2.1.2023

**Restoration and Development in the Northwestern Negev**

**“Green Negev” Project—Phase 1**

The Western Negev, also referred to as the Gaza Envelope, has suffered an unprecedented disaster in which some 1,200 people were killed, and nearly 250 more abducted to Gaza, settlements were destroyed, and rural communities and towns evacuated. The region has since become a war zone. The restoration and development work required to facilitate the return of residents to the northwestern Negev and enable the region to grow and prosper once more is now beginning to emerge. Furthermore, in the months and years after the war, issues of environmental protection, nature conservation, and habitat restoration will also have to be addressed.

The goal of this project plan is to place the preservation of open spaces at the center of decision-making processes regarding the Western Negev’s rehabilitation in such a way that will lead to the restoration of damaged areas and ensure their preservation, as well as improve planning and management. The war has caused extensive damage to nature, open spaces, and agricultural areas as a result of fighting, the outbreak of fires, troop movements, heavy equipment transport, and the accumulation and dumping of waste in the region. Significant development is expected to occur in the region in response to the destruction of settlements and infrastructure. This includes the construction of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones. Additionally, new infrastructure such as roads, electricity (including renewables), fencing, and security installations will be created.

Revitalizing and rebuilding the Gaza Envelope requires consideration of its open spaces, landscape, agriculture, biodiversity, hiking trails, leisure, and recreation. Before the war, these were all integral to the region’s character and a vital aspect of the identity of its local communities. Undoubtedly, these communities must be closely involved in the healing and rehabilitation process. This program provides an overview of the key actions that can and should be undertaken to ensure that all development in the region is undertaken in a way that safeguards the preservation of open spaces. The program described here offers an integrated view of development and conservation, which are interconnected in practice.

The project plan is divided into two main parts, which intersect and complement each other—**one aspect being open spaces and the other development projects.** Each section outlines the key steps required to preserve open spaces while facilitating proper development in the Gaza Envelope and ensuring residents’ quality of life, now and in the future. Local community engagement is incorporated into each component of the program, as high-quality development in the Western Negev (and in general) must be undertaken in partnership with local residents and communities. Furthermore, in light of the enormity of the disaster that has befallen them, these communities must be given an important role in decisions regarding development and the preservation of open spaces in the region.

At present, there are multiple stakeholders involved in planning for revitalization and development in the Western Negev. However, few are giving sufficient attention to the challenge of restoring, planning, and protecting open spaces so that residents can return to a built environment that is rich in diverse and high-quality open spaces, while also ensuring that all development is urban, compact, and high-grade. **The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) has a unique role to play in this regard,** as it can address the preservation of open spaces holistically as one of its central missions. This is due to, among other things, its independence as a non-governmental organization that has not been tasked with preserving any specific areas in the Western Negev. In addition, SPNI has a long history of planning and protecting open spaces, including countering development and other threats to open spaces. As a result, SPNI is able to focus on the immediate actions both in the open spaces and in the area of development that can increase the capacity for restoring and protecting open spaces in the Western Negev.

**Nevertheless, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel does not work in isolation. A comprehensive framework is necessary as part of the project plan. The Western Negev Regional Cluster will lead this initiative, which must ensure horizontal and vertical integration and cooperation from all relevant stakeholders**, including the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the Jewish National Fund, regional farmers’ organizations, the Israel Drainage Authority, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and the Ministry of Agriculture.

As part of the program, we propose developing a partnership between environmentally-focused civil society organizations, and government and municipal bodies—specifically, between SPNI and the Heschel Center for Sustainability, and the Western Negev Cluster of local authorities. This partnership will be able to leverage and integrate the diverse capabilities of its constituent organizations, with the goal of providing the best possible protection for open spaces. SPNI's program is unique because it prioritizes the preservation of nature and open spaces at its center, unlike other initiatives, processes, and programs currently being promoted in relation to the Western Negev. This central goal is the basis for the entire program, including all of its various components.Each partner in the project will play a key role in the areas where they are best able to make a unique contribution to the overall work, and where they have a shared organizational perception identity regarding the needs and solutions required by that part of the plan.

