

From Start-Up to **Scale-Up**

Start-Up Nature 2026 Impact Report





Shalom,

SPNI, in 2020, set out with a bold hypothesis: that we could move beyond merely protecting the remnants of Israel’s nature to actually restoring what had been lost. When we launched our first flagship restoration sites, the concept was unprecedented in our country, and there was no guarantee that this "Start-Up Nature" model would take root in such a complex landscape.

Today, the "Start-Up" phase is over. We have entered the era of the Scale-Up.

The success of those early sites triggered a paradigm shift in Israeli land management. What began as a disruptive idea is now a cornerstone of national policy. SPNI has emerged as the lead architect of this transformation. We are no longer just advocating for change; we are working with the State and many stakeholders on how to achieve it.

Growth From Flagship Sites to Flagship Regions

We have graduated from restoring individual ponds to orchestrating entire regions. This evolution is headlined by two landmark achievements that demonstrate our new capacity to scale:

The TAPUZ Project: Israel's First Eco-Solar Network

A first-in-Israel Eco-solar power network in the Jordan Valley, proving that clean energy and wild nature are not mutually exclusive.

The Kabara Expansion: An Exponential Leap Forward

A leap into large-scale, 2,000-acre restoration, where SPNI acts as the strategic lead for a broad coalition of stakeholders.

The Power of Your Partnership: Catalyzing Change

The growth documented in this report was made possible by your early, visionary support. You provided the initial capital SPNI needed to prove our methods. By leveraging your gifts, we have secured partnerships that are now bringing tens of millions of dollars in state and private investment into Israeli nature. Your belief gave us the credibility to sit at the table with national authorities and rewrite the rules of conservation.

A Mission of Resilience: Healing the North

Moving forward, our mission has taken on a new, urgent dimension. In the wake of the conflict that began on October 7th, the restoration of our Northern frontier is more than an ecological task—it is a cornerstone of national recovery. Our shovel-ready master plans for the Galilee and the Golan are designed to ensure that, as communities return home, they do so to a landscape that is healthy, vibrant, and resilient.

The Responsibility of Growth

Rapid success brings its own responsibilities. Today, Start-Up Nature is a permanent, professional department within SPNI, staffed by a dedicated team of experts. As we scale to meet this historic moment, your partnership remains vital. We must maintain our existing commitments while seizing new opportunities once thought impossible.

Thank you for believing in our vision. Together, we are proving that Israel’s historic landscapes can be reborn and that nature-based solutions are the key to our country’s resilient future.

With gratitude,

Dan Alon
CEO, The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel



The flourishing Amud Reservoir, one of our original two flagship projects.

