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# Recovery Update

And Opportunities for  
Continued Support



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## **Panthera Africa: Recovery Update and How You Can Continue to Support**

We would like to sincerely thank you for your patience during this incredibly difficult time. As we continue working through a large backlog of communication following the wildfire, your understanding and support have meant more to us than we can fully express.

### **Background and Context**

On 8 January 2026, a devastating wildfire swept through Panthera Africa Big Cat Sanctuary, causing extensive damage to infrastructure, structures and natural vegetation across our property.

In the immediate aftermath, our priority was clear. The safety and well-being of our animals came first. While the majority of our animals were safely evacuated, our team remained on site under extremely challenging conditions, continuing firefighting efforts for weeks while ensuring that every animal received the care and attention they needed.

Two of our animals, Arabella the tigress and Baguira the lioness, required intensive veterinary care and were transferred to our specialist veterinarian in Pretoria for treatment. We are incredibly grateful to share that they have both since returned home and are now back with us. While they are doing well, they remain in long-term recovery and continue to be closely monitored. Their environment has changed significantly, and it will take time for them to fully settle and adapt.

This experience has profoundly impacted Panthera Africa. While the physical damage is significant, the effect reaches far deeper. It has reshaped our landscape, challenged our operations and deeply affected both our animals and our team. Yet, through it all, our commitment to our animals' care, protection and our project remains unwavering.



## Operational Impact

Beyond the visible damage, the wildfire has had a significant impact on our ability to operate. Since January, we have been unable to host visitors or international volunteers, which form a substantial portion of our primary income.

As a result, we have lost our main revenue streams for the foreseeable future and are currently relying heavily on public support to sustain our daily operations. At this stage, we anticipate remaining closed until at least **August 2026**.

Despite this, our operational and running costs continue. These include:

- daily animal care and feeding, including specialised diets for each animal
- ongoing veterinary care, treatments and essential supplements
- staff salaries for our dedicated on-site team
- fuel and transport for daily operations and emergency needs
- maintenance and repair of camps, fencing, vehicles and infrastructure
- electricity, water and general farm utilities
- security and monitoring systems
- loan, rent and other fixed financial commitments
- ongoing fire prevention and land management efforts

**The financial impact has been considerable.** As an example, the loss of income from having to cancel our volunteer programme until April alone has already exceeded **R500,000**, which is not covered by insurance.

In addition, we currently estimate that the costs related to the evacuation of our animals, emergency veterinary care, months of intensive treatment and the safe return of Arabella and Baguira are close to **R1 million**. These costs fall outside of insurance cover and are still in the process of being fully calculated and finalised. At the same time, we are awaiting the final calculation of total disaster-related costs, as well as clarity from our insurance providers regarding what will be covered.



While there is still uncertainty around the full financial picture, it is already clear that the cost of rebuilding and re-establishing our operations will be substantial.

**Recovery at this scale is not something we can do alone**, and we will continue to rely on the support of our community as we move forward.

## Recovery Progress

Despite these challenges, public support has enabled us to continue moving forward. In the weeks following the fire, our team remained on site under extremely difficult conditions, continuing firefighting efforts for up to three weeks while caring for the seven sanctuary animals and several domestic animals that were at the sanctuary at the time.

Ahead of Arabella and Baguira's return home, we carried out extensive, essential and costly preparation work across the sanctuary before they could come home. While some of the big cat camps were fortunately not directly damaged, significant maintenance and repairs were required across the entire property. This included:

- repairing and maintaining camps and infrastructure
- restoring electrical fencing systems and replacing batteries
- installing cameras and lighting
- restoring security systems
- increasing fire protection

We also had to ensure that their night houses and feeding areas were suitable for their long-term recovery. This included providing hay for their night houses, which needs to be regularly replaced to remain clean and comfortable, as well as planting Kikuyu grass in their feeding camps.

This grass is essential for their comfort and ongoing recovery, while also playing an important role in fire prevention due to its moisture content. Both come at a significant cost, particularly the hay, which requires ongoing replacement.



We remained committed to ensuring that all our animals continued receiving the correct nutrition and care during this time, including those placed with partner sanctuaries. Given the stress and disruption caused by the fire and evacuation, they needed to be provided with food they were familiar with, along with specialised supplements to support their health.

In some cases, this meant incurring additional costs to support our partner sanctuaries by purchasing and transporting specific food and supplements, ensuring continuity in their care, diet and overall well-being of our animals. For context, the cost of purchasing food for our animals and transporting it by truck to a partner sanctuary can be approximately **R60,000** per time.

### **The Road Ahead**

While we have made meaningful progress, the road ahead remains long.

We continue to operate without our primary income streams, while still carrying the ongoing costs of running a sanctuary, even if currently on a reduced scale. To give context, it typically costs us around **R500,000** each month to operate when caring for our full population of 26 sanctuary animals. Even with fewer animals on site, these costs remain significant, as the core needs of a sanctuary remain unchanged.

Our recovery is not only about rebuilding what was lost, but about stabilising operations, supporting the ongoing wellbeing of our animals and strengthening our infrastructure for the future.

We are still awaiting confirmation of total losses and clarity on insurance coverage. However, it is already evident that the scale of recovery required is considerable, and that continued public support will be essential as we move forward.



## Current Recovery Needs and the Impact of Public Support

As we move into the next phase of our recovery, several key areas requiring urgent support have been identified. These needs are practical and immediate, and directly linked to animal welfare, our daily operations and the long-term sustainability of the sanctuary.

