WeForest

2024 Project Update

Wof-Washa Forest Restoration Project

Restoring the Ethiopian central highland's biodiversity hotspot area, Wof-Washa Forest, Amhara National Regional State

Project management and M&E team

Main implementing partner: **WeForest Ethiopia**

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See the full team at:
www.weforest.org/about-us/#our-team

Amhara State, Ethiopia
Great Green Wall

Timeline:
2023 - 2032

Targeted ecosystem: **Dry Afromontane Forest**
Biodiversity hotspot: **Eastern Afromontane**

KBA KEY BIODIVERSITY AREAS
Ankober, DedreSina #6252
Aluy Amba, Duletcha #6253

Tropical Important Plant Areas (TIPAs): Wof-Washa Forest ETHTIPA009

Project story

Wof Washa Natural Forest in Ethiopia is found in the eastern Afromontane biodiversity hotspot. The forest supports the lives of over 60,000 local people. However, limited resources, weak policy enforcement, and the absence of collaborative land management have left communities with few alternatives for meeting their needs. Over the last 20 years, nearly 2,000 hectares (14%) of the natural forest have been lost as people rely on the forest for harvesting and livestock grazing, highlighting the difficult balance between sustaining livelihoods and preserving natural ecosystems.

The project aims to conserve and restore close to 7,000 hectares of the natural forest through participatory, community-led forest management approaches; including strict protection, Assisted Natural Regeneration, enrichment planting of native tree species within the forest. Beginning in 2023, the project will run for five years until 2027, with a possibility of extension. With help from Ecologi, the project will be supported in achieving its goal of restoring this threatened landscape for the benefit of its nature and people.

Key challenges in the landscape

Population pressure
As population increases, agriculture and grazing activities encroach into the forest and more timber and other forest resources are unlawfully extracted. Farming on steeper slopes leads to soil erosion and landslides.

Livestock grazing
Encroaching cattle considerably damage emerging saplings and suppress the natural regeneration of the forest.

Timber harvesting
Illegal logging of rare timber species leads to biodiversity loss and ecosystem destabilisation.

Biomass-based energy
Communities are dependent on unsustainable harvesting of forest wood to provide energy for cooking.

Our integrated approach

To address these challenges, WeForest aims to conserve and restore the natural forest through community-led forest and landscape restoration.

Improving forest governance and stewardship
- The project will support the development of local bylaws in line with national and regional policies and regulations to strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Conserving and restoring the Forest
- Around 7,000 hectares of the natural forest will be conserved and protected through Participatory Forest Management (PFM) approaches, conservation, enrichment planting and Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR).
- Around 3,000 hectares of degraded and abandoned communal lands will be restored with economically and ecologically important trees.

Strengthening forest-friendly livelihoods
- The project will engage around 16,872 households in adopting sustainable livelihoods, introducing agroforestry practices and backyard plantation to an area of around 1055 hectares.

By integrating these interventions, the project will:
- Ensure that endemic trees and wildlife are protected
- Improve local livelihoods and income
- Reduce soil erosion and landslides

The long-term impact of our work will benefit people, nature and climate.

A long-term vision

Climate

The restoration of Wof-Washa Forest will contribute to both climate mitigation and adaptation: increasing tree cover to sequester carbon while improving water retention and soil stability to help communities adapt to droughts and erratic weather.

Nature

Restoring Wof-Washa Forest will protect biodiversity and secure critical ecosystem services like water and soil health. Improved land management will enhance habitat resilience, ensuring the forest continues to sustain both people and wildlife.

People

Strengthened governance and forest-friendly livelihoods will ensure communities see the forest as an asset—one that provides resources while being sustainably managed. By introducing agroforestry practices, the project reduces deforestation-driven income reliance while securing long-term economic stability.

Chilada baboon

Outcomes

By integrating these interventions, the project will:

- Ensure that endemic trees and **wildlife** are protected
- Improve local **livelihoods** and income
- Reduce **soil erosion** and landslides

Theory of Change

Existing problems in the landscape

- Forest resource extraction
- Weak governance structures
- Resources conflict
- Land degradation
- Biodiversity loss
- Deforestation

Risks

- Desertification
- Climate change
- Landslides due to forest degradation

WeForest Interventions

Improved forest governance and stewardship

- Improving local forest management structures and regulations
- Exploring ecotourism opportunities

Restoring and conserving at-risk forests

- Tree planting
- Assisted natural regeneration
- Enrichment planting
- Tree nurseries

Introducing forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviours

- Agroforestry
- Cookstoves
- Fodder
- Timber
- Beekeeping
- Farm irrigation
- Fuelwood
- Improving livestock practices

Project outcomes

- Community-led participatory forest management association established, Management plan and bylaws developed and implemented
- Improved forest cover and ecosystem services
- Improved household income and food security through forest-friendly livelihoods in communities around Wof-Washa

Long term impact

Climate

Stored and sequested carbon

Nature

Thriving biodiversity and intact ecosystems

People

Sustainable and resilient communities

2024 Major Achievements

A one-day consultative workshop created synergy among the different actors of Wof-Washa forest, and the process to form the Wof-Washa Protected area general management plan was begun. Other items, including benefit-sharing mechanisms and the prospect of future involvement in carbon trading, were discussed. This workshop marked a milestone for the proposed national park, establishing a common vision and management objectives.

