

Harbin Consensus on Strengthening Cooperation in Transboundary Conservation of tigers and leopards

Tigers and leopards are flagship species of biodiversity conservation in Asia. They play an irreplaceable role in maintaining ecosystem balance and are regarded as important carriers of ecological culture. In order to promote conservation of tigers and leopards, the Forum organized by the National Forestry and Grassland Administration of P.R. China and hosted by the Northeast Forestry University with support of 14 organizations listed in the Annex, was held in Harbin of China during July 27-30, 2019. Over 300 representatives and experts from 19 countries and 12 international organizations attended the Forum.

The Forum reviewed efforts, progress, challenges and achievements in conservation and cooperation of tigers and leopards over the past decade. Key topics included scientific methodologies for monitoring and restoration of big cats and their habitats, human-wildlife conflicts, technical and scientific standards, allocation of landscape resources and common areas for their transboundary conservation. Based on discussions and suggestions during the plenary and parallel sessions, a consensus on the transboundary conservation of tigers and leopards is reached as follows:

I. Strengthening the transboundary conservation of tigers and leopards and their habitats is of great significance to the recovery of global tiger and leopard populations.

(1) The tiger and leopard populations distributed in transboundary areas account for a significant proportion of global total. To effectively conserve tigers and leopards, it is critical to promote transboundary cooperation, for instance, by connecting fragmented habitats and ensuring gene exchange across the border to maintain or even increase genetic diversity of tigers and leopards.

(2) The overall conservation of tigers and leopards and their habitats in transboundary areas can be only realized when all range countries engage in cooperation mechanisms and implement common conservation actions.

(3) National and international organizations can play important roles to promote information exchange, improve scientific methodologies and harmonize scientific assessments and policies in the process of enhancing transboundary cooperation among governments and conservation agencies.

II. There are many challenges and difficulties in the conservation and restoration of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats in transboundary areas.

(1) The level of financial contribution is still not sufficient to support conservation of

tiger and leopard populations and their habitats in transboundary areas to the fullest while capacity building should be strengthened further.

(2) In some transboundary areas, free migration of tigers and leopards is facing challenges. This hinders genetic exchange among the populations.

(3) Scientific monitoring and assessment methodologies for tigers and leopards and their habitats in transboundary areas need to be coordinated in order to ensure credibility and consistency.

(4) There is a lack of effective transboundary mechanisms to facilitate communication and information sharing, which hinders timely implementation of joint conservation actions.

(5) Insufficient and delayed compensation for damages and losses caused by human-wildlife conflicts undermines support for conservation from local residents.

(6) Poaching, illegal trade and habitat destruction remain a problem.

(7) Ecosystem services provided by tigers and leopards have not been fully understood and tiger- and leopard-compatible livelihoods need to be explored and established.

III. Efforts of the past decade have effectively promoted the transboundary conservation of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats.

(1) Range countries have made significant efforts in the conservation of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats. These mainly include: drawing up national strategies/plans for tiger and leopard conservation; promoting the implementation of *Global Tiger Recovery Program*; improving relevant laws, regulations and policies; increasing financial support; expanding and integrating habitat conservation system by establishment of protected areas, especially national parks and nature reserves; carrying out survey and monitoring as well as field patrol and promoting protection of natural forests. These efforts could promote the growth of the tiger and leopard populations and improve their habitats.

(2) National and international organizations and research institutions have given strong support to the conservation of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats, including their backing and participation in the implementation of “Global Tiger Recovery Program” and national plans for tiger and leopard conservation, promoting of communication and information sharing of conservation technology and experience from all parties, launching extensive public education programs, and capacity building programs for conservation agencies, playing a significant role.

(3) The crackdown on illegal activities has been significantly enhanced and produced

remarkable results. The relevant governments have significantly promoted joint law enforcement efforts among source, transit and destination countries on curtailing illegal activities such as poaching of tigers and leopards and smuggling of their products by improving the coordination mechanism, strengthening information sharing with international organizations and enhancing capacity building.

(4) Public awareness in various countries, especially among local residents of tiger and leopard range areas, has been improved. Through active cooperation, various kinds of publicity and education programs are carried out by governments and non-governmental organizations for the public, transportation industry and the market. Especially those activities in communities around tiger and leopard range areas, have effectively enhanced awareness of the public and relevant industries on tiger and leopard conservation, promoted good will towards conservation, and promoted “multi-party collaboration for common conservation actions”.

IV. Recovery of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats in transboundary areas requires sustained and collaborative actions from all stakeholders.

(1) To strengthen conservation of tiger and leopard habitats in transboundary areas. It is critical to restore habitats of tigers and leopards and develop transboundary ecological corridors by establishing national parks or nature reserves in transboundary areas at level of landscape. Fragmented habitats shall be connected to ensure free migration and inhabitation of tiger and leopard populations and their prey across the border in the landscape.

(2) To improve information sharing, communication and coordination. Multi stakeholder platforms shall be strengthened to ensure information sharing in a timely and comprehensive manner and to implement joint scientific assessment. Platform members may include, but not limited to, competent government departments, research institutions, academia, international organizations and non-governmental organizations; and topics may include, but not limited to, status of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats in transboundary area, environmental pollution, ecological destruction and forest fires, scientific assessment on tiger and leopard populations, habitat conditions and various threat factors at level of landscape.

(3) To harmonize technical standards for scientific monitoring and habitat restoration. Databases and gene banks for tigers and leopards are encouraged to be established. Communication mechanisms should be improved to facilitate academic exchanges and develop unified technical standards for scientific monitoring and habitat restoration, with an aim to ensure the versatility and compatibility of the data, an accurate assessment on the dynamics of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats as well as trend of threat factors at level of landscape for more effective conservation actions.

(4) To strengthen law enforcement cooperation and information exchange in transboundary areas. Capacity-building of local law enforcement agencies should be enhanced, the communication and information exchange among local law enforcement agencies in transboundary areas should be improved, and if necessary, joint law enforcement actions should be encouraged, to maintain the ecological integrity of tiger and leopard populations and their habitats.

(5) To respond effectively to the challenge of human-wildlife conflicts. The relevant parties will actively exchange and promote experiences and measures in effectively responding to the challenge of human-wildlife conflicts; consider a compensation scheme; minimize any losses of local residents arising from tiger and leopard conservation; and maintain their enthusiasm to get involved in and support conservation.

(6) To actively explore eco-friendly ways of production and livelihood. Efforts should be made to explore an eco-friendly production and livelihood suitable for the range area of tigers and leopards, and promote it through ecological education and experience so as to increase the benefits of local residents from the conservation of tigers and leopards and realize the coordinated and sustainable development of tiger and leopard conservation and local communities.

(7) To mobilize social forces to support and participate in the transboundary conservation of tigers and leopards. Great endeavors should be made to enhance collaboration and cooperation of all parties including governments, private sectors, research institutions, national and international organizations and non-governmental organizations and to make full use of their influence for wider public ecological awareness, to reduce demand for illegal products and to carry out joint actions.

Annex

Support organizations:

Beijing Normal University (NFGA Monitoring and Research Center for Amur
Tiger and Amur Leopard)

Forestry and Grassland Administration of Heilongjiang Province

Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park Administration

China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA)

China Green Foundation (CGF)

China Green Carbon Foundation (CGCF)

Guangdong Chimelong Flora and Fauna Conservation Foundation (CLF)

North-East Asian Sub-regional Programme for Environmental Cooperation
(NEASPEC)

International Society of Zoological Sciences (ISZS)

World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC)

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

WildAid