

Insights Into Practice: The Business Case for Nature-Based Solutions

Nature-based solutions have the potential to drive positive business results by addressing pressing engineering needs while conserving and restoring natural landscapes. Nature-based solutions, which refer to projects that are motivated and supported by natural processes, can be applied to improve air and water quality, and reduce the risk of flood, fire, or drought. Unlike many forms of traditional grey infrastructure, companies that adopt nature-based solutions often see outsized and longstanding benefits due to their ability to effectively address a variety of business objectives, including financial; regulatory; environment, health and safety; and license to operate priorities.

Based on interviews with corporate sustainability leaders from eight companies, The Nature Conservancy developed a white paper in collaboration with members from its Business Council who have applied nature-based solutions to their operations. Drawing from real world case studies, it reveals practical insights on identifying drivers for adoption and strategies for operationalizing nature-based solutions.



This picture shows a xeriscaping project that was done at BSNF Railway’s head-quarter campus in Forth Worth, Texas. Xeriscaping involves the planting of select species of plants for water conservation and, over the long term, can reduce the irrigation and maintenance needs of the site. © BNSF

Why Should Companies Invest in Nature-Based Solutions?

Nature-based solutions are often dubbed “win-win” solutions, improving business value and protecting natural capital. Companies that have successfully adopted nature-based solutions have aligned their strategy with their most-pressing business objectives and sustainability goals. Financial savings and regulatory compliance consistently rank highly among corporate decision-makers, yet secondary drivers serve to round out the business case and drive greater organizational alignment.

Primary and Secondary Business Drivers for Adopting Nature-Based Solutions

Number of positive company responses based on whether a driver was a **primary** or **secondary** concern

Achieving Sustainability Goals	6		1
Increasing Marketing/Branding	5		1
Enhancing Company Culture	3	3	
Engaging Community Stakeholders	3		3
Mitigating Natural Disaster Risk	2	4	
Promoting Employee Wellbeing	1	5	
Lowering Project Costs	1	3	
Managing Regulatory Requirements & Risk	4		

How Do Companies Put Nature-Based Solutions Into Practice?

Adopting nature-based solutions takes time and requires a strong commitment and investment of time and resources to successfully operationalize. It is best achieved through a series of short-term goals that demonstrate success and allow for continuous improvement. Key learnings from the eight companies that participated in the development of this white paper reveal five important steps to aid in the integration of nature-based solutions across an organization.



Step 1

Identify a set of opportunities within the company where nature-based solutions can be immediately implemented and begin to build an evidence base of how they can provide value.

Step 2

Engage key stakeholders around the design and coordination of the opportunities identified in Step 1 to ensure that nature-based solutions can be effectively incorporated.

Step 3

Implement pilot projects to provide proof points that these projects contribute to the company's business drivers.

Step 4

Validate the business case by evaluating pilot projects and their unique benefits compared to grey infrastructure projects.

Step 5

Operationalize through a decision-making and implementation process that prioritizes nature-based solutions.

Business leaders also cited five supporting strategies that aided the adoption of nature-based solutions:

- A culture that promotes innovative environmental solutions;
- Policies that facilitate the adoption of nature-based solutions in projects;
- Leadership that promotes and communicates their benefits;
- A company decision structure that encourages dialogue and creative thinking between departments and sites; and
- External partnerships to help share best practices and streamline project design.

Once nature-based solutions are successfully operationalized, decision-makers will consider, promote, and implement these solutions consistently across departments, geographies, and employee levels. This requires an ongoing commitment and strong leadership.

About The Nature Conservancy's Business Council

The Nature Conservancy's Business Council is an invitation-only, collaborative platform for leading global companies to recognize value, gain expertise, and share experiences in corporate practices that will help create a world where people and nature thrive. Companies and organizations that contributed to this white paper: AECOM, Bayer AG, The BNSF Railway Company, The Boeing Company, Caterpillar Inc., Chevron Corporation, The Dow Chemical Company, Duke Energy Corporation, Yale University, and United Parcel Service. For more information, please contact Nathan Cummins, ncummins@tnc.org, and Martha Rogers, mrogers@tnc.org. To learn more visit nature.org/BusinessCouncil.