

Living Grasslands: wilding as nature-based opportunity for grassy ecosystems under diverse land tenure systems

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Nature-based solutions (NbS)

- Harnessing and restoring ecosystem functioning to address environmental and societal challenges
- **Nature-based opportunity** to emphasize that there are no free lunches (solutions = trade-offs)



IUCN (2020). Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions. A user-friendly framework for the verification, design and scaling up of NbS. First edition. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

(Re)Wilding increasingly highlighted as a NbS

- Form of ecological restoration that emphasizes restoring key, **autonomous**, ecological processes and infrastructure
- Contrasts restoration methods that rely on heavy human intervention



Restoring fire regimes



Restoring "wilder" grazing dynamics

Continuous grazing
without resting



Rotational grazing with
resting (closer to wild
grazing dynamics)



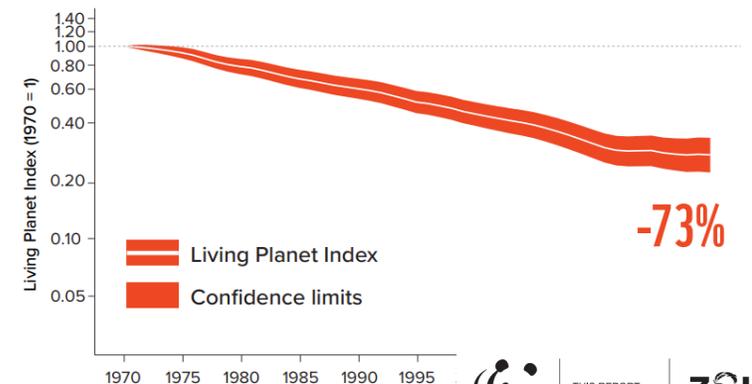
(Re)wilding is not (just) about protected areas

- Restoring autonomous ecological processes everywhere



Responds to the protected area paradox

- Ongoing biodiversity decline despite increasing conservation investments
- Challenge of restoring and conserving biodiversity outside protected areas while addressing other challenges, such as human livelihoods
- SANParks Vision 2040 and Mega Living Landscapes: reimagine how people can conserve biodiversity on a larger scale and in a more inclusive manner
- But how do you do this?



a. Global Living Planet Index



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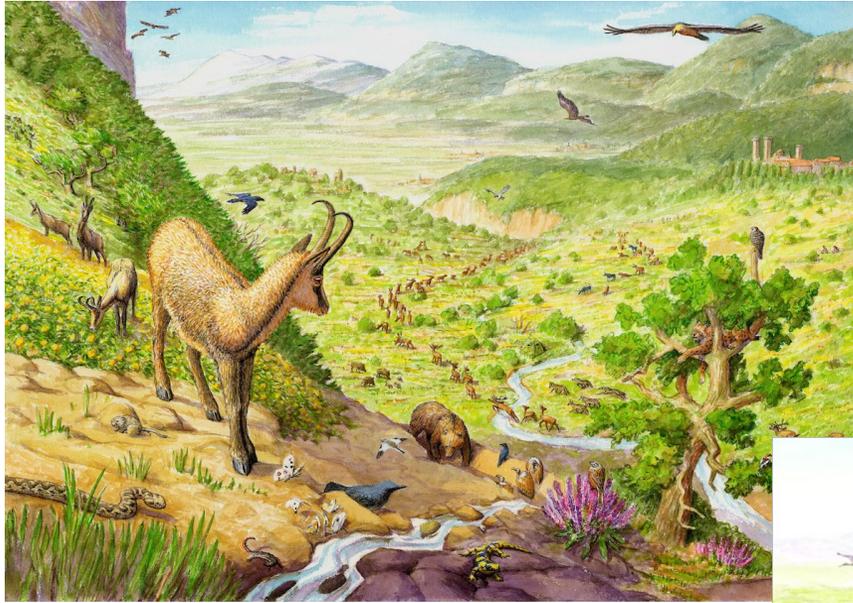
Vision 2040: envisioned Mega Living Landscapes