**The Society for the Preservation of Nature in Israel** can contribute in-depth knowledge of open spaces in the Western Negev and a proven ability to work for their restoration, planning, and conservation. SPNI has a strong record of protecting open spaces and ecosystems while considering relevant planning rules and regulations. SPNI has also long encouraged Israel’s planning authorities to make efficient use of land resources and incorporate sustainable development concepts. Furthermore, SPNI has extensive and successful experience working with government officials to drive changes in legislation and regulations and to influence policy.

**The Western Negev Cluster**—In Israel, local authority clusters are usually voluntary associations of neighboring local authorities that have decided to cooperate in order to enjoy an advantage of scale. The Western Negev Cluster has become a central player in promoting policies focused on reconstructing the Gaza Envelope and the region as a whole. The Western Negev Cluster has been leading the way in developing a climate change action plan over the past two years, with open spaces being one of the key components. As one of the outcomes of this plan, the Cluster has submitted an application to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund for funding to develop an open spaces masterplan and management system. Currently, the Western Negev Cluster is developing a strategic plan to support all areas of life. The Cluster is therefore well-positioned to take an integrated, “big-picture” approach to preserving open spaces as part of the broader plans and projects being implemented in the region. The Cluster thus offers a regional perspective that transcends administrative and municipal boundaries.

**The Heschel Center for Sustainability’s** contribution to the project includes its extensive renewable energy experience, gained during the implementation of its “Renewable Energy NZO project. Operating since 2019, NZO sets out a roadmap for Israel’s energy economy to transition to renewable energy sources. To this end, it has produced a series of research studies, position papers, and applied fieldwork. In recent years, the Heschel Center has been involved with climate change preparation and sustainable energy programs run by the Western Negev Cluster and some of its constituent authorities under the leadership of matrixP2. Thanks to this experience, the Heschel Center has a wealth of in-depth knowledge regarding sustainable energy in the Western Negev.

A central principle of the project plan is that it must be rooted in existing regional knowledge and planning, and leverage combined environmental concepts focused on sustainable development and open spaces conservation. Efforts can be focused on **putting environmental plans into action**, with regard to both the built environment and open spaces. In light of attention from the public and government, and of the significant resources that are expected to be poured into to the Western Negev following the catastrophe it has suffered, there is an opportunity to drive forward sustainable development and conservation plans that transform knowledge, principles, and environmental concepts into action. To this end, we must work effectively to develop the tools for action, and to garner organizational and institutional support. This can help us leverage those tools as part of the combined efforts of national and local government and other decision-makers.

The project is divided into three main distinct phases, each of which will operate relatively independently. SPNI will integrate these phases with support from a working team consisting of a representative from each organization. By integrating the three phases of the project plan, SPNI can maximize opportunities to protect, restore, manage, and reduce damage to open spaces. The three phases consist of: (1) restoring open spaces in the Western Negev and planning and improving their protection and management, in view of future needs for resilience in the face of climate change and increased development pressures; (2) addressing and responding to development initiatives in the Western Negev, as initiated by central and local government and other bodies; (3) promoting sustainable energy in settlements in the Western Negev. Our ability to achieve significant successes in Phases (1) and (2) will improve to the extent that we can initiate, implement, and incorporate sustainable development concepts that minimize damage to open spaces in the area of energy development, as focused on by this plan.

The duration of Phase 1, which is presented in this document, is expected to be one year.

Project structure:

Lateral support for the project: Community relations, lobbying, media, legal, administration.

**Sustainable energy in the community**

Main team: SPNI and Heschel energy and planning officers.

Support team: professional consulting, SPNI community liaison officer.

**Addressing and responding to initiatives**

Main team: Open spaces coordinator from the Cluster of authorities, SPNI community liaison officer.

Support team: Ecologist, GIS, professional consulting.

**Green Negev—Plan to Restore and Develop Open Spaces in the Western Negev**

The project will include: Management by the management team of the Nature Conservation Division, Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

Coordinated by an SPNI project manager.

**Open spaces**

Main team: Open spaces coordinator from the Cluster of authorities, SPNI planner, SPNI ecologist.

