MEP July 2024 Report

Registration is now open for the 2024 UltraMARAthon. Taking place on November 23, this 50-km race can be run solo or in teams of two or four. Your entry fee will support rangers, Africa Mission Services, and MEP.

GENERAL

Mara Elephant Project's conservation drone program is a sought-after resource for other organizations looking to learn best practices for deploying drones to support conservation efforts. In July, MEP assisted the Mara Hyena Project by deploying drones to locate and monitor hyena dens in the Mara Triangle. Recent rains have made locating the dens difficult but with drones hard-to-access areas are easy to locate and monitor. The Mara Hyena Project team then joined MEP at headquarters for additional drone and EarthRanger demonstrations. Collaborative efforts promote a healthy ecosystem and foster enhanced approaches that benefit the wildlife and communities in the Mara.

SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

It's been a year since the MEP 'Lima' ranger team was deployed in the high-conflict area of Mosiro. Recruited from the community, the men and women that makeup MEP's ninth ranger team continue to mitigate conflict, deter habitat destruction, and monitor elephants to promote coexistence. They've received advanced training to deploy new tools like drones to support their

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efforts and continue to rely on MEP's partners to increase security for both wildlife and communities.

The MEP / Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mau De-Snaring Units alongside partners Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Kenya Forest Service, and the Bongo Surveillance Project (BSP) have been patrolling the Mau Forest to deter poaching and habitat destruction. In the month of July, they removed a total of 100 snares inside the Mau Forest. Snares are prevalent in the Mau Forest as poachers target small animals for subsistence and commercial use. The two teams are working alongside our partners to ensure that the Mau Forest, the lifeblood of the Mara, is protected.

Collared elephant Fitz and his herd of over 100 individuals reside in the Nyakweri Forest, an area with a high level of deforestation pushing the elephants into bordering communities and creating increased conflict. The MEP "Golf" ranger team is permanently stationed in this area to protect Fitz and his herd and promote coexistence. Tracked by KWS, the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI), and MEP since 2019, Fitz's movements inform real-time responses to conflict and provide insights on movements, or lack thereof, of this herd that calls this forest home. In an effort to maintain this protection, Fitz was re-collared on July 9 with support from KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge. The MEP helicopter was a vital tool used to move Fitz out of a dense portion of the forest and into an open space where he was fitted with a new solar Savannah Tracking collar. The Angama Foundation has supported Fitz's protection since the beginning and we're extremely grateful for their partnership in protecting this elephant herd.

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MEP joined the Wildlife Ranger Challenge organized by Tusk Trust and the Game Rangers Association of Africa. In mid-July, MEP rangers took part in the time trial challenge, a 2.4 km time trial run where rangers test their limits and gauge their physical fitness. The two MEP teams comprising both male and female rangers participated and placed admirably. Africa's rangers are increasingly stretched as they continue to protect wildlife, support communities, enhance critical research, and so much more. MEP is taking part in the #WildlifeRangerChallenge this year to raise awareness of the crucial role our rangers play.

Collared elephant Ivy is well known for her clever crop-raiding behaviors earning her the title 'crop-a-holic'. She's one of KWS, WRTI and MEP's longest continually tracked elephants, and her movements have not only informed real-time mitigation but also provided new insights into elephant crop-raiding behavior to inform long-term intervention approaches. On July 13, MEP, Enoonkishu Conservancy, and Mbokishi Conservancy rangers joined KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge to deploy a new Savannah Tracking solar collar on Ivy. The MEP helicopter was used to move Ivy into a clearing and keep her herd at a safe distance. After she received her new hardware, she rejoined her herd, and their movements will continue to be tracked 24/7 to promote coexistence with the communities she lives alongside.

Overall, in July, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested 26 habitat destruction suspects. They removed 101 snares, confiscated 84 pieces of timber, destroyed 26 charcoal kilns, and mitigated 45 conflict incidents. In July, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,546.17 km on foot and 5,326.86 km by car in the GME.