A photo taken during an observation of the seed collection of the Pinus patula tree, which is the source of the seed. Pinus patula is a species that is found at the periphery of the forest in a specific location in the upper part of the forest as a buffer. Exotic but it is being intensively cultivated because it has a large seed reserve and its seeds are in high demand and are highly valued in the market for its timber.

Three guards, Mr. Wonedesen Gezahegn, Mr. Fekade Haile and Mr Zenebe Mamo, patrol Wof-Washa forest in collaboration with Wof-Washa kebele Administration, Taken during a site visit to Wof-Washa forest with the forest protection staff.

2024 activity update

Improved forest governance and stewardship

- The forest governance system was strengthened by involving **local leaders**, focal people and development agents.
- Communities were engaged on **nine occasions** to inform site selection, stakeholder analysis and key community actor identification, and an implementation organigram and stakeholder map were created.
- **12** participatory forest management groups (PFMs) were supported in creating delineated forest maps, forest management plans and internal bylaws.
- Wof-Washa underwent demarcation of park boundaries by the local protection authority (EFPA), and a proposal was drafted for **national park recognition**. WeForest began contributing to the management plan for the proposed Wof-Washa Protected National Park.

Restoring and conserving at-risk forests

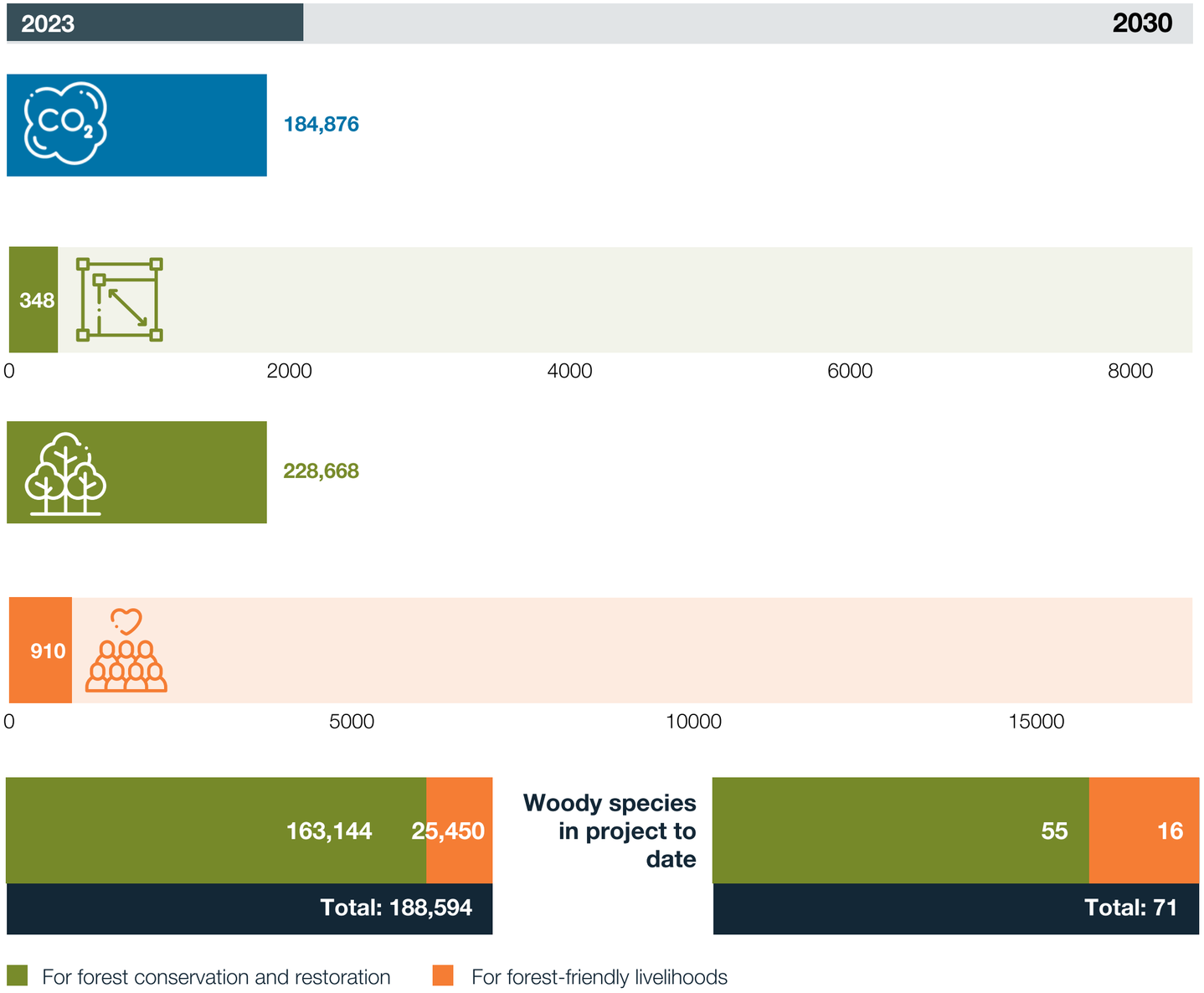
- **348** new hectares of Wof-Washa Forest were conserved and restored.
- **25,450** seedlings of three native tree species were planted in conservation and restoration areas.
- Throughout the year, operations took place through four WeForest nurseries, through which **39** nursery workers were employed.
- Over **500,000** seedlings are growing in four WeForest nurseries for 2025 planting season
- Other restoration activities included: **enrichment** planting in the forest area, tree planting on degraded semi-natural forest and fencing conservation areas to exclude livestock.

