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**STATUS OF NATURE CONSERVATION AND PRIORITY AREAS FOR  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOINT ACTIVITIES IN NORTH-EAST ASIA**

(Item 6 of the provisional agenda)

*Note by the secretariat*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper provides background materials on the status of biodiversity conservation in North-East Asia. After reviewing the state of biodiversity and highlighting the issues, it gives a resume of ongoing efforts and policy frameworks of nature conservation at the national and subregional level. Then it examines the rationale and prospects for subregional cooperation on nature conservation in North-East Asia. Finally, it covers prospective areas where cooperative activities can be developed following a step by step approach.

## II. STATUS OF NATURE (BIODIVERSITY) CONSERVATION IN NORTH-EAST ASIA

2. The North-East Asian 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 environments 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 the Russian Arctic region provides habitat for the snowy owl, Arctic fox, sharp-tailed sandpiper, musk ox, snow goose (*Chen caerulescens*), reindeer, and many other rare species. 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. 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 the Sea of Okhotsk coastlines, including most of the remaining Steller's sea-eagles (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*).

3. 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 a percentage of land area, it ranges from 68.2 % in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to 6.8 % in Mongolia (FAO State of the World's Forests, 2001). 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 0.1 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 last remaining natural forests 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 birds. Far Eastern leopards (*Panthera pardus orientalis*), with a population of only about 50, inhabits 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.

4. The sub-region's other ecosystems also provide habitat to a number of unique species of flora and fauna. For instance, China's freshwater aquatic ecosystem is a habitat to different varieties of phytoplankton, zooplanktons and aquatic vascular plants and freshwater fish. Of the 770 species and subspecies of freshwater fish known, 690 are endemic to the country. Its swamps are important feeding, breeding, and wintering grounds for many endemic and migratory species of water fowl and birds (China, NBSAP 2000). The sub-region's coastal and marine ecosystem which include coastal flats, estuaries, wetlands, mangroves, coral reefs and oceanic ecosystems serve as protective habitats to many marine species where some are known to be endemic in the region. *Table 1* presents the extent of biodiversity resources in the subregion.

### III. ISSUES AND THREATS TO NATURE CONSERVATION IN THE SUBREGION

5. Nature and biodiversity resources 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 2* mirrors the status of endangered species from a sample of five species of fauna and a general flora group in the subregion.

**Table 2. Number of endangered species of flora and five species of fauna in North-East Asia**

Countries	Five species Group of Fauna					Flora (representing Higher Plants)
	Mammals	Birds	Reptiles	Amphibians	Fish	
China	75	90	15	1	28	113
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	7	19				
Mongolia	29	33	8	10	7	537
Japan	12	14				
Korea	6	19				52
Russian Federation	31	38	5		13	129

Source: World Resources Institute, Earth Trends 2001 available at <http://www.wri.org>

**Table 1: Number of known and endemic species of Flora and Fauna in the North-East Asia region**

Countries in the North-East subregion	Total for all Species Groups				Five Species Group of Fauna								Flora		
	Fauna		Flora		Mammals		Birds		Reptile		Amphibian		Fish	Higher Plants	
	Total Known	Total Endemic	Total Known	Total Endemic	Total Known	Total Endemic	Total Known	Total Endemic	Total Known	Total Endemic	Total Known	Total Endemic	Total Known	Total Known	Total Endemic
<i>China</i>	2,819	392	32,200	18,000	400	83	1,103	70	340	81	290	158	686	32,200	18,000
<i>Democratic People's Republic of Korea</i>	148		2,898				115		19		14			2,898	
<i>Monqolia</i>	584	141	5,565	2,000	188	42	250	21	87	33	61	45	186	5,565	2,000
<i>Japan</i>	640		2,823	229	133		426				6		75	2,823	229
<i>Korea</i>	330	2	2,898	224	49	1	112		25	1	14		130	2,898	224
<i>Russian Federation</i>	1,286	13			269	22	628	13	58		41		290		

Source: World Resources Institute, Earth Trends 2001 available at <http://www.wri.org>

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. The indirect causes include population growth, demands from growing international trade, and poverty and lack of access to resources by the community are the main contributory factors to the diminution of biodiversity resources in the region. Overall analysis of these factors show that the main threat to biodiversity emanates from human activities.

