POSITIVE INCENTIVES COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

Task 18 of the Biodiversity Plan "The Power of Voluntary Action"

Case Study (USA)

CONNECTING NATURE-POSITIVE ACTION WITH CORPORATE VISION for 35+ Years

Wildlife Habitat Council

Organizers

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Summary

For more than 35 years, Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) has recognized, inspired, engaged and supported businesses to achieve wins for nature. It specializes in working alongside industry to identify voluntary land management and other business-related practices that progress “beyond compliance” while harmonizing operational needs with biodiversity uplift. While businesses begin to understand the shared benefits from managing their landholdings in concert with environmental and societal demands and increasingly seek opportunities to partner with others, WHC collaborates with businesses to ensure nature is considered in corporate, operational and site-level decision making.

WHC’s signature program, Conservation Certification®, offers companies recognition for site-level efforts that seek to improve habitat availability for native species and educate various stakeholders about locally relevant nature topics. In 2024, over 100 companies are recognized through WHC Certification for their participation in site-based biodiversity programs at more than 600 sites across nearly 20 countries.

Case Study

Introduction

Governments across the globe are endeavoring to implement regulations that align with 2030 and 2050 targets in The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). Civil society groups, such as the Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC), have developed and implemented innovative strategies to support businesses in aligning with the 2030 and 2050 targets that go beyond regulatory approaches available to government entities.

For more than 35 years, WHC has recognized, inspired, engaged and supported businesses to achieve wins for nature. It specializes in working alongside industry to identify voluntary land management and other business-related practices that progress “beyond compliance” while harmonizing operational needs with biodiversity uplift. Currently, WHC’s corporate membership of over 100 companies on the Fortune Global 500.

WHC collaborates with companies to ensure nature is considered in corporate, operational and site-level decision making. One way in which WHC accomplishes this is by guiding companies to create employee-led volunteer teams focused on establishing (and maintaining) site-based, locally relevant biodiversity

uplift projects. WHC conservation and biodiversity experts provide project recommendations, strategies and tactics, and assist in identifying and connecting with local stakeholders to support implementation and monitoring to ensure actions will have the greatest ecological and social impacts.

The Business Case for Conservation

From its decades working alongside industry, WHC has identified numerous benefits for companies engaging in a programmatic approach to site-based corporate biodiversity action (as shown in the following *C-Suite 16* graphic). The benefits can and have been deployed as positive incentives for meaningful corporate action on biodiversity.

WHC has determined that the incentives lie within three primary categories: benefits to the operations, support of good corporate citizenship and facilitation of business management targets.

Within each of these broader categories there are a series of more specific incentives, or business drivers, that businesses have realized are achievable through nature action. These benefits range from increasing climate change resiliency to attracting top talent in a competitive market, and supporting the permitting process through demonstration of good land stewardship to aiding in employee retention.

Community Engagement / Investment in Education: Cemex

Cemex, a Mexico-based global building materials, has successfully elevated its profile in the local community by engaging nearby schools in biodiversity-centered education.

The employee team at the Center Hill Mine has developed a long-standing, integrated partnership with the local school systems around Sumter County, Florida, where the mine is located. Comprised of a 996-acre active rock quarry, Center Hill Mine includes 229 acres of actively managed habitats including lakes, wetlands and forest.

Since 2006, the team has hosted local elementary school groups, beginning the curriculum with a mine tour to provide a context of where they are in relation to factors such as habitat, geology and site operations. Students participate in activities that correlate to the state and national academic standards and allow students to engage with the site's wetland habitat and its resident species, which include great blue herons, sandhill cranes, osprey, American coots, wood ducks, cormorants, anhingas and frogs.

The program includes fourth graders visiting the site over a three-week period in the fall, with students participating in activities focused on recycling, runoff and erosion, water conservation and the food chain. To ensure that educational goals are met, Cemex coordinates with teachers to evaluate the learning impact of the activities, conducting pre-tests on-site and post-tests in the classroom.

Several years ago, the Cemex team expanded its educational opportunities to high school students by developing a year-long curriculum focused on teaching students about the mine permitting process from start to finish, and ways environmental stewardship might be integrated into intensive activities such as mining. Through this program, students attend field trips and on-site trainings throughout the year, culminating in the students presenting their mine permitting plan at mock community and permitting meetings with the Board of County Commissioners, who are represented by teachers and at an actual commissioner.

