GOURITZ®
Cluster Biosphere Reserve

VISION 2036

A ten-year strategy for a thriving, living landscape

OUR VISION

By 2036, the Gouritz Biosphere is a thriving, living landscape where collaborative action conserves biodiversity, celebrates cultural heritage, builds resilience and generates knowledge that strengthens landscapes and communities locally and globally.

GCBR STRATEGIC PLAN 2027 – 2036



STRATEGY AT A GLANCE

From a special place to shared solutions

The Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (Gouritz Biosphere) lies within a globally important biogeographical transition zone of exceptional biodiversity and encompasses eight Strategic Water Source Areas. Its mountains, rivers, wetlands, coast, rangelands, farms, towns, and cultural landscapes form an interconnected living landscape. Yet it faces growing pressures from the compounding impacts of climate disruption, biodiversity loss, water insecurity and unequal economic opportunity which increasingly cascade across ecosystems, livelihoods and communities. The Gouritz Biosphere is therefore both a landscape at risk and an ideal place where practical approaches to resilience can be tested and shared with others.

Vision 2036 responds by positioning the Gouritz Biosphere as a living laboratory for resilience: a place where people work across boundaries, bringing together local knowledge and technical expertise to protect and restore nature, strengthen livelihoods, test practical responses and share solutions that can be adapted and applied elsewhere.

WHY	HOW	WHAT CHANGES
Healthy landscapes and capable communities are our strongest foundation for resilience in an uncertain climate.	We convene, connect, catalyse, build capacity and implement.	Living landscapes recover; livelihoods become more resilient; knowledge moves into action; more people lead change.

Four pathways to 2036

1. Mobilise partnerships for shared resilience

Bring people and institutions together around shared priorities and trusted relationships to enable coordinated action, aligning effort, expertise and investment across sectors and boundaries.

2. Restore and reconnect living landscapes

Conserve priority biodiversity, restore ecological infrastructure and coordinate land and water management across ownership and administrative boundaries.

3. Grow resilient, nature-positive livelihoods and communities

Work with land stewards, smallholders and enterprises to strengthen livelihoods and viable economic opportunities that sustain and are sustained by healthy natural systems.

4. Strengthen knowledge and capacity for collective action

Connect science, monitoring, lived experience and traditional knowledge through practical learning and capacity development so that young people, communities, institutions and partners can make informed decisions, adapt practice, and sustain action.

LEADERSHIP MESSAGES

A shared commitment

Message from the Chairperson

Vision 2036 is both an expression of confidence in this extraordinary landscape and a clear acknowledgement that its future cannot be taken for granted. The pressures facing the Gouritz Biosphere extend across property boundaries, municipal borders, and institutional mandates. Our response must do the same.

The Board is committed to providing the governance, stewardship, and organisational stability needed for the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve NPC (GCBR) to fulfil its role. We will safeguard the integrity of the strategy, support responsible resource mobilisation and hold the organisation accountable for delivery. We will also support approaches that strengthen resilience through proactive planning, protection of critical natural assets and investment in our people. Most importantly, this is not solely a GCBR plan. It belongs to the partners, communities, landowners, institutions and young people whose insight shaped it and whose participation will bring it to life. The Board enters this next decade with confidence in the GCBR team and in the collective capacity of this region to build a more resilient future.

Hendrik Visser l Chairperson

Foreword from the Chief Executive Officer

Vision 2036 builds on GCBR's greatest strength: bringing people together and connecting knowledge, capabilities and resources to turn shared ambition into practical action.

Our stakeholders affirmed the value of our landscape presence, trusted relationships and ability to connect conservation, livelihoods and learning. They also challenged us to focus, measure what changes and mobilise investment that matches the scale of the need.

With a capable team, committed partners and deep knowledge across the region, we have a solid foundation. Having been entrusted with leading this next chapter, my commitment is to strengthen these connections, guide clear strategic choices and ensure we remain accountable for progress. Deep care for nature and people underpins this responsibility and the work we undertake together.

Together, we will strengthen the Gouritz Biosphere as a living laboratory for resilience. We will take action, learn and adapt to deliver lasting benefits locally and share knowledge beyond our borders.

Vision 2036 is an invitation to build that future with us.

Linda Fletcher l Chief Executive Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The decade ahead

Resilience is not a programme. It is the result of healthier systems, stronger relationships, informed decisions and the capacity to adapt together.

The Gouritz Biosphere spans approximately 3.2 million hectares of exceptional ecological and cultural diversity. It is a working landscape where conservation, agriculture, settlements, tourism and livelihoods meet.

Climate change is intensifying existing pressures. Droughts and floods are becoming harder to anticipate, fire risk is increasing, invasive alien plants undermine water security, loss of biodiversity results in degradation of ecosystem services and vulnerable communities carry the greatest costs when systems fail.

These challenges are interconnected. They cannot be solved through isolated projects or by one institution acting alone. Vision 2036 therefore shifts GCBR from a collection of separate workstreams to an integrated approach to building landscape and community resilience through collective action. It positions the Gouritz Biosphere as a living laboratory for practical learning.

THE STRATEGIC PROPOSITION

Local action will remain the purpose. Shared learning will multiply its value.

Vision 2036 will connect people, knowledge and investment around the places and challenges that matter most. GCBR will help partners turn shared priorities into coordinated action, combine local knowledge and science, test practical responses in real landscapes, monitor results, learn from experience and adapt their approaches.

In this way, the Gouritz Biosphere will become a living laboratory for resilience delivering lasting value locally while generating and sharing lessons that can strengthen landscapes and communities elsewhere.

Four integrated pathways will guide progress to 2036:

1. Mobilise partnerships for shared resilience
2. Restore and reconnect living landscapes
3. Grow resilient, nature-positive livelihoods and communities
4. Strengthen for collective action

Together, these pathways translate the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) mandate and stakeholder-defined priorities into an integrated strategy, as set out in Annexure A, while alignment with wider national and international frameworks is detailed in Annexure B. GCBR will bring this strategy to life by connecting partners around shared outcomes. Landscape Coordinators will strengthen local agency and link local communities to wider opportunities. The Knowledge Hub will build capacity and share practical solutions across the Gouritz Biosphere and beyond.

