



## **Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus**

### **Half Year Report**

It is expected that this report will be a **maximum of 2-3 pages** in length.

**If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.**

**Submission Deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025**

**Please note all projects that were active before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025 are required to complete a Half Year Report.**

Submit to: [BCF-Reports@niras.com](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com) including your project ref in the subject line.

<b>Project reference</b>	<i>IWTEV020</i>
<b>Project title</b>	Combatting Illegal Fishing: Designing Evidence-based Interventions in Gulf of Honduras
<b>Country(ies)/territory(ies)</b>	Belize, Guatemala, Honduras
<b>Lead Organisation</b>	Wildlife Conservation Society
<b>Partner(s)</b>	
<b>Project Leader</b>	<i>Nicole Auil Gomez</i>
<b>Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)</b>	<i>October 31<sup>st</sup> 2025 HYR2</i>
<b>Project website/blog/social media</b>	

#### **1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end of September).**

Although we are not looking for specific reporting against your indicators, please use this opportunity to consider the appropriateness of your monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems (are your indicators still relevant, can you report against any Standard Indicators, do your assumptions still hold true?). The guidance can be found on the resources page of the relevant fund website.

The project achieved key progress in the development of a survey instrument, implementation of survey and interviews with local experts, and discussions with local expert associations across the three countries.

In Honduras, the project achieved key progress, including the identification and mapping of intervention areas in nine communities of Omoa and ten of Puerto Cortés, engaging 17 local associations. Field activities included surveyor training, pilot testing of the survey instrument, database validation of fishers, and supervision to ensure data quality and compliance.

In Belize, a local civil-society organization with established relationships in the target communities partnered with us to train experienced data collectors, pilot the survey instrument, and implementation the survey instrument across 8 communities from Dangriga to Punta Gorda town. Additionally, we interviewed experts and discuss the project with two local NGOs in southern Belize with enforcement authority and with the local government authority.

In Guatemala, the project achieved significant progress, including training process for the use of survey tool was carried out; and Identification and participation of 6 key communities with fishing activities. That included meetings with leaders to ensure approval and willingness to participate in the surveys. Field activities were carried out, and 120 surveys were applied. c) A complete analysis was developed. d) Additionally, we interview of experts identified (including government, NGOs, academic, community members representatives), a partial report were developed.

Across the three countries, WCS has successfully conducted 309 interviews in fishing communities. Participants included 260 men, 44 women, and 2 individuals whose gender was not specified within 30 coastal fishing communities in the Gulf of Honduras. WCS Guatemala and Honduras have concluded survey implementation, WCS Belize is pending closure by the end of October.

1.2 Interview local experts (government, academia, NGOs and local communities) in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras who have knowledge and/or experience on illegal fishing in the region.

Local interviews with experts across the three countries continues to progress with WCS Honduras having engaged with 17 local associations across 18 communities. WCS Belize has interviewed two local experts, met 2 fishers associations, and is in the progress of interviewing local government officials. Additionally, WCS Guatemala has been in contact with officials and employees from eight institutions (including government, NGOs, academic, community members representatives) to conduct interviews, with 50% advance as planned.

1.3 Design and standardize community survey instrument across the GoH countries and using WCS and FAO social safeguards.

WCS Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras collaboratively organized a series of meetings to design and agree on a standardized survey instrument to be implemented across the three countries. Upon finalization, the technical team translated the instrument into Spanish. To ensure ethical compliance and minimize potential risks when engaging with participants, WCS obtained approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB). Subsequently, all personnel responsible for conducting interviews received training from an IRB-approved certified trainer on ethical data collection practices, informed consent procedures, and the use of the Kobo Toolbox application. Virtual training sessions were held with participants from Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize to ensure full adherence to IRB requirements. Additionally, the WCS Belize program obtained a research permit from the Institute for Social and Cultural Research—the national authority responsible for regulating research involving human subjects— following their review of the project and survey instrument. This approval ensured that the survey posed minimal risk to participants and complied with national research ethics standards.

