

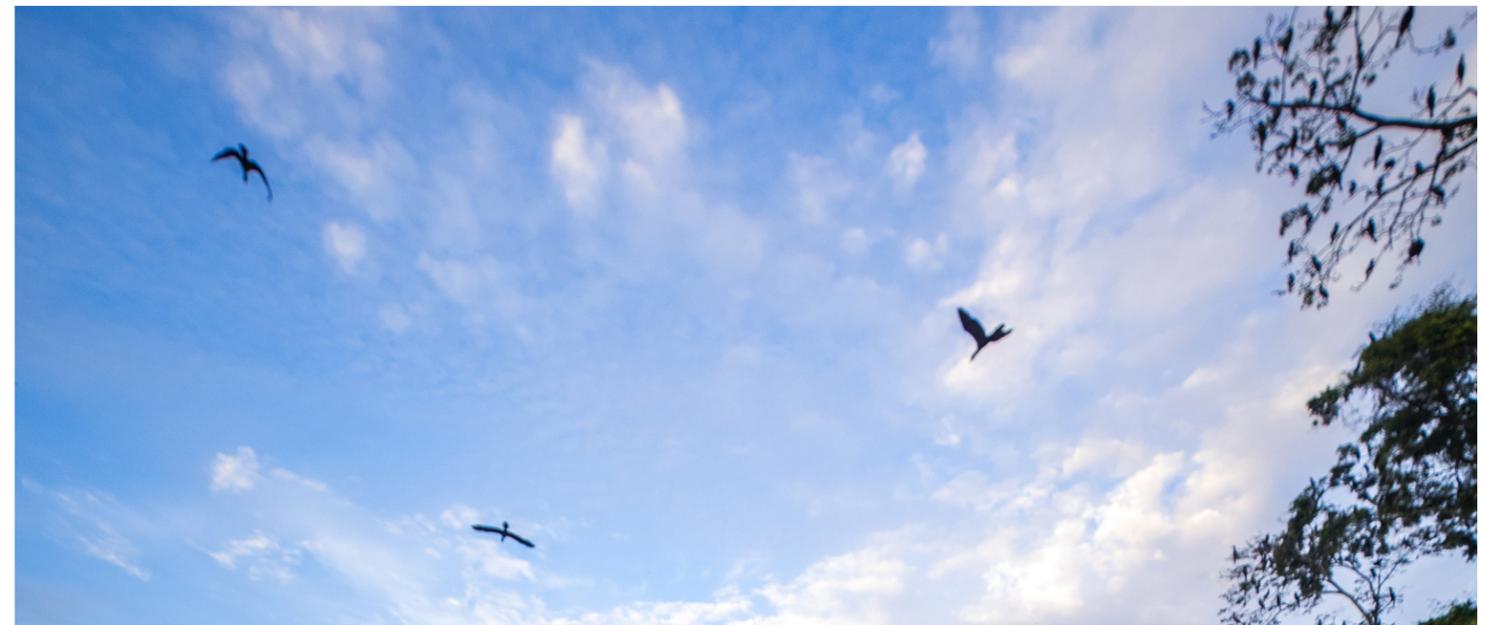


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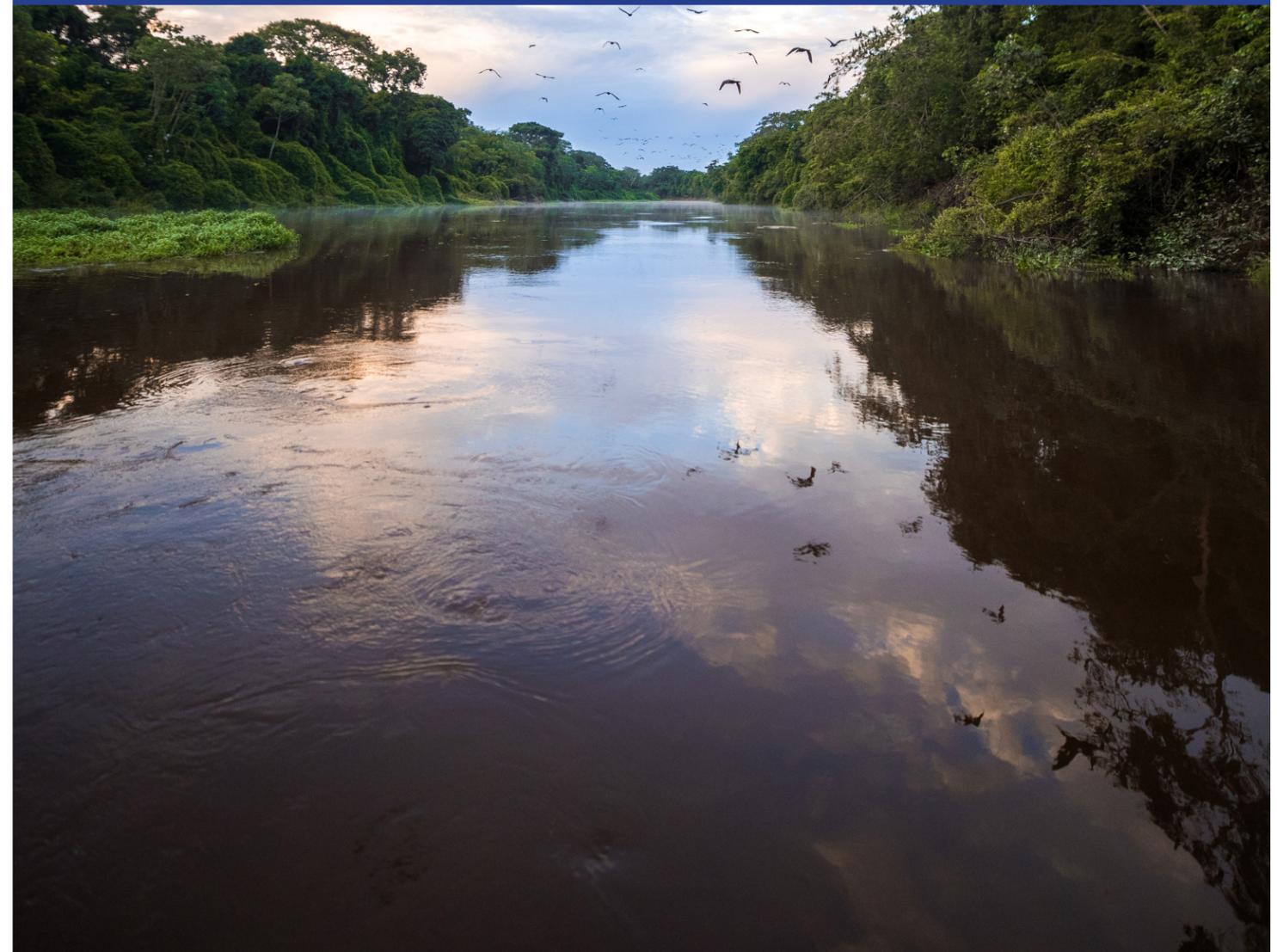
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# FREE-FLOWING RIVERS

SECURING THE  
FUTURE OF HEALTHY,  
UNOBSTRUCTED RIVERS



## A VITAL RESOURCE FACES HEAVY DEMAND

From the Nile to the Yangtze, rivers have long been the lifeblood of civilizations around the world. They are among the most diverse and productive ecosystems on the planet, contributing to economic growth, food security, and human well-being. They support wetlands, forests, and

other terrestrial habitats, and are home to many of the more than 100,000 freshwater species that exist—including nearly half of all fish species. Unfortunately, rivers are severely threatened by humankind's growing demands for food, water, and energy. Just one-third of the world's

longest rivers remain free flowing. The rest are interrupted by infrastructure that depresses aquatic wildlife and undermines the invaluable services rivers provide. WWF envisions a world where the most critical free-flowing rivers are valued and protected for the enduring benefit of people, wildlife, and nature.

## THREATS AND IMPACTS

### Biodiversity loss

Freshwater fish had the highest extinction rate among vertebrates worldwide in the 20th century. According to WWF's 2018 Living Planet Report, freshwater wildlife populations declined 83% between 1970 and 2014. Without thoughtful intervention, free-flowing rivers will continue to be lost and we will continue to witness the decline of freshwater species and their benefits to people.