Critique on (re)wilding and NbS in general

- Lack of empirical evidence for, and monitoring of, benefits beyond biodiversity restoration, especially in terms of livelihood impacts
- Suggestions that dominant rewilding narratives exclude humans and promote the separation between humans and nature
- Imbalanced power relations in decision-making, leading to doubts on whether rewilding/NbS can offer inclusive opportunities for rural development
- Need for rewilding/NbS to become more aware of biopolitics, to decolonize rewilding, and reduce the risk of being perceived as a form of neocolonialism

Images of rewilding



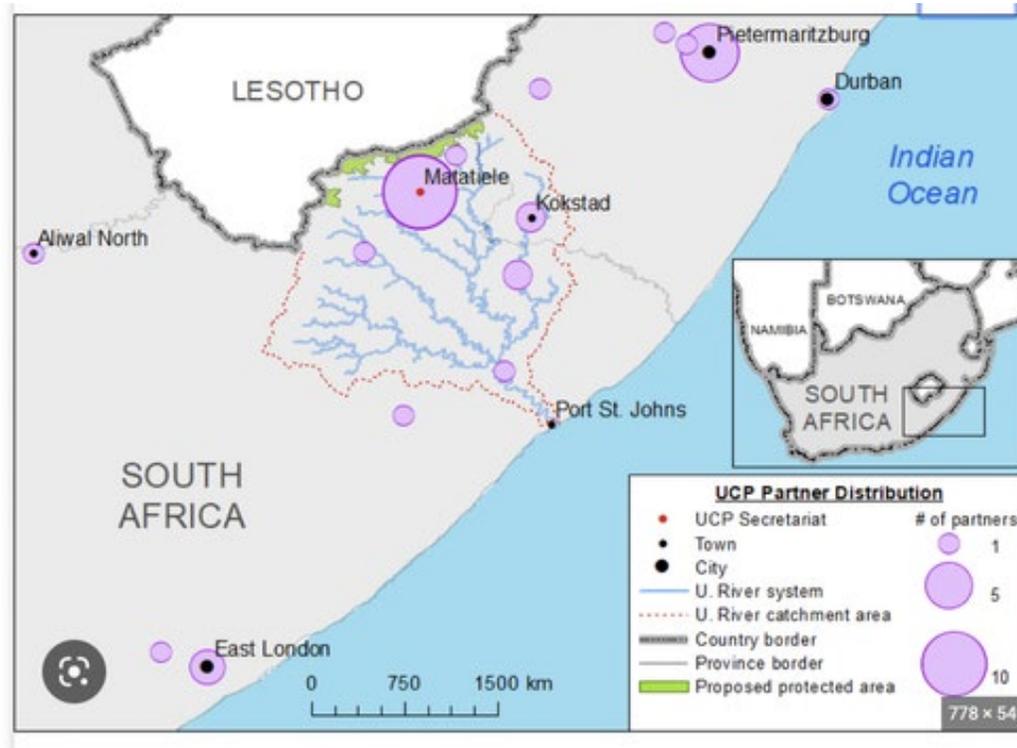
Our main research questions

- **RQ1:** How do you develop wilding scenarios in grassy ecosystems in a way that is inclusive of the people living in these systems, i.e., by building on their needs, visions, and knowledge while respecting the plural values they associate with biodiversity?
- **RQ2:** What are the trade-offs and synergies for biodiversity and people resulting from different wilding scenarios, and how do they vary across different land tenure/governance systems?

Our study landscape – uMzimvubu catchment

Provincially protected areas

Privately owned farms



Communally owned grazing areas

New landscape initiatives (MTTM Protected Environment, Grasslands National Park, Mega Living Landscape)

Three core objectives

1. Assess local knowledge: what biodiversity means in the eyes of the people and what plural values they associate with various components of biodiversity,
2. Build-up scientific knowledge: set-up participatory monitoring hubs, where community members and scientists jointly monitor biodiversity and associated livelihood values,
3. Integrate the local and scientific knowledge to co-create potential pathways to restore biodiversity-livelihood links.