1.4 Implement community surveys across the GoH countries to collect data on illegal fishing motivation and drivers.

WCS Guatemala and Honduras programs proceeded with implementation of the survey within respective communities at an earlier date than Belize due to the additional research permit required under Belizean law, which caused the delay in implementation

WCS Guatemala program with contractual partner APROSARSTUN conducted 120 interviews with community fishers, 92 men, 26 women, and 2 individuals whose gender was not specified, from 6 communities.

WCS Honduras with contractual partner Centro de Estudios Marinos (CEM) completed 50 interviews, 37 men and 13 women from 18 communities.

WCS Belize program conducted 139 interviews, 131 men and 8 women from 6 communities. WCS Belize have not completed conducting all surveys 2 communities are pending interviews.

Fishers did not consent to photos to be taken during the interviews. The next phase will focus on survey analysis and formulating recommendations to promote gender equity and alternative livelihoods for fishers.

**2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

In this period WCS major challenge was multiple rejections in obtaining individual consent for conducting the surveys across the communities. This was primarily an issue in Belize with Fishers citing survey fatigue and unwillingness to provide the information. Due to this challenge Belize data collectors spent additional days seeking other individuals to participate in the survey. In Honduras, partners cited fishers did not allow photography of them participating in the survey, understanding the sensitivity of the questions, and our ethical compliance photos were not taken without individual consent.

**3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

Discussed with NIRAS:	Yes/ NoX
Formal Change Request submitted:	Yes/ NoX
Received confirmation of change acceptance:	Yes/ No

Change Request reference if known: *If you submitted a financial Change Request, you can find the reference in the email from NIRAS confirming the outcome*

**Guidance for Section 4:** The information you provide in this section will be used by Defra to review the financial status of projects. This review will identify projects at random for spot checks on financial management and will include requests for evidence of the actual spend information provided below. Please ensure the figures you provide are as accurate as possible and that you have the evidence to support it. You do not need to provide it now.

**4a. Please confirm your actual spend in this financial year to date (i.e. from 1 April 2025 – 30 September 2025)**

[REDACTED]

**4b. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this financial year (ending 31 March 2026)?**

Yes  No  Estimated underspend: £

**4c. If you expect an underspend, then you should consider your project budget needs carefully.** Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible, and not later than 31<sup>st</sup> December. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes to your project if necessary. **Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.**

**NB:** if you expect an underspend, do not claim anything more than you expect to spend this financial year.

**5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCFs management, monitoring, or financial procedures?**

Suspicions or allegations related to fraud and error concerns should be reported to [fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk](mailto:fraudanderror@Defra.gov.uk)

Not Applicable

**6. Project risk management**

**6a. If your project has an Overseas Security and Justice assessment, please provide an update on any related risks, and any special conditions in your award paperwork if relevant for your project.**

Not Applicable

[REDACTED]

**7. Please use this section to respond to any feedback provided when your project was confirmed, or from your most recent Annual Report. As a reminder, all projects that were scored as 'Not Yet Sensitive' in the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) assessment of their latest Annual Report should demonstrate how they are meeting the minimum GESI-Sensitive standard.**

1. Please provide more detail on how project partners in government will be involved in decision making processes.

Government representatives will participate in national workshops where results will be reviewed collaboratively and translated into concrete strategy and interventions. These consultations will provide a platform for discussing practical enforcement responses, refining regulatory measures, and identifying opportunities for interagency coordination and better communication with fishing communities.

Government partners will also help **vet and endorse the Threat Assessment Report and intervention strategies**, ensuring that recommended actions are realistic, legally grounded, and supported by institutional mandates and current strategies.

2. There is no reporting on activities 1.4 – 1.6. Please clarify why this is not included and when these activities have been rescheduled to begin.

Reporting of the Activities 1.4-1.6 was not reported in Annual Report 1 as those activities were delayed due to a delay in the subcontract agreement. These activities were rescheduled to be implemented between April-November 2025. Activities 1.2-1.4 are completed; activities 1.5-3.1 will be executed from October to February 2026. An updated workplan is annexed to this document for reference with an updated timeline for remaining activities.