Support team: Professional consulting, GIS.

**Partial Description of the Program**

**Open Spaces**

The war has caused severe damage to the open spaces and ecosystems of the Gaza Envelope. They may suffer additional damage after the war ends, in view of potential pressures from civilian and military development.[[1]](#footnote-1) The rehabilitation of the Western Negev and the return of its residents cannot be considered complete if the area to which they return is left scarred and damaged. Therefore, the rehabilitation and development of open spaces must be considered an essential element of wider rehabilitation and development plans.

The Western Negev region is known for its extensive open spaces, which include a rich tapestry of streams, natural areas, nature reserves, national parks, forests, and agricultural areas. It is this combination that makes the region’s open landscapes so unique and so attractive to residents, visitors, and travelers. Even before the war, the Western Negev had considerable potential for nature and ecosystem preservation and restoration, and had not exhausted its capacity for hiking trails, tourism, and leisure (although it drew a many visitors, especially during the annual Darom Adom Festival).

We propose that immediate efforts be focused on restoring, preserving, planning, and managing open spaces. The main goals are to tackle the damage caused by the war and possible threats posed by development, to create a more durable framework for preserving open spaces, and to maximize the potential of hiking trails, tourism, and leisure in the Western Negev. These aims are integrated into the plans and processes detailed below. This project plan takes effect at precisely the same time that the Israeli government is planning to make large-scale investments to develop the Western Negev. Strengthening open spaces is an essential and integral element of development and will allow a balance to be achieved between development and nature preservation.

The wide variety of open spaces in the Western Negev is partly a result of the various bodies and groups that have been involved in developing and preserving them. These include the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the Jewish National Fund, agricultural organizations, farmers’ organizations, agricultural corporations, and regional councils. In recent years, the Western Negev Cluster has begun to take a leading role in developing a comprehensive vision for the region’s open spaces.

This proposal is the final piece of the mosaic of plans and initiatives for open spaces in the Western Negev that has gradually been taking shape over the last year:

1. **A nationwide action plan for the implementation of open space restoration projects**. Over the past year, SPNI has developed the groundwork for the plan and its work methodology, in partnership with the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, and local authority clusters that responded to a call for applications disseminated via the regional councils’ center. One of the successful clusters was the Western Negev Cluster. Work with the Clusters began in the second half of 2023, and has already yielded significant results, some of which directly impact the Western Negev, including: (1) a loess survey in the Eastern and Western Negev Clusters in collaboration with the Open Landscape Institute to examine restoration potential; and (2) work with farmers to conduct a pilot for the restoration and improvement of ecological functioning, similar to the work currently being undertaken in Nahal Tzipori in Israel’s Galilee region.
2. As an outgrowth of the climate change preparedness plan, the Western Negev Cluster, with help from SPNI, submitted an application to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund for funding for an open spaces masterplan. A central element of this masterplan the formation of a management mechanism for the complex system of open spaces in the Western Negev.
3. **A strategic plan for the Western Negev**—Recently, the Western Negev Cluster has begun work on a strategic plan for the region, which addresses various areas of life. Although still in its early stages, the plan is expected to have a strong influence on the trajectory of development in the Cluster. Through our collaborative efforts with the Cluster, this “Green Negev” project plan, in particular the components concerning open spaces, will impact—and perhaps be incorporated into—the Cluster’s strategic plan in a way that optimizes the restoration, protection, and management of open spaces.

These developments are unfolding amid an increasingly close working relationship between SPNI and the Western Negev Cluster. SPNI has in-depth knowledge of the region’s open spaces and the applicable regulations, including planning regulations. SPNI also has excellent knowledge regarding the various tools that can be used to help preserve and manage open spaces, as well as insights into and an understanding of the restoration work taking place in them. This knowledge and understanding reflect SPNI’s commitment to preserving open spaces as one of its central aims. As a voluntary association of local authorities in the region, the Western Negev Cluster is able to take a regional and comprehensive perspective that transcends divisions between municipalities and divisions between those managing the open spaces.

