



A MESSAGE

from the Board Chair and the CEO

In our Annual Report letter, we normally reflect on the year gone by and WWF's many important accomplishments. The organization does have much to be proud of, but it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge up front a very hard truth: This has been an awful year across most of the world.

At a time when many governments are fractured and polarized, our climate is worsening, and nature continues to be destroyed, we've been beset by a global pandemic that is leaving enormous human devastation in its wake. It has not been the easiest of times for us to deliver against our mission—to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and build a future in which people and nature both flourish.

In response to the coronavirus, WWF has been operating remotely in nearly 100 countries since the middle of March. On a daily basis, we are astonished at the perseverance and unity that our staff members bring—via phone calls and video meetings and more—to doing the necessary work that the world needs from us now more than ever.

For all of us, it is clear that our mission could not be more urgent. While more of the world now focuses on solving the climate crisis, it is still not enough. We are increasingly aware of the consequences of a simultaneous loss of nature, including the demise of species and ecosystems and the many good things they provide us that are fundamental to our lives. We are faced with running out of planet as we scramble to meet humanity's needs, and we know we need to find new ways to produce more while also conserving nature.

LISTEN, LEARN, ACT

Science has always been a foundation of WWF’s conservation ethos. We know too well the danger in making assumptions without diligent and inclusive research. And so we’ve dug in on the zoonotic source of COVID-19 and dedicated ourselves to increasing the level of understanding of the science of zoonotic diseases.

We’ve amplified the voices of people in five Asian nations through a recent survey that reflected greater than 90% support for the closure of illegal and unregulated wildlife markets, and worked to implement bans on the consumption of wildlife that enables diseases to “spill over” from wildlife to humans. We’re engaging corporations, governments, Indigenous leaders, and other partners throughout the Amazon basin and beyond on green infrastructure design, making sure that all economic development and disaster recovery initiatives properly blend job creation, respect for local communities, and sustainability.

We continue to heighten awareness, raise resources, and develop partnerships to support conservation areas around the world, helping to reverse the slide toward extinction for tigers and rhinos and elephants. We keep working to reduce the harmful effects of close human-wildlife contact. We engage directly with local communities to design new programs that are respectful of their rights and attuned to their needs. And we continue to help build more sustainable supply chains for food, from farm to table, and stronger accountability to see that corporations do the right thing.

We cannot reflect on this year without acknowledging and sharing in the collective grief over the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many other Black Americans.

We spoke out about the racial injustice that has plagued our country for centuries and pledged our unqualified support for the Black Lives Matter movement. We vowed to add our influence to the fight to bring justice to those communities who for too long have not benefited from or been included in the conservation movement. We are determined to find ways in our work, in our communications, and in our partnerships to help remedy those wrongs.

We have also reckoned with reports of human rights violations at the hands of government park rangers in places that we’ve supported in Africa and elsewhere. As a result, we have taken a deep look at our work

The state of the world today makes clear the need for discipline and perseverance on the part of communities, institutions, businesses, and individuals in order to safeguard the whole. And we’re taking steps to guarantee that the values that guide WWF today—courage, respect, collaboration, and integrity—are front and center in everything we do.

around the world, and are taking steps to better safeguard the people who live in the places we work. Specifically, we have created what we believe is the strongest, most principled approach to ensuring that local communities are at the center of our programs and that our efforts help to secure their rights and well-being.

This is a time for us to listen, to learn, and to act. We are working hard to acquire new and necessary disciplines, not only in how we hold safe our staff and our partners during COVID-19, but also in how we guarantee that we bring respect and open minds to our relationships in all our work—from the heart of the Congo to the halls of Congress and beyond.

ONE PLANET, ONE PEOPLE

Zoonotic could well end up being one of the top buzzwords of 2020, as the world learns more about the root cause of COVID-19 (likely a wet market in China where live animals are sold and slaughtered). We already know that many of the diseases most deadly to humans, including Ebola, MERS, SARS, and HIV, spilled over from wildlife to people. We’ve identified and learned more about the connection between the destruction of forests and rivers and the quality of our air and water—and, ultimately, the quality of life for people. And we’ve learned even more about the connection between human health and the destruction of nature, particularly as it affects the most marginalized communities in the world.

In a meeting with President Duque of Colombia, as part of a trip organized by WWF, we had a conversation about how the state of the environment reflects humanity’s broken relationship with nature, and the consequences that brings for all of us. President Duque spoke eloquently about the imperative to build a new economy and a new type of governance that brings peace not only to people but also to the natural world.

This reflection called to mind an earlier conversation with Secretary of the Smithsonian Lonnie Bunch, who prior to that appointment spent the better part of two decades creating the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture. He talked about what makes that institution so unique, explaining that while it was built around a single narrative centered on the history and culture of African Americans, the museum’s creators considered its audience to be all Americans, because the African American experience touches everyone.

What both of these conversations made plain is what we have to do across our work: secure the rights of *all* people to a sustainable future, everywhere we work, from the Northern Great Plains to the islands of Indonesia. The narrative of people and their dependence on the natural world is universal. And it is a narrative that we need to make real and powerful in our engagement of every society where we work.

HUMILITY AND DISCIPLINE

This has been a terrifically challenging year for so many reasons, yet the vital work of conservation marches on. We are deeply grateful for the amazing people and communities with whom we work every day. Those partnerships have helped bring about so many successes: permanently protecting some of the most essential landscapes in Peru and Colombia and beyond; expanding bison habitat by more than 20,000 acres in Badlands National Park; raising millions of dollars for Indigenous communities and others most affected by the historic Amazon fires. And we are grateful to WWF's staff for finding creative ways to get this work done despite the limitations they face.

Increasingly, as we reflect on our work, we reflect on the importance of humility and discipline. We need to have the humility to look in the mirror and examine ourselves: to acknowledge the good things we do, but also to be honest about our shortcomings and work hard to address them.

We need the discipline to act—to jump on the best opportunities, but also to identify, acknowledge, and act on areas for improvement. And we're taking steps to guarantee that the values that guide WWF today—courage, respect, collaboration, and integrity—are front and center in everything we do.

The state of the world today makes clear the need for discipline and perseverance on the part of communities, institutions, businesses, and individuals in order to safeguard the whole. And it makes clear that the future of conservation will be built on the connection between nature and the survival of humanity.

There are moments in time that disrupt our worldview. This is one of them. If we want to look for a silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic, perhaps it is this: It has made undeniably clear the profoundly important relationship between nature and human health. When we break our relationship with nature, we do so at our own peril. But when we care for nature, the benefits accrue not just to the many forms of life with whom we share this planet, but also to us, to our families, and to all of humanity.



DR. PAMELA MATSON
Chair, WWF-US Board of Directors



CARTER ROBERTS
President & CEO, WWF-US

In a year of unparalleled challenges, WWF stood strong, continuing to deliver results that benefit both people and nature and move us toward a healthy natural world.