



THE EARTHSHOT PRIZE ANNOUNCES BHUTAN AS A 2026 FINALIST

- **Bhutan is recognised in the Protect and Restore Nature Earthshot category for maintaining nearly 70% forest cover to protect water security for 1.6 billion people across South Asia and its new Restore Bhutan initiative to restore forests by 2030**
- **The world's first carbon-negative nation, Bhutan maintains nearly 70% forest cover and protects more than half of its land through a national Protected Areas Network.**
- **Its forests and watersheds help safeguard freshwater systems that support 1.6 billion people across South Asia, while Restore Bhutan aims to restore a further 50,000 hectares of forests, farmlands and urban landscapes by 2030.**
- **Five Winners announced at Awards Night in Mumbai on November 17, as the two-month countdown begins.**

THIMPHU, Bhutan, 18 September 2026: Bhutan is today revealed as a 2026 Finalist of The Earthshot Prize, the world's most prestigious environmental award, for demonstrating how a small nation's forests can safeguard water security across an entire region. Home to just 800,000 people, Bhutan maintains nearly 70% forest cover, protecting the Himalayan watersheds that around 1.6 billion people downstream across South Asia depend on for water.

Founded by Prince William in 2020, The Earthshot Prize recognises solutions from different geographies, sectors and stages of development that are tackling our planet's greatest environmental challenges. Now past the halfway point of the Earthshot decade, The Earthshot Prize in 2026 celebrates leadership from around the world as governments, businesses, organisations and communities turn environmental ambition into practical action at scale.

Nominated in the Protect & Restore Nature Earthshot, Bhutan's recognition reflects decades of national leadership that has placed nature at the heart of development under the overarching philosophy of Gross National Happiness. Rather than treating forests simply as natural resources, Bhutan has embedded environmental protection into its constitution, public policy and national identity, demonstrating that economic development and environmental stewardship can reinforce one another over generations.

The Himalayan kingdom has constitutionally committed to maintaining at least 60% forest cover in perpetuity, consistently exceeded that target by maintaining almost 70% forest cover, and established a Protected Areas Network covering more than half of the country. These long-term commitments have helped conserve biodiversity, store carbon and strengthen the natural systems that millions of people depend upon every day.

The significance of Bhutan's forests extends far beyond its borders. Rising in the Himalayas, they help safeguard the freshwater systems that support 1.6 billion people downstream across South Asia, regulating river flows that provide drinking water, sustain agriculture, generate hydropower and underpin livelihoods throughout the region. At the same time, Bhutan's forests absorb more carbon than the country emits, while supporting globally important biodiversity across one of the planet's richest mountain ecosystems. Together, these landscapes deliver ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, freshwater regulation, erosion control and cultural value, estimated to be worth US\$14.5 billion each year, demonstrating that protecting nature can strengthen both environmental resilience and long-term economic prosperity.

Building on decades of conservation leadership, Bhutan launched Restore Bhutan, a national initiative designed to strengthen the long-term resilience of forests, farmlands and urban landscapes through large-scale ecological restoration, innovative climate finance and community stewardship. Rather than relying solely on short-term conservation projects, Restore Bhutan seeks to institutionalise restoration through sustainable financing, long-term monitoring and locally led implementation, a framework that can support nature recovery for decades to come.



As a 2026 Finalist, The Earthshot Prize will work with Bhutan to help accelerate Restore Bhutan by supporting partnerships for blended finance, connecting the initiative with international conservation, climate finance and philanthropic partners, and raising global awareness of how long-term investment in landscape restoration can strengthen biodiversity, water security and climate resilience for generations to come.

Prince William, President and Founder of The Earthshot Prize, said: *"Every year, our Finalists give me renewed optimism. They show us that, even as the environmental challenges remain urgent, extraordinary people around the world are already proving that progress is possible. Seeing solutions work gives us all confidence to act. When they succeed, they inspire others and accelerate change. I'm proud to welcome these 15 Finalists to the Earthshot Prize community and look forward to celebrating their stories in Mumbai this November."*

Bhutan's approach to conservation has evolved over more than half a century. Since the 1970s, national development has been guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, recognising that economic prosperity, environmental protection, cultural heritage and community wellbeing are interdependent rather than competing priorities. This philosophy has shaped public policy for generations, culminating in one of the world's strongest constitutional commitments to nature: a requirement that at least 60% of the country's land remains under forest cover for all time; an interconnected network of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, nature reserves and biological corridors that allow wildlife and ecosystems to move freely across the landscape. Together, these forests provide habitat for endangered species including 131 tigers, 134 snow leopards, 302 red pandas, 25 white-bellied herons and 678 Asian elephants according to recent wildlife surveys, while helping regulate some of Asia's most important freshwater systems.