01 | OUR CONTEXT

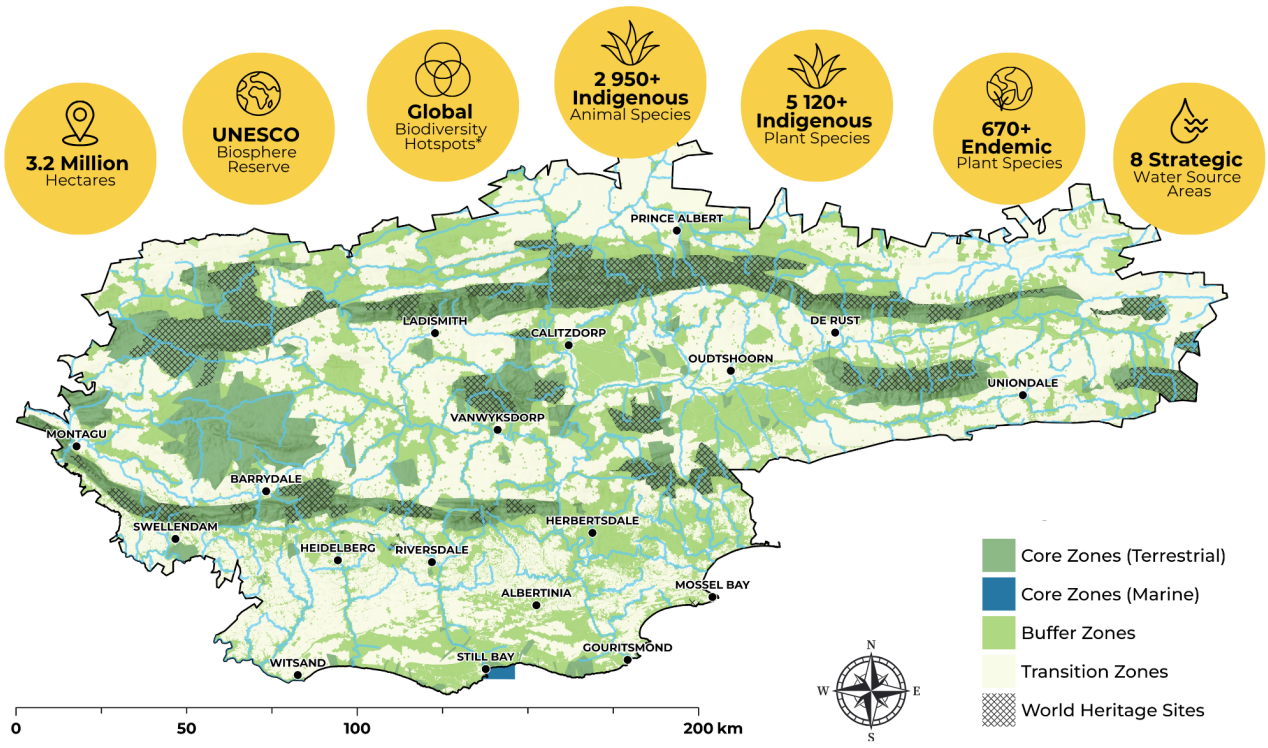
Why the Gouritz Biosphere, and why now?

A globally significant landscape is confronting a global challenge with local knowledge, relationships, and practical experience already in place.

A landscape of global significance

The Gouritz Biosphere is distinguished by its position as a globally significant biogeographical transition zone, with exceptional vegetation diversity represented by 32 endemic or near-endemic vegetation types, each supporting distinctive assemblages of locally adapted species, including more than 5,000 plant species. It also contains eight Strategic Water Source Areas, underscoring its importance for regional water security. Its core, buffer, and transition zones and exceptional endemic biodiversity exist alongside productive agriculture, smallholder systems, towns, tourism economies and a rich cultural heritage.

This convergence creates a conservation responsibility and an opportunity to understand how biodiversity, water, land use, livelihoods and institutions interact across an entire social-ecological system.



Climate change is a risk multiplier

Located at the transition between summer and winter rainfall regimes, the region has always lived with variability. Climate change is compounding and intensifying its resulting vulnerability. Rising temperatures, more frequent heat waves and longer dry periods deepen water insecurity while heightening fire risk. Increased flood risk and changing conditions for ecosystems and

crops create growing uncertainty for farming and settlements. Invasive alien plants, degraded catchments, fragmented habitats, constrained governance capacity and economic inequality further intensify these threats.

Climate risk is therefore not a separate workstream, but the context in which every strategic choice must be made. Water security, biodiversity, livelihoods, land management, disaster preparedness, cultural continuity and institutional cooperation are interconnected dimensions of resilience, none of which can be advanced in isolation.

Strong foundations for informed collective action

The Gouritz Biosphere offers a strong enabling environment for developing and demonstrating resilience solutions. Capable local and provincial institutions, nearby universities, established knowledge networks, deep technical and local knowledge, active community volunteerism and proven implementation experience provide a substantial base from which to work. With a decade of engagement and on-the-ground delivery, strengthened by the sustained presence of Landscape Coordinators, GCBR has built trusted relationships and a practical understanding of the landscape. Together, these assets provide a credible foundation for Vision 2036 to connect and strengthen what already exists, test and improve practical responses and scale approaches that demonstrate lasting value.

The coordination gap

Knowledge and commitment already exist across the Gouritz Biosphere. What is often missing is the connective tissue: a shared view of priorities, sustained relationships, accessible evidence, aligned investment, and an organisation able to keep diverse actors moving towards common outcomes. GCBR helps to provide that connection. It is uniquely positioned to broaden, deepen and strengthen this role through its nationally and internationally endorsed UNESCO mandate, local landscape presence, delivery record and trusted partnerships.

THE PRESSURE	THE RESILIENCE RESPONSE
Water insecurity, degraded catchments and invasive plants	Restore ecological infrastructure and coordinate catchment action
Habitat loss and fragmentation	Secure stewardship, corridors and connected conservation landscapes
Climate-sensitive livelihoods	Support sustainable production, local value chains and nature-positive enterprise
Fragmented knowledge and short project cycles	Build shared evidence, adaptive learning and long-term partnerships
Unequal access to opportunity and influence	Invest in youth, smallholders, communities and inclusive participation

02 | STRATEGIC IDENTITY

What guides us

VISION 2036

By 2036, the Gouritz Biosphere is a thriving, living landscape where collaborative action conserves biodiversity, celebrates cultural heritage, builds resilience and generates knowledge that strengthens landscapes and communities locally and globally.

MISSION

Building resilience through people, partnerships and nature.