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HELICOPTER

On July 9, the MEP helicopter was in the air to support the KWS vets with the SWT Vet Units on the ground with a treatment in the Mara Triangle. KWS vets Dr. Njoroge and Dr. Asuka treated a bull elephant with a tumor in his left eye. After treatment, he was back on his feet and rangers will remain on the ground to monitor him as he recovers. Partnerships are essential in safeguarding wildlife and MEP is working closely with other partners in the landscape to make this a reality.

The MEP helicopter was involved in three different collaring operations in the month of July. Two elephants, Fitz and Ivy, were both re-collared and a new individual in the Olderkesi area identified as Individual 6554 were all fitted with new Savannah Tracking solar-powered collars. Their movements will continue to be tracked 24/7 to promote coexistence with the communities they live alongside.

DRONES FOR CONSERVATION

Special Projects Manager's Update

The month of July has been particularly challenging due to increased crop raiding. As crops ripen, there has been a noticeable increase in conflict caused by elephants, particularly in regions with large-scale farms. This month, MEP drone pilots have been actively responding to the escalation in conflicts caused by elephants extending their movements towards Nkorikori, an area with substantial agricultural activity and dense human settlement.

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With the wildebeest migration approaching the Mara, a significant number of wildebeests have been crossing the border into the Mara Triangle. This migration has, in turn, pushed larger herds of elephants towards the Siria Escarpment, resulting in increased crop raiding in Transmara. We deployed two teams equipped with drones to manage the conflict in the area. The 'Golf' team has been on daily patrols, focusing on a particular herd near Partakila.

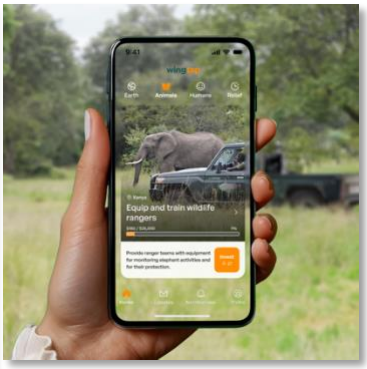
In July, MEP rangers from HQ responded to a bull elephant that was causing problems in community lands. They acted as a barrier both on the ground and in the air to protect the elephants and people living in these bomas.

Looking ahead to August, we plan to begin photographing and counting livestock inside bomas in the Mara North Conservancy. Our goal is to cover 35 bomas in the Mara North region by the end of the month. Additionally, we have successfully tracked several of our collared elephants in the Greater Mara Ecosystem this month. We monitored six collared elephants—Matali, Polaris, Kiambi, Ivy, David, and Fred—using drones.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

In July, MEP celebrated World Ranger Day and several members of our support staff joined their ranger colleagues on patrol to demonstrate their commitment to supporting their protection efforts. They also hand delivered the over 200 thank you messages from our donors across the world. Below is an excerpt of one of the messages we received.

"Thank you for the amazing work you are doing every day in the field! It is very obvious, that this is not just a job for you, but indeed your passion and labor of love for the elephants, the people, and the environment of the Mara! It is truly a gift to have you!" **Beate Assmuth-Ong**



Also, in July, MEP launched our recurring donor club. You can now join the MEP herd by setting up your monthly donation today and receiving your official herd membership pin. You can have more impact on the protection of elephants by committing to regular support. You can now find MEP on Wingtap. A new app designed to make giving to your favorite charity even easier. Download the app and follow along to receive updates on our work and help us reach our goal.

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Mara Elephant Project Trust in Kenya received $36,875 in donations in July. Thank you to Jeffrey Wu, Asilia Kenya Ltd, Basecamp Explorer Foundation – Kenya, and Bea Wanjiru for your support. Mara Elephant Project USA received $166,184.27 in support of MEP's efforts. Thank you to the Sandra Bush, Karen & Steven Petak, Mark Pahuta, the Ann & Gordon Getty Foundation, Claire Goldstein, Eric & Brianna Selness, James Clement, Anthony Gramer, Sandra Atlas Bass, Vincent Foglia, Gregory Grinder, Carmen Cappadona, Elizabeth Peyton, Curtis Collins, Jerre Gresly, Nancy Munn, Darlene Brown, Mary Keefe, Martin Schuler, Karen Kehoe, Peter Farrell, Marcia Donley, Mavourneen Leeper, M Procter, Barbara Tuchi, and William Van Buren for your support. We also received a donation from Space X after they recently visited MEP in the Mara to see how we're using StarLink for more reliable high-speed internet.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Deputy Director's Update

July was marked by significant meetings and activities focused on project planning, equipment procurement, training evaluations, and collaborative work plans. Some of the key activities included participating in the NASA Grant Rollout Meeting to discuss objectives and timelines and submitting a detailed equipment request for the GDA project to ensure efficient implementation.

