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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Nature conservation has been identified as one of the key priority areas of subregional cooperation since NEASPEC's inception in 1993, and the first NEASPEC project fully funded by the member States was for the nature conservation programme. With the strong support and meaningful contribution by the member States, NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy¹ was adopted at the 12th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in 2007, which identified six flagship species, namely, three feline species (Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Snow leopard) and three migratory bird species (Black-faced spoonbill, White-naped crane and Hooded crane). The overall goals of the Strategy include contributing to biodiversity conservation strategy of, promoting transboundary and intergovernmental cooperation on, and enhancing coordinated mechanisms for the target species and their habitats. The overall approach of the Strategy also supports the subregional implementation of international agreements such as Convention on Biodiversity (CBD), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and other relevant international agreements relating to nature conservation.

2. Since the project *"Establishing Coordination Mechanisms for Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia"* implemented in 2010-2012, the nature conservation programme has been following two parallel tracks: one for the targeted feline species and the other for migratory birds and their habitats.

3. **Conservation of targeted feline species:** As a follow-up to the above-mentioned project, NEASPEC implemented the project *"Study on Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis"* during 2014-2016. This scientific assessment project generated new information on the patterns of cross-border movements of Amur tigers and leopards and presented specific areas of transboundary cooperation. The project was especially meaningful in the sense that biological samples and captured images of the species were exchanged between China and the Russian Federation for the first time and were utilized for joint analysis and comparative study.²

4. Following to the recommendations of the study, a new project proposal on a joint habitat management plan on the two species was developed through the Consultation Meeting on Transboundary Nature Conservation in early 2018 and presented to SOM-22 (2018). The proposal included (a) joint habitat assessment, (b) joint scientific monitoring methodology, and (c) capacity building for transboundary management; and received a general support by member States.

¹ http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Publication_SavingNatureConservation_2.pdf

² The project report is available at http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files//2018_12_17_UNESCAP_%ED%98%B8%EB%9E%91%EC%9D%B4.pdf

5. **Conservation of migratory birds and habitats:** Since the adoption of the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy in 2007, SOMs have considered and supported the implementation of several major projects involving diverse stakeholders:

- The project “*Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Migratory Birds in North-East Asia*”, which was implemented during 2014-2016, covered eight scoping surveys and two joint studies including the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and the Dauria International Protected Areas (DIPA), and identified that changing habitat conditions, land use changes, human disturbance, natural climatic variance and water management practices as the major threats to the habitats³. The project also supported awareness raising and capacity building training for young scientists and partners in member countries;
- “*Field Survey at the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)*” in 2014 in collaboration with the Hanns Seidel Foundation in view of the importance of migratory bird habitats in DPRK and the vital need of DPRK’s involvement for the success of habitat conservation in the subregion.
 - i. The field survey produced the first makings of baseline information of the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve as the evidence that qualified the reserve as “internationally important wetland” under the Ramsar Convention. The project thus facilitated the accession of the DPRK to the Ramsar Convention and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). The surveyed site was designated as one of the first Ramsar Sites in the DPRK⁴.
 - ii. The survey also affirmed the vital role of transboundary cooperation among habitats bordering China, DPRK and the Russian Federation in the Tumen River Estuary for conserving globally vulnerable migratory bird species. It recommended the three bordering countries to consider designating the exiting protected areas as Ramsar Sites and working towards creating a transboundary Ramsar Site, which would be the first one of such in Asia⁵.
- The study on “*Connectivity Conservation and Transboundary Cooperation in North-East Asia*”, which was carried out in 2017 jointly with the Korea Environment Institute (KEI), provided an interdisciplinary analysis on connectivity conservation in cross-border areas, based on the DIPA as case study. The project also identified the gaps and options for improving the current transboundary conservation efforts in the subregion. The project report is contained in Annex III to the present document.