#### **IV. POLICY FRAMEWORKS 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 or are developing their National Bio-diversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Likewise, all the countries have set apart a fairly reasonable part of their forest and other areas for conservation of nature and wildlife resources. Respective legislations for nature conservation have been developed. Action for raising awareness and education is underway. Inventories are being undertaken and assessment and monitoring is taking place. The effectiveness of implementation of the policy frameworks, however, varies depending on the countries' capacity and available technical and financial resources. A good example of this variation is reflected in the designation and management of protected areas. According to a rule of thumb of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the protected areas should constitute 10 percent of the national territories. Except for Mongolia and China, other countries in the sub-region do not meet this target. Coverage of all ecosystems in the protected area systems is essential but certain ecosystems have a particularly low representation such as marine ecosystems. However, a large portion of the forests is covered as protected areas. *Table 3* shows the profile of protected areas in the subregion. It may also be noted that in the same table, the number of protected areas that are part of the global agreements such as the World Heritage sites and wetland areas are also shown.

**Table 3. Profile of Protected Areas in North-East Asia**

Countries	Protected Areas (PAs)				Protected Areas part of Global Agreements		
	No. of PAs	Area under Protection (in '000 hectares)	Per cent (%) of total land area in Protected Areas	No. of Marine Protected Areas	No. of Biosphere Reserves	No. of World Heritage Sites	No. of Wetlands of International Importance
China	1,227 <sup>2</sup>	98,200	9.85	56	16	7	7
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	31	316	2.6	X	1	0	X
Japan	96	2,561	6.8	187	4	2	11
Mongolia	42	17,991	11.5	X	3	0	6
Republic of Korea	30 <sup>1</sup>	683	6.95	N/A	N/A		X
Russian Federation	219	52,907	3.1	16	20	5	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,645</b>	<b>172,658</b>		<b>259</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>59</b>

Source: World Resources Institute, Earth Trends 2001 available at <http://www.wri.org>

<sup>1</sup> Reference: Green, M. and Pain, J., (1997) State of World's Protected Areas at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

<sup>2</sup> As updated by China

8. Table 4 below shows the priority assigned according to the type of habitat vis-à-vis the adequacy of resources made available to support activities for their protection. It will be noted in the subregion, that while many countries attach high priority for protecting these areas, little resources are made available which overall affects the effective implementation of the nature conservation programmes. The level of development of countries in North-East Asia also do not guarantee the provision of resources for the protection of biodiversity resources. Japan, which is considered to be a developed country in the region does not allocate sufficient resources for the protection of its natural habitats.

**Table 4. Priorities attached to habitat types in North-East Asia**

Countries	Habitat Type				
	<i>Inland Waters</i>	<i>Marine and Coastal</i>	<i>Agricultural</i>	<i>Forest</i>	<i>Dry and sub-humid</i>
China	H (L)	M (L)	M (L)	H (L)	M (L)
Japan	H (L)	H (L)	H (L)	H (L)	
Rep. of Korea	M (A)	M (L)	M (A)	M (A)	

Source: Compiled from the national questionnaires submitted to the CBD Secretariat

Notes: H – High priority (A) – Resources are made available  
M – Medium priority (L) – Low resources  
L – Low priority

## B. International and Subregional Cooperation

9. Most countries in North-East Asia have committed themselves to the implementation of international environmental conventions as shown in *Table 5*.

**Table 5. Status of Implementation of Relevant Nature Conservation Multilateral Environmental Agreements in the North-East Subregion (as of February 2003)**

Countries	Conservation of Nature, Biodiversity Resources and Protection of Natural Resources						Convention for Combating Desertification 1995
	Biodiversity and Biosafety		CITES 1973	RAMSAR 1971	CMS <sup>1</sup> 1983	World Heritage 1972	
	CBD 1992	Cartagena Protocol 2000					
China	R		R	R		R	R
Democratic People's Republic of Korea							
Japan	R		Ac	R			R
Mongolia	R		Ac	R			R
Republic of Korea	R		Ac	R			R
Russian Federation	R		R	R		R	

Source: Convention Secretariats

Notes:

CBD Convention on Biological Diversity Ac Acceded  
 CITES Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species R Ratified  
 CMS Convention on Migratory Species

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 Manchuria City in July

<sup>1</sup> The Convention to Migratory Species (CMS) has several multilateral agreements that cover the protection of listed endangered migratory species (as identified under Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention). As of February 2003, there are twelve (12) Agreements/Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) under the CMS. Among the countries in the subregion, only Mongolia has entered into one of agreements under the CMS.