By 2030, Restore Bhutan aims to restore 50,000 hectares of degraded forests, farmlands and urban landscapes. Beyond the scale of restoration, the initiative is focused on ensuring the quality, survival and long-term sustainability of restoration efforts, including through appropriate species selection, site-specific restoration approaches, improved planting practices and long-term monitoring of restoration outcomes. Alongside ecological restoration, the initiative is developing long-term financing mechanisms, including blended finance and nature finance, to help ensure restoration continues well beyond individual grant cycles.

Bhutan is helping the world reach a positive tipping point - a threshold in a system beyond which change becomes self-propelling. Bhutan's commitment to protecting its high-integrity ecosystems is contributing to positive tipping points for the protection of the world's high-integrity ecosystems and the restoration of degraded forests and landscapes. Bhutan's work is especially significant given that for this to happen, 30% of the world's intact, high-value ecosystems need to be under real, well-resourced protection by 2030, while the annual loss of untouched forest needs to fall close to zero.

Princess Chimi Yangzom Wangchuck, Royal Government of Bhutan, said: *"Bhutan's conservation journey is rooted in a longstanding commitment to living in harmony with nature. With nearly 70% forest cover and a carbon-negative status, we have built a strong foundation for protecting our forests and landscapes. This commitment reflects the vision of our Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and continues under the leadership of His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Yet, new challenges are emerging. Nearly 2,000 water sources are drying up, while forest fires affected almost 18,000 hectares between 2021 and 2024. These challenges remind us that protecting our natural heritage also means building resilience for generations to come. Being recognised as an Earthshot Prize Finalist gives us an opportunity to scale government-led, community-driven conservation and share Bhutan's experience with other forest-rich, climate-vulnerable nations."*

Restore Bhutan marks the next evolution of Bhutan's environmental leadership. Building on decades of constitutional protection for nature, it is moving beyond project-based conservation towards a permanent national system for conservation and sustainable forest management, integrating ecological restoration, climate adaptation and long-term financing into government planning and national policy. Initiatives



including Bhutan for Life and the National REDD+ Strategy have laid the foundations for this transition, while Jurisdictional REDD+ (JREDD+) is emerging as a cornerstone of the Bhutan's approach, creating a government-led mechanism to unlock sustained, landscape-scale investment in forests and ecosystems for generations to come.

As the flagship implementation platform for this national vision, Restore Bhutan is translating policy and finance into practical action on the ground. Working with partners including Conservation International, the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation and the Bhutan Ecological Society under the wider Mountains to Mangroves programme, it aims to restore approximately 50,000 hectares of degraded forests, farmlands and urban landscapes through science-based restoration, strengthened fire management and community stewardship. Supported by blended finance, high-integrity carbon crediting and JREDD+, Restore Bhutan is creating a durable model for financing nature recovery beyond traditional project cycles, demonstrating how governments can embed restoration into long-term national development while strengthening biodiversity, carbon storage, water security and climate resilience.

The programme also places local communities at its centre. Indigenous knowledge, local stewardship and community participation are integrated throughout planning and delivery, recognising that the long-term health of Bhutan's forests depends upon the people who have lived alongside them for generations. Education and youth engagement are equally important components, helping equip the next generation to continue protecting and restoring Bhutan's natural heritage in the decades ahead.

This year's 15 Finalists were selected from The Earthshot Prize's database of nearly 7,000 nominations across 169 countries, supported by a global network of over 363 nominators, and an Expert Advisory Panel of more than 150 specialists, alongside assessment and research by The Earthshot Prize's selection team and partners.

They join a community of 75 Finalists supported since 2020, whose work has collectively avoided or captured more than 18 million tonnes of CO₂e, protected or restored 58 million hectares of land and 85 million hectares of ocean and coastline, removed or avoided 465,000 tonnes of waste, saved 21 million tonnes of water and improved air quality in regions home to 600 million people.

Aligned with the five Earthshots: Protect and Restore Nature, Clean Our Air, Revive Our Oceans, Build a Waste-Free World and Fix Our Climate - the Finalists will be considered by Prince William and fellow members of The Earthshot Prize Council, with five Winners announced at the 2026 Awards Night in Mumbai, India.