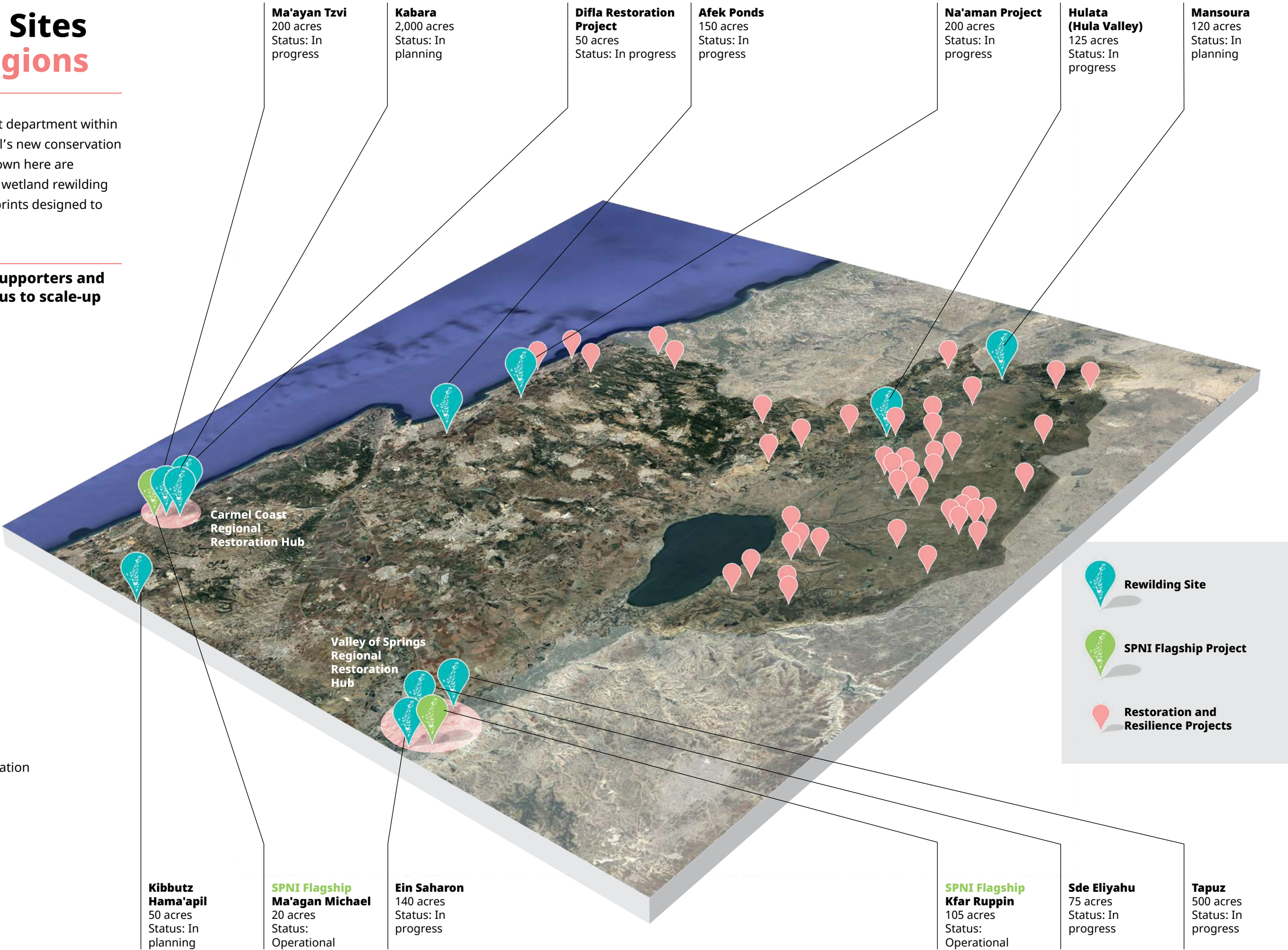
Photo:
Yuval Dax

From Flagship Sites to Flagship Regions

Evolving from a pilot into a permanent department within SPNI, Start-Up Nature now leads Israel’s new conservation strategy of ecosystem restoration. Shown here are operational, in-progress, and planned wetland rewilding sites alongside the shovel-ready blueprints designed to reclaim the Northern frontier.

With thanks to our generous supporters and investors who partnered with us to scale-up Start-Up Nature

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The Ripple Effect: A Valley Transformed

Creating Israel’s First Eco-Solar Network

Start-Up Nature was originally founded to address a critical threat: the risk that former fish ponds in the Valley of the Springs—essential stopover sites for millions of migrating birds—would be permanently drained and converted into traditional solar fields. While the Kibbutzim urgently needed new revenue streams to replace their increasingly uneconomical fish farms, total drainage would have destroyed the flyway.

The “TAPUZ” project is the solution to resolving this tension. Finalized after two years of negotiation, this landmark \$20 million initiative proves that clean energy and wild nature can flourish together. By 2029, we will transform 1,500 acres of former fish farms into a unified "Eco-Solar" landscape: 1,000 acres for solar arrays to power 130,000 homes, and 500 acres rewilded into high-value wetlands under SPNI’s stewardship.

Leveraging Success for the Future

This is the ultimate "Start-Up" success story: using donor-backed pilots to unlock massive infrastructure investment. Over 80% of this project is funded by the solar developer and the drainage authority, financially securing the future of our Kfar Ruppin site and driving our expansion across the Beit She’an Valley.

A Transformation Rooted in Community Heritage

Our success is built on a collaborative approach: we don’t just work in these communities; we work *with* them. We recognize that for these Kibbutzim, land is more than a resource—it is a heritage. The TAPUZ project allows them to build a sustainable economic future without sacrificing the natural values that define their home.

For the region's communities, the truest value of this project isn't found in a ledger, but in the vibrant return of life—the morning birdsong and the call of the jackal—to the fields they call home. These are the values that the community knows SPNI shares, proving that we can protect Israel’s nature and develop its economy at the same time.