We also led a review meeting to evaluate the Training of Trainers program, focusing on lessons learned and improvements. MEP attended a GDA MEL meeting with MMWCA, emphasizing accurate data collection and evaluation methods, and participated in a research department meeting to discuss ongoing projects and resource allocation.

Other notable activities involved finalizing and sending letters to the Fran Duthie scholarship finalists, drafting the second-year work plan for the GDA project, and delivering an engaging presentation on the SFS program at Sekenani. These activities have collectively advanced our projects and laid the groundwork for future success.

Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) Team

In July, the team made a presentation at Encounter Asilia Mara Camp as part of MEP's Visitor Program.

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The team camped at Ol-Kinyei Conservancy for two weeks as part of their comprehensive recording of elephant sightings for the ongoing data collection. In the month of July, they observed a total of 55 individuals, with 5 new individuals identified and 29 individuals reidentified. One key individual the team sighted was collared bull Kiambi, one of the longest-tracked individuals.

Data and Reporting Team

The team led by Francis made several changes to the field forms to facilitate the data analysis process and generated maps and tables for the Mau teams for the period from January 1, 2024, to June 30, 2024. Furthermore, they produced a data summary of all events and patrols collected in the past six months. Lastly, the team had the opportunity to host guests from the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association (MMWCA). During the visit, the team made a presentation to illustrate how our organization uses the EarthRanger platform to collect data, analyze, and create reports that are data-driven in monitoring and conservation of the Greater Mara Ecosystem.

In July, a total number of four grids were visited and completed and a significant number of roads and physical features were marked by Field Assistant Milton. The head of Geospatial Data, Eugene summarised this month's data as depicted in the image below.

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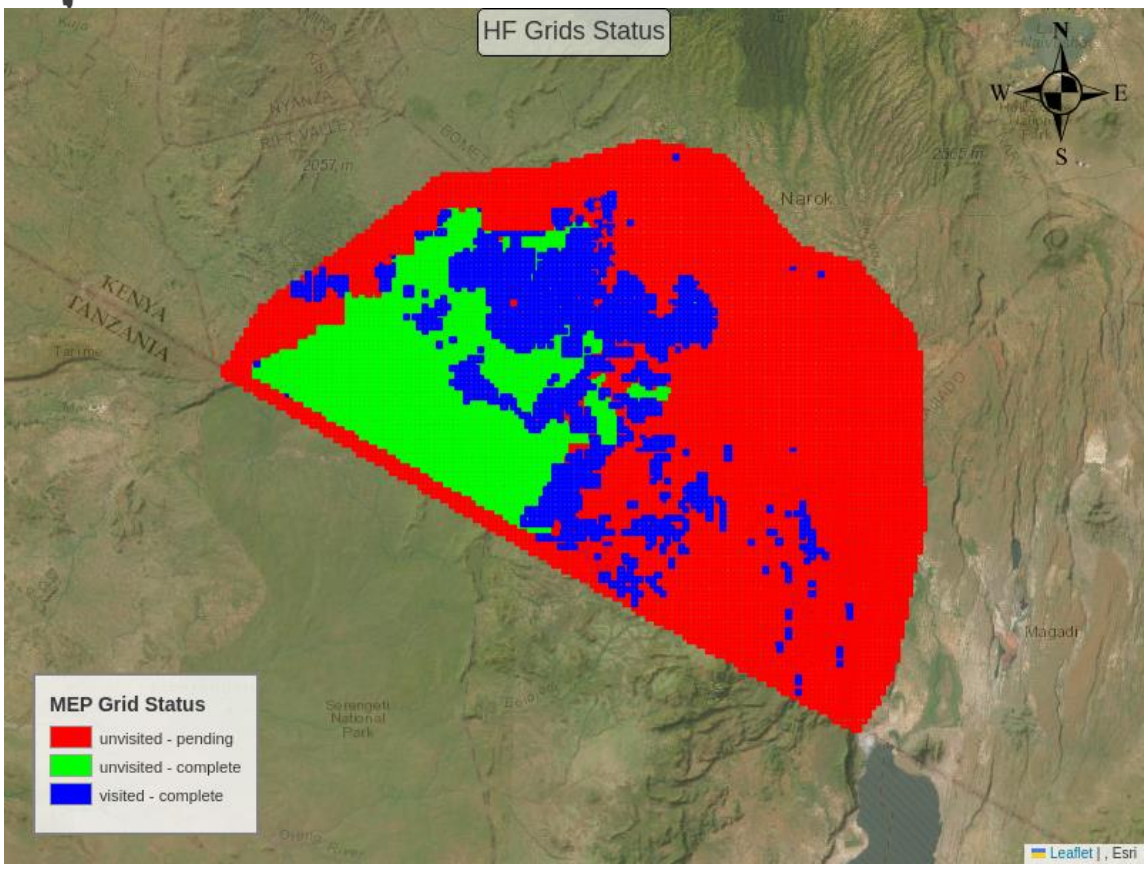

