**Report for the Glazer Foundation**

To help prepare for this project, a select working team, including mapping teams, ecologists, and planners, is meeting weekly to develop a methodology and suitable mapping tools. The purpose is to create a sound basis for advancing the work within a wider team. We have also held a number of legal consultations about creating platforms to promote the issue of land rehabilitation in various land usage designations, and we have laid the groundwork for moving forward with this effort. Meanwhile, we are also pressing forward with short- and medium-term projects that will enable us to identify opportunities and undertake field-based learning, which will help us reach conclusions and influence methodology on a national level.

Projects being undertaken concurrently with advancing our methodology:

1. **Developing an action plan for land rehabilitation in Israel.** We responded to a call for proposals by the Israeli Open Spaces Conservation Fund for a joint project with the Ministry of Environmental Protection to develop an action plan for land rehabilitation in Israel. The Fund accepted our proposal, and we are currently in the process of developing a joint project with the Ministry of Environmental Protection with a total budget of NIS 2,440,000.

2. **Restoring and rehabilitating abandoned fishponds and transforming them into functioning aquatic habitats.** Israel’s fishponds were developed mostly in areas with abundant water resources whose land was unsuitable for vegetable farming, including the Hula Valley, Carmel Beach, the Acre Valley, the Beit She’an Valley and Harod Basin, and the Jezreel, Hadera, and Alexander Basins. After the Israeli market was opened to imports, and changes were made in the water system, Israel’s domestic fishing industry became less profitable. Many fishpond areas have been abandoned, converted to other agricultural uses, or simply not maintained. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel has embarked on a joint venture with the Israel Nature and Parks Authority to restore and rehabilitate abandoned fishponds across Israel, and transform them into functioning aquatic habitats. The work began in June 2023, after signing an agreement and forming a working team. The first phase of the project has been provided with a budget of NIS 447,526.

3. **Undertaking a special call for proposals for restoration projects as a tool for mitigating and addressing the impact of the climate crisis in Israel**: The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, via the Israeli Open Spaces Conservation Fund, has issued a call for proposals for projects related to restoring wetland habitats (the call for proposals has a budget of NIS 20 million). The call for proposals stated that: “*The Israeli Open Spaces Conservation Fund, which operates under the auspices of the Israel Land Authority, is seeking to identify and advance action-oriented projects to be carried out in Israel’s open spaces that will make a practical contribution to mitigating and addressing the climate crisis in Israel. [Areas of interest include]: preserving, rehabilitating, and strengthening the ecological resistance and resilience of wetland ecosystems in areas that are susceptible to the effects of climate change in Israel—including activities around preservation and rehabilitation, such as rewilding and restoring damaged ecosystems.”*

4. **Advancing the Kabarah swamp restoration project.** The Kabarah swamp near the Carmel range was drained and altered beyond all recognition during the 1920s, and became an artificial cultural landscape with nothing remaining of its original marshlands and the fauna and flora living there. This project seeks to restore the Kabarah swamp to its former glory and rehabilitate and rewild its destroyed habitats. Alongside the ecological restoration efforts, the work will include suitable development work that will enable the public to visit the area, learn about the history of its draining and restoration, and become familiar with the flora and fauna of this unique habitat. To advance the planning of this area, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel has partnered with the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, Kibbutz Ma’agan Michael, and the Carmel Drainage Authority. The planning budget is NIS 1.5 million, and we are in the process of forming a working team.

5. **Rewilding Israel’s Fishponds—Start-Up Nature’s Tapuz (Regional Photovoltaic (PV) Corporation) Pilot Project.** This project involves identifying situations where fishponds are starting to close down, and understanding that this phenomenon poses an opportunity and a threat. The Tapuz project was created as part of an agreement with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture, and fish farmers in Emek HaMa’ayanot in Israel’s Northern District. The agreement was made in light of the decrease in profitability of Israel’s fishponds resulting from the removal of tariffs on fish imports and an increase in water tariffs, developments that will lead to thousands of dunams of Emek HaMa’ayanot’s fishponds drying up. The aim of the Tapuz project is to compensate the fish farmers by enabling them to develop a project to install approximately 4,000 dunams of PV panels on top of the drained fishponds. In light of this, we have supported a request from Tapuz’s project leaders and the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure to conduct a feasibility study about converting some of the fishponds into PV panel installations and rewilding others as wetland habitats. We propose examining ways to address climate change holistically, by creating a climate “package” that combines two important elements—emissions reduction and emissions absorption. This will include developing renewable energy projects along with initiatives to restore and rehabilitate habitats, all as part of a holistic climate “package.” The project is moving forward with a planning team, aiming to restore 2,000 dunams of fishponds and transform then into wetland habitats that can support wildlife.

6. **A joint project by the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel and the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority to develop nature restoration projects.** Our environment is constantly changing. While nature conservation bodies everywhere must contend with shifting challenges in an increasingly complex world, Israel’s environmental problems appear particularly complex. Israel faces a number of extraordinary crises and challenges arising from its unique conditions and circumstances. Israel has one of the highest population densities in the Western world and a high rate of population growth that is more typical of a developing country. The country has also had to cope with large waves of immigration and the resulting need to develop rapid housing solutions, a diverse population whose subgroups have different land use needs, a precarious security situation that demands a high budget and creates limitations, and more. The premise is that in view of the scope and severity of these trends, Israel must examine new and innovative tools and methods for nature conservation and habitat rehabilitation. Continuing to rely solely on existing tools, and adopting a “business as usual” attitude, will severely undermine our ability to protect environmental values in Israel. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority have created an “hours bank” that can be used for consultants to help develop and run nature restoration and preservation projects.