Strategic choices

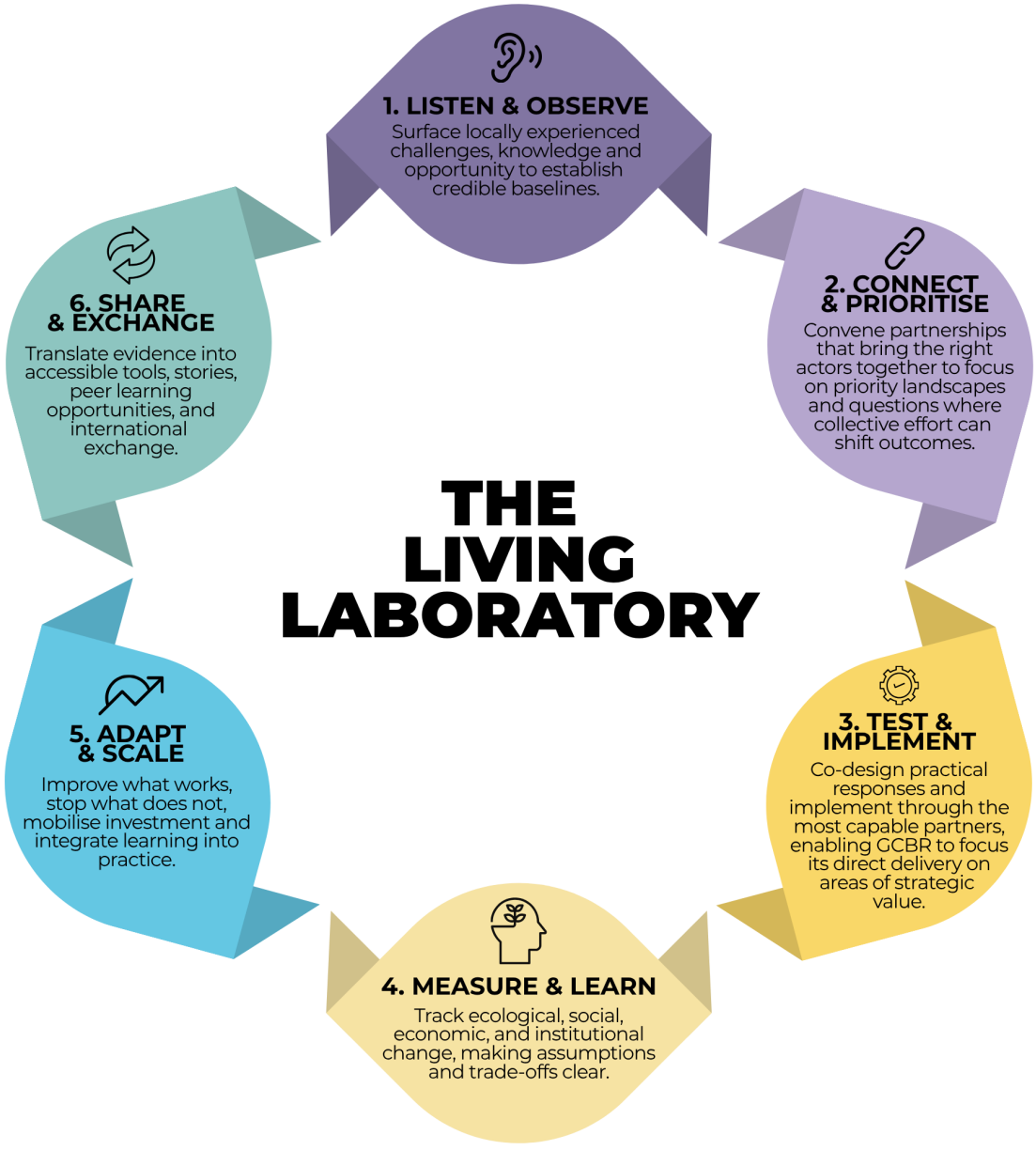
- Prioritise depth and strategic leverage over being everywhere or doing everything.
- Work through existing partnerships, institutions and networks wherever possible, creating new structures only when a real gap exists.
- Treat local knowledge, cultural heritage, practical field experience and formal science as complementary sources of understanding.
- Design initiatives for learning and scale from the outset.
- Seek co-investment, shared accountability, and long-term stewardship rather than dependency on once-off projects.
- Act as a strategic catalyst, convening targeted partnerships that pool diverse expertise and align resources behind shared, high-leverage priorities for collective action.
- Remain locally accountable while making our learning internationally accessible.

03 | OUR DISTINCTIVE PROPOSITION

The Gouritz living laboratory for resilience

A living laboratory is not a building. It is a disciplined way of learning from action across a real landscape.

UNESCO biosphere reserves are learning places for sustainable development where conservation, sustainable development, and knowledge generation are integrated to build resilience. Vision 2036 makes that mandate practical. The Gouritz Biosphere as a living laboratory will connect the people who experience landscape challenges with the people who hold relevant knowledge, implementation capacity, policy engagement, and investment to facilitate the co-development of practical solutions.



What makes the model credible

ASSET	CONTRIBUTION
A whole living landscape	Linkages between core, buffer, and transition zones connect protected areas, priority areas, working lands, towns, and communities into functional systems.
Trusted local relationships	Landscape Coordinators and long-term partners connect strategy to lived realities and land-use decisions.
Implementation capability	Restoration and field programmes generate practical evidence, employment, and learning.
Diverse knowledge	Science, monitoring, practitioner insight, citizen science, and cultural knowledge are integrated to strengthen learning and guide action.
Partnerships	Cross-sector landscape partnerships co-develop solutions, aligning and mobilising resources around agreed priorities.
Global platform	UNESCO MAB networks create pathways for peer exchange, visibility, and shared learning.

04 | THEORY OF CHANGE

IF

GCBR helps landscape actors identify shared priority actions, access useful knowledge, coordinate action and investment and learn from implementation...

AND

land stewards, communities, institutions, researchers, government and enterprises have the capacity, incentives, and resources to act together over time...

THEN

living systems will recover and reconnect; livelihoods and institutions will become more resilient and practical learning will improve decisions in the Gouritz Biosphere and beyond.

GCBR's role

ROLE	WHAT IT MEANS
Convene	Build trusted cross-sector platforms to foster mutual understanding and alignment around shared priorities.
Connect	Link people to peers, specialists, knowledge, policy processes, markets, finance and opportunity.
Catalyse	Mobilise resources, unlock co-investment and help promising ideas to evolve into coordinated action.
Build capacity	Strengthen land stewards, communities, youth, enterprises, restoration contractors and partner institutions.
Implement strategically	Retain direct delivery where GCBR has a distinctive capability, particularly Landscape Coordinator deployment, restoration and smallholder support and where delivery leverages substantial impact or creates strategic learning.
Learn and share	Measure outcomes, translate evidence and exchange lessons locally, nationally and internationally.