### Infrastructure

One of the most severe threats to river systems is dams and other infrastructure development. In particular, more than 3700 hydropower dams are under construction or proposed. More than 3,700 dams are under construction or planned. While hydropower is a less carbon-intensive energy source, poorly placed dams can have devastating impacts. The future depends on finding alternative

energy solutions and placing new infrastructure in a way that minimizes impacts on people and nature.

### Impacted communities

Many communities depend on free-flowing rivers for their livelihoods and sustenance. Free-flowing rivers deposit nutrient-rich silt on floodplains and deltas, creating fertile agricultural land. Inland water fisheries provide the primary source of protein for hundreds of millions of people and their value is estimated at upwards of US\$43 billion.

## WWF'S STRATEGY

To protect the world's most vital, free-flowing rivers, WWF is undertaking a four-part strategy.

### Sustainable Basin & Energy Development:

WWF is supporting uptake of new development pathways, financial tools, and other incentives to shift development planning in ways that maximize economic and energy benefits while minimizing negative impacts on people and nature. Redirecting financial flows to bankable and sustainable renewable energy projects is a critical component of this workstream.

### Advocacy & Outreach:

WWF employs public advocacy and communications to advocate for policy change; to increase understanding of the impacts of unsustainable infrastructure and the potential for alternative energy and natural infrastructure solutions; and to raise awareness of the value of healthy, free-flowing rivers.