Notwithstanding the various initiatives that are being put forward for the region, we recognize that there is a need for a dedicated plan that focuses on preserving open spaces. The reasons are as follows:

1. There is a need to map and analyze the damage that the war has caused to the region’s open, natural, and agricultural spaces, and to actively encourage their rehabilitation and restoration.
2. Given the damage caused by the war and the potential damage from the many development initiatives slated to move forward in the short-term, it is imperative action will be taken to ensure that open spaces and their protection are included in government initiatives and other development in the Western Negev.
3. Most of the initiatives planned for the region are focused on infrastructure development and economic growth. There is a need for a complementary track that will serve as a “compass” for the protection of open spaces. This track will help specify refine development initiatives to ensure that they do not occur at the expense of open spaces.
4. The plan submitted to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund has not yet been approved; in any event, it was underbudgeted due to the limitations of the Fund.
5. A dedicated framework is needed to prioritize the protection of open spaces, advocate for them, and work on their behalf. This can be achieved through collaboration between a nature conservation and open spaces organization and a body with a comprehensive regional vision.

The project plan set out in this document is meant to support, reinforce, and complete other initiatives, and where appropriate, integrate into them, rather than replace or detract from them.

The proposed plan includes several components, the purpose of which includes addressing the gaps in the “mosaic” and creating an infrastructure that can fill those gaps and bind the various components together. The main activities that will be carried out during the program period (Phase 1) are as follows:[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Immediate promotion of restoration and preservation processes:**

1. Mapping the damage caused by the war to open spaces—this phase is expected to be carried out in the near future with funding from the Nature Defense Forces project.
2. Compiling a list of restoration and preservation cases and developing budgetary sources to:
   1. Develop and prepare an approach to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund, which is expected to issue a special call for applications for the Gaza Envelope and the region. The total budget allocated for this project is NIS 100 million. By working together with the Western Negev Cluster, we can pool applications for the region, and present proposals with a broad, Cluster-wide vision that can make a significant, wide-ranging impact on open spaces and their rehabilitation.
   2. Develop and promote project portfolios and seek additional sources of funding (governmental and non-governmental) for the reconstruction of the Gaza Envelope region. For example, the Jewish National Fund is expected to provide around NIS 2 billion to rehabilitate open spaces, and it is important that we, too, develop and champion worthy projects.
   3. Secure funding from the Ministry of Defense for the restoration of SPNI activities that were halted during the war.

**Support for restoration, planning, protection, and long-term management of open spaces in the Western Negev[[3]](#footnote-3)**

1. Reinforcing and increasing the resources available to SPNI, including as part of our joint work with the Western Negev Cluster, for the restoration, planning, and management of open spaces in the region. In this way, it will be possible to give significant consideration to open spaces within the Cluster’s work and the various initiatives it is developing or involved in. The emphasis is on being able to support immediate work to address the damage to open spaces in the Gaza Envelope caused by the war. The work will take a holistic overview of the entire region as an open and important continuum in terms of society, tourism, and agriculture, including its role as the breadbasket of Israel and as significant source of livelihood for its residents.
2. Emphasizing that considerations with respect to the restoration, planning, protection, and rehabilitation of open spaces in the Western Negev should be included in all decision-making processes by relevant planning institutions, such as the dedicated planning committee that will be created for the region, the Tkuma Directorate, the Israel Lands Authority, the Open Spaces Conservation Fund, the Israeli Parliament (Knesset), and many other bodies.
3. SPNI is slated to join the Western Negev Cluster’s strategic planning team, which has been formed to address various issues relating to open spaces. The Western Negev Cluster is seeking to include SPNI in a strategic team that is currently being formed to address this issue.
4. Increasing the resources available for the open spaces masterplan and consolidating its administrative apparatus. An application for its funding has been submitted to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund. The Open Spaces Conservation Fund originally allocated NIS 1 million for this purpose, but this budget was reduced following the Cluster’s failure to allocate more money for this purpose, and due to budget constraints and issues relating to the maximum amount that could be applied for. In light of the war, we estimate that more resources will be required to develop a professional and in-depth plan. This is due to severity of the disaster, including the physical damage caused by the region’s position in a war zone, and the various complex political pressures that will require skillful “navigating” and “routing” of the various processes involved. Furthermore, opportunities will likely arise that should not be missed, even if they require careful handling and the right connections to be made in real time.

