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IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT IDEAS

Proposals on Nature Conservation under the North-East Asian Subregional Programme on Environmental Cooperation

Note by the Secretariat

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Proposals on Nature Conservation under the North-East Asian Subregional Programme on Environmental Cooperation

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The sub regional cooperative effort in North-East Asia was initiated immediately following UNCED in June 1992, when first meeting of the Senior Officials (SOM) was organized in February 1993 in Seoul, the Republic of Korea. The recommendations of this Meeting provided guidance in developing the basic framework for environmental cooperation. It decided to promote a step by step and practical approach to environmental cooperation and identified three priority areas for action namely (a) Energy and air pollution; (b) Ecosystem management, in particular deforestation and desertification; and (c) Capacity-building. While several projects and activities have been undertaken in the area of energy and air pollution and related capacity building efforts within the sub regional cooperative arrangement, activities in the area of ecosystems management, in particular nature conservation have started gaining ground only recently.

2. In order to initiate activities in this area, the secretariat proposed the North-East Asia Nature conservation Programme at the Seventh SOM held in Beijing in July 2001. The Meeting noted that the programme was interesting, but needed further exploration and consultation in expert group meetings. The Meeting also requested the ESCAP secretariat to formulate a project in the area in consultation with participating countries for GEF funding. Subsequently, an Expert Group Meeting on Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia was organized with the support of the Government of the Republic of Korea from 13-14 December 2001 in Jeju Island. The guidance of that Meeting enabled prepare this document, which besides providing a rationale and background on the ongoing efforts in nature conservation at national and sub regional level in North-East Asia, explores preliminary ideas on activities where subregional cooperative efforts could be beneficial.

II. NATURE CONSERVATION IN NORTH-EAST ASIA: RESOURCES AND THREATS

3. North-East Asia subregion is rich in nature and natural resources. The habitats in the region vary from forest and grasslands to arctic and desert ecosystems, coastal and marine environment and wetlands of international importance. The subregion has areas of a special value for the world community, having the habitat for many rare and endangered species. For instance, only Russian Arctic region provides habitat for the snowy owl, Arctic fox, sharp-tailed sandpiper, musk ox, snow goose (*Chen caerulescens*), reindeer, and many others. Wrangel and Herald Islands in Chukotka boast the highest density of population of polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) in the world. Most of the world's entire population (50,000) of Rossets gulls (*Rhodostethia rosea*) nest in the northern Russian Far East (RFE). Yakutia is a major nesting site for 2,000 remaining Siberian white cranes (*Grus leucogeranus*). Kamchatka Peninsula supports the world's largest population of brown bears, estimated at 20,000. In its rivers and along its shores are the world's richest salmon stocks (including king salmon, which can reach almost two meters in length). Huge populations of northern fur seal, Steller's sea lion, and sea otter (*Enhydra lutris lutris*) congregate along the Sea of Okhotsk and Kamchatka coastlines. Over two-thirds of the total seabird population of the former USSR, an estimated 4.5 million pairs, feed along the Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk coastlines, including most of the remaining Steller's sea eagles (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*).

4. The forest cover in North-East Asia amounts to 1062 million ha. It ranges from 852 million ha in the Russian Federation, one of the highest in the world to 6.2 million ha in the Republic of Korea. As percentage of land area, it ranges from 68.2 % in the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea to 6.8 % in Mongolia. Forest area per capita is one of the highest at 5.8 ha in the Russian Federation and one of the lowest to an extent of .1 ha in China and the Republic of Korea. This vast difference in magnitude and dimensions of the forest cover has important implications for nature conservation as well as biodiversity management in the subregion. North-East Asia also has some of the remaining natural forest of the world. The taiga forests teem with brown and black bears, wolves, sable, squirrels, lynx, elk, wild boar, wolverine, and hundreds of species of bird. Far Eastern leopards (*Panthera pardus orientalis*), with a population of only about 50, inhabiting the black fir forests along the border of the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea. In all, there are more than 1,500 species of flora, almost 100 mammal species, 400 species of bird, and more than 200 species of butterfly in Primorskiy Krai alone.