### Policy Protections & Governance:

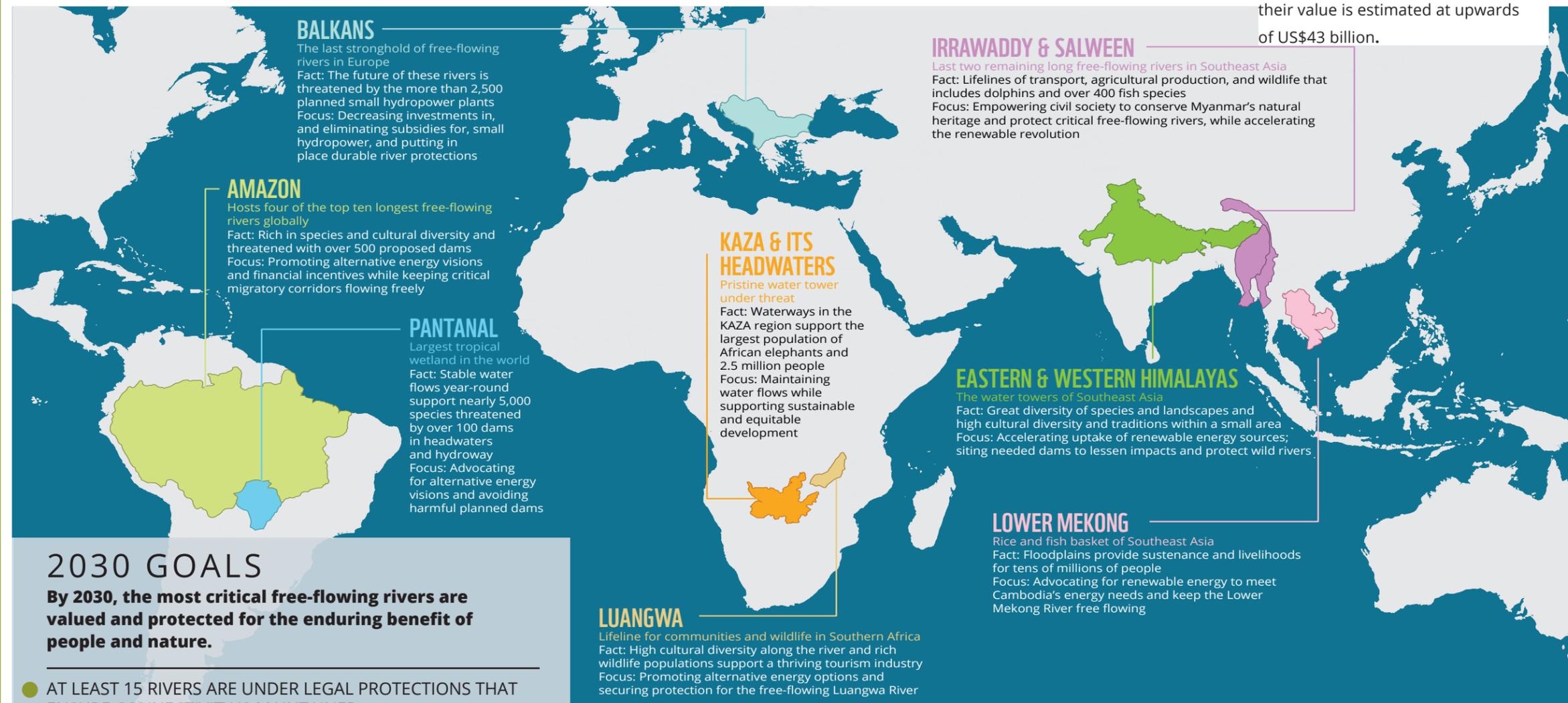
Protection of the world's most important free-flowing rivers from future development is critical. WWF is working with local communities and other stakeholders to pilot, document, and share various mechanisms to secure rivers and strengthen their management.

### Science:

There is still much we don't know about how rivers, wildlife, and human development interconnect. WWF is continuing to measure the health of rivers and assess the efficacy of various policy, market, and community-oriented interventions in specific geographies and at a global scale.

## WHERE WE WORK

Our efforts are focused in those areas (see map below) that are the final frontiers for free-flowing rivers, that are hotspots for freshwater biodiversity, and that are urgently threatened by dam development.



## 2030 GOALS

**By 2030, the most critical free-flowing rivers are valued and protected for the enduring benefit of people and nature.**

- AT LEAST 15 RIVERS ARE UNDER LEGAL PROTECTIONS THAT ENSURE CONNECTIVITY IS MAINTAINED
- WITHIN PRIORITY GEOGRAPHIES, LOSS OF RIVER CONNECTIVITY IS AVOIDED ON AT LEAST 22,500 KM OF RIVER THROUGH ALTERNATIVE ENERGY AND BASIN-SCALE PLANNING

### For more information contact:

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