Considering these circumstances, we will work with the Cluster to expedite part of the infrastructure required for the masterplan. This will include developing a work methodology and forming a steering committee. In this regard, it should be emphasized that the plan submitted to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund will serve as a basic outline, and its components will be revised as necessary. These will also allow us to link some of the other work included in the plan to the broader course of the Cluster’s masterplan.

**Strengthening regional capabilities to maintain open spaces**

1. Working with residents in local communities to identify partners and ambassadors for nature conservation, increasing their capacity, and strengthening their commitment to maintaining open spaces.
2. To date, the Western Negev Cluster’s engagement with the issue of open spaces has mainly relied on a plan prepared by external consultants. That plan reflects the needs of various stakeholders (for example, the climate change action plan included a section on open spaces). We believe that, in light of (a) the considerable challenges that will arise from the many restoration and rebuilding needs in the Western Negev, (b) current opportunities, and (c) the considerable attention being given to the region, now is the right time to establish a dedicated role for open space preservation within the Western Negev Cluster. The need for a dedicated coordinator to lead on issues concerning open spaces has become increasingly important in the SPNI’s work with the Clusters and is also becoming apparent in the talks with the Western Negev Cluster. This coordinator could help ensure that the various plans and actions involving open spaces that are being developed in the Cluster are integrated in an optimal manner. In addition, such a coordinator could also take advantage of various opportunities that arise, help develop a “Cluster DNA” and a “Cluster concept” for the region’s open spaces and play a role in developing open spaces management concepts as they take shape in the region. Furthermore, by working with nature conservation bodies and national open spaces organizations operating in the area, the new role could significantly boost the planning, restoration, protection, and management of open spaces. A dedicated coordinator will also reduce the likelihood that the open spaces and open spaces management masterplan will just gather dust on a shelf, rather than being put into practice. We believe that funding such a role for a limited period, in conjunction with the many initiatives and programs that are taking place around open spaces, will demonstrate its impact. This could lead to a funding mechanism being developed to extend the role into the future and serve as a model for similar roles in other clusters.

**Outcomes/ progress indicators/ success metrics:**

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| **Topic/Activities/Outcome** | **Progress/success indicators** | **Lack of success/lack of progress indicators** |
| Mapping war damage. | Compiling a report. | Failure to compile a report. |
| Preparing and submitting project bids to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund. | Submitting at least six bids (some on the 24th and some on the 25th). Being successful in four. | More than the ability to submit or win, success in bringing together partners and supporters for proposals will testify to the building of an effective and functioning interorganizational framework in the Western Negev. An inability to submit bids to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund may testify to difficulties in organizing and collaborating with the various bodies that work with open spaces in the Western Negev. |
| A dedicated security budget for rehabilitation. | Taking budgetary responsibility for tackling hazards and damages caused by security activities. | Unwillingness to provide dedicated budgets. |
| Integration of reserves, forests, and areas along rivers and ecological corridors into the protected areas chapter of National Outline Plan 1. | We are not leading this activity, and therefore our influence on the pace is limited. However, we are heavily involved in it. Success will be progress in integrating the perception of expanding protected areas in space, and conferring a more significant status on ecological corridors. | Inability to integrate land into protected areas or corridors; widespread and effective opposition to their integration; a drastic reduction in the scope of new protected areas (in relation to our proposed scope) or of ecological corridor areas, in such a way that harms their ecological effectiveness. |
| Integrating into the Cluster's work and increasing its capacity. | Creating a structured work framework within the Cluster, while delegating tasks; consolidating means to integrate the issue of open spaces into the Cluster’s strategic planning; developing the role of Cluster open spaces coordinator to lead and integrate the open spaces plan and play a dominant and influential role in the Cluster. | Failure to form working relations with the Cluster; limited influence over strategic planning; difficulties in integrating the open spaces coordinator into the Cluster / program. |
| Commencing implementation of the Cluster’s open spaces plan as submitted to the Open Spaces Conservation Fund. | Establishing a steering committee that meets at least twice during the period of the plan (Part 1); developing a work Gantt and methodology; establishing a planning team. | Non-performance of these activities. |
| Nature conservation activists in communities. | Forming a network of activists that will consist of between 10–20 local resident members, which will support the formation of the Masterplan and the activities that will be carried out as part of this project. | Failure to identify activists, or form a network.  The network is not effective in terms of the project activities. |