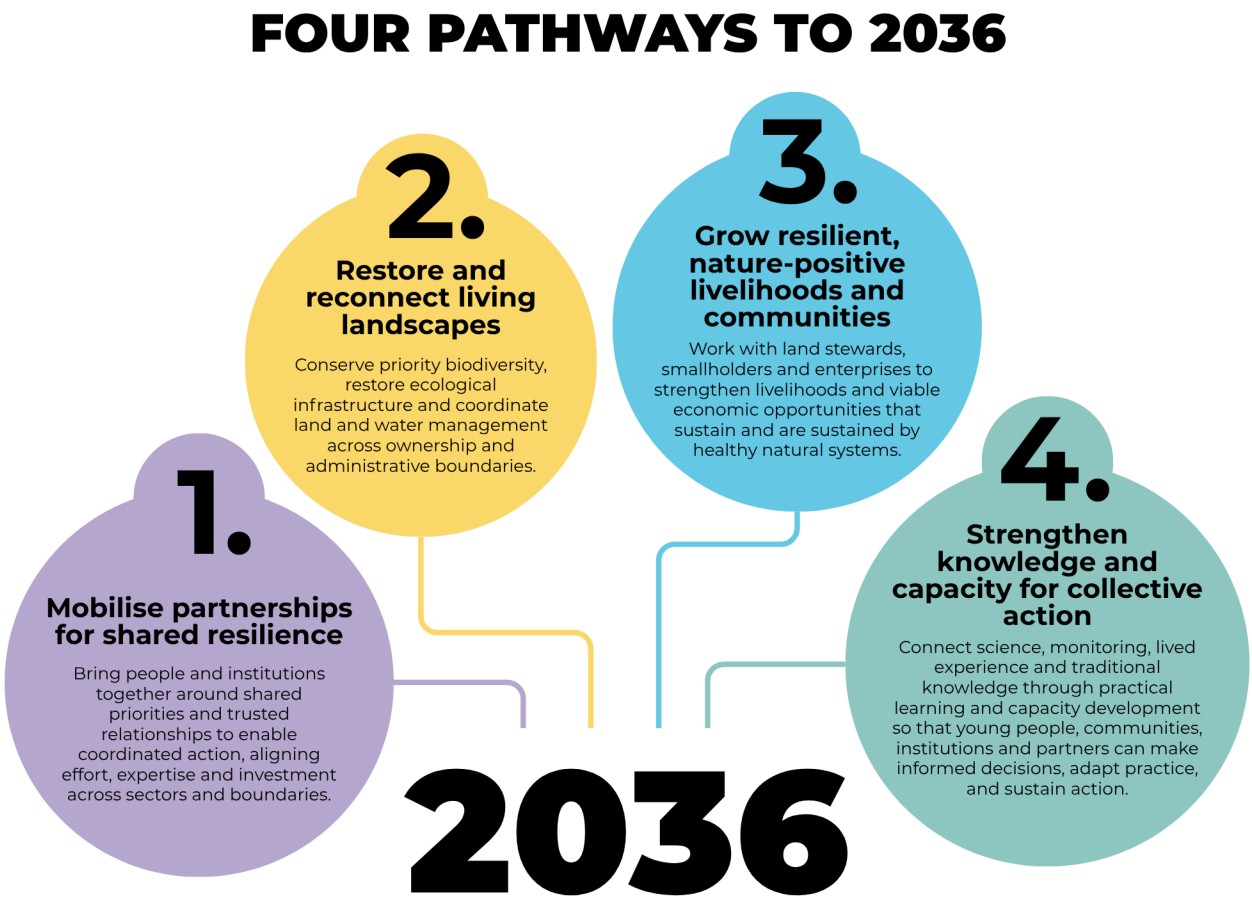
Critical assumptions we will test

- Partnerships can sustain implementation when trust, coordination, resources, and accountability are strong.
- Land stewards will invest when benefits, responsibilities, and incentives are clear.
- Knowledge is more likely to change practice when it is trusted, timely, accessible, and connected to relationships.
- Long-term, flexible finance enables better landscape outcomes than fragmented short-term projects.
- The value of the living laboratory depends on reflective learning, including learning from approaches that do not work as expected.

05 | STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Four pathways for a resilient future

These pathways are deliberately integrated. Each combines the 3 functions of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (conservation, sustainable development, and knowledge & capacity building), in service of shared resilience outcomes.



1. Mobilise partnerships for shared resilience

By 2036, a broader and more diverse network of people and institutions collaborate through strong, trusted, and mutually accountable partnerships to align priorities, combine capabilities, mobilise resources, and sustain coordinated action across the Gouritz Biosphere.

We will

- Convene and strengthen trusted cross-sector partnerships that bring together communities, landowners, government, civil society, researchers, funders and the private sector around shared landscape priorities.
- Build on existing partnerships while broadening participation to people, institutions and sectors, with particular attention to women, young people, previously disadvantaged communities and other underrepresented voices.
- Align information, expertise, implementation capacity and investment around agreed geographic and thematic priorities.
- Support collaborative planning and coordinated implementation across property boundaries, municipal jurisdictions, catchments and institutional mandates.
- Coordinate participation in relevant policy planning and investment processes.
- Strengthen connections with national, regional, and international networks, including the UNESCO MAB network, to expand opportunities and exchange learning.

2036 signs of progress

- Diverse and durable partnerships coordinate action around defined landscape priorities.
- Partners have complementary roles that fill gaps and reduce duplication.
- Local institutions and community networks play stronger roles in setting priorities, mobilising resources, and leading implementation.
- Increased public, philanthropic, and private investment is mobilised around shared priorities to deliver locally informed resilience outcomes.
- Collaborative platforms have broader and more representative participation.
- The Gouritz Biosphere is recognised as a place where people and institutions work together for the resilience of people and nature.

2. Restore and reconnect living landscapes

By 2036, priority terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine systems are better connected, managed, restored and protected; strengthening their capacity to sustain biodiversity, water, livelihoods and cultural values under changing conditions.

We will

- Support collaborative landscape forums to align information and resources around refined regional priorities.
- Enhance connectivity that supports species movement, ecological processes and climate resilience.
- Deploy Landscape Coordinators to work with landowners to improve land and water management across priority landscapes and catchments.
- Strengthen biodiversity stewardship and other durable conservation mechanisms on private, communal, and public land.
- Restore ecological infrastructure in priority Strategic Water Source Areas and biodiversity areas through strategic interventions, including invasive alien plant management and sustained follow-up.
- Integrate nature-based solutions into planning frameworks as proactive interventions to reduce fire, drought, flood and other disaster risks.
- Recognise and safeguard cultural landscapes, heritage knowledge and the relationships between identity and place.

2036 signs of progress

- Priority landscapes are managed through active, locally supported partnerships and integrated management plans.
- The protected and conserved area network grows in ecological representativity, connectivity, and management effectiveness.
- Restoration investment is systematically implemented with gains maintained through long-term stewardship of the land.
- Water, biodiversity, and disaster-risk benefits are measured and increasingly motivate public and private investment.

3. Grow resilient, nature-positive livelihoods and communities

By 2036, more people have secure and dignified livelihoods supported by a thriving restoration economy, nature-positive production and tourism, that strengthen ecological integrity and local resilience.

We will

- Build productive landscape partnerships that align agriculture, biodiversity, water security, disaster risk reduction, responsible finance and local economic development.
- Deploy Landscape Coordinators to inform and influence farmers to improve land and water management and adopt appropriate best-practice production approaches, together with conservation-linked income opportunities and incentives.
- Support smallholder farmers with practical extension, animal and crop health support, regenerative practices, stronger organisations and links to inputs, markets, and value chains.
- Support nature-positive enterprises in restoration, biomass utilisation, sustainable harvesting, ecotourism, cultural tourism and related services.
- Promote local procurement and value chains that retain more benefit within communities and recognise sustainable production.
- Connect entrepreneurs to business development, mentorship, finance through credible partners, rather than duplicating specialist support.

