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PRESS RELEASE

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New study: Wild tiger populations in key sites could triple in a generation, given optimal conditions

14 November 2018 - A new study finds that wild tiger populations in key tiger recovery sites across Asia have the potential to triple within a human generation given strong site management, contributing up to 15 per cent increase in the global tiger population.¹

Spread across various habitats in 10 tiger-range countries, some of the study's tiger recovery sites could be on track to fulfil their highest estimated tiger population capacity within the next 20 years, but only if effective efforts in anti-poaching and in stabilising prey base for the predator are maintained, among other conditions.

"We're at a critical juncture for tiger conservation, where we can bring wild tiger populations back from their devastating decline but concerted effort is needed to reach it. This study has revealed tremendous potential among these sites – although some areas are still lagging behind, particularly in South East Asia, several others are already beginning to experience an increase in wild tigers. We know this can only happen when there is strong political will, sustained investments, responsive governance and public support – all critical conditions regardless of which site we are looking at," said Margaret Kinnaird, Leader of WWF's Wildlife Practice.

The study, conducted by 49 conservation experts from 10 tiger-range countries, developed site-specific and ecologically realistic targets and timelines for the recovery of tiger populations in 18 tiger recovery sites, identified under WWF's global tiger conservation programme.

Lead author of the study and population ecologist at Panthera, Dr Abishek Harihar said, "Each tiger site is unique and requires intensive efforts based on specific plans that are relevant at the site level. This study has clearly laid out different components of a tiger recovery system, with a special focus on recovery sites - areas with high potential for long-term recovery of wild tiger populations. Our assessment serves as a template to guide planning for population recovery in other sites globally and helps to inform more effective, integrated approaches to tiger conservation."

According to the study, increased and eventually stable prey populations are a pre-requisite, while comprehensive systems to reduce the risk of human-wildlife conflict are essential for ensuring safe co-existence among the increased wild tiger populations and local communities, which are also projected to grow in population size.

"The presence of wild tigers represent thriving biodiversity and indicate healthy ecosystems - as apex predators, tigers can only survive with a stable prey base. This study affirms the need for tiger-range

¹ There are 18 tiger recovery sites from 10 tiger-range countries selected for the study, which currently support around 165 (118 – 277) wild tigers. These sites have the capacity to harbour up to 585 (454–739) individuals in the study's best case scenario, representing an estimated tripling of their current combined population.

governments to take a holistic, long-term view towards tiger recovery which must include plans for revival of prey animals and other wildlife at the site-level,” said Dr Rajesh Gopal, Secretary General, Global Tiger Forum (GTF).

Since the beginning of the 20th century, both the population and range of wild tigers have been estimated to have shrunk by a devastating 95 per cent, due to rampant poaching and habitat destruction. In 2010, the global tiger population reached an all-time low of around 3,200, prompting 13 tiger-range governments to convene and commit to TX2 - one of the most ambitious goals ever committed to for the conservation of a single species.

The authors of this study, concluded that although the goal to double tiger numbers by 2022 may be ambitious given the limited time frame, it is still possible as long as significant and sustained conservation efforts are actioned immediately.

“Doubling wild tiger numbers is just the first step – it is the very least we need to put a safe distance between wild tigers and the threat of extinction. As we move towards the TX2 goal, we must recognise that global efforts put into tiger recovery is aimed at the long-term survival of tigers in the wild, way beyond 2022,” said Joseph Vattakaven, coordinating author and tiger biologist from WWF.

Notes to Editor

The research article - [*Recovery planning towards doubling wild tiger Panthera tigris numbers: Detailing 18 recovery sites from across the range*](#) - was published in PLOS ONE on 9 November 2018. In this study the recovery potential of 18 sites across the tiger’s range, identified under WWF’s Tigers Alive Initiative, was assessed involving 49 authors. The paper suggests that tiger populations in these 18 potential recovery sites - which currently support an estimated 165 (118–277) tigers - could more than triple to around 585 (454–739) under optimal circumstances.

For media requests, please contact:

Lim Jia Ling | WWF Tigers Alive | jlilim@wwf.sg | +65 9298 0961

About WWF

WWF is one of the world’s largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the Earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. Visit www.panda.org/news for latest news and media resources and follow us on Twitter @WWF_media.

About TX2

About Tx2 In 2010, the governments of the world’s 13 tiger range countries committed to TX2 at the St Petersburg ‘Tiger Summit’ – the global goal to double the number of wild tigers by 2022, the next Chinese Year of the Tiger. WWF is a key driver of the TX2 goal, working together with governments, businesses, development partners, local communities, and many others to ensure tiger conservation is given the priority and investment it requires.