

**UNITED NATIONS**

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

Seventeenth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

20-21 December 2012

Chengdu, China

**REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

(Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda)

**Development of the Cooperation Mechanisms for Nature Conservation in  
Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia**

*Note by the secretariat*

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## I. OVERVIEW AND OUTCOME OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

1. In accordance with NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy adopted by the 12<sup>th</sup> Senior Officials Meeting (2007), the SOM-14 approved a project entitled “Establishing Coordination Mechanisms for Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia”. The project aims to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation for nature conservation in transboundary areas in North-East Asia. Particularly, the project was expected to develop a framework for transboundary cooperation mechanism in the Lower Tumen River basin encompassing parts of China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Russian Federation.

2. With the budget of US\$ 198,170 (US\$ 48,170 from the Core Fund and US\$ 150,000 from the Government of the Russian Federation), the project facilitated major stakeholders to exchange information and discuss joint activities by holding the following meetings:

- Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia on 2-4 November 2010 in Hunchun, China
- Review Meeting and Field Training on Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia on 21-23 July 2012 in Vladivostok, Russian Federation
- International Workshop on the Conservation and Restoration of Endangered Species’ Habitats in North-East Asia (a side event of the World Conservation Congress) on 10 September 2012 in Jeju, Republic of Korea

3. The EGM in 2010 held in collaboration with the State Forestry Administration of China reviewed existing cooperation mechanisms on nature conservation in transboundary areas, sharing experience from Dauria International Protected Area and Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve. More importantly, the meeting collected recommendations for effective management of protected areas in transboundary areas which are good references to potential mechanisms for strengthening transboundary cooperation in the Lower Tumen River areas.

4. The review meeting and field training were held in collaboration with the Far East Office of WWF Russia to review the current situation of bilateral cooperation between China and Russia on scientific research and policy measures to enhance joint efforts to protect tigers and leopards and their habitats. During the meeting, the Secretariat proposed to develop the *NEASPEC Partnership for Tiger and Leopard Conservation* as a key recommendation of the NEASPEC Project on Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia. In addition, the two day field trip to tiger habitat in Orlinoye hunting estate provided an opportunity for Chinese and Russian experts to identify shared methods and indicators for monitoring Amur tigers and Amur leopards.

5. The International Workshop on the Conservation and Restoration of Endangered Species’ Habitats in North-East Asia, which was jointly organized by the Korean Society

for Environment and Ecology (KESS) and NEASPEC to review the status and protection policies for migratory birds, in particular, cranes and black-faced spoonbills, which are flagship species identified by the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy. Based on the review, the Meeting discussed the need to coordinate close collaboration among protected areas that serve as key habitats of the species. In this regard, the Meeting came to a conclusion on the need to establish the North-East Asia Ecological Network (NEA Eco-Net) as an action-oriented network among key habitats in the subregion. The detailed proposal for the Network is attached as Annex III “Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Species for NEA Eco-network with special emphasis on Cranes and Black-faced Spoonbills”.

6. Through the meetings, and national research and consultations, the project produced “the Review of Environmental, Socioeconomic and Institutional Conditions and Experiences in Multi-/Bilateral Cooperation on Nature Conservation for the Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia” in collaboration with Chinese national experts and the Russian implementing agency, the Center for International Project. Based on outcomes of the Review and recommendations collected during EGM and consultations with experts, the project also produced “A cooperation framework for the conservation of the Amur tiger and Amur leopard in the Tumen River Area” for the consideration and decision by the SOM-17.

## **II. REVIEW OF NATURE CONSERVATION IN TRANSBOUNDARY AREAS IN NORTH-EAST ASIA**

### **A. National Programmes and Policies**

7. Currently, Jilin Province has 32 forest reserves which are also major habitats for Amur tigers and Amur leopards. In fact, traces of tigers and leopards have been found in 4 districts over the past few years. In order to prevent habitat fragmentation and decrease in preys, Jilin Forestry Bureau plans to expand present tiger and leopard protection areas to cover 10 forestry protected districts. In addition, ecological corridors will also be developed to link these districts to facilitate migration of tigers and leopards.

8. In April 2012, Jilin Province completed a project plan on “Amur Tiger and Leopard Protection and Habitats Development in Changbai Mountain”. This Plan emphasizes on restoring habitats, sustaining instant wild population, and increasing ungulate resources in Changbai Mountain area. The Plan aims to restore 1.2 million hectare habitats and develop ecological corridors covering 100,000 hectares along borders of China, Russia and DPRK. In the plan, the population of Amur tigers and leopards is expected to be doubled (15-20 individuals) by 2022 and settled female tigers are expected to increase to 5 individuals.