Ma'agan Michael: Experiencing the Wonders of Rewilding

Close Encounters with Wetland Restoration

Experiencing the wonder of rewilding firsthand, visitors to the Ma'agan Michael Birding Park are not simply observing the site—they are part of a carefully designed experience. Developed in partnership with Kibbutz Ma'agan Michael, the park was conceived from the outset as a place where people can encounter nature directly. In 2025, this vision reached a major milestone with the park's opening to the public, marking the transition from a restoration project to a living, accessible site.

This year also saw significant progress in grounding the educational model and developing the infrastructure needed to support it. What began as a single, general visitor experience is evolving into a range of experiences, designed for different audiences and at different times, allowing the park to be engaged with in multiple ways.



Citrine Wagtail





Understanding the Landscape: Bridge Vantage Point

From here, the guide introduces the landscape and its history—from natural wetlands and coastal dunes, through its period as fishponds, to its current restoration as a wetland habitat and critical role within the flyway.

Orientation: Entrance Pavilion

A gathering point where visits begin. The guide welcomes the group, provides a brief orientation to the site and its purpose, and from here the group sets off into the landscape.



Building a Park Community

Over the past year, we took important first steps in building a community around the park. Our field coordinator maintains a daily presence on site, moving through the park and sharing updates with a dedicated WhatsApp group, now with more than 70 members from the surrounding area.

Two full-time volunteers have joined the park's activity, and we have strengthened the existing community of bird ringing volunteers. Together, they support ongoing ecological monitoring at the site, including daily bird surveys, biweekly bird ringing, and monthly point counts, alongside sampling routes for dragonflies.



Blue-Cheeked Bee-Eater



At the Heart of It: Birdwatching Hides

At the hides, visitors watch birds as they go about their daily lives, and experience the wonder of close encounters with nature, undisturbed. The guide explains what they are seeing, providing context for their observations. It is here that visitors can begin to understand and emotionally connect with the importance of wetland restoration.



Rounding Out the Experience: Education

The visit concludes at Beit Canada, Israel's first educational center dedicated to wetland rewilding. Here, visual materials, installations, and films provide context and deepen visitors' understanding of the site. Building on what they have seen in the field, this stage connects their experience to the broader work of wetland habitat restoration and conservation.

International Birding & Research Center Eilat: Innovation and Adaptation

Supporting a Global Flyway Across the Desert

Eilat sits at the heart of one of the world’s most critical bird migration flyways. Over the past year, SPNI’s International Birding & Research Center Eilat (IBRCE) has expanded beyond the center’s gates to launch rewilding projects across the Southern Arava. By adapting existing infrastructure and forming strategic partnerships with local businesses, we are scaling the IBRCE from a single site into a leading force for regional conservation.

Creating a Network of Microsites

At the edge of the Sahara, the Southern Arava is the last stop before a barren desert crossing. Yet natural habitats that once sustained these migrations have largely vanished, leaving millions of birds dependent on an inadequate "patchwork" of human-made sites: farms, wastewater ponds, and urban green spaces.

Rather than building new wetlands, we are upgrading the existing landscape. Our mapping of the Arava identified **63 high-priority, high-potential sites**, that through targeted, low-cost interventions we can link into a functional network of stopover microsites.



The International Birding & Research Center Eilat. Photo: Yuval Dax

Bird species that have benefitted from this network of stopover sites



Pilot Sites: From Proof of Concept to Outsized Impact

Our pilot phase demonstrated that small, strategic interventions can deliver outsized ecological impact and can scale.

Community Pilot: Kibbutz Neot Smadar

A community “Bioblitz” generated local enthusiasm and data to launch the initiative. Targeted habitat upgrades transformed the area into a thriving sanctuary, providing massive biological returns, proof of concept, and momentum for expansion to 63 new sites across the Arava.

Industrial Pilot: Eilat Wastewater Ponds

We mitigated the hazards of industrial water infrastructure by adding safe perches, floating islands, and restored native vegetation. New visitor infrastructure allows birdwatchers to access the site while nesting birds remain undisturbed.

Agricultural Pilot: Fields and Orchards

In farming zones, we are integrating native vegetation and drinking spots to create "safe havens." This approach attracts predatory bird species that act as biological pest control, reducing the need for chemical pesticides and creating a shared victory for both farmers and nature.

In 2025, building on these successes, we secured over \$300,000 to expand across all 63 sites, turning a series of isolated water sources into a life-saving corridor for the world's birds.