5. Nature and biodiversity in North-East Asia has been subjected to great pressures. The disappearance of habitat, diminishing species, and genetic erosion are the main cause of concern. Table 1 mirrors the status of endangered species from a sample of seven species group in the subregion. It can be noted that in the sampled group the

Table 1: Number of endangered, endemic and forest species occurring for 7 species groups

Country/Area	All 7 Species groups		Country-Endemic Endangered Species								
	Total Species	Endangered Species	Total, all 7 species groups	Forest occurring by species group							Total
				Amphibians	Birds	Ferns	Mammals	Palms	Reptiles	Trees	
China	4310	402	137		16	10	8	4	1	69	108
Dem People's Rep. of Korea	579	29	1							1	1
Japan	1351	353	41		5	53	6	2		-	66
Mongolia	623	26									
Republic of Korea	551	25								-	
Russian Federation	138	77	3								

Ref. World Resources Institute, State of World Resources, 2000, Washington DC

number of endangered and threatened species ranges from 5% in Republic of Korea to approximately 27% in Japan.

Table 2: Protected Areas in Northeast Asia

Country	Total Area	# of Protected Areas	Total area of protected areas	Total % protected
China	9,597,000	810 (1,227)	682,407 (982,000)	7.11 (9.85)
DPR Korea	122,310	31	3,158	2.58
Japan	369,700	96	25,590	6.92
Mongolia	1,565,000	35	161,291	10.31
Republic of Korea	98,445	30	6,838	6.95
Russian Federation	17,075,400	216	516,688	3.03

6. There are several factors, which contribute directly or indirectly to biodiversity loss. Land conversion – e.g. from forest or grassland to cultivated land, deforestation, forest fires, desertification, climate change, reclamation of wetlands, pollution of air, soil and aquatic environment, introduction of exotic or invasive species, over-hunting or over-fishing, replacement of traditional varieties of grain, fruits, vegetables and livestock by high-yielding varieties are some of the factors that contribute directly to biodiversity loss. Among the indirect factors population growth, demands from growing international trade, and poverty and lack of access to resources by the community are the main contributory factors. Overall analysis of these factors show that the main threat to biodiversity emanates from human activities.

III. POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

A. National

7. The countries in North East Asia have developed a fairly good policy framework for nature and wild life conservation. All the countries have developed their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea is in the final stages of the preparation of this document). All the countries have set apart a fairly

reasonable part of their forest and other areas for conservation of nature and wildlife resources. Legislation has been developed. Action for raising awareness and education are underway. Inventory is being undertaken and assessment and Monitoring is taking place. Effectiveness of implementation of the policy frameworks, however, varies depending on capacity and available resources (both technical and financial). A good example of this variation is reflected in the designation and management of protected areas. According to IUCN rule of thumb the protected areas should constitute 10 percent of the national territories. Apart from Mongolia and China other countries in the region do not meet this target. Coverage of all ecosystems in the protected area systems is essential but certain ecosystems have particularly low representation such as marine ecosystem. a large portion of the forests is covered as protected areas.

8. Priority assigned by various habitat and resource adequacy in the North-East Asian countries is reflected in table 3, which was compiled from a questionnaire circulated by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity.

Table 3: Priority assigned by biodiversity habitat and resource adequacy in North-East Asia

Biodiversity by habitat type	Country		
	China	Japan	Rep. Of Korea
Inland water	H (L)	H (L)	M (A)
Marine and coastal	M (L)	H (L)	M (L)
Agricultural	M (L)	H (L)	M (A)
Forest	H (L)	H (L)	M (A)
Dry and sub-humid	M (L)	NR	NR

B. International and Subregional Cooperation

9. Most countries in North-East Asia have committed themselves to the implementation of international environmental conventions (Table 4).

