

IMPACT REPORT

2024



Center for Conservation in the Horn of Africa



Background

In 2024, the Center for Conservation in the Horn of Africa (HOA Center) continued its successful and impactful approach to wildlife protection in a region fraught with unique challenges. After decades of decline that saw Grevy's zebra populations plummet from 15,000 in the 1970s to around 2,000 at its lowest, conservation initiatives in recent decades have shown promising results in stabilizing the wild population. The species' threatened status, reflected in its IUCN classification as Endangered and CITES Appendix I listing, continues to demand focused conservation attention.

Conservation in the Horn of Africa operates within a complex environment challenged by cyclical droughts, poverty, and regional instability. The Saint Louis Zoo's commitment to this region spans more than a quarter century, with the 2004 establishment of the WildCare Institute marking a formative moment in formalizing these conservation efforts. Success in this environment depends heavily on sustained external support and strong partnership networks. Immediate threats to wildlife include diminishing water resources, particularly as climate change intensifies drought cycles, while expanding infrastructure continues to fragment traditional grasslands and migratory routes.

Disease outbreaks and poaching, especially during times of economic hardship, further threaten population stability.

The year 2024 brought three milestone events:

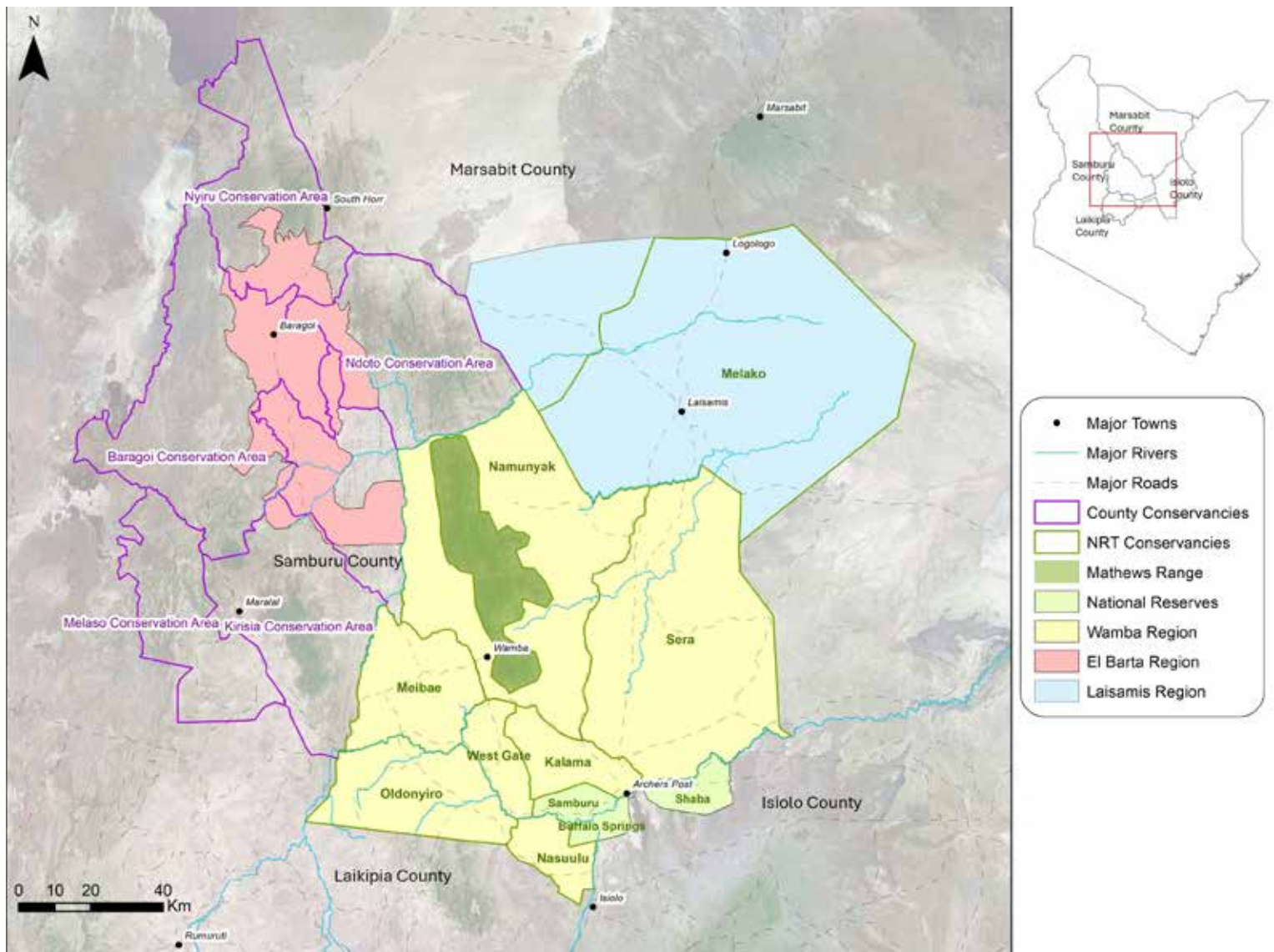
- » January's Great Grevy's Rally, a critical citizen science initiative providing vital population data through coordinated photographic census.
- » A historic leadership transition at the Grevy's Zebra Trust as co-founder Belinda Low Mackey passed the Executive Director role to Peter Lalampaa.
- » The 20-year anniversary celebration of the beginning of Northern Rangelands Trust.