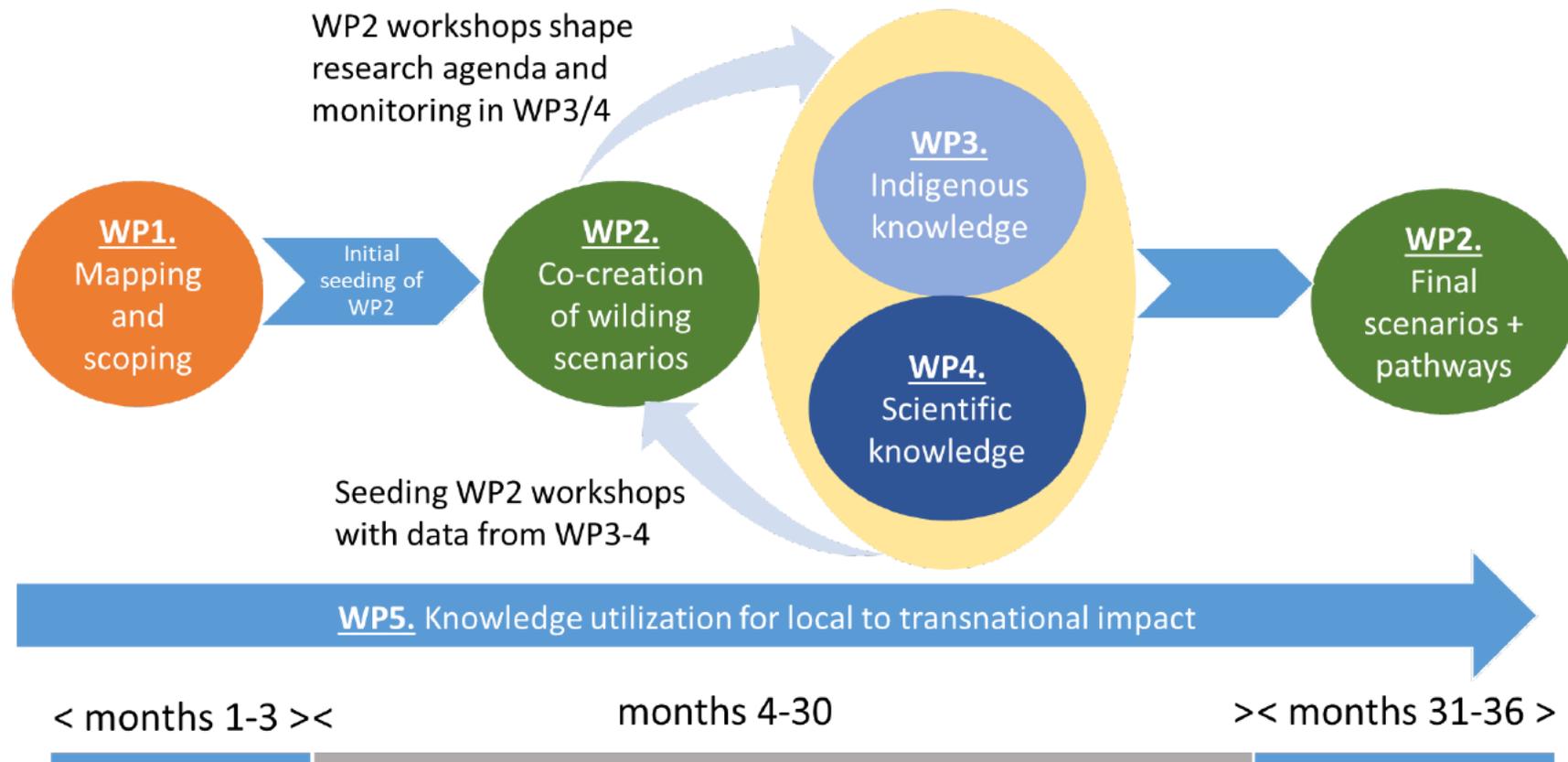


Figure 1. Overview of breakdown of Wilding Grasslands into 5 work packages (WP), interrelation among these WP's and rough timeline (see GANTT chart for specific timeline).