2036 signs of progress

- Land stewards adopt practices that improve ecological condition, productivity and capacity to withstand climate shocks.
- Smallholders have stronger organisations, services, market relationships and roles in resilient local food systems.
- Viable nature-positive enterprises create livelihood and restoration benefits without undermining ecological integrity.
- Public, philanthropic and private capital increasingly co-invest in locally-designed resilience outcomes.

4. Strengthen knowledge and capacity for collective action

By 2036, people and institutions across the Gouritz Biosphere can access, contribute to and apply relevant knowledge, with the confidence, skills and capabilities to make informed decisions, adapt practice, and sustain action that strengthens resilience.

We will

- Strengthen the regional Knowledge Hub to actively connect people, knowledge, and opportunities, rather than serving merely as a repository of information.
- Build the capabilities of community organisations, conservancies, contractors, landowner groups and local institutions to plan, implement, monitor and sustain resilience action.
- Create two-way learning platforms through forums, field days, practitioner networks, peer study groups, workshops, exchange visits and appropriate digital channels.
- Develop a shared research and learning agenda around priority management, livelihood and policy questions identified within the landscape.
- Strengthen environmental, biodiversity, freshwater, and socio-economic monitoring through robust indicators, shared protocols, and citizen science.
- Bring scientific research, monitoring, practitioner experience, lived experience, and traditional knowledge into dialogue, recognising their complementary value.
- Facilitate intergenerational knowledge sharing by capturing, preserving and sharing the experience of elders and long-term land users, traditional knowledge and youth perspectives to build an enduring regional knowledge legacy.
- Translate research and practical learning into accessible guidance, decision-support tools, stories and training materials.
- Support youth as ambassadors, co-creators and leaders.
- Use storytelling, events and public engagement to make the relationships between nature, wellbeing, livelihoods and resilience visible and meaningful.
- Share validated lessons through local and international networks.

2036 signs of progress

- Decisions across priority landscapes and institutions are increasingly informed by credible, locally-relevant evidence and diverse forms of knowledge.
- Land stewards, communities, practitioners and decision-makers can readily find the knowledge, guidance, or experts needed to address practical questions.
- Research and monitoring respond to landscape priorities and strengthen planning and practice.
- Local organisations and institutions demonstrate greater capability to initiate, implement, monitor and sustain their own resilience action.
- Environmental decisions reflect more diverse voices, cultural knowledge and lived realities.
- Lessons from the Gouritz Biosphere spread through local and international networks, inspiring wider action.

06 | DELIVERY

An organisation built for collective impact

GCBR will operate as the backbone of a distributed partnership network. Its value will lie in maintaining the relationships, shared direction, intelligence, coordination, and learning that enable many actors to contribute to landscape-scale outcomes.

GCBR's operating model was deliberately designed to deliver its strategic objectives.

Design principle	Rationale
Partnerships are central to delivery	GCBR convenes trusted cross-sector partnerships that align priorities, combine capabilities and mobilise resources for coordinated action across the landscape.
Design around value	Landscape Coordinators are central to GCBR's value proposition. Resourcing, decision-making and reporting arrangements will strengthen their effectiveness while sustaining the organisation's wider delivery, knowledge and governance capabilities.
Identity and knowledge networks are infrastructure	Communications, brand identity and the Knowledge Hub support credible convening and coordination. They are therefore designed in from the start.
Adaptive capacity is a non-negotiable design requirement	The operating model can scale up and down as funding ebbs and flows. Modularity is built into each role and function from the outset, rather than retrofitted under funding pressure.
Fractional expert network	A select number of specialist roles with clear mandates are defined. These are long-term partners who understand the landscape and are accountable to outcomes, rather than building a large full-time headcount.
The Board strengthens the model	The Board strengthens the model through governance, strategic counsel, networks and access to diverse expertise while maintaining appropriate oversight of management and delivery.

Five operating principles

Landscape presence is infrastructure: Maintaining continuity in the deployment of GCBR Landscape Coordinators will maintain trusting relationships and local knowledge. GCBR's resourcing decisions will protect their ability to convene, support and connect actors in priority landscapes.

The best-placed actor leads delivery: GCBR will not compete with partners or duplicate effective structures. It will instead clarify roles and support delivery by the actor or partnership with the strongest mandate and capability.

Implementation generates learning: Projects will be designed as part of a wider portfolio, with common questions, indicators and learning products.

A flexible expert network extends capacity: A core team will be complemented by long-term specialist partners in areas such as science, policy, finance, communication and evaluation.

Governance enables adaptation: The Board will protect mission, accountability and organisational sustainability, while enabling strategic adjustment.

The five areas of work below translate GCBR's operating model into clear organisational responsibilities. Each defines the purpose of the work, where capacity will sit and the results for which it will be accountable. Organising GCBR around the work required, rather than fitting the strategy to a fixed structure, protects strategic focus, clarifies ownership and allows capacity to evolve as delivery needs change.

Areas of work	Purpose	Key accountabilities
Executive Leadership	Champions the vision, nurtures partnerships and secures the resources that make delivery possible	Strategic leadership, institutional partnerships, resource mobilisation, governance, organisational health, and policy engagement
Landscape coordination and delivery	Holds the trusted relationships through which regional priorities become local action, and delivers the field work GCBR retains directly	Landscape partnerships, landowner extension, biodiversity stewardship, ecological restoration, smallholder support, nature-positive enterprises, and environmental education
Knowledge, monitoring, data science and systems	Builds the shared evidence base for collective action, connecting knowledge to the decisions it should inform	Developing and sharing best practice using the Knowledge Hub, integrated data management, targeted research, monitoring and evaluation.
Communications and impact reporting	Translates change across the landscape into evidence of why it matters, making the value of GCBR's work visible to those whose decisions shape it	Storytelling, public engagement, impact and progress reporting, stakeholder identification and brand identity.
Finance and administration	Upholds the financial integrity and operating discipline that allow GCBR to be trusted with larger and longer commitments	Financial management and control, reporting and compliance, grant and contract administration, executive support and board secretariat.