Through partnerships with community-based organizations like the Grevy's Zebra Trust and the Northern Rangelands Trust, the HOA Center's conservation efforts emphasize community leadership, engagement and development. This integrated approach acknowledges that successful wildlife conservation is inseparable from community prosperity. The Center's work spans entire ecosystems, from protecting critical water sources to supporting sustainable grazing practices that benefit both wildlife and livestock, creating a balanced approach that promotes both zebra population growth and sustainable human-wildlife coexistence.

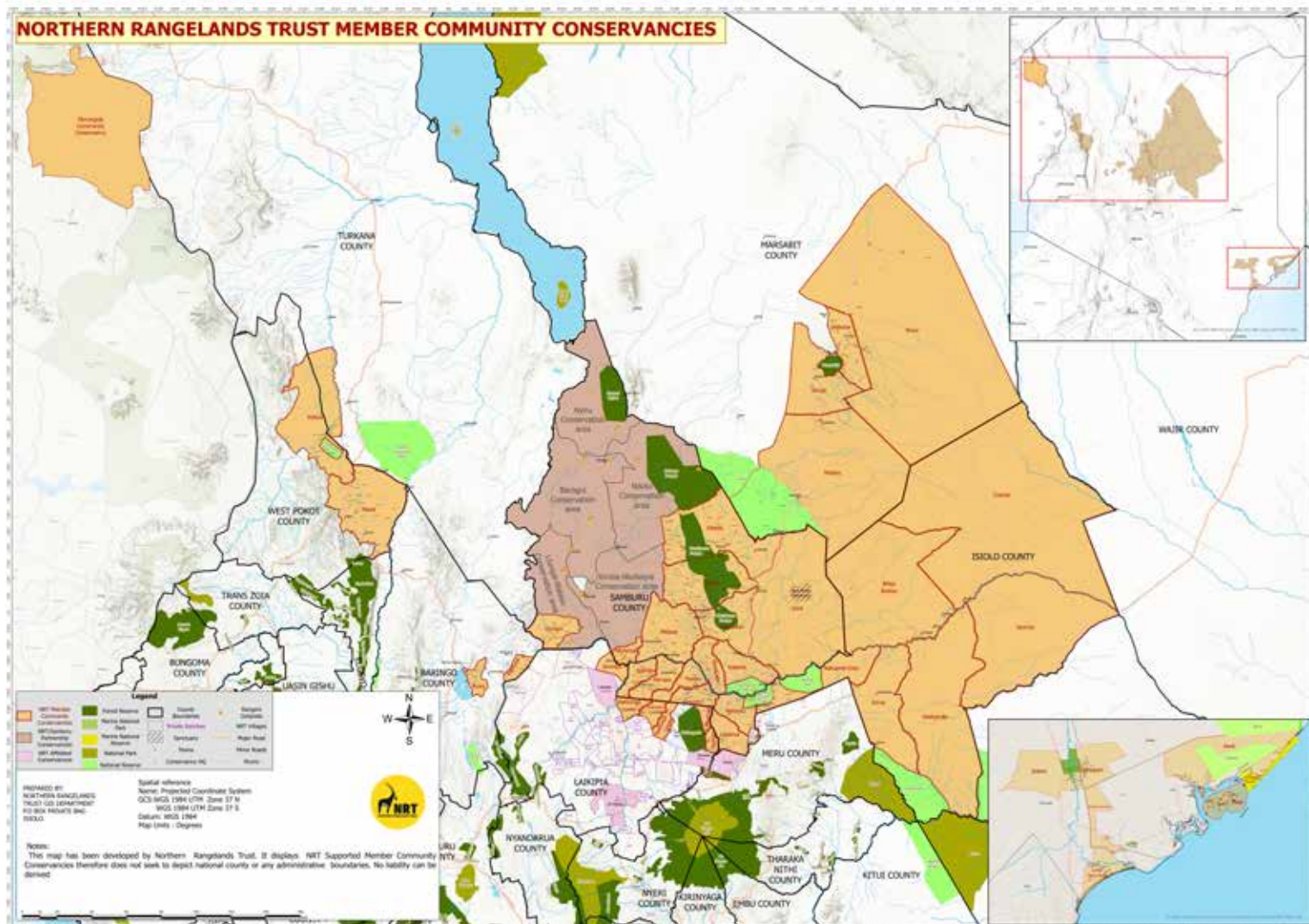
Location and Focal Species

The HOA Center focuses its efforts in northern Kenya and Ethiopia, with primary emphasis on northern Kenya where over 90% of the world's remaining Grevy's zebras reside. The Grevy's zebra serves as the Center's flagship species, distinguished as Africa's largest zebra species with its characteristic fuzzy ears, intricate stripes, white underbelly, and white-bordered dorsal stripe - features that earned it the Samburu name "Loiborkurum," meaning "white-rumped." Though historically found across the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, the species

is now confined to the arid landscapes of northern Kenya and three isolated areas in Ethiopia. These arid regions present unique conservation challenges but also opportunities. While the Center's primary focus is Grevy's zebra conservation, its landscape-level approach benefits other unique species in the region through protection of shared habitats and ecosystems, including the hirola, African elephant, mountain nyala and Ethiopian wolf.