3. Is it still feasible to complete the project by February 2026?

We anticipate all activities will be completed by February 2026, our concern is the completion of all deliverable reports by Final reporting deadline of May 31st, 2026. We intend to make all efforts to have all deliverables reports completed by the submission of Final report deadline but there is some risk if there is additional unforeseen event that may delay the completion of reports.

4. Please explain in more detail how the evidence generated by this project will be used to improve fishery governance in GoH.

The project's behavioural and socio-economic evidence will be used to reshape enforcement and management strategies to become more targeted, preventive, and community-informed while strengthening regional coordination. By identifying the key motivators and opportunities driving illegal fishing and trade, the findings will enable authorities to design non-punitive deterrents, tailored communication campaigns, and risk-based enforcement approaches that focus limited resources on priority hotspots and high-risk actors. Evidence will be shared with community-based organizations, cooperatives, and local authorities to build their capacity to interpret and apply data in decision-making, thereby strengthening co-management systems grounded in shared and verifiable information.

Integrating community perspectives will ensure that interventions balance conservation goals with livelihood needs, allowing fishers to contribute their insights and identify feasible, locally relevant alternatives that reduce dependence on illegal fishing. Furthermore, by providing this information to regional bodies such as TRIGOH, OSPESCA, and CCAD, the project will enhance transboundary coordination—enabling these institutions to better understand the status of illegal fishing in the Gulf of Honduras, align national strategies, and identify potential avenues for regional investment and collaboration to combat IUU fishing effectively.

5. Please explain what matched funding will be available and when.

Match funding will be available for the period between December to February through WCS Unrestricted funds in the form of staff time of key personnel dedicated to this project to support delivery of the project's planned activity and reporting output.

## Checklist for submission

Have you responded to **feedback from your latest Annual Report Review**? You should respond in section 6, and annex other requested materials as appropriate.

Have you reported against the most **up to date information for your project**?

Have you **clearly highlighted any confidential information** within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website?

Include your **project reference** in the subject line of submission email.

Submit to [\*\*BCF-Reports@niras.com\*\*](mailto:BCF-Reports@niras.com)

Please ensure claim forms and other communications for your project are not included with this report.

**Annex 1: Work Plan- Updated October 2025**

		IWT CHALLENGE FUND PROJECT												2024												2025												2026											
Outcome	Activity	IUU			Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			Q5			Q6			Q7																										
		August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	August	September	October	November	December	January	February															
	Signing Sub Awards, Review of Budgets																																																
<b>Output 1</b>	1.1 Conduct a literature review of academic publications, grey literature, and reports on illegal fishing in the GoH.																																																
	<b>HALF YEAR REPORT 1</b>																																																
	1.2 Interview local experts (government, academia, NGOs and local communities) in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras who have knowledge and/or experience on illegal fishing in the region.																																																
	1.3 Design and standardize community survey instrument across the GoH countries and using WCS and FAO social safeguards.																																																
	<b>END OF YEAR REPORT</b>																																																
Threat assessment created to understand the nature and extent of illegal fishing in the GoH	1.4 Implement community surveys across the GoH countries to collect data on illegal fishing motivation and drivers.																																																
	1.5 Analysis of data collected as well as available information (including literature) to behaviours, key actors, and motivations.																																																
	<b>HALF YEAR REPORT 2</b>																																																
	1.6 Write and submit one journal article on illegal fishing to open access journal																																																
<b>Output 2: Evidence-based strategies to reduce illegal fishing in the GoH created and validated by Belizean, Honduran and Guatemalan governments.</b>	2.1 Organize and implement three national stakeholder workshops to discuss the research findings and develop evidence-based interventions/approach to address illegal fishing in the GoH.																																																
	2.2 Information gathered during the consultation process analysed.																																																
	2.3 Evidence-based CWT intervention/approach strategy designed in consultation with stakeholders developed.																																																
<b>Output 3</b>	3.1 Produce and disseminate a brief that provides evidence-based advice to decision makers																																																