Table 4: Status of ratification of various Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Country	CBD	Biosafety Protocol	WH	CITES	CMS	RAMS AR	Desertification
China	1993	2000	1985	1981	*	1992	1997
DPR Korea	1994	2001	1998				
Japan	1993		1992	1980		1980	1998
Mongolia	1993		1990	1996	1999	1998	1996
Republic of Korea	1994	2000	1989	1993		1997	1999
Russian Federation	1995		1988	1992	*	1977	

CBD: Convention on Biodiversity, WH: World Heritage,
CITES: Convention on international trade in endangered species
CMS: Convention on migratory species, * Non-party/have signed MOU on Siberian crane.

10. In addition some bilateral agreements also exist, which among others include:

- 1981 Sino- Japan agreement on protection of migratory birds;
- 1988 China and former Soviet Union signed agreement on fisheries;
- 1993 China and Russian Federation signed the agreement for the protection of fish propagation in bordering water along Hailong River and Wusuli River;
- 1990 China and Mongolia signed agreement on protection of natural environment.

China, Mongolia and Russian Federation are also exploring to establish joint/transboundary nature reserves – A Tripartite Committee of three countries met in Manchuri City in July,2001.

IV. PROSPECTS AND POTENTIAL FOR SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION IN NORTH-EAST ASIA

11. The North-East Asian region is rich in forestry and wildlife resources and form part of the same bio-geographical realm. The subregion is one of the richest in wildlife resources and many similar species are threatened and endangered. All the countries have laid very high priority to nature and biodiversity conservation as a part of their national environmental policy. This along with several other factors listed below provide an ample ground for subregional cooperation among the six countries of the subregion in ecosystems and species conservation.

Subregional diversity:

12. The subregion is very diverse in the stage of its economic development, environment endowments and natural resource base. While Japan and the Republic of Korea are some of the richest countries in the Asian region, Mongolia and the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea are the developing countries with limited financial resources. The per capita availability of forest resources in the Russian Federation is the highest in the world, in China, Japan and the Republic of Korea it is very low. Such a vast diversity has both its positive and negative points. While, the problems for nature conservation in the subregional countries may be very different in nature, these might afford complementarities for cooperative endeavour. For example, some countries have well developed systems for protected areas management and other countries can learn from their successful experience. At times, different levels of financial support to programmes and projects by different countries might not be conducive to the healthy development of cooperative relationships.

Interest and imperatives for subregional cooperation:

13. All the six countries have expressed their interest in the nature conservation as this area has been listed as one of the priority areas for subregional environmental cooperation in North-East Asia by successive meetings of senior officials. Consequently, a programme on nature conservation is urgently needed to coordinate conservation and development in the North-East Asia. There are many ecosystems that transcend geographical boundaries and if their effective protection has to be managed, it can be secured only through transborder efforts. Similarly, there are many species of wildlife that move across the borders or are endangered in several countries. The transfrontier environmental cooperative efforts could leverage further in-situ and ex-situ preservation efforts with innovative techniques that may be generated from the experience of other countries in the. Therefore, it is imperative to coordinate nature conservation with economic development at the subregional level.

International commitment:

14. The wildlife and biodiversity conservation has been recognized as a part of the package of international environmental programmes and actions for implementing Agenda 21, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and several other relevant conventions described in Section IV. Most of these instruments demand the participating countries to cooperate with each other for conservation actions at the regional levels, for the countries are enjoined to formulate necessary plans. The proposals for subregional cooperation in the Northeast Asia would provide a valuable platform for ensuring this global commitment.

Global benefit:

15. The environmental benefit of this subregional cooperation would accrue at global level as the ecosystems of the region are so unique, that many species do not occur anywhere else in the world. Ninety per cent of biodiversity of North-East Asia are concentrated on a relatively narrow seashore belt. The forests and grasslands contain rare and endemic species found nowhere else. Of particular significance, as a model for many similar areas around the world, is the attempt to treat it in an integrated fashion, four major levels of biodiversity at the molecular level with ex-situ genome conservation at the species level, at the habitat or community level with the identification and incorporation of currently unprotected forest associations, and at the landscape level with the buffer zone land use planning.