2001. These subregional agreements reinforce the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

### C. Support from the Global Environment Facility

11. The Eighth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM 8) reiterated that synergies be developed with on-going initiatives in the subregion. Table 6 below presents information on projects supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in the four countries of the subregion. The formulation of the Nature Conservation Programme under the NEASPEC can benefit from these projects through linkage and a determination of areas where synergies can be developed. One may note that Japan and Korea are not recipients of the GEF funding. However, in their cases, resources are allocated to implement their respective projects as reflected in their National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBSAPs). (See Information Paper ENR/WG/NFP/3a))

**Table 6. Projects supported under the GEF for four countries in North-East Asia (as of February 2003)**

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Type of GEF Project</i>		<i>Amount of GEF Grant (US\$ M)</i>	
	<i>Single Country</i>	<i>Regional and Global</i>	<i>Total amount of Single Project</i>	<i>Total Amount of Regional/Global Project</i>
China	13	4	56.415	24.270
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	3		1.824	
Mongolia	6	1	6.725	0.750
Russian Federation	8	3	35.450	13.44

Source: GEF available at <http://www.gefweb.org>

### D. Preparation of the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Programmes (NBSAPs)

12. All countries in the subregion have prepared their respective NBSAPs that reflect a comprehensive strategy and approach to nature conservation and biodiversity resources management. These documents should be valuable in the identification of priority areas for the subregion as its preparation were subjected to a consultative process in the respective countries. Although their substantive discussions were directed to national and local level efforts, there are common strategic thrusts that can be used as reference for subregional

cooperation. *Table 7* presents a summary of common thrust of the NBSAPs of countries in the subregion.

**Table 7. Common Thrusts of NBSAPs in the North-East Asia**

<b>Countries</b>	<b><i>National Biodiversity Action Plan Strategic Thrusts</i></b>	<b><i>Thematic Reports</i></b>
Japan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity Components particularly for the following resources: forestry, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, biotechnological use of genetic resources.</li> <li>2. Identification and monitoring of biological diversity components</li> <li>3. Promotion of policies particularly on providing incentives, strengthening research and surveys education and public awareness; and impact assessment and minimizing adverse impacts.</li> <li>4. Promotion of international cooperation through information exchange, technical and scientific cooperation, cooperation with developing countries.</li> </ol>	Thematic reports have also been submitted by the country focusing on efforts to address specific concerns relating to the management of alien species, forest ecosystems and mountain ecosystems.
Republic of Korea	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identification of biodiversity components and monitoring.</li> <li>2. Strategy for sustainable use of biodiversity for the following sectors: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism and the protection and exploitation of genetic resources.</li> <li>3. Capacity building to cover improving incentives, enhancing research, education and advertising, exchange of information and technology; and</li> <li>4. International cooperation.</li> </ol>	Thematic reports were submitted to address specific concerns in forest ecosystems and the management of alien species
China	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improving basic research of biodiversity;</li> </ol>	Reports have also been submitted focusing on efforts addressing specific concerns

<b>Countries</b>	<b>National Biodiversity Action Plan Strategic Thrusts</b>	<b>Thematic Reports</b>
	2. Improving national network of nature reserves and other protected areas;  3. Conservation of wild species significant to biodiversity;  4. Conservation of genetic resources related to crops and domestic livestock;  5. Establishment of nationwide information and monitoring networks for biodiversity conservation.	relating to the management of alien species, forest ecosystems and mountain ecosystems.

Source: Country Reports to Thematic Areas available at <http://www.biodiv.org>

## **V. PROSPECTS AND POTENTIAL FOR SUBREGIONAL COOPERATION IN NORTH-EAST ASIA**

13. The North-East Asian region is rich in forestry and wildlife resources and form part of the same bio-geographical realm. As stated earlier, the subregion is one of the richest in wildlife resources, but many 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 provides an ample ground for subregional cooperation among the six countries of the subregion in ecosystems and species conservation.

### Subregional diversity

14. The subregion is very diverse in terms of 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 People's Republic of Korea are developing countries with limited financial resources. The per capita availability of forest resources in the Russian Federation is the highest in the world, whereas in China, Japan and the Republic of Korea it is very low. Such a vast diversity has both its positive and negative aspects. While the problems for nature conservation in the subregional countries may vary in nature, these might afford complementarities for cooperative endeavours. For

example, some countries have well developed systems for protected areas management and other countries can learn from their successful experience.

#### Interest and imperatives for subregional cooperation

15. All the countries have expressed their interest in 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 subregion. There are many ecosystems that transcend national 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 counties in the subregion. Therefore, it is imperative to coordinate nature conservation with economic development at the subregional level.

#### International commitment

16. Wildlife and biodiversity conservation has been recognized as a part of the package of international environmental programmes and actions for implementing Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the WSSD, 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 subregional levels. The proposals for subregional cooperation in the North-East Asia would provide a valuable platform for ensuring this global commitment.

#### Global benefits

17. The environmental benefit of the subregional cooperation would accrue at global level as the ecosystems of the region are so unique that many species of exceptional human value do not occur anywhere else in the world. Ninety per cent of biodiversity in North-East Asia is concentrated on a relatively narrow seashore belt. The forests and grasslands contain rare and endemic species found nowhere else. Therefore it is in the global interest to protect biodiversity in the subregion.

