

<https://www.unenvironment.org/engaging-nature-based-solutions-coalition-climate-action-summit>

For submission by 5 May to nbs@4sd.info

1. Title/Heading.

Andes Action: Restoring one million hectares of High Andean Forest Ecosystems

2. Context and rationale:

Ranging from 3.800 to 5.500 meters asl, *Polylepis* forests are proportionally the most important habitat in the higher Andes for all that they influence below. They comprise a 5,000-kilometer-long, vegetative band spanning 7 Andean countries and supporting a unique, globally rare, and rapidly disappearing ecosystem.

In Peru, primary *Polylepis* forests has been reduced to just 3% of their natural range; to date, they are estimated to cover only 500,000 hectares across the continent. In the last decades, deforestation has seen a dramatic increase, due to harvesting for firewood and construction materials, uncontrolled fires, and grazing by livestock.

Polylepis forests are a major contributor of the Andean water system, feeding into important watersheds that provide freshwater for thousands of Andean communities, towns and cities, including multi-million metropolis such as Lima and Quito.

Due to escalating climate change in the higher Andes, water is increasingly scarce in the dry seasons or flows uncontrolled in the rainy season, leading to soil erosion and landslides, reduced agricultural yields and overall harder livelihood conditions for high Andean communities. As a consequence, communities recognize the link between *Polylepis* forests and water security and are now coming together to restore their watersheds and forests across the Andes.

3. An overview of the contribution.

Andes Action is a new Latin American-led large-scale restoration initiative, aiming to restore one million hectares of high Andean ecosystems (mostly *Polylepis* forests) in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina and Chile in the next 25 years. *Andes Action* works with a growing and scalable network on-the-ground conservation/restoration leaders in six countries with proven, effective models to partner with indigenous communities to reforest priority watersheds – mainly for local climate resilience and water security reasons.

Based on a model developed in Peru over the last 18 years, Andes Action's on-the-ground leaders harness ancient Incan traditions in indigenous communities to provide effective restoration: In the spirit of Ayni (reciprocity), communities unite by donating their time to reforest each others' watersheds, creating a growing, culturally enhanced, cost-effective restoration movement to be replicated and scaled across Latin America.

To date, approximately two million native Polylepis trees have been planted, with an additional 500,000 trees per year. The goal is to double tree planting every year to reach 5-10 million trees planted yearly at the end of phase 1 (2019-2024).

4. [How the contribution leverages living natural systems as a solution to avert climate change?](#)

High Andean Polylepis forests are a prime example of upstream natural infrastructure that provides key ecosystem services and climate change mitigation adaptation and mitigation capacities, along with multiple other benefits such as biodiversity conservation and community livelihoods of cultural significance.

Polylepis forests often are inseparably linked to wetland creation, where carbon potential should be considerably higher. Reforested areas begin delivering measurable ecosystem services after five years of growth.

Both carbon and water storage potential are currently being assessed in PES studies. Preliminary results are expected in June 2019 and will be used to support Andes Action's scaled impact narrative as well as to the set up of its first PES (carbon and water) retribution programs that will contribute to long-term financing.

5. [How might the contribution support both climate mitigation and adaptation as well as other important co-benefits and social, economic and environmental outcomes in coming years. They may include:](#)

Andes Action provides a replicable and scalable, community-driven conservation and restoration model in high Andean forest ecosystems that provides extraordinary water and carbon storage and regulation benefits for increased climate resilience, along with multiple benefits such as biodiversity conservation, added community income, indigenous land protection and titling, capacity building for local community and conservation leaders, as well as preservation of the Andean indigenous culture.

The main incentive for communities to participate in Andes Action is their recognition that these forests are a key ally for long-term climate resilience, in particular water security for agriculture, added food security and integral community development.

This project both captures carbon, and minimizes species extinction/ fosters an increase in biodiversity. There are at least 27 species with IUCN status of either CR, EN, or VU that occur in the project areas, including Alliance for Zero Extinction species.

6. Which countries and organisations are involved in the contribution?

Andes Action, works with a growing and scalable networks of experienced on-the-ground implementation actors with existing community relations, including: Ecosistemas Argentinos (Argentina), Asociacion Armonia (Bolivia), University of San Simón (Bolivia), CONAF (Chile), Ecotropics (Colombia), Andean Adventures (Ecuador), Aves y Conservación (Ecuador), Fundación Jocotoco (Ecuador), Mae Chimborazo (Ecuador), Conservación Amazónica (Perú), Ecosistemas Andinos (Perú), Global Forest Generation (USA).

Through its members, Andes Action contributes to the 20x20 initiative and is currently developing supporting partnerships with WRI, WeForest, ForestTrends, TNC and other public, state and private organizations that recognize its value and potential.

7. How have stakeholders (for example local communities, youth and indigenous peoples, where applicable) been consulted in developing the contribution?

ECOAN has developed the pilot Vilcanota project over 18 years in collaboration with 26 indigenous communities in order to arrive at project methodologies that are culturally appropriate and ecologically effective.

Proof of a successful model is that each year, more communities reach out to Andes Action implementation partners to be included in the restoration model, mainly for increased water security and the additional income resulting from seedling production activities in participating community.

