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PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF ON-GOING PROJECTS (Project IV: Nature Conservation)

Note by the Secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The First Meeting of the Senior Officials (SOM1) held in Seoul, Korea in 1993 provided guidance in developing the basic framework for environmental cooperation in the North-East Asia. It decided to promote a step by step approach to environmental cooperation and identified three priority areas, viz., (a) energy and air pollution; (b) ecosystem management in particular deforestation and desertification; and (c) capacity building.
2. The Second Meeting of the Senior Officials (SOM2), held in Beijing, China in November 1994 endorsed five priority projects for implementation for NEASPEC countries, wherein three dealt with air pollution and energy and two focused on biodiversity and capacity building for forestry and grassland management. Funding support for the proposals pertaining to energy and air pollution and related capacity building activities were obtained and training and other activities were implemented accordingly. However, establishment of NEASPEC Core Fund has resulted in the revival of interest in nature conservation programme.
3. At the Seventh SOM held in Beijing, China in 2001 the secretariat proposed the North-East Asia Nature Conservation Programme with the intention of initiating activities in this area. The Meeting expressed interest but requested the secretariat to further explore and consult an Expert Group from the region and study the formulation of a framework for the programme. The Meeting also requested ESCAP secretariat to develop a project in the area in consultation with participating countries for GEF funding. Subsequently an Expert Group on Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia was convened in Republic of Korea in December 2001, which discussed among others the proposed nature conservation programme. Guided by the decision of the Seventh SOM, the Experts Group suggested to the secretariat to prepare a document which besides providing a rationale and background on the on-going efforts in nature conservation at the national and subregional level in North-East Asia, should also explore preliminary ideas on activities where subregional cooperative efforts could be beneficial. A document (ENR/PSO/ECNA(8)/2) was prepared accordingly and submitted to SOM8.
4. The Eighth SOM (SOM8) held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia in June 2002, elicited strong support for work on nature conservation emphasizing the involvement of stakeholders and suggested to focus actions in the areas of capacity building, exchange of information and expertise, data base management, scientific research and use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The Meeting also recommended to establish the working group of national focal points on nature conservation whose task will be to identify priority areas for development of

projects in nature conservation, initiate exchange of information to grasp issues and problems and to bring issues to the attention of governments for cooperative action.

5. The Meeting also noted that the secretariat was giving concerted attention to the prevention and control of dust and sandstorms (yellow sand) in North East Asia and was playing a coordinating role in close collaboration with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the development of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project.

II. REVIEW OF ONGOING PROJECTS

A. Nature Conservation

6. The First Meeting of the Working Group on Nature Conservation in North-East Asia was held in Bangkok, Thailand from 21 to 22 July 2003. As this was the initial meeting of the group, the discussions focused on the terms of reference of the Working Group on nature conservation, priority areas for action and follow-up activities by NEASPEC. The group agreed that these matters be presented to SOM 9 for the senior official's consideration.

7. As part of the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Working Group on Nature Conservation in North-East Asia, the group recommended that its general scope and structure shall be to primarily guide and oversee the formulation, development and implementation of the Nature (Biodiversity) Conservation Programme for North-East Asia. It will provide support to the Senior Officials of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme on Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC), in identifying areas where cooperation is needed in the implementation of subregional activities on nature conservation. The Working Group shall be represented by at least one of the nominated national focal point from each of the countries in the subregion. The Working Group shall meet at least once a year. The terms of reference of the Working Group are attached as annex 1.

8. With respect to the priority areas for nature conservation in the subregion, the group recommended the following: (a) Management of and cooperative research on nature reserves; (b) Conservation and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity; (c) Ecological monitoring and conservation of marine ecosystems and coastal zones; (d) Conservation and management of forest ecosystems; (e) Conservation and recovery of large mammals; (f) Conservation and management of grassland ecosystems; (g) Conservation, monitoring and cooperative research on important migratory species; and (h) Prevention and control of alien invasive species.

9. For follow up activities, the group agreed to undertake the following activities:
- a) To collect information on the on-going programmes and projects of national and international organizations in the subregion and respective countries of North-East Asia to develop synergies between new and ongoing initiatives in the subregion with respect to nature conservation; and
 - b) Convene another meeting of the working group to consider new initiatives in line with on-going work. The meeting may be convened either before or immediately after SOM 9 depending on the response from the national focal points related to data collection.

10. The working group was informed by the secretariat that a project proposal on the North-East Asia Subregional Cooperation in Nature Conservation was circulated to the member countries of NEASPEC for their consideration. In this respect the working group recommended that the countries should expedite their review, comments and concurrence as soon as possible. The secretariat informed that the Government of Mongolia had already sent its endorsement of the project.

B. Prevention and Control of Dust and Sandstorms in North East Asia

11. Acknowledging that dust and sandstorm (DSS) is a serious environmental phenomenon in North East Asia with transboundary implications, the Governments of People's Republic of China (PRC), Japan, Republic of Korea and Mongolia requested UNESCAP, UNEP, UNCCD and ADB to jointly develop an expanded and integrated technical assistance that will promote regional cooperation on DSS to be cofinanced under the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). The proposal was approved with two major components: one for initiating an institutional framework for regional cooperation and second, the development of a master plan for regional cooperation on alleviating DSS.

12. As part of the institutional framework, a steering committee was formed cochaired by China and Mongolia and, comprising of all four affected countries i.e., China, Japan, Mongolia and Republic of Korea as well as participating agencies; ADB, UNESCAP, UNEP and UNCCD. The Steering Committee will provide overall guidance to the implementation of the project. Under the steering committee, three technical committees were also established which shall have the following responsibilities: (a) preparation of an investment strategy for mitigating measures in DSS originating areas chaired by UNESCAP; (b) promotion of regional cooperation mechanism to

be chaired by UNCCD; and (c) preparation of a phased program to establish a regional monitoring and early warning network for DSS and a comprehensive assessment of scientific findings chaired by UNEP.

13. The first joint meeting of the technical and steering committees was held at the Asian Development Bank in Manila from 31 March – 1 April 2003. The meeting approved a phased programme for the project. During the first phase, a programme on regional monitoring and early warning will be implemented. UNEP was to take the lead. During the next phase, an investment strategy for mitigating measure will be prepared by UNESCAP. Currently the work is ongoing on regional monitoring and early warning. Simultaneously the work has also ensued on the subregional cooperation. Efforts are ongoing for the establishment of a website and work has also commenced on the preparation of a Newsletter.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

14. The Senior Officials may wish to take note of the progress made in the past year in the implementation of the projects on nature conservation. They may also wish to review and endorse the recommendations of the first meeting of the Working Group on Nature Conservation in North East Asia particularly on the terms of reference of the working group, the priority areas for nature conservation in the subregion and the follow-up activities for NEASPEC. The Senior Officials are also requested to consider and approve the project proposal on the North-East Asia Subregional Cooperation in Nature Conservation.