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WCS and Hershey launch landmark partnership to protect forests, species & livelihoods in Nigeria

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The four-year initiative, backed by a $2.5 million commitment from Hershey, will promote deforestation-free cocoa, climate-smart farming, agroforestry and supply chain traceability while improving farmer livelihoods and protecting endangered wildlife in Nigeriaâ??s Cross River State



The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and The Hershey Company today announced a new partnership to protect one of Africa's most important rainforest landscapes: the Cross River State in Nigeria. The Hershey Company has committed $2.5 million to WCS for a four-year project that aims to improve farmer livelihoods, strengthen supply chain resilience, and advance deforestation-free cocoa production and biodiversity conservation in Cross River State, Nigeria.

The partnership will focus on an area that contains Nigeria’s largest remaining rainforest and serves as one of the country’s most important cocoa-producing regions. More than 100,000 households depend on cocoa farming for their livelihoods, and the area contributes nearly one-third of the country’s valuable cocoa exports. The landscape supports rich biodiversity, including critically endangered Cross River gorillas, Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzees, drill monkeys, and forest elephants.

Balarabe Abbas Lawal, Nigeria’s Federal Minister of Environment said: “Nigeria is committed to building a sustainable cocoa sector that balances economic growth with forest protection. This partnership between WCS and Hershey directly supports our national policy objectives by promoting deforestationâ??free cocoa, improving farmer livelihoods, and protecting endangered species. It demonstrates the value of aligning private sector investment with government priorities to secure longâ??term supply stability and safeguard our forests.”

Joe Walston, Executive Vice President of WCS Global Program said: "Too often, wildlife conservation and agricultural production compete. But when we get it right, we can achieve both. And we need to get it right in places like Cross River’s forests, which are globally important for wildlife and critical for the region’s cocoa production. This partnership reflects our commitment to bringing together communities, conservation, and the private sector to create a future where nature thrives, people prosper, and sustainable cocoa production supports both."

Tricia Brannigan, Vice President and Chief Procurement Officer for The Hershey Company said, “The long-term resilience of cocoa depends on thriving farming communities and healthy landscapes.” Angela Tejada Chavez, Director of Sustainable Sourcing Cocoa for The Hershey Company added, “Through our partnership with WCS, Hershey is working alongside farmers, communities, government stakeholders and supply chain partners to improve livelihoods, protect forests and help create a more resilient future for cocoa and the communities that grow it.”

The announcement comes at a pivotal moment for the global cocoa sector. Cocoa production in West Africa continues to face complex challenges including climate pressures and persistent livelihood constraints for farmers that can put pressure on forests and biodiversity. This underscores the need for collaborative investments that strengthen communities, protect forests and support a more resilient cocoa supply. As part of Hershey’s strategy to support resilient farming, the company is committed to supporting 1 million hectares of regenerative agriculture, restorative or protective practices.

Thanks to this partnership with The Hershey Company, WCS will ally with communities, federal and state government agencies, supply chain actors, and civil society organizations on a landscape-level collaboration to support deforestation-free cocoa production. The partnership will promote climate-smart cocoa production and agroforestry, strengthen forest protection and community-based natural resource management, and improve traceability across the cocoa supply chain as a means of stopping deforestation.

These efforts will help farmers improve productivity, reduce the risk of cocoa-driven deforestation, and prepare for emerging market requirements, including the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). It will also help to ensure the long-term viability of cocoa production in the region.

Inaoyom Imong, WCS Nigeria Country Director said: “This partnership with Hershey demonstrates that thriving cocoa farming communities and healthy forests can go hand in hand. Through a landscape-scale approach, we will help farmers improve productivity, build climate resilience, and access new market opportunities while safeguarding the globally important forests and wildlife of the Cross River landscape. We are excited to work with Hershey and other stakeholders to advance a forest-positive cocoa future in Nigeria.”

The partnership builds upon WCS’s more than 20 years of conservation work in Cross River State, where the organization works closely with communities and government agencies to protect critical wildlife habitats, strengthen natural resource governance, and support sustainable livelihoods. The initiative is designed so that it can be refined and expanded into other cocoa-producing regions in Nigeria and beyond. By bringing together conservation, sustainable agriculture, and supply chain actors, the partnership will demonstrate how thriving farming communities, resilient cocoa supply chains, and healthy forests can co-exist and reinforce each other.