**Leading partner—the Western Negev Cluster**

The work will be led by a team that includes the Cluster’s open spaces coordinator, and a planner and an ecologist from SPNI. To expedite implementation of the open spaces masterplan, we will form a steering committee, which will be mainly involved in work to prepare the masterplan. However, it can also assist at key points during this phase of the plan, in particular by guiding rehabilitation efforts and preferred rehabilitation plans.

**Development Component**

Engagement in development should occur simultaneously and in conjunction with dealing with and responding to development initiatives. It should also formulate alternative development plans that respond to the needs of residents and settlements in a way that ensures a high quality of life and protection of the environment and open spaces.

**Addressing and responding to development plans**

SPNI routinely addresses and responds to development plans. However, the Western Negev is predicted to experience a flood of development plans in a relatively short timeframe, initiated by many parties and via a wide array of decision-making processes. As a result, an extraordinary focus of effort will be called for.

**Key areas of activity:** The Tkuma Directorate, national planning institutions, the Southern District Committee, a special planning committee that will be established via a legislative amendment specific to the Western Negev region, government ministries, authorities, and government for-profit companies (the Israel Lands Authority, the Ministry of Construction and Housing, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Transportation, the Settlement Division, the National Roads Company of Israel, Noga—The Israel Independent System Operator Ltd, the Knesset, and local authorities), the Knesset, local authorities and more.

**Work required**: Identifying and examining initiatives; examining and formulating positions and references; proposing alternatives, changes, and improvements; identifying partners for our positions; identifying bodies and individuals in local communities who back our vision, providing them with support, and increasing their capacity; liaising with local communities to mediate disputes and formulating alternatives where necessary; providing representation in front of planning institutions, decision-makers, and entrepreneurs; conducting lobbying activities in local and national government; communication.

Outcomes/ progress indicators/success metrics:

1. Impact on the locations of temporary housing solutions for evacuees.
2. Integration into the work of the Israel Lands Authority and the Tkuma Directorate for the development of housing in the Western Negev.
3. Influence on legislative processes relating to planning, construction, infrastructure, and electricity.
4. Reducing the scope of the area that will be allocated to ground-based solar energy and the precision of the management mechanism and the site location in a way that will reduce damage to open spaces.[[4]](#footnote-4)
5. Integration into the work of the special committee for planning and construction in the Western Negev, if it is established.

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| **Topic/Activities/Outcome** | **Progress/success indicators** | **Lack of success/progress indicators** |
| Temporary housing solutions. | Preventing temporary housing from being erected in areas where it would cause harm. | Erecting temporary housing in areas where it will cause irreversible damage. Erecting temporary housing that is expected to become permanent in locations not previously earmarked for development. |
| Influencing the work of the Israel Lands Authority and the Tkuma Administration for the development of the Western Negev. | Integration into planning and development processes and influencing the choice of development directions, development sites, and types of development. | Lack of effectiveness in processes; promotion of numerous harmful development projects. |
| Influencing legislation concerning the Western Negev. | Identifying the main harms expected in the proposed legislation and reducing these during the legislative process, vis-à-vis the government and in Knesset. | Legislation does not accommodate proper planning processes and the need to protect the environment and open spaces. Once it is in effect, it will be too easy for harmful projects to be given the go-ahead. |
| Impact on the development of the electricity sector in the Western Negev. | Reducing the scope of ground-based solar installations and harmful agrivoltaics; changing how ground-based solar facilities are planned and developed to reduce damage to open spaces. | Large-scale development of ground-based solar and agrivoltaics installations occurs “from the ground up” in a way that does not take into account the need to preserve open spaces, continuity, and the landscape. |
| Integration into a special planning committee that will be established within the Tkuma Directorate. | It is possible that within the framework of the legislation, a planning committee will be established with extensive powers for the Tkuma region, and it is likely that we will be representatives there (we will probably have to push for this in the legislative process). A success indicator will be our ability to become a dominant influence on planning procedures that will be put forward in such a way as to minimize harm to open spaces by development initiatives. | Failure to integrate into the committee’s work and its policy outline. |