Introducing forest-friendly livelihoods

- **163,144** seedlings were planted for agroforestry purposes, including multipurpose seedlings such as Olea europaea and high-value crop species including coffee, banana, papaya and citrus.
- **39** hectares were converted to agroforestry
- **910** households participated in or benefitted from the project: **77** joined planting activities; **158** joined training activities; **49** were involved in nursery input supply; **39** employed as nursery workers; **539** were beneficiaries of the Agroforestry programme; **48** participated as Forest guards.
- A youth tree seed collection group was established, providing ten young people with training and support and generating **890 USD** as income.

Progress tracker

See end of report for our progress tracking methodology



Mr. Werkeshet Behaylu, one of 15 workers at the Wof-Washa, Genet Tree Nursery, watering Juniperus procera seedlings.

The picture was taken during the preparation of a participatory village base and development map.
The development map of each kebele was prepared by involving 14-18 selected community members.

2024 Challenges

The Amhara region has faced challenges due to ongoing political instability since 2023. This instability has disrupted project activities in various ways such as hindering access to sites where activities were planned, and causing difficulty in gathering and mobilizing communities. Security concerns, including armed conflicts and civil unrest, have forced temporary suspensions of fieldwork and limited the mobility of project staff including monitoring activities. Despite these challenges, efforts are being made to adapt project strategies, prioritize safety, and collaborate with local stakeholders to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of restoration initiatives. The situation still remains active, requiring close monitoring and flexible planning to mitigate risks and achieve project goals.

Looking ahead to 2025

The activities of the Wof-Washa Forest Restoration Project will continue into 2025, with priorities including:

- Ensuring the Wof-Washa protected area management plan is approved
- Restoring and conserving 500 hectares of natural forest
- Engaging close to 2,300 household in agroforestry practices, including the planting of high-value apple trees
- Developing 15 land use plans
- Developing 12 bylaws for 12 villages
- Strengthening 11 existing participatory forest management cooperatives through training on seed collection and forest management.

Supporters & Partners

2024 project partners

- **SUNARMA** implemented livelihood activities in partnership with WeForest
- **Amhara Agriculture & Natural Resource Management Bureau** participated in project technical inputs, monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes and impacts and facilitated an enabling environment for project implementation.
- **Woreda Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Offices** took the same function as above but at the district level.
- **Amhara Finance & Economic Development Bureau** oversaw and helped coordinate and regulate WeForest project activities and budget.
- **Amhara National Regional State, Environment, Forest and Wildlife Protection and Development Authority** provided institutional leadership on the implementation of the project, engaging in forest protection and development of Wof-Washa forest.
- **Debre Birhan Agriculture Research centre (DARC)** advised the project on appropriate technology options, data analysis, technical support in developing research tools, and providing training.
- **Kebele administration** provided support to the project through mobilizing the community and ensuring the sustainability of the project.
- **Ethiopian Forestry Development** provided technical support and oversight on the implementation of Wof-Washa forest management plan. Provided support on the carbon trade scheme of Wof-Washa forest.
- **Ethiopian Environment and Forest Research Institute** provided research and technical inputs.
- **Amhara Region Agricultural Research Institution (ARARI)** provided research and technical inputs to Wof-Washa forest

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How we measure and forecast our impact

Baseline

For the sake of simplicity, the progress bars in this report show a baseline of zero. This represents the concept that the area covered by WeForest forest and landscape restoration (FLR) activities was zero; thus the associated trees conserved and restored, carbon stored and households impacted through WeForest intervention was also zero.