2024 Grevy's Zebra Trust Area of Operation in Northern Kenya



2024 Northern Rangelands Trust Area of Operation in Kenya and Uganda



Recognition:

In a year marked by global recognition and strategic growth, the conservation efforts in northern Kenya garnered widespread acclaim from leading international organizations. These acknowledgments, ranging from prestigious conservation leadership awards to artistic recognition, underscore the multifaceted impact of community-based conservation initiatives. Meanwhile, key partnerships were strengthened and new platforms emerged for sharing critical messages about grassland conservation and climate action on the global stage.

Awards:

- » Belinda Low Mackey was honored as one of Disney Conservation Fund's Top 10 Women in Conservation, receiving a \$50,000 award to Grevy's Zebra Trust in her honor for her leadership in community-based Grevy's zebra conservation. The recognition was announced during International Women's Day celebrations.
- » The National Geographic Society/Bufett Award for Leadership in Conservation was presented to Peter Lalampaa, acknowledging his outstanding achievements in African wildlife conservation.
- » Natalia Mroz earned a Silver Award in the prestigious Prix de la Photographie (PX3) competition for her striking documentation of Grevy's Zebra Trust's conservation work. Her photographs from the 2024 Great Grevy's Rally were also showcased in the first edition of WildCare Institute's Journeys magazine.
- » Kalama Community Wildlife Conservancy received the Sustainability Award at Northern Rangelands Trust's 20th anniversary celebration, recognizing it as the conservancy with the most effective long-term sustainability plan.