9. In 2012, the Wangqing Nature Reserve in Jilin Province was approved to be upgraded to a national level reserve. Wangqing Nature Reserve was first established as a provincial reserve in 2002 to protect the forest ecological system. Over the past few years, increasing evidence showed that Wangqing has become an important habitat for Amur tigers and Amur leopards. More importantly, Wangqing locates at a vital place where embraces the largest connected network of habitat patches. This region covers the closest points to source populations of Amur tigers and Amur leopards in the Russian Far-East. It also has the capacity to hold the largest number of tigers in the greater Changbai Mountain landscape. Thus, the National Wangqing Nature Reserve which covers 67,437 hectares is designed to protect Amur tigers and Amur leopards and their habitats. It will be of extreme importance to double the number of Amur tigers in Jilin Province by 2022.

10. On July 29 2012, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Tiger Day, Jilin Forestry Bureau launched a tiger recovery trial project. Initiated by World Wide Fund (WWF) and local forestry authorities, the project released over 30 captive-bred red and sika deer into the forest in Wangqing County near Changbai Mountain. The recent surveys showed that inadequate prey is a major hurdle in supporting the settlement of tigers in North-East China. For example, density of red deer and wild boar in China is less than half the number in neighboring Russia. Thus, the trial project is expected to complete the food chain of Amur tigers, luring them to migrate from Russian Far East to China. The project will also include reforestation, anti-poaching campaigns and population monitoring activities in the Changbai Mountain areas.

11. In November 2011, Heilongjiang Province adopted “Heilongjiang Action Plan for Amur Tigers in Forestry Protected Districts” which aims to increase the number of Amur tigers to 128 in the next 40 years. Based on the Plan, Heilongjiang Province approved the establishment of Amur tiger protected areas in Laoyeling and Wandashan forestry protected districts. Laoyeling protected district covers 70,000 hectares, which borders Russia in the east and is on the south of the Hunchun Nature Reserve. Wandashan protected district thus covers 80,000-100,000 hectares. Within these districts, 3-4 ecological corridors linked to the Russian Far-East will be built to facilitate tiger migration from Russia to China.

12. In addition to Laoyeling and Wandashan districts, Heilongjiang Province also identified Zhangguangcailing as another priority area for Amur tiger protection. In the following few years, these three districts will develop collectively to strengthen tiger protection work in Heilongjiang Province. Recovery of prey density will be the most important task in these protected districts. Compensation scheme which could decrease the conflicts between human and tigers will be developed before sufficient prey can be reintroduced in the regions.

13. Russian Federation in January 2010 undertook an institutional restructuring of an important cluster of tiger reserves and protected areas to strengthen the administrative and

conservation effectiveness of their management. Subsequently, in April 2012, the government of the Russian Federation approved the establishment of the Leopard National Park which covers 262,000 hectares in the southwest of Primorsky Krai. The national park not only embraces the entire area of the Leopardovy Zakaznik but also expands to the area adjacent to the Hunchun Nature Reserve in Jilin Province, China. The park consists of two major parts: the strictly protected area in the Borisovo Plateau with 300,000 hectares and the area with 1.2 million hectares along the Sino-Russian border.

## **B. International Cooperation**

14. In 2010, China's Jilin Province and neighboring Russia's Primorsky Krai agreed to establish the first cross-boundary protection zone for Amur tigers. The zone straddles the border along Jilin province and Primorsky Krai, where both sides enforced anti-poaching measures. As part of the agreement, Jilin and Primorsky plan to step up the amount of information they share and adopt identical monitoring systems for Amu tigers and their prey.

15. During the 6<sup>th</sup> International Ecological Forum "Nature without Borders" held in Vladivostok on 19-20 July 2012, both Russian and Chinese experts put forward to establish joint expert group to enhance Amur tiger conservation in transboundary areas. The main purpose of the joint expert group is to initiate the Sino-Russian Transboundary Area Network. The Network aims to (1) enhance information and experience exchange on Amur tiger and their habitats; (2) improve Amur tiger and Amur leopard monitoring; (3) strengthen ecological protection of Amur tigers and Amur leopards in Sino-Russian border areas; and (4) promote environmental education and public awareness.

16. Although cross-border cooperation for Amur tiger and Amur leopard protection has been gradually strengthened in North-East Asia over the past decade, there was no systematic mechanism to cooperate and coordinate actions or policies among neighboring countries. The coordination of nature use in the border regions advanced very slowly in the absence of transboundary cooperation mechanism.

17. The existing system of protected areas cannot ensure sustainable nature use in the transboundary regions in North-East Asia. This is because these systems cannot preserve biodiversity in the transboundary ecosystems, nor build corridors for the rehabilitation of the lost biodiversity in the adjacent areas of transboundary ecosystems.