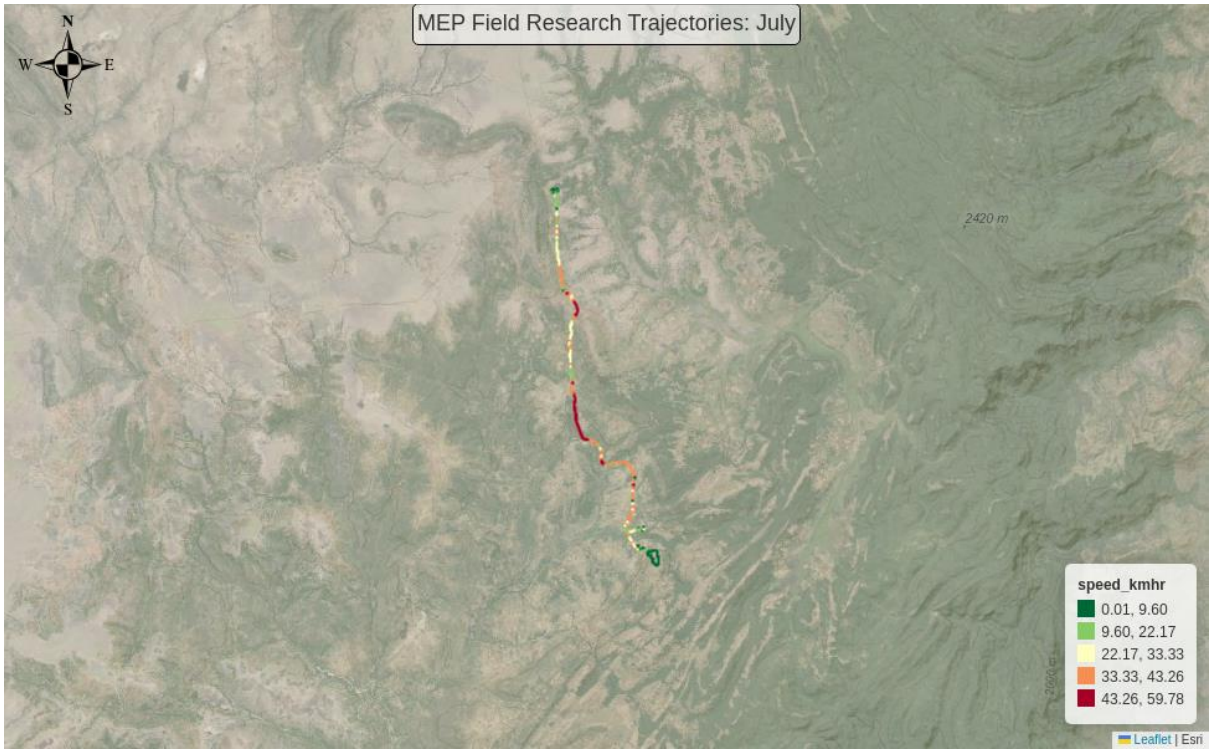

Movements of MEP's one field assistant in July. All of our field assistants are working on mapping fences, roads, and landcover ground-truthing points using motorbikes and our TerraChart app. They covered a total of 58.12 Km and recorded 11.2 km of fences and 0 LCC points in July.

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MEP Co-Existence Farm
General Update

The coexistence project has continued its impact in the community through the women's kitchen garden training and the conservation school club activities. In July, we reached a total of 847 students in the five schools we are working with. They include Ormeoshi, Enkipai, Nabulu, Kileleoni, and Emarti primary schools. The activity with the support of MEP took place countrywide on National Read Aloud Day, and the Learners were provided with 20 books that highlighted the importance of education and conservation in the communities, a reminder that conservation education should conserve our habitat through the creation of agents of change.