Teams within SPNI will accomplish the work in this section of the plan, providing a comprehensive framework for tackling and addressing plans and initiatives. The work will be led by a planner, who will identify plans, and a community liaison officer, who will liaise with communities, identify partners, and mediate conflicts. The two staff members earmarked to carry out these roles are experienced professionals and residents of the Gaza Envelope. They are aware of the needs and challenges involved and have links with local communities and open spaces. By integrating our activities that focus on addressing threats and challenges into this comprehensive work, we can constantly examine initiatives and plans from the perspective of the needs of nature preservation as they arise in the section of the plan dealing with open spaces. Our sustainable energy and resilient city teams can then offer alternatives.

**Initiating alternative development options for renewable energy**

Thanks to its many years’ experience of planning and development processes, SPNI understands that offering alternative options, whether micro-alternatives or fundamental ones, can be extremely useful when attempting to counter damaging development initiatives. Given the likelihood of intensive development in the Western Negev, which will take place under increased pressures, the ability to offer alternatives will be critical for success. The two main areas of development that will likely be promoted in the Western Negev are: (1) residential housing and urban development or supporting infrastructures (such as employment, public buildings, industry); and (2) renewable electricity generation, electricity transmission, and storage infrastructure, proposed as part of a plan to develop renewable energy alternatives.

**An operative plan for sustainable energy in the Western Negev**—The Western Negev produces a relatively large amount of solar electricity, mainly through ground-based solar farms on agricultural land on agricultural settlements. There has also been a trend toward using built areas for solar installations, mainly on kibbutzim and in land belonging to public institutions. The intense focus on the Western Negev may significantly accelerate the development of solar energy in the region. A transmission network is expected to be created to support this development (a decision on such a network is currently under consideration by the Israel Land Authority Council). The intense focus on the Western Negev is an opportunity to encourage large-scale solar energy development, including by building energy storage and management infrastructure in built-up and damaged areas of the region that have not as yet been significantly exploited for this purpose. The Western Negev is intended to serve as an example for utilizing the built environment to optimize electricity production for local consumption, and for transporting the excess to the central coastal plain. For many years, SPNI has worked to promote alternatives to ground-based solar energy, including roof solar panel initiatives. The Heschel Center for Sustainability and the NZO project have worked intensively to develop theoretical and applied knowledge to support renewable energy development in Israel. This includes the development of widespread dual-use solar as part of the transition to a low-carbon economy. Specifically, the Heschel Center for Sustainability developed the energy chapters of the Western Negev Cluster’s climate change preparedness plan. In addition, the Sustainability Center is involved in writing regional guidelines for renewable energy production and efficiency in the built environment in Sderot and the Cluster, as well as guidelines for promoting agrivoltaic fields while considering landscape and ecology issues. The combination of the capabilities of SPNI and the Heschel Center creates a strong basis for formulating an operation plan for the widespread introduction of solar energy in the built-up area of the Western Negev.

