CLOSE THE LOOP

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In this document, we present the Conservation Standards as a cycle where teams might enter at the step that is most appropriate for their situation. A project team starting up a new project might go through Steps 1 (Assess) and 2 (Plan) fairly quickly (perhaps over a 4 5 day workshop) to sketch out the basic strategic plan for their project. They may then circle back and fill in the details over the next few months for these steps, while they are also beginning the implementation work in Step 3 (Implement). The team 12 might then conduct its first analyses in Step 4 (Analyze & Adapt) after 6 months and use this work to develop internal and external communication products in Step 5 (Share). Many teams, however, may enter the cycle at a later stage (e.g., Step 4, where they want to understand whether what they have been doing is working). Over time, they may go back to earlier steps and revisit decisions and assumptions and make them more explicit.

As is the nature of cycles, you have the opportunity to run through the Conservation Standards cycle, or parts of it, multiple times. Moving through some or all of the cycle naturally illuminates factors that were unknown in earlier steps. This new knowledge can feed directly into relevant areas, strengthening various elements of your overall conservation plan and your on-the-ground implementation. For example, you might revisit and adjust your vision and focal values, identify new factors or relationships that should be incorporated into your situation model, update audiences or information needs, and adjust strategic, monitoring, and/or operational plans.

The intent behind this cycle is not to put you and your project team in an endless loop of work. Rather, it is to remind you that evidence-based conservation and adaptive management are dynamic processes that require you to constantly learn and improve over time.

Closing the loop is about iteratively going through the steps in the project cycle to improve your efforts and further develop your thinking, products, and processes over time – both for your team's needs, as well as those of the broader conservation community. It is the essence of transforming ordinary management into true evidence-based conservation and adaptive management.