In reality, when a WeForest project begins, our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team undertakes a detailed survey on forest structure and regeneration through establishing Permanent Monitoring Plots, and conducts an extensive questionnaire on livelihoods, to establish meaningful baseline values. You can read more about our full MEL activities here.

Hectares planted, conserved and restored

Progress up to 2024

Verifiable cumulative total since the project began of all mapped intervention sites, also known as polygons, of:

1) Conservation forest areas, such as forest reserves

2) Restoration forest areas, such as Assisted Natural Regeneration and planting areas

3) Agroforestry areas on community/farm land

End of Project Target

Target number based on the potential area of land able to be conserved, restored and planted in the project area under the known and expected conditions at project start. However, it is subject to change based on unforeseen opportunities or challenges that may arise.

Anticipated tons of CO2 to be sequestered through project activities

Progress up to 2024

Extrapolated tons of CO2 calculated from the measured areas of different types of land use (for example forest or agroforestry) under “Hectares of forest planted, conserved and restored” to date, and the average amount of projected long-term CO2 per hectare provided from literature review for each land use type in their locations. Although totalled, please note the methodology for calculating these CO2 projections are specific to land-use type, and span a period corresponding to the expected time taken for the trees to reach maturity, which varies between locations.

End of Project Target

As above, but using the target (and not current) number of hectares planted, restored and conserved and their respective area totals as a parameter for calculations. As this parameter is subject to change, the associated CO2 target may also change over time.

Number of trees conserved and restored*

Progress up to 2024
Extrapolated number of trees calculated from the measured areas of different land use types (for example conservation areas, restoration areas or agroforestry) under “Hectares planted, conserved and restored” to date, and the average tree densities observed for each land-use type when mature, known through our MEL activities or scientific literature.

End of Project Target
As above, but using the target (and not current) number of “Hectares of forest planted, restored and conserved” and their respective area totals as a parameter for calculations. As this parameter is subject to change, the associated trees conserved and restored target may also change over time.

*Estimations based on average numbers per hectare

Trees planted to date (2024)

Total
Actual counted number of planted seedlings and saplings of woody (tree and shrub) species in the project to date.

Trees planted for forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors
Only woody species directly planted for livelihood improvement. This also includes woody fruit, fodder & timber trees, and woody cash crops, exclusively planted on community or farm land.

Trees planted for forest conservation and restoration
Only woody species that were directly planted for ecological reasons, aiding restoration of the natural forest ecosystem.

Woody species in project to date (2024)

Total
Actual observed number of woody (tree and shrub) species:

- Regenerating in the conservation/restoration zones (i.e. in the Permanent Monitoring Plots) and
- Planted, either for restoration or livelihood improvement
- Growing as mature trees in the conservation/restoration zones (i.e. in the permanent monitoring plots).
- Please note, these numbers are not exhaustive and the true species richness is likely to be higher.

Tree species for forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors
Only woody species directly planted for livelihood improvement. This also includes woody fruit, fodder and timber trees, and woody cash crops, exclusively planted on community or farm land.

Tree species for forest conservation and restoration
The woody species observed in the project area that are not used for livelihood improvement purposes. Where species are used for both livelihood improvement and restoration (which is sometimes the case, as we use native species as much as possible), they have been counted under ‘forest-friendly livelihoods and behaviors’.

Mammal and bird species sighted to date

Numbers are included where we have a good level of biological monitoring, for example using camera traps or audio devices - please note that numbers are unlikely to capture the full species richness of the project area and that the absence of reporting does not imply the absence of species.

Other notes

WeForest works in close cooperation with local partner organisations, institutions, community-based organizations and local people. Therefore, our impact can never be fully separated from the work of our partners. WeForest acknowledges that the presented impact numbers cannot be solely attributed to our work, but is also supported through the hard work contributed by all our local partners.

Terminology

Conservation
Where native forest canopy cover is still intact, we focus on protecting the forest from any threats and disturbances, such as overgrazing, unsustainable wood extraction and fire.

Restoration
Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR): Where there is reduced forest cover but high potential for natural regeneration, we aim to accelerate natural recovery, typically through preventing soil degradation, reducing competition with weeds, and protecting young trees.

Tree planting
Where there is reduced forest cover and little regeneration potential, we actively plant native trees at a density that corresponds with the regeneration potential.

Agroforestry and tree crops
Where agricultural landscapes exist, WeForest promotes the planting of trees for livelihood improvement. These trees can be used either for direct consumption or sale (fruits, timber, fuelwood) or to support other crops or livestock (agroforestry). Native tree species are prioritized but, where necessary, non-native species may be used.