Notable Happenings:

- » The HOA Center formalized three-year partnerships with both Grevy's Zebra Trust and Northern Rangelands Trust through new Memorandums of Understanding, establishing clear expectations and

commitments for all parties.

- » Grevy's Zebra Trust Executive Director Peter Lalampaa brought the connection between wildlife conservation and climate action to the global stage during his participation in New York Climate Week.
- » On the U.S. Department of State's Innovation Station podcast, hosted by the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, Belinda Low Mackey shared insights on grasslands' vital role in conservation efforts.
- » The HOA Center contributed to shaping Grevy's Zebra Trust's ambitious new five-year strategic plan, charting a bold path forward for the organization's conservation mission.
- » Northern Rangelands Trust celebrated its 20th anniversary - a milestone marking two decades of remarkable growth. Since its establishment in 2004 with the Saint Louis Zoo's support, Northern Rangelands Trust has expanded from 9 to 45 community conservancies, now safeguarding wildlife across 15 million acres. This exponential growth exemplifies the lasting impact of the Zoo's strategic and long-term investment in community-led conservation and local capacity building.



Center Impact

The HOA Center's interconnected achievements in northern Kenya's wildlife conservation reached new heights in 2024 through strategic initiatives spanning citizen science, landscape restoration, and organizational leadership - driving measurable progress in protecting the endangered Grevy's zebra. These coordinated efforts demonstrate the power of combining scientific rigor with community-led conservation approaches, setting new benchmarks for species protection across Africa.

The HOA Center maintained its strategic focus in 2024, directing 100% of its conservation support to northern Kenya, where the majority of Grevy's zebras reside. While political instability in Ethiopia prevented direct funding there in 2024, the Center maintains active connections and stands ready to resume conservation activities once conditions permit.

1. Great Grevy's Rally and Population Monitoring:

The January 2024 Great Grevy's Rally marked a significant milestone in citizen science and community engagement. Over 120 teams comprising more than 600 participants, including local landowners, rangers, Kenya Wildlife Service officers, and international citizen scientists, deployed across northern Kenya. The Rally collected nearly 14,000 images over two census days, recording 1,938 individual Grevy's zebra sightings on Day 1 and 2,314 on Day 2. Notably, six Saint Louis Zoo team members from five different departments participated, continuing the HOA Center's tradition of the involvement of zoo professionals in every Rally since its inception in 2016. This effort represents both the largest coordinated census of the species and a powerful demonstration of collaborative conservation.

Following the unprecedented three-year drought (2020-2023), population monitoring at the Great Grevy's Rally and throughout 2024 revealed encouraging signs of recovery. Monitoring teams observed an average juvenile percentage of 30.3% across populations, indicating healthy reproductive rates. In areas like El Barta and Wamba, teams recorded strong foal-to-adult ratios, suggesting successful post-drought population recovery.



The establishment of new monitoring technologies, including the development of an AI-powered photo-identification database through a transformative Saint Louis Zoo private donation, promises to enhance future population tracking capabilities.

2. Landscape-Level Conservation and Rangeland

Regeneration: Powerful partnerships, combined with dedicated organizational efforts, northern Kenya's landscape-level conservation achieved remarkable momentum in 2024. The collaboration between Grevy's Zebra Trust (GZT), Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), and the HOA Center demonstrated the impact of coordinated action, with NRT's Kalama and Westgate conservancies working alongside GZT's Rangelands Team to manage 3,700 cattle across 21,500 hectares - creating optimal conditions that supported over 600 Grevy's zebras.