V. POTENTIAL AREAS OF COOPERATION

16. Some tentative ideas for subregional cooperation in North-East Asia are being suggested below.

Develop information exchange mechanisms:

17. The initial cooperation efforts may focus on developing several simple, user-friendly mechanisms to foster a constant informal exchange of information and

experiences between the countries of North-East Asia, particularly at the subregional level. This web page is the first of these mechanisms, intended to provide wider access to information on nature conservation, wildlife management and biodiversity conservation. A second mechanism will be a list server to foster intraregional communication and information exchange among collaborating institutions. The project may also prepare recommendations for the development of an Internet-based roster of regional experts in nature conservation.

Facilitate and enable nature conservation planning information exchanges:

18. The project may focus on gathering and disseminating nature conservation planning information and materials on technical, policy, and process issues using the information exchange mechanisms described above in collaboration with members of national governments, regional scientists and experts, and academic organizations. The project will share the information gathered from other subregional, regional and global programmes.

Development of lessons learnt and case studies:

19. The project may work in cooperation with the relevant national, subregional and regional and global programmes to provide information and inputs obtained from experience to develop lessons learnt and best practice guidelines and case studies. In particular, the project will seek input from members of national agencies dealing with nature conservation and biodiversity, regional experts and academic organizations in Northeast Asia in order to identify new and innovative best practices and lessons learnt.

Organize subregional information exchange workshops:

20. Subregional workshops may be organized for experts, practitioners and key policy makers to strengthen the capacity of country experts to have access to wider subregional and global expertise and materials. The workshop will allow planners to assemble and share their collective experiences, to discuss problems encountered and solutions developed, to identify commonalities and differences in implementation, and to compare and adapt approaches.

North-East Sub-Regional Network On Protected Areas:

21. The North-East Asian Sub-Region has a large number of protected areas in almost all eco-zones. These are generally well managed and there are many successful examples of in-situ conservation. In order to share data, information and experience, establishing a North-East Asian Sub-Region of protected areas could be an important initiative. It could be on the same pattern as that of ASEAN network of heritage and parks and reserves.

North-East Asian Sub-Regional Network On Institution On Grassland Management:

22. Grasslands constitute a very important natural resources in the sub-region. In many countries, it is in a state of environmental degradation and efforts are necessary to restore these important eco systems. Establishment of a North-East Asian Sub Regional Network on Institutions on Grassland Management would help in sharing experience and expertise for mounting programmes of effective grassland conservation and management. It might also promote seed banks and replicate successful experiences.

Sub-Regional Cooperation In Combating Forest Fires:

23. As discussed earlier, forest fires are a source of extensive forest devastation in the North-East Asian region. While in some countries, significant capacities exist for dealing with forest fires; in others these are woefully inadequate. It might be a good idea to pool out equipment and expertise in dealing with forest fires for which a sub-regional cooperation arrangement may be initiated.

Sub-Regional Agreements On Wetlands:

24. Wetlands constitute an important natural resource in the region. Most of the countries are parties to Ramsar Convention on wetlands and have undertaken many significant initiatives for protection of such wetlands. However, much more such efforts

are needed as in many countries, wetlands are still in the state of decay. The North-East Asian countries could establish a sub-regional agreement on wetlands in order to share data information and replicate successful stories.

Sub-Regional Agreement On Protection Of Migratory Parties:

25. Only one country i.e. Mongolia is party to the Bonn Convention on Migratory species of Animals and their habitats. All other countries are yet to ratify this convention. However, there are many bilateral or multilateral agreements for the protection of migratory birds and animals initiated by China, the Russian Federation and Japan. It might be useful to explore possibilities of having a sub-regional agreement on the protection of migratory birds and species in North-East Asia. Or else, subregional meetings may be organized to discuss the bottlenecks in ratification of the Bonn Convention by the concerned countries.

Establishment Of North-East Asian Sub-Regional Nature Conservation Centre:

26. The countries of the North-East Asia may consider establishing a sub-regional bio-diversity center that could act as a focal point for all activities relating to sub-regional cooperation in nature conservation and bio-diversity management. This center may be organized on the pattern of the similar center in ASEAN. The center should focus on creating data basis, capacity building, exchanging successful experiences and promoting research in nature conservation.