restoration
- Livelihoods development for conservation (as prescribed in Article 54 of the Forestry Law (2017), Circular No. 28 (2018) and Decision No. 208 (2024)).¹⁷⁵
- Tourism (as prescribed in Article 14 of Decree No 156)

These organizational arrangements mandated in the Vietnam legislation characterize modern multi-functional protected areas. They show strong corroboration with the generic organizational structure for protected areas in Southeast Asia;¹⁷⁶ with the training themes described in the IUCN Protected Area Staff Training Guidelines¹⁷⁷ as well as the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas: Standard.¹⁷⁸

Table 16. List of recent USAID and other donor support for biodiversity conservation in Vietnam

USAID:

- Green Annamites Project (2016-2020, \$24M). Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam.
- Biodiversity Conservation Activity (2020-2025; \$38M (planned)). 19 protected areas in Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue, Quang Binh, Lam Dong, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh provinces as well as two national parks: Cuc Phuong and Cat Tien.

¹⁷¹ Government of Vietnam. (2012). PM Decision No. 07/2012/QĐ-TTg issuing several policies to strengthen forest protection dated 8 February 2012.

¹⁷² Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. (2018). Circular No 28/2018/TT-BNNPTNT on sustainable forest management dated 18 November 2018.

¹⁷³ Government of Vietnam. (2018). Decree No.156/2018/ND-CP on enforcement of several articles of the law on forestry dated 16 November 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Government of Vietnam. (2019). Decree No. 01/2019/ND-CP on forest rangers and forest protection forces of forest owners dated 1 January 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Government of Vietnam (2024). Prime Minister Decision No. 208/QĐ-TTg approving the project on development of multi-use values of the forest ecosystems to 2030, vision to 2050, dated 29 March 2024.

¹⁷⁶ Appleton, M. R., Texon, G.I. and Uriarte, M.T. 2003. Competence Standards for Protected Area Jobs in South East Asia. ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation. Los Baños, Philippines. 104 pp.

¹⁷⁷ Kopylova, S.L. and Danilina, N.R. (Eds.) 2011. Protected Area Staff Training: Guidelines for Planning and Management. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. xiv + 102 pp.

¹⁷⁸ IUCN and World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) (2017). *IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas: Standard, Version 1.1*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

- Sustainable Forest Management Project (2020-2025; \$36,274,960 (planned)).
- Mekong Delta Coastal Habitat Conservation (2021-2024; \$2,900,000 (planned)). Kien Giang and Soc Trang provinces.

Other Key Donors:

KfW:

- Sustainable Forest Management and Biodiversity as a Measure to Decrease CO2 Emissions (KfW 8)
Five reserves in Ha Giang and Lao Cai provinces
Ha Giang Province: Bắc Mê NR, Du Già NR, Khau Ca SHCA and Bat Xát NR (established in 2016).
Lao Cai province: Hoang Lien-Van Ban NR
February 2015 – January 2023.
- Protection and Inclusive Management of Forest Ecosystems in Quang Nam, Kon Tum and Gia Lai Provinces (KfW 10). 20,000 ha of natural production forest located in seven districts.: (1 January 2014 – 30 June 2021. 11,290,000 EUR
- Wildlife and zoonotic project work in Pu Mat NP and Yok Don NP from 2024 to 2029 with total budget of 9 mil Euro and implemented by Forest Protection Department.

GIZ:

- Programme on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Forest Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Vietnam, Phase I and Phase II, 2014-2021. The project strengthened the management capacity of protected areas with respect to data and information management including SMART adoption and establishing sustainable financing strategies.

German Government (BMB IKI):

- PA solution project, (2016-2021)
Focused PA governance and IUCN Green List (PA performance standard)
PA ecotourism in the context of climate change and pandemic.

JICA:

- Project for strengthening Community-based Management capacity of Bidoup-Nui Ba National Park. January 2010-January 2014.
- Project for development of the national biodiversity database system (2011-2015).
- Project on Enhancing Sustainable Natural Resource Management (2015-2021) Phase 1.
- Project on Enhancing Sustainable Natural Resource Management (2021-2025) Phase 2.

Others:

- GEF Creating Protected Areas for Resources Conservation (PARC) in Vietnam Using a Landscape Ecology Approach worked in Ba Be NP, Na Hang NR and Yok Don NP (1997-2004). Total grant \$6,011,840.
- Strengthening Protected Areas Management Project (SPAM) – implemented from 2001-2003, funded by DANIDA managed by the WWF Indochina Programme and The Forest Protection Department (FPD). The project had four pilot provinces of Lao Cai, Thua Thien Hue, Gia Lai and Ba Ria-Vung Tau.
- GEF - The Green Corridor Project, implemented from 2003-2004 in Hue Province. Focus on a corridor connecting Phong Dien Nature Reserve and Bach Ma National Park in Thua Thien Hue province in Vietnam. Total funding \$0.7M.
- ADB – Biodiversity Conservation Corridor Initiative (BCI) and Biodiversity Conservation Corridor (BCC) project implement in Quang Tri, Hue and Quang Nam province from 2005 to 2009 (BCI: grant) and from 2012 to 2020 (BCC: Loan \$30M and GEF grant \$4.5M). Implemented by MONRE and ADB.
- BLF Project funded by UK with total budget \$5.5M. Worked in four sites include Nghe An Province (Pu Mat NR, Anh Son protection forest) and Kon Tum Province (Chu Mon Ray NR and Ngoc Linh NR). Implemented from 2024 to 2029 by FFI (Lead) and SVN and IUCN.