	Species Count	Species with Breeding Indications	Species of Conservation Concern
Ma'agan Michael	247	38	36
Kfar Ruppin	250	69	57
Eilat Bird Sanctuary	277	42	37

Rewilding the Kabara: Expansion through Coalition Building

The Kabara swamp was drained in the 1930s as part of the early pioneers’ efforts to drain Israel’s marshes. However, the reclaimed land proved unsuitable for agriculture and prone to flooding, leading to its eventual disuse.

Initiating a project of this size and scale is no easy undertaking. Only a veteran environmental organization like SPNI has the expertise and relationships necessary to make it a reality.

Inspired by the success at SPNI’s first two flagship sites, government and local authorities, along with philanthropy, formed a coalition to undertake an ambitious project to restore this 2,000-acre site.

For over two years, SPNI has been working to assemble the different stakeholders into a cohesive unit that has secured an initial \$2 million in funding to develop the detailed plans for this complex infrastructure project and to negotiate formal agreements for managing and maintaining the newly rewilded Kabara site among the different local and regulatory stakeholders.

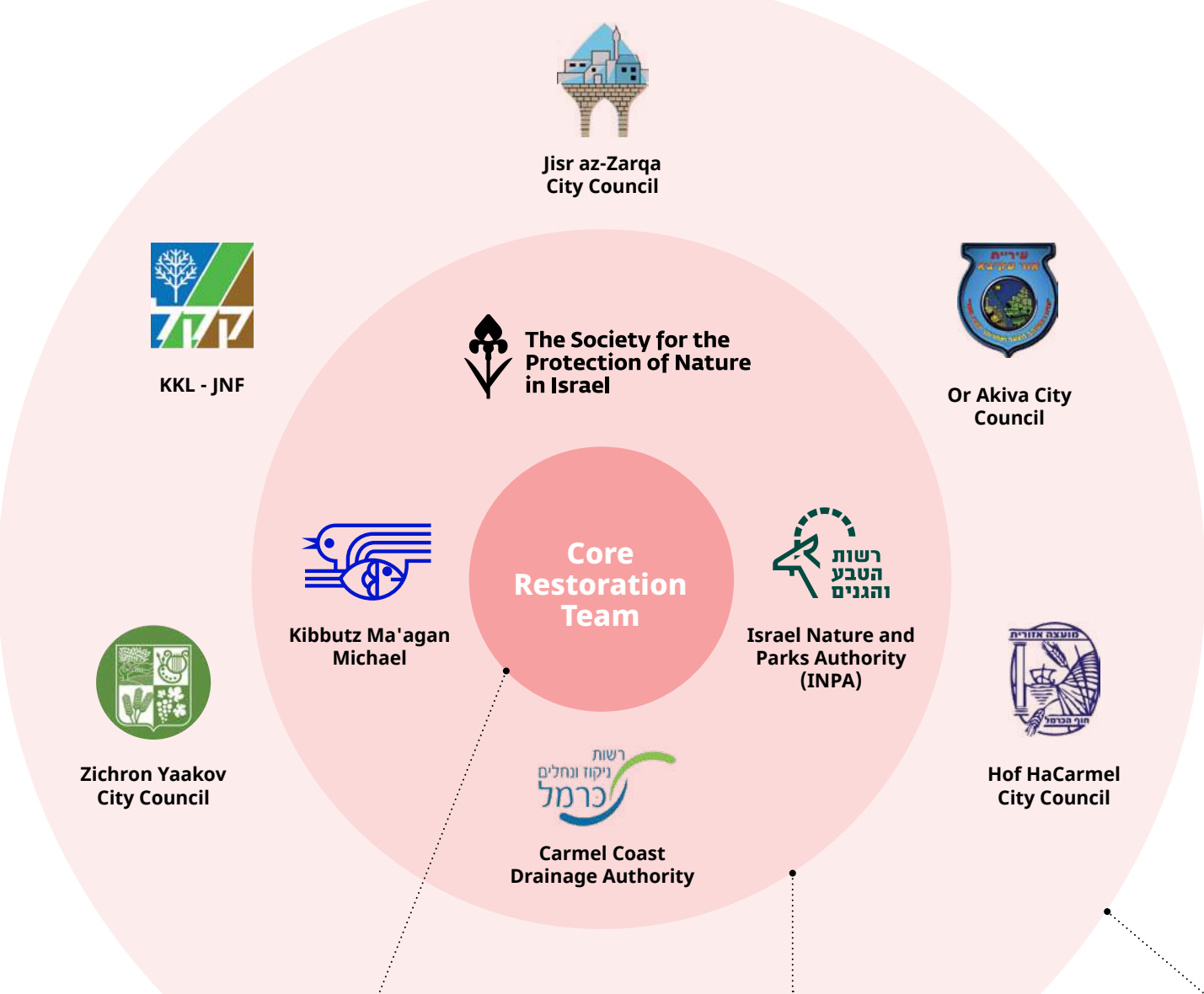
This project represents an exponential leap in the scope of our work, with a projected cost of over \$35 million. More than any other, this project represents Start-Up Nature’s transformation from a bold experiment to an established, professional conservation program.