**The main actions that will be carried out during the program period (Phase 1):**

1. Identifying barriers and the incentives needed to boost renewable energy initiatives in built-up areas within regional councils and cities in the Western Negev, and prioritizing solutions according to their effectiveness and maturity of the process The plan will be submitted within two months after work commences. Urban spaces will be a significant focus when prioritizing solutions.
2. Promoting incentives and solutions to the central obstacles to solar projects identified as ripe for resolution and that are highly effective in implementing solar applications The precise details of the incentives and solutions will be determined by liaising with local authorities, settlements, and professionals, and put these forward to local and central government to facilitate their implementation. A consultation forum may be formed for this purpose, which will include professionals (from industry, local and central government, and civil society), representatives from the community, and representatives from professional and sectoral bodies (such as the Kibbutz Movement). The forum will help the program team pinpoint difficulties and problems, and to find appropriate solutions.
3. Conducting advocacy work with relevant government officials to remove barriers and obtain vital resources.
4. Implementing regional guidelines within the activities of local planning and construction committees, which will encourage/require renewable energy to be incorporated in new builds and urban renewal projects.
5. Integrating renewable energy into built-up areas as part of the Cluster’s strategic plan and as part of the Tkuma Directorate’s five-year plan.
6. Undertaking mapping work and developing a set of principles for the preferred areas and methods for developing agrivoltaics facilities. The goal is to develop agrivoltaics in a manner that avoids harm to open spaces, their continuity, and the landscape. The set of principles will be promoted as part of a normative framework for agrivoltaics projects within regional planning processes.

Outcomes/progress indicators/success metrics:

1. Barriers and incentives report—to be carried out during the program period.
2. Significant progress in providing highly effective solutions for 3–4 barriers. At least two will be highly relevant to urban areas.
3. Significant progress in implementing regional guidelines in at least one authority in the Western Negev and integrating a policy within the authority for promoting solar energy in new construction/urban renewal projects.
4. Solar energy in built-up areas will be given significant attention in the Cluster’s strategic plan as a key step toward economic and energy development in the region. Solar will also be given significant attention in the Tkuma Directorate’s five-year plan.
5. A set of principles for preferred areas for agrivoltaics facilities—to be carried out during the program period.
6. If needed, a consultation forum will be formed to work with the program team—to be carried out during the program period.

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| **Topic/Activities/Outcome** | **Progress/success indicators** | **Lack of success/progress indicators** |
| Report on incentives and obstacles to promoting renewable energy in built-up areas in the Western Negev. | Report prepared. | Failure to prepare a report/inability to specify the main incentives and obstacles that need to be addressed. |
| Putting forward solutions for 3–4 key obstacles that are ready for a solution (two relevant to the city). | Successfully gaining the attention of relevant decision-makers, progressing toward a solution. | Failure to put forward solutions to key obstacles; lack of attention; continuing with “business as usual, even in the Western Negev. |
| Developing regional guidelines to promote solar energy in construction projects. | Significant progress in at least one authority in the Western Negev. | Lack of willingness or ability to advance these guidelines in local committees. |
| Forming a “package” to promote solar energy in built-up areas as part of the work of the Tkuma Directorate and the Ministry of Energy. | A “package” of this kind is included in the Tkuma Directorate’s work plan, and is promoted as part of the economic development activities in the region. | Failure to integrate a “package” in the Tkuma Directorate’s activities, continuation of “business as usual” regarding solar energy in built-up areas. |

The program will involve cooperation with other bodies that are working toward similar goals, including the “Energy in Built-up Areas Report” steering committee led by the Environment Division at the Ministry of Energy, the Green Energy Association of Israel, and other environmental, professional, and sectoral organizations.

**Lead partner**: The Heschel Center for Sustainability. The work will be carried out in coordination and cooperation with the Western Negev Cluster in light of his high level of commitment and lead role in writing and implementing a climate crisis assessment plan.

**Required staff**: Program center; experts in electricity, planning, regulation, and law (from the partner organizations plus additional consultants); lobbying and media; administrative support.

1. It is worth noting, however, that even before the war there was a need to restore, manage, and improve open spaces in the Western Negev, a need that has only increased. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Please note that the steps set out here are not necessarily intended to be consecutive and are expected to be carried out at least in part simultaneously, and not necessarily in the order of their appearance in the proposal. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Some of the activities set out here are also required to support short-term restoration. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In drafting Sketch 4.0, the intention is to allow each locality to establish 1,500 dunams of ground based solar energy and/or agrivoltaics in about 49 localities. This is a total area of around 75,000 dunams. Understanding this scope before starting the program will help us get an indication of the degree of success of our response and influence work. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)