The Prize Council includes Prince William; Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah; Cate Blanchett; Indra Nooyi; José Andrés; Christiana Figueres; Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim; Wanjira Mathai; Nemonte Nenquimo; Gisele Bündchen; Luisa Neubauer; Naoko Yamazaki; Ernest Gibson; and Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

To find out more about this year's Finalists, visit: <https://earthshotprize.org/>

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Notes to Editors

⁴ The Earthshot Prize has collaborated with The University of Exeter's Green Futures Solutions team to create a report: [Positive Tipping Points: Accelerating system change to repair our planet](#) which advances the



application of Professor Tim Lenton's foundational science of positive tipping point science through its first systematic use across all five Earthshots.

About The Earthshot Prize:

For more information about The Earthshot Prize, visit: www.earthshotprize.org

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Founded by Prince William and incubated in The Royal Foundation in 2020 for a year before becoming an independent organisation, The Earthshot Prize is the world's most prestigious environmental award designed to identify, back and celebrate groundbreaking leadership in environmental action. Inspired by President John F. Kennedy's Moonshot, which united millions of people around the goal of reaching the moon, The Earthshot Prize is designed to mobilise a decade of action for the planet. The five challenges are: Protect and Restore Nature; Clean Our Air; Revive Our Oceans; Build a Waste-Free World; and Fix Our Climate.

The Earthshot Prize aims to turn the current pessimism surrounding environmental issues into optimism by championing inspiring leadership and helping to scale incredible cutting-edge solutions. It will discover 50 Winners over 10 years with the power to repair the planet. More than an award, The Earthshot Prize works in partnership with a Global Alliance of Partners to support the scaling of the solutions discovered and selected each year.

The Global Alliance Founding Partners are a group of leading global organisations and philanthropists, which act as strategic funding partners to the Prize, including Aga Khan Development Network, AL Philanthropies, Allen Family Philanthropies, Bezos Earth Fund, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Breakthrough Energy Foundation, Builders Vision, Coleman Family Ventures, DP World, Elaine and Eduardo Saverin Foundation, Eleven Eleven Foundation, Giving Grousbeck Fazzalari, Holch Povlsen Foundation, Rob Walton Foundation, Sandy and Paul Edgerley, Standard Chartered Bank, Stelios Philanthropic Foundation, Temasek Trust, and Uber.

Global Alliance Partners are non-profit environment and sustainable development organisations that bring expertise, global reach and serve as nominating organisations each year. For a full list of our Global Alliance Partners, visit: <https://earthshotprize.org/people-partners/global-alliance/>

Global Alliance Members are some of the world's largest and most influential companies and brands that will support The Earthshot Prize, implement ambitious changes within their businesses and accelerate the advancement of the solutions of The Earthshot Prize Finalists and Winners. They are Arup, Bloomberg L.P., British Airways, Deloitte, Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, Hitachi, Ingka Group (IKEA), Microsoft, The Multichoice Group, Natura &Co, Safaricom, Salesforce, Unilever, Vodacom Group, and Walmart.

About Bhutan:

Bhutan is small landlocked Himalayan country recognised for its enduring commitment to environmental stewardship, rooted in the vision of its Monarchs and the philosophy of Gross National Happiness. This conservation legacy has shaped national development through the protection of forests, biodiversity and critical ecosystems, and continues to guide Bhutan towards a resilient and sustainable future. The Constitution of Bhutan mandates maintaining at least 60% forest cover at all times, while the country currently maintains nearly 70% forest cover and 52% of its land is protected under the network of protected areas.

Despite these strong conservation achievements, climate change, ecosystem degradation and increasing environmental pressures are placing growing strain on Bhutan's natural resources and communities. These challenges underscore the need to complement Bhutan's conservation efforts with large-scale, long-term restoration that strengthens the resilience of landscapes and the people who depend on them.



Restore Bhutan is a national landscape restoration programme that builds on this proud conservation legacy, honouring the vision of Bhutan's Monarchs by restoring degraded landscapes, strengthening climate resilience, conserving biodiversity and water resources, and securing a sustainable future for generations to come. Launched in 2025 by the Royal Government of Bhutan, Restore Bhutan brings together government agencies; DoFPS, the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation, Bhutan Ecological Society, Conservation International, local governments, institutions and communities to restore 50,000 hectares of degraded forests, agricultural lands and urban landscapes by 2030. The programme takes a whole-of-Bhutan approach, moving beyond individual restoration projects towards a coordinated national restoration system that combines ecological restoration, sustainable land management, community engagement and innovative financing to deliver lasting benefits for nature, climate and people.