The Transformation of the Kabara

In the last weeks of 2025, we took the first practical step to rewild the Kabara by turning off the mechanical pumps that drained local springs into the nearby Taninim Stream. The results were immediate. We observed the groundwater rise, saturating the soil and creating conditions for vegetation to flourish, which it did almost instantly. With this trial complete, we now have a proven blueprint to turn two years of planning into action. Video: Guy Arad

Coalition Partners for Rewilding the Kabara



Core Restoration Team:
Designing the Future

SPNI’s handpicked specialist team includes expert river rehabilitation specialists and landscape architects to develop the technical solutions to make this ambitious plan a reality.

Lead Stakeholders:
The Operational Engine

SPNI and our primary partners are the driving force behind Kabara’s progress. This group meets weekly with the restoration team to oversee every technical detail. The participation of the Carmel Coast Drainage Authority and INPA helps overcome regulatory hurdles, while Ma'agan Michael’s participation reflects their commitment to honor the landscape’s legacy.

Regional Stakeholders:
Community Integration

To ensure the Kabara is a true community asset, local stakeholders convene every two weeks as part of an ongoing effort to create community engagement in this project. Through regular town hall meetings, we address local concerns—such as debunking myths about malaria—and maintain an ongoing dialogue. This transparency has turned potential critics into active supporters who see the rewilding of the Kabara as a source of regional pride.

The Mansoura Breakthrough: Redefining Israel's Water Infrastructure

A Hidden Jewel in the Hula Valley

Nestled in the northern Hula Valley, between the ancient flows of the Dan and Hermon streams, lies Mansoura. This 120-acre site, once a commercial fish farm, sits upon a natural wetland landscape rich with shallow groundwater. For years, SPNI has envisioned returning these abandoned fishponds to their original state—creating a thriving wetland sanctuary for migratory and domestic birds, as well as Israel’s endangered otters.

A Collision of Needs

However, the project recently faced a defining challenge. Following a series of severe drought years, the Drainage Authority advanced plans to construct a conventional reservoir on this very site. While the need for water storage was undeniable, a standard concrete-and-pipe reservoir would have buried the ecosystem under industrial infrastructure.



The Mansoura project can rejuvenate a key feeding ground for Israel’s endangered otters, giving this apex predator hope for the future.

The Eco-Hydrological Alternative

Recognizing that water security and nature conservation do not have to be mutually exclusive, **SPNI proposed a first in Israel alternative: an Eco-Hydrological Reservoir.** This approach incorporates large-scale water storage directly into a functional wetland ecosystem. By doing so, we offer a cost-effective model that supports national infrastructure while providing a permanent home for the Hula’s rare biodiversity.