## VI. SUGGESTED AREAS OF COOPERATION

18. Some tentative ideas for subregional cooperation in North-East Asia in the light of the suggestions made at the SOM8 are given below:

### **Phase 1: Promotion of Information Exchange and Capacity Building on Nature Conservation in the North-East Asian Subregion**

19. An area that needs immediate attention is the exchange of information on existing national and international programmes of nature conservation in the North-East Asian countries. Efforts will focus on identifying existing national centres; assessing capacity-building needs, barriers and available resources; and defining feasible approaches to subsequent cooperative activities on a long term basis.

#### (a) Establishment of a subregional working group:

The initial cooperation efforts also need to be focused on the establishment of an *ad-hoc* Working Group on North-East Asian Subregional Cooperation on Nature Conservation. The Working Group would primarily provide a forum for national nature conservation experts nominated by participating countries to exchange information, interact on broad based issues relating to nature conservation that are of common concern to the participating countries, and identify priority areas for possible cooperation. The Working Group is envisioned to play coordinating and advisory roles in the implementation of parallel project activities as described in subparagraphs 19(b) – 19(e) hereafter. *This First Meeting of the Working Group on Nature Conservation is intended to initiate the firming up of the task of the group.*

#### (b) Development of information exchange mechanisms:

Efforts may be directed towards 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. It can be initiated by developing a web page to provide wider access to information on nature conservation, wildlife management and biodiversity conservation in North-East Asia. A second mechanism could be an electronic discussion forum to foster intraregional communication and information exchange among collaborating institutions. Such an internet-based discussion forum might

also identify recommendations for the development of an Internet-based roster of regional experts in nature conservation.

(c) Facilitate and enable nature conservation planning:

This activity 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 activity should include sharing of the information gathered from other subregional, regional and global programmes.

(d) Organize subregional information exchange workshops:

Subregional workshops may be organized for experts, practitioners and policy makers to strengthen the capacity of country experts and provide them with access to subregional and global expertise and materials. The workshops may be organized on a sectoral basis, and should allow planners and experts in specific fields 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.

(e) Development of case studies and lessons learnt:

This activity on information exchange and dissemination may work in cooperation with the relevant national, subregional, regional and global programmes to compile successful case studies, new and innovative best practices, establish guidelines and conduct analysis of lessons learnt from nature conservation experiences by different organizations in the subregion. In particular, the compilation of success cases and lessons learnt should promote interaction among member countries and international organizations and agencies dealing with nature conservation and biodiversity in North-East Asia.

**Phase 2: Promotion of Sustainable Nature Conservation in the North-East Asian Subregion**

20. This phase of the project would build on the progress and outcome of the Phase I on the establishment of an Ad hoc Working Group and exchange of information. The proposed

Phase 2 activities are preliminary information and subject to further elaboration, re-shaping and selection according to the conclusions and recommendations of the Phase 1 project. In particular these areas can be considered once the areas of priorities are defined, the participating national institutions identified; the subregion's capacity-building needs and barriers are characterized, available resources assessed and the overall approaches to future cooperative activities are agreed upon by the Working Group. These areas may include:

(a) North-East Asian Subregional Network On Protected Areas

The North-East Asian Subregion 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 Subregion of protected areas could be an important initiative. It could be of the same pattern as that of the ASEAN network of heritage parks and reserves.

(b) North-East Asian Subregional Network Of Institutions On Grassland Management

Grasslands constitute a very important natural resource in the subregion. In many countries, grasslands are in a state of environmental degradation and efforts are necessary to restore these important ecosystems. The establishment of a North-East Asian Sub Regional Network of 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.

(c) Subregional Cooperation In Combating Forest Fires

As discussed earlier, forest fires are a source of extensive forest devastation in the North-East Asian subregion. 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 equipment and expertise in dealing with forest fires, for which a subregional cooperation arrangement may be initiated.

(d) Subregional Agreements On Wetlands

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

in many countries wetlands are still in the state of decay. The North-East Asian countries could establish a subregional project on wetlands in order to share data information and replicate successful stories.

(e) Establishment Of a North-East Asian Subregional Nature Conservation Center

The countries of the North-East Asia may consider establishing a subregional biodiversity center that could act as a focal point for all activities relating to subregional cooperation in nature conservation and biodiversity management. This center may be organized following the pattern of the similar center in ASEAN. The center could focus on creating databases, capacity building programmes, exchange of successful experiences and promotion of research in nature conservation.

## **VII. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

21. The Meeting may wish to guide the secretariat on the implementation of the activities and projects as identified in paragraphs 19 and 20, which is primarily related to information and capacity building in line with the recommendations of the Eighth Senior Officials Meeting on the North-East Asia Subregional Programme on Environmental Cooperation.