Partnership architecture

PARTNERS	SHARED CONTRIBUTION
Landowners, farmers, communities, and conservancies	Place-based knowledge, stewardship, implementation, and long-term maintenance
Government and statutory agencies	Mandate, policy, regulation, technical capacity, public investment, and scale
Civil society and implementing organisations	Mobilisation, delivery, community relationships and specialist expertise,
Research and education institutions	Co-designed research strategy, monitoring, learning pathways, establish best practice
Private sector and enterprise	Innovation, markets, services, investments, and nature-positive business models
Implementing partners	Locally active organisations with specialist skills support implementation.
Funders	Investment and strategic partnership
Global networks	Knowledge exchange and pathways to wider influence

07 | ENABLERS

What will make the strategy possible

Diversified, long-term finance

Build a balanced, blended portfolio of philanthropic, government, corporate, and earned-income mechanisms. Package investable landscape portfolios rather than isolated activities and use grant funding to unlock co-investment and innovation.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Create an integrated, reflective approach to monitoring ecological, livelihood and institutional outcomes. Establish baselines, combine data with stories of change, enable two-way learning, review assumptions and continually improve practice.

Data and digital systems

Integrate spatial, environmental and programme reporting to support better decisions. Ensure information is reliable, responsibly shared and useful for setting priorities, adapting management and communicating results.

Communication and influence

Showcase the impact of interventions through accessible stories that highlight the value of nature, its cultural importance and role in building resilience. Share evidence with decision-makers, communities, funders and other landscapes facing similar challenges.

Strategic partnerships

Strengthen regional platforms and partnerships by mobilising and aligning resources and knowledge to advance collective action and systemic change.

People and organisational resilience

Invest in leadership, specialist capability, staff wellbeing, succession, financial management, and systems that enable the organisation to scale responsibly as funding changes.

INVEST LOCALLY. LEARN GLOBALLY.

Investment in the Gouritz Biosphere will deliver tangible outcomes in a globally significant South African landscape. It will also build practical knowledge on strengthening resilience across biodiversity conservation, catchment restoration, land stewardship, livelihoods and collective governance in an environment impacted by compounding climate and socio-economic challenges. Funders will be invited to support long-term portfolios, shared learning and institutional capacity, not only short-term project outputs.

08 | ROADMAP

A phased timeline to 2036

Vision 2036 builds on a decade of implementation, learning and trusted relationships, together with GCBR's established Landscape-based Coordination Model. The next decade will strengthen, integrate and scale this foundation, while generating evidence that can inform resilience practice elsewhere.

PHASE	STRATEGIC FOCUS	PRIORITY MOVES
2027 – 2028 Strengthen and align GCBR networks and Regional Knowledge Hub	Focus, integration, and readiness for scale	Build on GCBR's established networks, programmes and delivery experience and strengthen strategic partnerships where needed. Secure Landscape Coordinator capacity and launch a diversified finance strategy. Refine priority landscapes; consolidate baselines and the shared learning agenda to establish the foundations of the Knowledge Hub.
2029 – 2030 Demonstrate, deepen, and scale	Integrate proven approaches, test new solutions, and expand what works	Implement integrated living laboratory portfolios that combine conservation, livelihoods and learning. Scale effective stewardship and restoration approaches; strengthen smallholder and nature-positive enterprise pathways; enhance the Knowledge Hub's role in knowledge exchange by facilitating the evaluation and publishing of emerging results; and exchanging the first synthesis lessons.
2031 – 2033 Consolidate and influence	Embed durable systems and extend influence	Institutionalise successful partnerships, delivery models and financing mechanisms; deepen policy engagement; strengthen local and partner-led implementation; extend learning across additional landscapes; and expand national and international peer-exchange with a five-year strategic review informing priorities for the next phase.
2034 – 2036 Sustain, transfer, and renew	Secure the legacy and prepare for the next horizon	Secure the long-term stewardship and financing of successful initiatives; transition mature initiatives to capable partners where appropriate; consolidate and share the Gouritz evidence base; identify priorities requiring continued attention; evaluate outcomes across the decade and use the findings of this review together with new stakeholder insights to co-create the post-2036 strategy.

Priorities for the first 24 months:

1. Translate Vision 2036 into a five-year implementation, monitoring and resource mobilisation plan.
2. Strengthen and formalise roles with priority partners where needed, clarifying shared outcomes, contributions and accountability.
3. Refine and confirm priority landscape portfolios using existing relationships and knowledge, ecological need, social opportunity, partner readiness and investment potential.
4. Strengthen the Landscape Coordinator Model ensuring capacity to sustain trusted local relationships, coordinate action and connect landscape priorities with expertise and partnerships.
5. Consolidate existing evidence of GCBR's impact and learning, determine a focused set of future outcome indicators, address critical baseline gaps, and set 2031 and 2036 targets.
6. Establish the first integrated living laboratory portfolios by bringing existing programmes and partnerships together within priority landscapes, identifying key learning questions and selecting demonstration sites where additional testing and evidence can add value.
7. Build a diversified, multi-year funding pipeline that supports core coordination, Landscape Coordinator capacity, monitoring, learning, and communication, as well as implementation at landscape level.

09 | ACCOUNTABILITY

How will we know whether resilience is growing?

Resilience cannot be reduced to one number. GCBR will use a balanced results framework that tracks changes in ecological condition, community well-being, livelihoods, capability, relationships, decisions and the spread of useful learning. A detailed indicator protocol, with definitions, baselines, targets, data sources and responsibilities will be developed during the foundation phase.

OUTCOME AREA	ILLUSTRATIVE MEASURES
Living landscape systems	Hectares under effective stewardship and restoration; maintenance of ecological processes reflected in veld condition, landscape connectivity, and catchment health; status of priority species and habitats including freshwater ecosystems.
Resilient livelihoods and communities	Adoption of sustainable practices; livelihood and enterprise viability; smallholder market access; decent work; local value retained; co-investment mobilised
Collective capacity	Active partnership compacts; partner follow-through; institutional capability; diversity and quality of participation; locally-led initiatives
Knowledge into action	Research responding to local priorities; evidence used in plans, policy or practice; accessible knowledge products; peer exchange supported by shared datasets and baselines;
Capacity development	Active landscape platforms mobilise collective action; uptake of best practice; youth leadership; public understanding; intergenerational exchange
Organisational resilience	Funding diversity; staff capability and retention; governance effectiveness; delivery quality; learning actions completed

Learning and review rhythm

- Quarterly: portfolio reflection on delivery, emerging risks and immediate adaptations.
- Annually: public progress and learning report combining results, stories, challenges, lessons learned and next decisions.
- Biennial: partner learning forum to test assumptions and refresh priorities.
- 2031: independent mid-term strategic review.
- 2035-2036: end-of-decade evaluation and co-creation of the next strategy.

ACCOUNTABILITY PRINCIPLE

We will report not only on GCBR's delivery, but also on landscape-level change, the collective contribution of partners, remaining uncertainties, and how learning informs future decisions and action.