### Urgent Needs

#### Grass Seed Donations (planting deadline May 2026)

One of our most urgent priorities is planting grass seeds across **approximately six hectares** of land before the May planting window closes, particularly within our big cat enclosures and feeding camps.

We are specifically looking for Kikuyu grass for our feeding camps, if possible, as it provides soft, padded ground cover that improves comfort for our cats, while also supporting fire management due to its moisture content.

**Your impact:** *By supporting this need, you help us maintain stable and suitable ground conditions within our enclosures, improve day-to-day conditions for our animals and support practical fire management efforts.*



#### Deep Cycle Batteries for Big Cat Enclosures (needed before winter, June 2026)

Our electrical fence systems rely on energisers powered by 105Ah deep-cycle batteries. These generate short, high-voltage pulses through the fence lines, delivering a brief deterrent shock.

While not harmful, this shock effectively prevents animals from approaching or breaching the fences, ensuring they remain safely contained while also protecting staff and, when we reopen, our visitors and volunteers.

With reduced sunlight during the winter months, additional battery capacity is essential to maintain consistent and reliable power at all times.

Each battery costs:

- approximately **R3,000**
- Based on current estimates, up to 20 batteries are required, bringing the total to **R60,000**
- While a full assessment is still underway, there is an urgent need to begin replacing units as soon as possible to reduce risk.

**Please note:** Several of our current batteries are beginning to fail due to age and ongoing wear, with possible additional impact from recent fire-related conditions. As they deteriorate, they lose their ability to hold a charge, directly affecting the performance and reliability of the fence system and increasing safety risks for both animals and staff. Our fencing systems must meet government-regulated standards set by the Department of Agriculture, and this type of replacement falls under general wear and tear and is not covered by insurance.

**Your impact:** *Your support ensures the timely replacement of these batteries, helping us remain compliant and maintain safe, fully operational enclosures. It will also play a vital role in helping us rebuild and move towards reopening our sanctuary.*



### **Construction Support for 8 x Big Cat Night Houses & Water Systems (urgent)**

We are working towards rebuilding eight fire-proof big cat night houses to support the long-term safety, care and management of our animals.

Approximate costs and breakdowns per night house (please note we are currently securing quotes for the excluded items):

- R80,000 - R100,000 per unit (foundation, walls and roof only)
- R100,000 has already been secured towards the foundations only

This estimate excludes:

- metal drop gates, crush systems and doors
- water bowls
- metal piping and taps
- painting (internal and external)
- water sprinkler systems, portable pumps and flow tanks

**Please note:** At present, water sprinkler systems for our big cat enclosures are a key priority. If we are able to extend these systems across the sanctuary, it will further support our day-to-day operations and strengthen our ability to respond effectively in the event of fire.

**Your impact:** *Your support provides safe, secure and durable shelter for our animals, improving their safety while strengthening the infrastructure that supports effective day-to-day management. It also enhances our ability to respond across key areas, particularly during extreme or emergency situations such as wildfires.*



### **Metal Water Pipes (urgent)**

Our existing plastic water pipes, buried up to two metres underground, were damaged during the fire. We are now in urgent need of durable metal piping to replace them across the sanctuary. These systems are essential for the day-to-day running of the sanctuary, as well as supporting fire preparedness and management.

**Your impact:** *You help us build a more reliable and durable water system that supports daily operations and strengthens our emergency readiness.*

### **Additional Long-Term Needs**

#### **Workwear for Our On-Site Team**

Our team continues to work in physically demanding and often extreme conditions. Durable, high-quality workwear is essential to protect them from the elements and the nature of the work.

**Your impact:** *You support the people who care for our animals every day, enabling them to work safely, comfortably and effectively.*

#### **Firefighting Gear and Protective Clothing**

Fire preparedness remains a priority, as fire risk continues to be part of our operating environment.

**Your impact:** *You help protect our team and strengthen our ability to respond quickly and safely in the event of future fires.*

#### **Indigenous Trees**

Planting indigenous trees will form part of managing the sanctuary environment and replacing vegetation lost in the fires.

**Your impact:** *You support ongoing site management and contribute to maintaining a functional and balanced environment within the sanctuary.*



## Your Impact

Supporting Panthera Africa means more than helping us recover. It means helping us move forward to a place where we can once again operate sustainably and independently.

Your support will:

- ensure continued expert care for our animals
- support the day-to-day running of the sanctuary
- strengthen essential infrastructure and systems
- support our dedicated team on the ground
- improve our preparedness for future challenges
- help us move towards reopening and re-establishing our core income streams

This has been one of the most emotional and challenging chapters we have ever faced. In moments like these, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, but your kindness and your willingness to stand beside us have reminded us of something essential and powerful - we are not alone. In fact, we are immensely supported and have a massive human pride walking this purposeful path with us.

Every single act of kindness matters. Whether it is a donation, a helping hand, or simply sharing our story, each contribution is helping us rebuild, piece by piece, and giving us the motivation, courage and fuel to rise again.

You are part of our Pride. Because of you, we have strength. Because of you, we have stability. And because of you, we are able to keep moving forward with hope.

If you are able to support, or even just share this update with your network, it would mean more than words can express. By helping us reach further, you are opening doors to the people and partnerships that will carry us into the next chapter.

*Together, we rise.*

With sincere thanks and gratitude,



Co-Founders

Panthera Africa Big Cat Sanctuary