Simultaneously, GZT's community-led initiatives drove significant independent progress, with women's groups constructing more than 13,000 rainwater retention bunds (semi-circular pits that capture rainwater) and harvesting 1,230 kg of native grass seeds for future restoration. This dramatic increase from just 1,000 bunds in 2022 showcases the accelerating pace of restoration efforts. The program successfully integrated regenerative grazing plans for nearly 5,000 cattle, leading to visible landscape recovery in areas that previously required emergency feeding during drought periods.

Community members reported improved livestock health and increased Grevy's zebra presence in restored areas, validating the effectiveness of this integrated approach. This comprehensive strategy to rangeland regeneration not only facilitated natural recovery in drought-affected areas but also exemplified how traditional pastoral practices can harmoniously coexist with wildlife conservation objectives, setting a new standard for community-based conservation in the Horn of Africa.



3. Historic Leadership Transition and Institutional Strengthening:

The year marked a transformative moment with the leadership transition at Grevy's Zebra Trust, as co-founder Belinda Low Mackey passed the Executive Director role to Peter Lalampaa, a conservationist from northern Kenya. This transition, representing the fulfillment of a founding vision from 2007, exemplifies successful local capacity building and sustainable conservation leadership. The transition included a comprehensive succession planning process and the launch of a new five-year strategic plan, setting a clear course for the organization's future.

The transition's success was further validated by Peter Lalampaa's receipt of the prestigious National Geographic Society/Buffer Award for Leadership in Conservation. This recognition not only acknowledged individual achievement but also validated the organization's approach to developing local conservation leadership.



Stories from the field

From Hardship to Hope: The Story of Mama Grevy

Ngeeti Lempate's journey to becoming "Mama Grevy" began in 2003 at a moment of personal crisis. As a widow with seven children and having lost most of her livestock to drought, the weight of being the sole provider felt almost unbearable. But at a community meeting led by Belinda Low Mackey, everything changed when her community selected her to become one of the first Grevy's Zebra Scouts, and thus one of the first community women to be employed in conservation in northern Kenya.

Born in Ngutuk Ongiron Group Ranch, Ngeeti remembers a childhood landscape that seems almost mythical today: "When I was growing up as a young girl this land was beautiful, filled with buffalos, rhinos, giraffes and a sea of grass. There were hundreds of Grevy's zebras on the Naibelibeli plains."



Ngeeti earned the nickname “Mama Grevy” during the droughts of 2005, 2009, and 2023, when she voluntarily walked great distances each day to dig shallow wells, providing water for thirsty Grevy’s zebras. This selfless act saved numerous zebras who depended on these wells for survival.

Despite being non-literate when she started, Ngeeti taught herself numbers and letters. Her data collection proved crucial, helping identify Ngutuk Ongiron Group Ranch, now Westgate Community Conservancy, as a critical refuge for Grevy’s zebra - research that was later published in *Biological Conservation*.

“This job has changed my life,” Ngeeti reflects. “It has given me confidence within my community and a voice as a woman. I can now engage elders and women and call them for community meetings. Morans respect me and listen when I talk to them, which was unheard of in the Samburu setting.”

For nearly 20 years, Ngeeti’s Scout salary supported her family and also five other households in her extended family. Her conservation ethic inspired the next generation - her son now works as a conservancy ranger. Ngeeti’s dedication to conservation was recognized when she received the Disney Conservation Hero award in 2017.

In 2021, Mama Grevy transitioned from Grevy’s Zebra Scout to Grassland Champion, a new role that would allow her to devote 100% of her time to her true passion - - restoring her community’s grazing lands. In the last few years, her efforts have transformed 22 hectares of degraded land into thriving grassland. The restored area now supports 78 cattle and produces notably nutritious milk - a testament to her vision of restoring the landscape she remembers from her childhood.

Soft-spoken and humble, Mama Grevy has become a powerful voice for conservation in northern Kenya, proving that the most effective environmental leadership often comes from those with the deepest connections to the land and its people.