10 | RISK AND ADAPTATION

Planning for uncertainty

STRATEGIC RISK	HOW WE WILL RESPOND
Short-term or single donor funding	Diversify income; fund core capacity; build multi-year portfolios.
Partner fatigue or weak follow-through	Collaborate with multiple partners and adopt distributed leadership, reducing reliance on any single organisation. Establish clear partnership agreements, identify and measure progress on shared priorities, make realistic asks and provide regular feedback.
Overextension across a vast landscape	Apply transparent prioritisation; concentrate depth in priority landscapes; scale through partners and learning.
Gains are not maintained	Secure land-steward commitments and follow-up finance; develop management plans and post-project support.
Knowledge Hub becomes technology-led	Design around user needs, trusted people and exchange; technology remains an enabler, not the product.
Climate or socio-economic shocks disrupt plans	Use adaptive portfolios, scenario planning, local intelligence, and flexible decision cycles.
Global positioning displaces local accountability	Keep local outcomes and participation as the primary purpose; share only validated, context-aware lessons.

Our adaptation rule

The vision and strategic pathways provide direction, but the implementation portfolio must remain adaptable. Any decisions to make material changes will be evidence-based, documented and communicated to partners and the Board. Adaptation will be treated as responsible strategy execution, and not as failure to follow a fixed plan.

11 | AN INVITATION

Build the living laboratory with us

The future of the Gouritz Biosphere will be shaped by the quality of the relationships, decisions and investments we make now.

Vision 2036 offers a common direction and invites every actor to bring their distinctive contribution to our shared future.

IF YOU ARE...	WE INVITE YOU TO...
A land steward or community	Share knowledge, shape priorities, test practices, sustain gains and ground our partnership in local realities.
A public institution	Endorse plans that are aligned with your institutional mandate, mobilise investment and resources, remove barriers, and scale demonstrated approaches.
A researcher or educator	Co-design targeted questions, share and make data accessible, provide feedback on findings to practitioners, build local capability, and open pathways for young people.
A business or investor	Develop credible nature-positive models, provide markets and services and invest in measurable landscape resilience.
A funder	Back long-term outcomes, core coordination capacity, encourage experimentation and shared learning
Implementing partner	Apply best practice, share learning and support mobilisation of additional resources.
Community benefit / non-profit organisation	Collaborate towards mutual objectives, sharing knowledge, resources, and connections.
Other place-based conservation initiative	Exchange methods and evidence, adapt lessons to context and help build a stronger global practice of place-based resilience.

OUR COMMITMENT

GCBR will convene with integrity, focus resources where they can shift systems, make knowledge accessible, learn honestly and will remain accountable to the people and places of the Gouritz Biosphere.

Together, we can build a landscape that withstands an uncertain future, adapts and thrives and shares its learning to help others do the same.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A strategy shaped by many voices

Vision 2036 was developed through a multi-phase process of surveys, workshops, and targeted engagement with representatives of communities, landowners, government, conservation organisations, research, and education institutions, the private sector, youth, biosphere reserves, and the GCBR team and Board.

Their contributions affirmed the enduring relevance of people and nature living in harmony, sharpened GCBR's role as a trusted convenor, and helped translate a wide field of priorities into an integrated strategy for resilience.

GCBR extends its sincere thanks to every person and organisation that shared their time, knowledge, challenges, and hope. Your continued partnership is essential to turn Vision 2036 into meaningful action and lasting change across the region.

ANNEXURE A

Alignment to stakeholder priorities and the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve mandate

This strategy is organised around four integrated pathways to 2036. The first, **Mobilise partnerships for shared resilience**, recognises that none of the strategy's ambitions can be achieved by GCBR or any other institution acting alone. It elevates partnership from a way of working to an explicit strategic priority; strengthening the relationships, coordination and shared investment needed to deliver landscape-scale change.

The partnership pathway does not introduce a separate stakeholder-defined priority. It provides the foundation through which all nine priorities will be advanced. The remaining three pathways organise the substantive priorities identified through consultation spanning conservation, sustainable development, knowledge and capacity-building.

This mapping protects the integrity of the stakeholder process while avoiding a siloed narrative and demonstrating how the four pathways collectively advance the interconnected functions of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

STRATEGIC PATHWAYS	STAKEHOLDER-DEFINED PRIORITIES	UNESCO MAB FUNCTIONS
Restore and reconnect living landscapes	Sustainable land management Biodiversity stewardship Assisted natural regeneration	**Conservation** Sustainable development Knowledge & capacity building
Grow resilient, nature-positive livelihoods and communities	Productive landscape partnerships Smallholder support Nature-based enterprise development	**Sustainable development** Conservation Knowledge & capacity building
Strengthen knowledge and capacity for collective action	Knowledge Hub development Youth empowerment Research and policy engagement	**Knowledge and capacity-building** Sustainable development Conservation

Cross-cutting themes

Climate resilience and disaster-risk reduction

Water security and ecological infrastructure maintenance

Cultural heritage and local knowledge

Equitable, inclusive and intergenerational leadership

Partnership, co-investment and shared accountability

Evidence, learning and communication

ANNEXURE B

Strategic, policy, and legislative alignment

Vision 2036 is intentionally aligned with global, national, provincial and local frameworks for biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, sustainable development and cooperative governance. This helps GCBR translate high-level commitments into practical, place-based action, while ensuring that learning from the Gouritz Biosphere can inform wider policy and practice.

The table below identifies the frameworks most directly relevant to GCBR's mandate and strategic pathways. It does not imply that GCBR is responsible for delivering every target, nor does it replace project-level legal and regulatory compliance. Rather, it shows where GCBR can make a distinctive contribution through landscape coordination, partnership, implementation, knowledge and shared learning.