Additional opportunities for students exist outside of these programs, including the site's annual Earth Day event, started over a decade ago, and includes over 35 educational booths focused on habitat and the environment, which are led by universities, community partners and government agencies.

Through these and other projects and partnerships, the Cemex Center Hill Mine has established itself as a meaningful member of the community, producing educational opportunities reaching hundreds of local students.

Employee Engagement / Nature-Based Solutions: Toyota

Toyota Motor North America leverages the power of nature-based solutions in support of its public commitment to biodiversity and its long-term employee engagement goals. Toyota creates opportunities for employees and community members to engage in learning, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math related topics.

At Toyota's Production Engineering and Manufacturing Center (PEMC) in Georgetown, Kentucky U.S.A. an opportunity to combine nature-based solutions and employee engagement has created a successful and enriching conservation program.

Utilizing the practice of Morizukuri, a Japanese concept of forest creation by planting groups of trees and grasses, Toyota and its employee volunteer teams developed a 22,600-square-foot microforest at the PEMC site in 2020. The land, which was previously dominated with non-native grasses, was first planted with 24 species of trees native to the Bluegrass region of Kentucky, including sycamore, tulip poplar and black walnut.

The following year, employees added four more native tree species with the Miyawaki method, developed by Dr. Akira Miyawaki, a Japanese botanist who worked with Toyota for years to develop forests on the company's property. The Miyawaki microforestry method relies on amending the soil and using native species to accelerate forest maturation, focusing efforts on species that naturally occur later in the vegetation succession.[1] The Morizukuri microforest is also part of its 1.8-mile Toyota Kentucky Biodiversity Trail, thus extending the educational and recreational benefits of this project to the general public.

The program provided more than 70 employees with the unique opportunity to learn about microforestry concepts and processes, engage with nature through tree plantings, collaborate with fellow employees, and create new environmental stewards.

1. Chelsea Green Publishing. 2023. Imagining a mini-forest's potential: The Miyawaki method. https://www.chelseagreen.com/2023/the-miyawaki-method/

The morizukuri microforest planting at PEMC allowed for employee participation as well as collaboration with local experts and NGOs.

Land Management for Social License to Operate: Ontario Power Generation

Meaningful community engagement that goes beyond transactional interactions or conventional corporate philanthropy can enhance a company's ability to establish, maintain or restore social license to operate (SLO). Obtaining SLO involves building trust with community members and leaders through environmental and socially responsible actions that are informed by local needs, and then communicated to community members. In a recent WHC survey, 30 percent of its members indicated they engaged in site-based conservation action to support securing SLO.

Ontario Power Generation (OPG) implemented a land management program that extends beyond their fence line in Wesleyville, Ontario, Canada in support of local conservation efforts and community needs. OPG engaged with community stakeholders and partners to build environmental resilience and strengthen its relationship with neighboring landowners.

The OPG Wesleyville facility encompasses 1,200 acres of agricultural and pasture lands, as well as forested areas and provincially significant wetlands. Wesleyville Creek, one of the highest quality coldwater streams in the region, flows across the property, draining into Lake Ontario.

Starting in 1998, in response to an environmental survey that identified reforestation and stream restoration as top opportunities for on-site biodiversity, employees planted oaks, maple and other native trees, resulting in over 40,000 seedlings planted on the property to date. Additionally, Wesleyville employees began work on a multi-phase stream restoration project, the first step of which entailed clearing out excessive sediment and removing beaver dams that were confining the creek's brook trout population to areas with limited food and few places to spawn.

Over time, OPG employees, in partnership with contractors and local conservation authorities, removed in-stream culverts for greater trout mobility, planted willows to provide shade and moderate the creek's temperature and, with the help of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, installed a barrier that prevents invasive sea lampreys from entering the creek. Monitoring data collected by the local Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) indicates that brook trout spawning activity is increasing, sea lampreys are being effectively controlled and the creek's water quality has remained high.

Beyond these initial projects, OPG has continued to grow its conservation efforts through the installation of more than 50 artificial nesting structures for birds like ospreys, tree swallows and bluebirds.

To engage community members and build further SLO, OPG has driven conservation action on neighboring properties, which also contain portions of Wesleyville Creek. In 2017, OPG and adjacent landowners partnered in a cost- and data-sharing program that has resulted in uniform creek management practices across the sites, and installation of 20 nest boxes on neighboring lands.

