

Conservation news

Co-designing pathways to human–giant otter coexistence in the Pantanal

During 10–13 November 2025, 31 representatives from governmental agencies, NGOs, research institutions and local communities met at SESC Pantanal for a participatory workshop on human–giant otter coexistence. Convened as an action of the National Action Plan for the Conservation of the Giant Otter, of the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation, the workshop used the Planning for Coexistence framework (Marchini et al., 2024, *Conservation Science and Practice*, 6, e13082) to co-develop a Theory of Change for the Brazilian Pantanal.

The workshop was aligned with recommendations from the 3rd International Workshop on Giant Otters, organized by the International Giant Otter Alliance and the IUCN Species Survival Commission Otter Specialist Group in February 2025 in Lima, Peru, which strengthened the Alliance network and advanced a Theory of Change-based coexistence plan. The Pantanal meeting contributed by generating locally grounded evidence and implementation pathways that connect national priorities to socio-ecological contexts.

Participants identified five priority human–giant otter interactions: (1) otter mortality from retaliatory killing or accidental capture, (2) competition for fish, space and water, (3) irresponsible wildlife tourism, (4) pathogen transmission between giant otters and domestic animals, and (5) ecotourism, which benefits both people and wildlife. Wildfires and habitat degradation were also recognized as major threats but were not analysed in depth because they are addressed in other components of the National Action Plan.

Participants then mapped underlying drivers and proposed 41 actions and associated products. Implementation will require coordinated efforts among participating institutions and partners, including Projeto Ariranhas, state environmental agencies, Instituto Homem Pantaneiro, Panthera Brasil, SESC Pantanal, Embrapa Pantanal, the Brazilian Association of Aquariums and Zoos, tourism

bodies, universities, research institutes and local enterprises such as Fazenda Barranco Alto.

A central outcome of the workshop was not only the list of actions but the advancement of an innovative planning model that integrates national-level action planning with locally participatory, Theory of Change-based coexistence design. This hybrid approach reinforces the strategic orientation of the National Action Plan for the Conservation of the Giant Otter while facilitating a context-specific process capable of identifying drivers, clarifying pathways of change and strengthening shared accountability. By producing a results chain, the Theory of Change-based method emphasizes outcomes and provides a transparent framework for evaluation and monitoring, supporting more rigorous verification of progress and adaptive decision-making.

The Pantanal workshop contributes directly to the implementation and strengthening of the National Action Plan for the Conservation of the Giant Otter and to the International Giant Otter Alliance-led effort to develop a Theory of Change-based coexistence plan for the species. More broadly, it illustrates how structured, participatory planning can translate national conservation strategies into locally grounded action and strengthen the foundation for coordinated giant otter conservation across the species' range.

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