Framework alignment

FRAMEWORK	CORE DIRECTION	HOW VISION 2036 CONTRIBUTES
UNESCO Hangzhou Strategic Action Plan for the MAB Programme and World Network of Biosphere Reserves (2026-2035)	The adopted global framework for biosphere reserves. It contains 34 voluntary action targets organised under three objectives: advancing environmental agreements; strengthening the MAB network; and advancing research and knowledge.	Vision 2036 is a direct local expression of the Hangzhou plan: • Restoring and reconnecting living systems advances conservation, restoration and climate action • Resilient livelihoods and nature-positive development support inclusive participation and sustainable development; and • The Living Laboratory approach, Knowledge Hub and active peer exchange advance research, learning and a stronger MAB network.
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015-2030	Seventeen integrated global goals addressing poverty, wellbeing, inequality, sustainable economies, climate, biodiversity and partnership.	GCBR contributes most directly to SDG 6 (Clean Water), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 17 (Partnerships). Youth, knowledge and inclusive livelihood pathways also support SDGs 4, 5 and 10. The four high level outcomes deliberately integrate ecological and social outcomes rather than treating them as separate agendas.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)	The GBF aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and put nature on a path to recovery by 2050, with the overarching vision of people living in harmony with nature. Of the four global goals for 2050, three are particularly relevant: maintaining and enhancing the integrity and resilience of ecosystems and species, sustaining nature's contributions to people and ensuring adequate means of implementation.	Vision 2036 is strongly aligned with the GBF movement away from isolated conservation projects towards integrated, landscape-scale approaches that connect conservation, restoration, sustainable production, climate resilience, livelihoods, spatial planning, finance, knowledge and partnership. The four pathways translate this integrated approach into action by linking partnerships, landscape restoration and nature-positive livelihoods with knowledge and capacity to deliver interconnected GBF outcomes at landscape scale: • Mobilise partnerships for shared resilience: Targets 14, 18, 19, 22, 23 • Restore and reconnect living landscapes: Targets 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 • Grow resilient, nature-positive livelihoods and communities: Targets 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16 • Strengthen knowledge and capacity for collective action: Targets 20, 21
South Africa's Climate Change Act 22 of 2024 and National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy	The Act establishes a coordinated national climate response and a pathway towards a climate-resilient, low-carbon economy and society, with defined roles for national, provincial and municipal spheres. The adaptation strategy promotes integrated, evidence-based action to reduce vulnerability and strengthen adaptive capacity.	Vision 2036 treats climate change as the context for every strategic choice. Catchment and ecological restoration strengthen natural buffers; landscape coordination enables cross-boundary adaptation; resilient livelihoods reduce vulnerability and the living laboratory generates locally grounded evidence for municipal, provincial, and sectoral adaptation.
South Africa's Draft National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2026-2035	At October 2026, South Africa is finalising a revised NBSAP aligned with the GBF. The draft emphasises whole-of-government and whole-of-society implementation and provides the national pathway for biodiversity commitments through 2035.	GCBR offers a practical landscape platform through which landowners, communities, government, conservation organisations, researchers, and businesses can implement shared biodiversity priorities. Monitoring and learning from living laboratory portfolios can also provide grounded feedback on what enables or constrains implementation locally.

SANParks Vision 2040 and the Mega Living Landscapes approach	SANParks' Vision 2040 is a future where people and nature thrive together in sustainable mega living landscapes. The approach connects protected areas with surrounding communities, productive land, private holdings, and wider ecosystems to support biodiversity, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.	Large parts of the GCBR fall within areas prioritised by Vision 2040. Moreover, GCBR's whole-landscape mandate, its support for landscape platforms and deployment of landscape coordinators provide a mechanism for advancing this vision across protected and productive landscapes. These mechanisms together with the Knowledge Hub also connect partners and landowners, and contribute evidence about how conservation, livelihoods, and resilience can be strengthened across the landscape beyond protected-area boundaries.
Western Cape Protected Areas Expansion Strategy, adopted June 2025	The provincial strategy identifies priority biodiversity areas for addition to the protected-area network so that the Western Cape's biodiversity, ecosystems, and ecological infrastructure are better represented and secured.	GCBR supports implementation through biodiversity stewardship, landowner engagement and ecological corridor planning. Landscape Coordinators help identify opportunities, build landowner readiness, connect properties into wider ecological networks and support the progression of suitable sites towards formal or other effective long-term conservation.
Western Cape Provincial Strategic Plan (PSP) 2025-2030	Four portfolios guide provincial action: Growth for Jobs; Safety; an Educated, Healthy and Caring Society; and Innovation, Culture and Governance.	Nature-positive enterprise, productive landscape partnerships, and smallholder support contribute to Growth for Jobs. Catchment restoration, invasive alien plant management, fire preparedness, and climate adaptation enhance safety and resource resilience. Youth pathways, environmental education, and public participation promote an educated and caring society, while the Knowledge Hub and partnership model advance innovation and cooperative governance.
Western Cape Environmental Implementation Plan, 5th Edition (2025-2030)	The provincial blueprint for coordinating and harmonising environmental policies, programmes and decisions under NEMA. It prioritises proactive, evidence-based environmental governance, biodiversity, ecological infrastructure, climate adaptation and intergovernmental coordination.	Vision 2036 provides an implementation and learning platform within the Gouritz Biosphere. Its integrated portfolios connect ecological infrastructure, biodiversity, climate resilience, livelihoods, monitoring and cooperative action. GCBR's convening role and positive working relationships with both provincial and local institutions can help translate policy alignment into measurable landscape outcomes.

Western Cape Ecological Infrastructure Investment Framework	The EIIF provides a provincial framework for identifying where investment in ecological infrastructure can deliver the greatest benefits for water security, climate resilience and disaster risk reduction. It assesses multiple risks at quaternary-catchment level, including threats to water security, degradation of rivers and wetlands, estuary degradation, wildfire and flood risk, rangeland degradation and coastal vulnerability. Its objective is to promote the appropriate valuation of ecological infrastructure and direct investment to the places where it can deliver the greatest ecological, social, and economic returns.	The Gouritz Biosphere includes many areas prioritised by the EIIF. Vision 2036 provides a platform for implementing the EIIF through landscape partnerships and the deployment of Landscape Coordinators. By demonstrating the value of ecological infrastructure for water security, climate resilience and disaster risk reduction, GCBR can translate EIIF priorities into locally supported collective action. This includes supporting catchment and rangeland restoration, mobilising landowners and partners and coordination across municipal and catchment boundaries. GCBR can also help bridge between provincial and local government, aligning and blending public and private investment around coordinated, landscape-scale investment in ecological infrastructure.
Municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs)	Five-year municipal plans, reviewed annually, that integrate local development needs, spatial priorities, service delivery, environmental management, local economic development and resource allocation. Current IDP cycles will be renewed during the Vision 2036 period.	Landscape Coordinators connect municipal priorities with landowners, communities, technical partners, and implementation opportunities. GCBR can catalyse and support practical action on water security, invasive alien plants, fire and disaster resilience, biodiversity, environmental education, agriculture, tourism, and nature-positive local economic development. By demonstrating local needs, shared benefits and practical opportunities, GCBR can help motivate municipalities to allocate additional budget to priority actions through their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). Alignment should be reviewed annually as IDPs and municipal priorities change.
WWF South Africa Strategy 2030	WWF South Africa's Strategy 2030 aims to reshape land and seascapes for people and nature, unlock economic transition and mobilise finance at new scales. Its land and seascape approach focuses on four geographic priorities, aligned with SANParks' Mega Living Landscapes (MLLs), Strategic Water Source Areas and the	GCBR's position within WWF's geographic priorities, combined with its whole-landscape mandate and established Landscape Coordinator Model, provides a strong platform for collaboration. GCBR can help translate the shared ambition of Vision 2040 and WWF Strategy 2030 into locally grounded action across protected and productive landscapes, contributing to biodiversity stewardship, ecological restoration, resilient livelihoods and finance mobilisation. Its local presence,

broader ambition of Vision 2040. Key targets include securing and improving 5 million hectares, benefiting 5 million people, and mobilising finance at new scales.

partnerships and implementation capacity provide an opportunity to strengthen WWF's impact at landscape level while generating practical learning for wider application.