In addition to sharing monitoring data with its neighbors, OPG and its partners make contributions to local research. Every year, grasses and other material from bluebird and tree swallow nests are provided to the Royal Ontario Museum in support of research on cavity-nesting birds, and monitoring data on these species is sent to the Ontario Eastern Bluebird Society, who integrates the information into its spring newsletter. Data collected in the wetlands is used by Environment and Climate Change Canada as baseline information in studies on biodiversity and climate change's impact on wetlands.

The result has been increased SLO for not only the OPG facility but the company as a whole. They maintain and nurture this good will through ongoing community outreach and engagement strategies informed by new data and shifts in community needs.

Validating Corporate Action for Nature – WHC Conservation Certification®

Companies must be able to verify the validity of voluntary corporate biodiversity action for reporting and other purposes. WHC's standard for verification of on-site conservation efforts requires that projects must meet the following criteria:

- Be locally appropriate
- Exceed applicable regulatory requirements
- Identify a valid conservation objective
- Provide conservation value
- Have measured and documented outcomes

WHC measures the validity of these qualifications through its WHC Conservation Certification® program. Established in 1989, WHC Certification continues to be the world's only voluntary sustainability standard designed for broad-based biodiversity enhancement and conservation education activities on corporate landholdings.

WHC Certification benefits to businesses include:

- A single platform capable of recognizing the company's site-specific efforts to manage and restore native habitats, whether terrestrial or aquatic, and support the plant and animal species indigenous to those areas
- Recognition of education efforts aimed at both formal and informal learning audiences, whether to raise awareness or to provide specific conservation training to support future biodiversity efforts.
- Aggregated metrics for reporting and disclosure, and to measure progress for continual improvement.
- Third-party credibility with an objective evaluation.
- Demonstrates a long-term commitment to managing quality habitat for wildlife, conservation education and community outreach initiatives.

WHC Conservation Certification programs can be found in 47 U.S. states and 17 countries, with 605 programs by 105 companies. Each program is led by an employee team that manages habitats, species and education projects that support the health of local ecosystems and benefit native species. To learn more about these efforts, browse WHC Member Spotlights.

As the pace of change at the nexus of biodiversity and business continues rapidly, including the emergence of new environmental, social and governance (or ESG) tools, WHC is taking steps to ensure the Certification standard remains a hallmark for quality habitat for wildlife, conservation education and community outreach initiatives.

To shape the future of WHC Certification, the organization has convened a new WHC Executive Advisory Committee who will guide the decision-making process of the standard, reinforcing its prominence internationally, and further establishing its reputation of outstanding quality.

Importance of Collaboration

As proven through WHC's 35+ years of working with businesses, collaboration is the cornerstone of any successful, sustainable corporate biodiversity action. Connecting business with key partners, whether they be consultants, government agencies, NGO's or community stakeholders, helps inform the process and elevates the outcomes of nature-positive activities. Businesses increasingly understand the shared benefits from managing their landholdings in concert with environmental and societal demands and seek information and opportunities to partner with others.

As the only international NGO focused exclusively on enabling private sector action for nature, WHC is uniquely qualified to assist businesses in finding collaborators who can advance their goals. Whether through direct engagement with WHC expert consultants or via its annual gathering corporate professionals working at the intersection of business and nature, WHC offers opportunities to share and learn innovations to advance biodiversity for both people and nature.

Conclusion

With the GBF seeking a whole-of-society approach to deliver on the goals for biodiversity for 2030 and beyond, it is clear that the private sector has a key role to play. For this sector of society, positive incentives to action come in many forms, from securing social license to operate, to reducing climate risk, and increasing employee engagement. All these efforts indirectly contribute to a business' bottom line, thus increasing internal investments, placing them beyond philanthropy, and increasing resiliency to cyclical reductions in budgets. Providing a verification through the WHC Certification scheme provides businesses with a mechanism to leverage local conservation action into corporate-wide reporting frameworks. Finally, requiring renewal on a 2- to 3-year timeframe ensures continued effort, adaptive management and greater biodiversity outcomes.

According to the Biodiversity Credit Alliance, a biodiversity credit is a "certificate that represents a measured and evidence-based unit or positive biodiversity outcome that is durable and additional to what would have otherwise occurred." Using this definition, we can see that certified conservation actions on corporate lands can be labelled as biodiversity credits and in the case of the WHC Certification program, credits that are not traded but measured as a positive incentive across a spectrum of business concerns.