18. Establishment of transboundary protected area has been recognized as the best approach to restore biodiversity, which was verified by international experience, such as Daurian International Protected Area (DIPA) between China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation and Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature (KLIN) between China and the Russian Federation. Thus, member States of NEASPEC may consider the development of transboundary area as a key method to improving protection work on Amur tigers and Amur leopards in North-East Asia.

### III. PROPOSAL FOR LAUNCHING THE NEASPEC PARTNERSHIP FOR TIGER AND LEOPARD CONSERVATION

19. As a key recommendation of the project, it is proposed to launch the NEASPEC Partnership for Tiger and Leopard Conservation. The partnership's major goals and roles would be the facilitation of (1) communication for information exchange and knowledge sharing across borders, (2) collaboration among stakeholders for joint work including joint survey and monitoring on the border, joint anti-poaching activities, capacity training programme, sustainable forest management, etc, and (3) coordination of domestic policies responding to complex conservation issues including ecological corridors and transboundary protected areas. The proposal is attached hereto as Annex I.

20. Launching the Partnership could be the first step to establishing such kind of transboundary protected area for Amur tigers and Amur leopards in the subregion. The Partnership could facilitate further development of regional environmental networks and more importantly could translate political decisions into actions plans. This would mark the beginning of a new stage in the evolution of Amur tiger and Amur leopard protection in the subregion – transition from local and regional to global.

Therefore, launching the NEASPEC Partnership is proposed as follows:

- **Key Activities:** Partnership's major goals and roles would be the facilitation of (1) communication for information exchange and knowledge sharing across borders, (2) collaboration among stakeholders for joint work including joint survey and monitoring on the border, joint anti-poaching activities, capacity training programme, sustainable forest management, etc, and (3) coordination of domestic measures and activities related to transboundary cooperation such as the establishment of ecological corridors and transboundary protected areas.
- **Membership:** The Partnership may consist of government agencies, academic institutions, NGOs from China and the Russian Federation as well as relevant stakeholder groups from other NEASPEC member States and international organizations.
- **Coordination committee and working groups:** As the main organ for the partnership, the coordination committee may comprise of representatives from major stakeholder groups. The committee oversees and supports the plans and activities of working groups to be established for carrying out activities in the action areas.
- **Activity/Information center(s):** The operation of the partnership requires activity/information center(s) in order to plan and organize activities and facilitate

communication among participating stakeholders. The Activity/Information Centers, which will be operated under the overall guidance of NEASPEC, could be housed in a government institute or any other body that are fully involved in transboundary cooperation. In addition, activity/information center(s) could work on collection and analysis of information, facilitation of knowledge-sharing, and implementation of joint activities. In this connection, the Feline Research Center of SFA, China, and Russian Far East Federal District Department of Environmental Control in the capacity of the coordinator of the Russian Working Group on Amur Tiger and Leopard could act as the activity/information center(s) with technical support from NEASPEC Secretariat.

- **Financial and human resources:** The establishment and the operation of the partnership would not require any large scale of additional funding. A key purpose of the partnership is to streamline and strengthen ongoing communication and collaboration among stakeholders, thereby making more effective responses to required actions for protecting tigers and leopards. The next step of the partnership could be the formulation of options for coordination of conservation policies and measures across national borders. Nevertheless, the major parts of communication, collaboration and coordination would be undertaken domestically, which means financial and human resources are mostly devoted to domestic action. However, key stakeholders, in particular, the government, need to allocate additional financial and human resources for operating the coordination committee and working groups, and undertaking joint activities. Nevertheless, it is necessary for NEASPEC to co-finance the costs of operating secretariat/ activity center in order to materialize the plan. The required funding from NEASPEC for co-financing is estimated to be about US\$50,000-\$60,000 per year, which could be mainly used for hiring one full-time staff for each secretariat/activity center, operating an information platform on tiger and leopard, and supporting communication.
21. The process of launching the Partnership includes the following:
- Expert review: This proposal was reviewed by the concluding meeting of NEASPEC project on transboundary nature conservation held on 21-23 July 2012 in Vladivostok.
  - Review by the SOM-17: SOM-17 reviews the proposal and makes a decision.
  - Launching an intergovernmental/multi-stakeholder process: Should the SOM decide to establish the partnership platform, the Secretariat will facilitate an intergovernmental/multi-stakeholder process from late 2012 or early 2013.

#### IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

22. The Meeting may wish to make a decision on the proposal for the establishment of NEASPEC Partnership for Tiger and Leopard Conservation, and request member States to make necessary national arrangements to develop and operate the Partnership.

23. The Meeting may wish to make a decision on the project proposal for the “Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Species for NEA Eco-network with special emphasis on Cranes and Black-faced Spoonbills”.

24. The Meeting may wish to provide guidance on the approach and activity of NEASPEC with regard to the implementation of NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy.

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