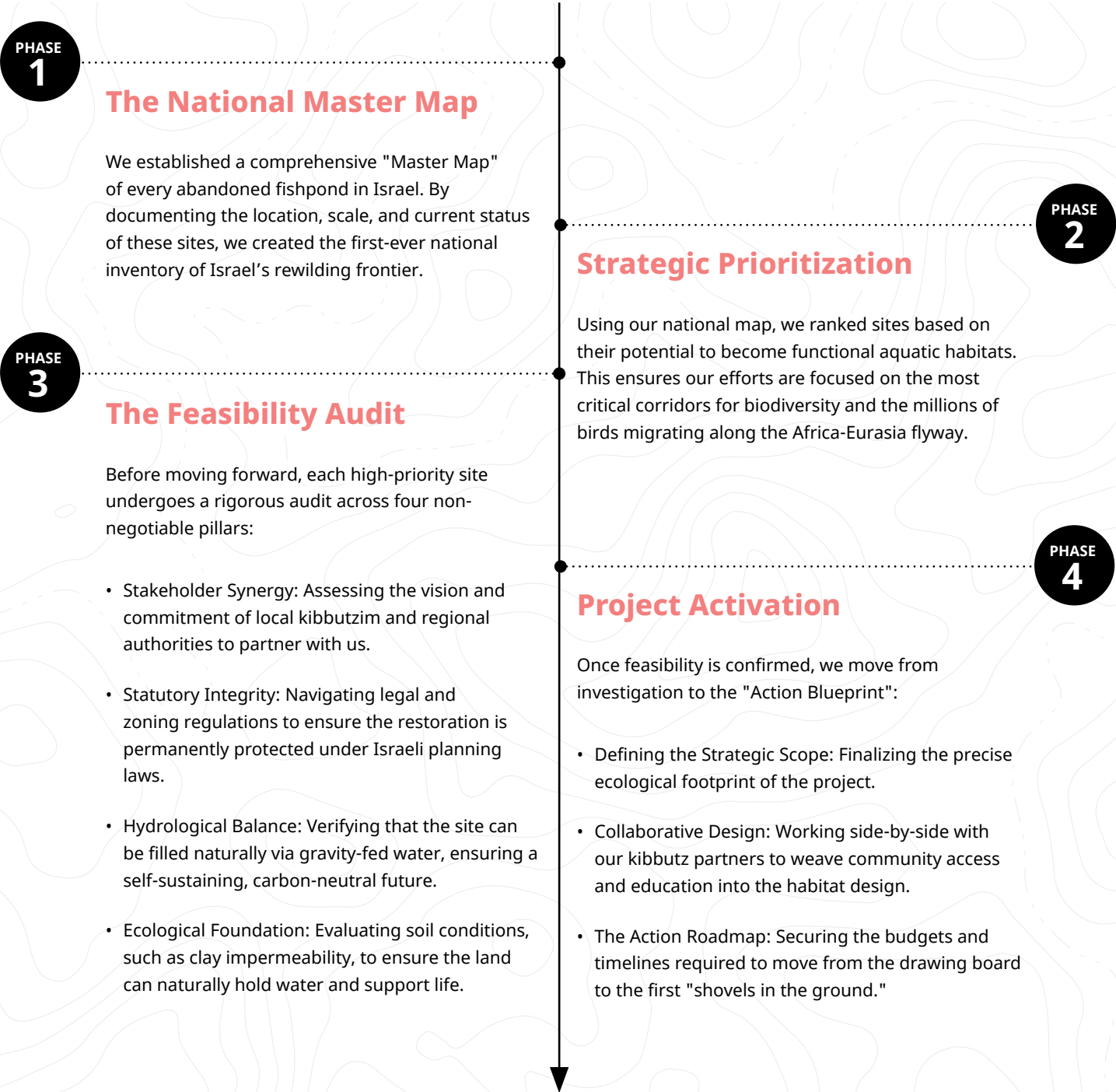
Advancing the Pilot

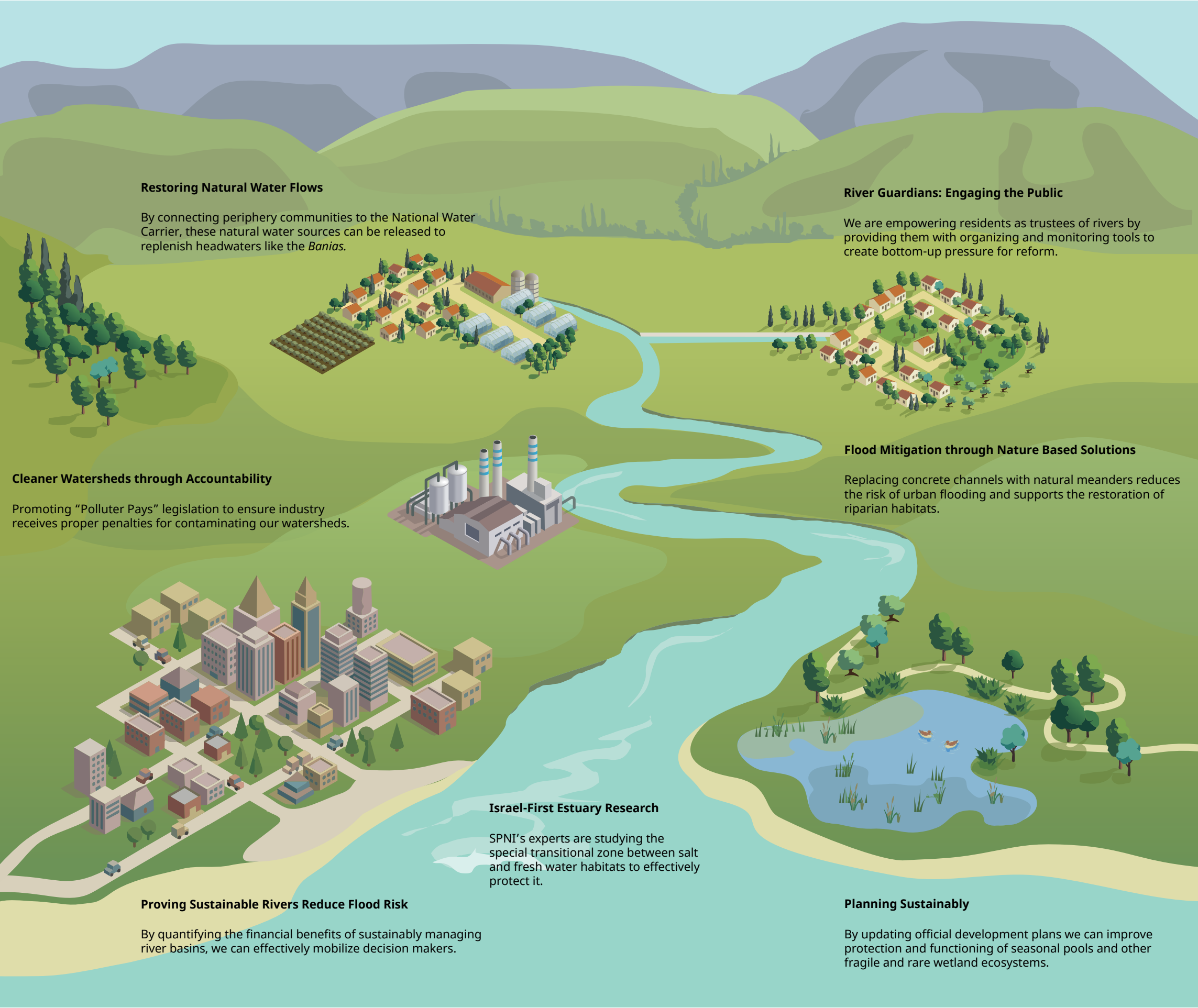
This initiative represents a significant step toward incorporating nature-based solutions into Israel’s national water grid. SPNI is currently working in full partnership with the Drainage Authority on a feasibility study, including exploratory drilling and detailed hydrological assessments. With the Drainage Authority co-funding a third of the research costs, a successful pilot at Mansoura will serve as a national model for sustainable infrastructure development.

Defining the Future of Start-Up Nature

The success of our flagship sites proved a vital concept: with the right approach, Israel’s lost wetlands can be brought back to life. However, to reclaim these habitats at a national scale, we required a rigorous, data-driven strategy to ensure the highest return on investment.

In 2023, SPNI launched a landmark joint venture with the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) to map every abandoned fishpond in the country. Over the last two years, we have invested over \$315,000 into this rigorous process, **ensuring every Start-Up Nature project we initiate will have the highest ecological potential and the greatest chance for long-term success.**





Restoring Israel's Rivers: A Historic Opportunity

A healthy river is the heartbeat of a landscape. When a river is allowed to follow its natural, meandering path, it does more than just move water; it recharges our groundwater, nurtures the soil, and acts as a vital "shock absorber" during extreme weather. **It is nature's most effective defense for our homes and our future.**

Today, over two-thirds of Israel's 600 km river network is in distress. For decades, natural springs were diverted and rainfall was forced into sterile concrete channels, leading to urban flooding and the loss of our most precious habitats. Industrial runoff further stripped these blue arteries of their natural value.