8. Where can the contribution be put into action?

Andes Action works to expand throughout the range of high Andean *Polylepis* landscapes and watersheds in each of the participating countries (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, and in the future, Venezuela). Currently, an analysis of the main macro-watersheds is being undertaken to quantify actual restoration and impact potential.

9. How the contribution will be delivered? How will different stakeholders be engaged in its implementation? What are the potential transformational impacts?

Andes Action will engage with established conservation leaders and partner organizations working throughout the Andes to partner with local communities to establish protected areas to encompass the remaining 500,000 ha of *Polylepis* forests, and to restore an additional 500,000 ha.

Local communities living around and depending on the forests are key to the success of the project as they provide the main seedling production capacities and the actual restoration workforce. Their lives can be potentially transformed through alternative sustainable livelihoods, more dependable flow of water, and security against land incursion through titling of their ancestral lands – this increasing the incentives to stay in their communities and reducing immigration and cultural degradation.

10. Is this initiative contributing to other Climate Action Summit workstreams (industry transition; energy transition; climate finance and carbon pricing; infrastructure, cities and local action; resilience and adaptation; youth and citizen mobilization; social and political drivers; mitigation strategy)?

Since Andes Action is a new initiative (launched 2018 internally, to be launched publicly in 2019) we are at the beginning of our outreach and endorsement efforts. Though no other formal outreach have been done for the Climate Action Summit, Andes Action could contribute to climate finance, carbon pricing, natural infrastructure, cities and local action, resilience and adaptation and mitigation strategy.

11. How does this contribution build upon examples of experience to date? How does the contribution link with different ongoing initiatives?

Andes Action's effective restoration model has been developed over 18 years in the highlands of Cusco in Peru by ECOAN and 26 indigenous communities.

Andes Action is now contributing to the Latin-American 20x20 restoration initiative – and will be launched publicly at the 2019 annual meeting of 20x20 in Buenos Aires in June.

Andes Action is currently connecting to the emerging Latin-American water and natural infrastructure restoration programs (TNC water funds, ForestTrends) as well as to the TNC reforestation accelerator that provides acceleration for ambitious reforestation initiatives.

12. What are the mechanisms for funding (with specific emphasis on potential for partnerships)?

Andes Action envisages a diverse funding strategy comprising four main streams:

1. Early stage CSR, private and philanthropic donations to support building early-stage seed capacities (25%), including reforestation grants and contributions by B-Corporations, private-sector models (1% for the planet).
2. Multilateral funding including development grants from banks, bilaterals and other development agencies (GCF, GEF, WB, IKI, etc.) mainly to support public investments in natural infrastructure, de-risking and matching private investments, early stage PES scheme development and creation of endowments or other supporting funding structures.
3. Carbon funding: Develop and market 50-100 large-scale carbon projects of varying sizes (1,000-50,000 ha) to be taken on by international carbon project developers, including REDD+.
4. Water funding: Connect to emerging water funding and green infrastructure restoration programs across Latin America.

13. What are the means of stewardship, metrics for monitoring?

Stewardship varies by site, however main stewardship categories and metrics are:

- Numbers of Protected Areas created and hectares of forests protected under these.
- Number of communities supported to title land and Hectares of ancestral community land titled.
- Number of watersheds under reforestation
- Hectares under conservation
- Hectares under restoration
- Trees planted per planting season
- (G)Tons of carbon sequestered and water stored/produced
- Number of IUCN priority species protected

14. What is the communication strategy?

As a new initiative (to be launched publicly in 2019), in its first year after pilot stage, the communication strategy includes a new website for Andes Action, two official public launches of Andes Action (First at the 2019 annual meeting of the 20x20 restoration initiative in Buenos Aires in June 2019, and second at the 2019 International *Polylepis* Congress in September 2019 in Quito, Ecuador).

Other emerging opportunities are being developed to be featured at the 2019 Global Landscapes Forum in Bonn and Luxembourg and IUCN's 2019 Latin-American Parks Congress in October in Lima; as well as in cooperation with the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication.

Andes Action has already received excellent feedback from governments, restoration pledges (20x20, Bonn Challenges), UN-organizations (UNEP) and other forums and will gradually build on this capacities for effective communication and outreach.

Additionally, for Andes Action to succeed, the initiative will work at the national and subnational level to gather volunteers and increase community participation and create a Latin-American social movement for forest landscape restoration.

15. What are the details of proponents (indicating the degree of commitment among the countries and organizations that are named).

- Ecosistemas Andinos, Peru: lead implementer of Andes Action
- Global Forest Generation, USA: lead supporting partner of Andes Action
- Ecosistemas Argentinos: implementing organization
- Aves y Conservación, Ecuador: implementing organization
- Andean Adventures (Ecuador): implementing organization
- Aves y Conservación (Ecuador): implementing organization
- Fundación Jocotoco (Ecuador): implementing organization
- Mae Chimborazo (Ecuador): implementing organization
- Asociacion Armonia (Bolivia): implementing organization
- University of San Simón (Bolivia): implementing organization
- CONAF (Chile): implementing organization
- Ecotropics (Colombia): supporting organization
- Asociación de Conservación Amazónica (Perú): implementing organization