We received another batch of the long-awaited seedlings of citriodora (Globulus) from Kutoka Ardhini, great collaborators in the market experiment. We have hippos visiting the farm, and due to the circular setup, they have rarely entered the plots. Late in July, we also had two elephants visiting the farm and they transversed the rosemary plots, but zero predation was observed. They later predated on two acres of maize on the neighboring farms.

From right: Elephant and Hippo footprints in the farm.

Figures 1,2,3, & 4: Chili, Citriodora, Tea tree, and Rosemary crops plots doing well.

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Climate Report

Table 2: 1 MEP's Experimental Farm Rainfall Recording July 2024

Date	Rain gauge 2 (200m2)
2024_07_14	12

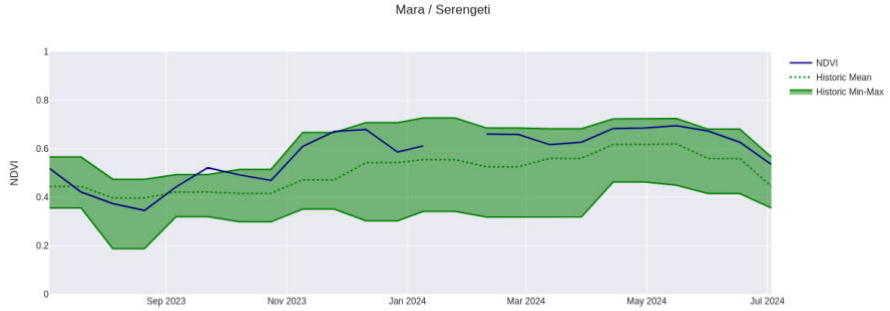
Tracking Manager Report

From top to bottom; Collared elephants Ivy, Kiambi, Polaris, and Lolotoo were all sighted by MEP rangers in the month of July.

ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a measure of plant photosynthetic activity. Higher NDVI indicates the plant is greener. The blue trend line shows the current value while the green shaded area shows the min-max range of values centered around the green trend line from values measured back to February 2000.

Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



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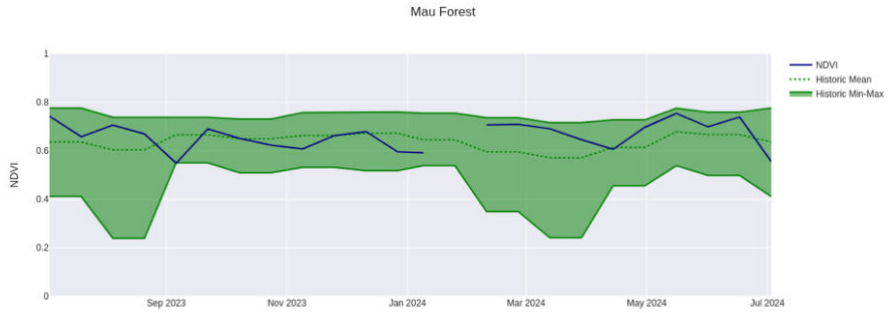
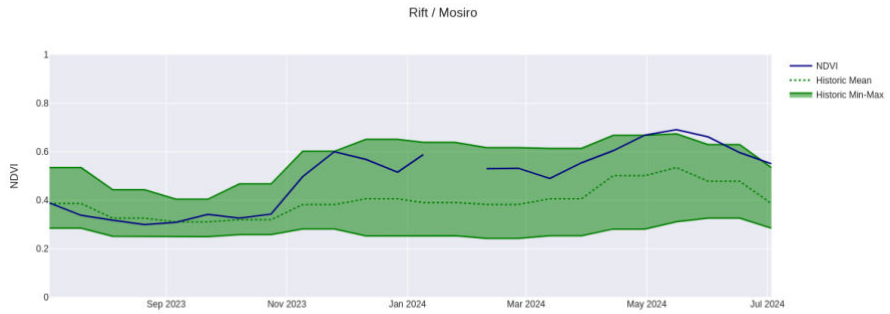
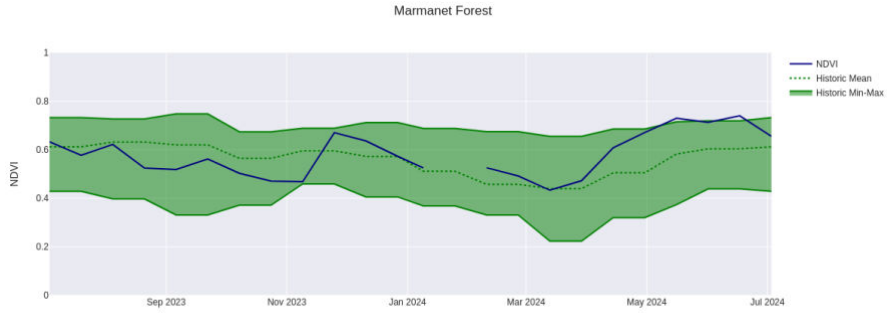
Mau Forest



Rift Valley / Mosiro



Marmanet Forest



Nyakweri Forest

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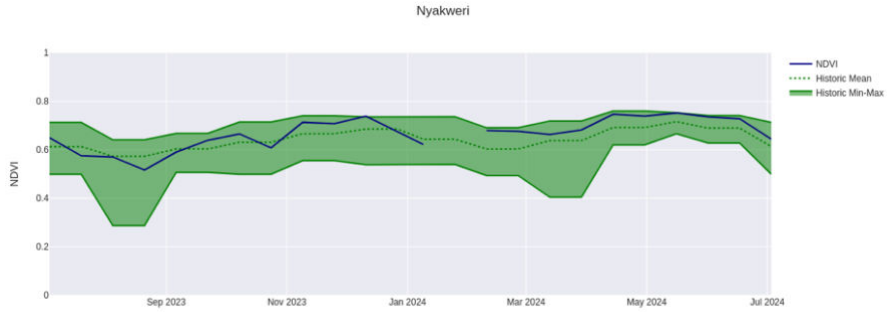
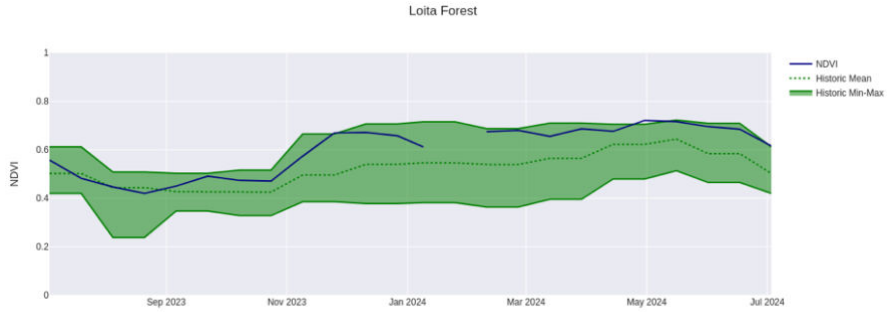


Loita Forest



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