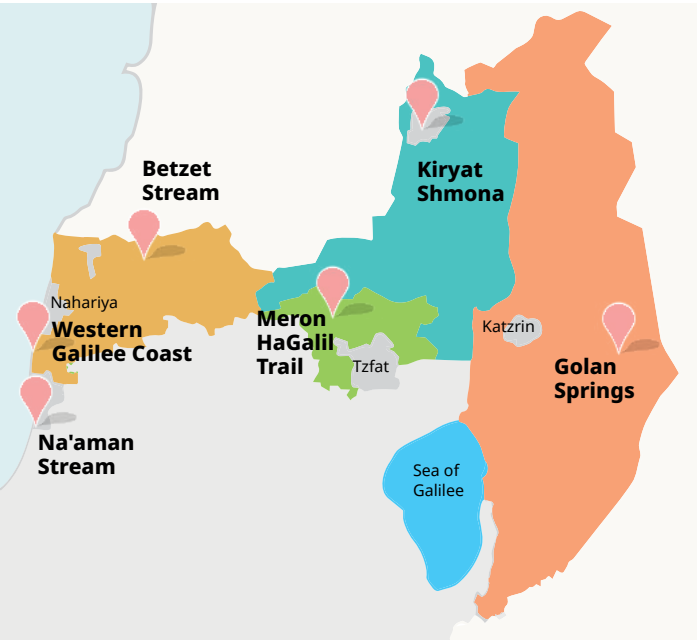
But today, we stand at a historic crossroads. **Israel's "Desalination Revolution" has provided a once-in-a-generation opening to rehabilitate these 600 km of riverbeds.** We aren't just returning water to the land; we are restoring its lifeblood.

In 2025, we witnessed a landmark moment: desalinated water was pumped into the Sea of Galilee for the first time. This proves that the national will to restore our water exists. SPNI is now providing the vision and the expertise to match the political will and ensure that both man and nature will benefit.

Rehabilitating the North: A Strategy for Regional Recovery

Northern Israel is defined by a mosaic of unique ecosystems and natural treasures, from high-altitude springs to coastal saltmarshes, but today, its landscapes stand at a historic crossroads. Compounded by decades of neglect and the craters and scars of missiles and drones, these vital ecosystems require more than just protection — they require a masterplan for recovery.

Working in an official capacity through the JDC-ELKA initiative, SPNI has prepared the definitive roadmap for the ecological and social restoration of the North. This is not just a vision; it is a practical, shovel-ready blueprint created in partnership with local authorities. **As government funding is authorized, we stand ready to begin the vital work of healing the Galilee and the Golan, ensuring that as communities return home to build their lives they return to a landscape that is healthy, vibrant, and resilient.**



Strategic Project Highlights: Ready for Action



Amir Balaban

The Western Galilee: Reclaiming the Northern Coastline

Our masterplan targets the reclamation of 20km of ecologically rich habitat from Rosh HaNikra to Acre. The design secures rare saltmarshes and kurkar ridges by integrating the coastline into the Israel Sea Trail. This project is engineered to balance the protection of endangered species with sustainable local tourism and community stewardship.



Davidi Vardi via PikiWiki

The Merom HaGalil Trail: Connecting Communities to Forests and Springs

This planned 75-kilometer national corridor will link local businesses and multicultural communities—including Druze and Circassian villages—to a rejuvenated landscape of forests and springs. The project is designed to secure the Galilee’s unique identity while providing the robust infrastructure needed for sustainable regional tourism.



David Mami via PikiWiki

Betzet Stream: Restoring the Flow from Mountain to Sea

The blueprint for Nahal Betzet re-establishes a year-round flow to the stream, removing invasive species to reclaim biological integrity from the Galilee Heights to the Mediterranean. This proposal utilizes nature-based solutions to transform the river into a premier public asset for recreation and local guardianship.



Yael Hammerman Solar

Na’aman Stream: A New Green Gateway for the Entire Region

Our plan transforms an 11-kilometer industrial canal into a vibrant natural stream connecting Acre to its rural surroundings. By restoring water quality, the project will reinforce the impact of our existing Start-Up Nature work in the Na’aman saltmarsh, creating a "green gateway" for the entire region.



Maysits Kassif

Kiryat Shmona: A New "Water City" in the "Land of Streams"

We have designed a transformation for Kiryat Shmona into a premier "Water City." By replacing concrete pipes with open, meandering channels, the plan allows the Zahav and Ayun streams to breathe life back into the urban core. A new trail system will link neighborhoods directly to the mountains, boosting the local economy through nature-based tourism.



Rachel Weissler via PikiWiki

Golan Springs: Safeguarding the Golan's Springs

The masterplan establishes a management framework for the Golan’s network of sensitive springs. By addressing agricultural runoff and supporting native wetland species, the project ensures these springs remain thriving biodiversity hotspots that are both ecologically functional and safely accessible to the public.

Cover photo: Common flamingos in Kfar
Ruppin's rainbow pools.

Video: Yuval Dax



החברה להגנת הטבע
The Society for the Protection of
Nature in Israel