Plans for the Future:

Looking ahead, the HOA Center will build on 2024’s momentum while addressing emerging challenges.

Priority areas for 2025 include:

- » Preparing for the 2026 Great Grevy’s Rally while improving year-round monitoring capabilities.
- » Expanding the implementation of the new AI-powered photo-identification database system, enhancing our ability to monitor and protect Grevy’s zebra populations.
- » Strengthening the integration of regenerative grazing programs across more community conservancies, building on the successful ongoing model.
- » Facilitating the purchase of a dedicated vehicle for women-led grassland restoration initiatives.
- » Supporting both Grevy’s Zebra Trust and Northern Rangelands Trust in their strategic growth, with emphasis on expanding community-led conservation initiatives.
- » Continuing to seek out and provide start-up support for promising new conservation initiatives in the Horn of Africa.
- » Supporting standout individuals and organizations that show exceptional promise in the conservation field.

» Maintaining connections with conservationists in Ethiopia to resume conservation activities once conditions stabilize.

These priorities reflect our commitment to sustainable, community-led conservation that creates resilient ecosystems supporting both wildlife and human communities.

Donors

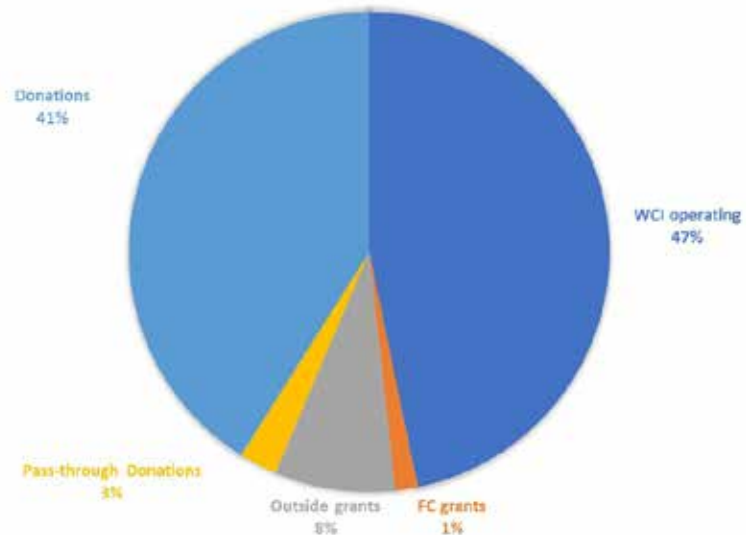
The HOA Center's financial strategy involves a mix of direct funding, competitive grants, private donations, pass-through donations and in-kind contributions, all of which support the Center's strategic conservation goals. This approach maximizes the impact of available resources by leveraging partnerships and collaboration. Almost half (47%) of the overall outgoing funding to field partners was provided by WildCare Institute, while the other half was matched with competitive grants (9.5%), private donations (41%), and pass-through donations (2.5%). The Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Park provided an additional in-kind contribution of 25% of the HOA Center Director's time and salary in 2024, which supports the HOA Center's operational and conservation activities.

2024 Competitive Grants: Disney Conservation Fund, Saint Louis Zoo Field Conservation Grant

2024 Private Donations: Kevin Beckmann, Kaye and Phil Hinson-Campbell

2024 Pass-Through Donations: Detroit Zoo, Sacramento Zoo

2024 Sources of Funding for HOA Center



Partners

Next steps for this Center and its conservation partners in 2024 and beyond will be largely driven by overcoming the challenges encountered over the last three years, socially and financially. The HOA Center will continue to support its existing partners according to the strategies outlined in the 3-Year Center Plan 2023-2025 and in alignment with GZT's and NRT's strategic plans.

While the HOA Center will continue to investigate emerging organizations and programs that are aligned with its interests and priorities, its top priority over the next few years will be to sustain the HOA Center's long-term investments with its two core partners – GZT and NRT.