³ Project report: http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files//UNESCAP_Migratory%20Birds.pdf

⁴ Rason Migratory Bird Reserve Survey Report (2014)

http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Rason%20migratory%20bird%20reserve_birds%20and%20habitats.pdf

⁵ Presented at SOM-20

6. Based on the outcomes and recommendations of the previous projects, the Secretariat suggested, and member States considered, at SOM-22 strengthening the coordination among protected areas located along or near the national boundaries. To create a transboundary Ramsar site in the Tumen River Estuary was presented as a concrete example involving the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve in the DPRK, the Khasansky Nature Park in the Russian Federation, and the Fangchuan National Park in China. SOM-22 generally welcomed the proposal and supported discussing the plan further, including to conduct further surveys and study visit in the proposed sites at the Tumen River Estuary.

II. CONSERVATION OF THE FELINE SPECIES

7. Since the Hua Hin Declaration on Tiger Conservation and the first International Tiger Forum held in St. Petersburg, the Russian Federation, in 2010, tiger range countries and communities have taken proactive actions to jointly strive to double the number of wild tigers (Tx2) by 2022. For instance, the Government of China established the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) covering Heilongjiang and Jilin Provinces along the DPRK and Russian border in 2017. Earlier this year, the Administration of the TLNP and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which contains a three-year road map for joint monitoring, capacity building and awareness raising activities.

8. Notwithstanding the progress on domestic policy measures and growing webs of collaboration across the borders, there is still a great need for establishing a partnership platform to make transboundary cooperation more efficient and effective. In this context, *International Forum on Tiger and Leopard Transboundary Conservation* was held in Harbin, China on 28-29 July 2019 to share the latest progress and discuss ways toward strengthening transboundary cooperation. The Forum was jointly organized by the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA) of China, Northeast Forestry University and 14 supporting organizations including NEASPEC. Attended by more than 300 representatives and experts from 19 countries and 12 international organizations, the Forum also presented cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data for monitoring; discussed human-animal conflict, restoration of populations and habitats, and technical and policy issues; and emphasized collaborative actions.

9. The Forum adopted *the Harbin Consensus on Strengthening Cooperation in Transboundary Conservation of Tigers and Leopards* as an outcome document. The Consensus pointed out the importance of transboundary conservation for the recovery of global tiger and leopard populations and called for sustained and collaborative actions from all stakeholders. It particularly indicated the needs to establish transboundary protected areas/ecological corridors; improve information sharing mechanism; and harmonize technical standards for monitoring.

10. As one of the parallel sessions of the Forum, *Workshop on Transboundary Conservation of Big Cat Species in North-East Asia* was jointly organized by NEASPEC and the NFGA on 29 July 2019. The Workshop aimed to elaborate the proposal presented at SOM-22 in line with the latest progress and discuss how to develop a platform for transboundary cooperation in the subregion.

11. Noting that joint scientific assessment and information exchange on Amur tigers and leopards have not taken place since the completion of the previous NEASPEC project, the workshop requested an urgent action towards establishing a cooperation system. Discussions suggested to create a transboundary protected area by combining existing national parks in border areas and to conduct joint habitat assessment of ecological corridors and habitats.

12. The workshop also shared the latest progress in snow leopard conservation and discussed the need of capacity building in scientific assessment and information exchange among range countries. Noting that the last NEASPEC project on snow leopards was conducted in 2006 to train Mongolian experts on monitoring methodology, the workshop requested the Secretariat to prepare a follow-up action for snow leopards focusing on capacity building for scientific assessment.

13. During the workshop, the Government of the Russian Federation indicated potential financial contributions to the follow-up NEASPEC projects. Subsequent to the workshop, experts of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation have worked on developing project proposals, focusing on

- i. *Sino-Russian transboundary protected area* in the East Manchurian (Changbaishan) area to ensure the integrity of diverse ecosystems in bordering protected areas and strengthen transboundary management;
- ii. *Feasibility study in Lesser Khingan*, where wild Amur tigers have been re-spotted since 2010s after 40 years of disappearance, to seek possibility of population recovery and habitat connectivity with the Sikhote-Alin/Wandashan area and beyond; and
- iii. *Study of migration of snow leopard along the Mongolian-Russian border* for population assessment and capacity building for data analysis from camera trapping.

III. CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRDS AND HABITATS

14. As the follow-up to the discussion at SOM-22 on the coordination among protected areas located along or near the national boundaries for the conservation of migratory birds, the present document focuses on setting up a transboundary conservation area in the Tumen River Estuary. The creation of transboundary conservation areas can bring multiple benefits on: (a) restoring ecological biodiversity through connecting the initially divided natural habitats to address habitat fragmentation; (b) maximizing the efficiency and productivity of conservation

and management strategies through increased capacity on personnel, local knowledge, field techniques and equipment, and funding; and (c) fostering better relations and reinforcing confidence and trust between two or more political entities thus contributing to regional stability, economic cooperation and social development⁶.

15. The Tumen River Estuary is one of the most important transboundary areas in North-East Asia that provide key habitats of migratory birds and compass national protected areas across the borders. Despite the significance of biodiversity value and cooperation, there is no mechanism for information exchange and cooperation among the protected areas. Therefore, setting up a transboundary Ramsar site was considered at the SOM-22 as one of the possible options to formulate such transboundary cooperation.

Various forms of transboundary conservation

16. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) puts forward four main categories of transboundary conservation practice, namely: transboundary protected areas, parks for peace, transboundary conservation and protected areas, and transboundary migratory corridors (see table below)⁷.

Table 1. IUCN Categories of Transboundary Conservation

	Category	Definition
1	Transboundary Protected Areas	An area of land and/or sea that straddles one or more borders between states, subnational units such as provinces and regions, autonomous areas and/or areas beyond the limit of national sovereignty or jurisdiction (“Areas”), whose constituent parts are especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed cooperatively through legal or other effective means.
2	Transboundary Conservation and Development Areas	Areas of natural and associated cultural resources form a matrix that contributes to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and promotion of social and economic development; and managed cooperatively through legal or other effective means.
3	Parks for Peace	Transboundary protected areas, of natural and associated cultural resources, are formally dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and to the promotion of peace and cooperation.
4	Transboundary Migration Corridors	Areas of land and/or sea in two or more countries, which are not necessarily contiguous, but are required to sustain a biological migratory pathway and where cooperative management has been secured through legal or other effective means.

⁶ NEASPEC working paper: Transboundary Cooperation for Nature Conservation – World Trends and Ways Forward in Northeast Asia, February 2015, <http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Transboundary%20Cooperation%20for%20Nature%20Conservation.pdf>

⁷ *ibid.*

17. Apart from the IUCN’s categories, three other designations can be overlaid (see table below)⁸:

Table 2. IUCN Categories of Transboundary Conservation

1	Transboundary World Heritage Site	Protected areas on either side of an international boundary fall collectively into the designation of the area as a World Heritage site under the UNESCO
2	Transboundary Biosphere Reserves	Two or more countries represent commitment and cooperation on the conservation of biodiversity, apply together to the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere program
3	Transboundary Ramsar Site	Parties to the Ramsar Convention agree to establish a Ramsar Site on their territory as part of a bigger Transboundary Ramsar Site. The authorities on both sides of the border agree to collaborate in the management of the transboundary site and to notify the Secretariat of their intents.

18. Having the DPRK acceded to the Convention in 2018, all NEASPEC member States are contracting parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and have designated a large number of Ramsar sites (see the table 3). China will host the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention (COP14) in 2021. However, NEASPEC member States have not utilized the concept of transboundary Ramsar site despite designating many protected wetlands, while there are 18 transboundary Ramsar sites in Europe and 4 in Africa.

Table 3. Number of Ramsar sites in NEASPEC member States

NEASPEC countries	Year of Entry	Ramsar Sites	Hectares
Russia	1977	35	10,323,767
China	1992	57	6,948,592
Mongolia	1998	11	1,439,530
Japan	1980	52	154,696
ROK	1997	23	19,618
DPRK	2018	2	7,241

(source: Ramsar Convention website)

19. The proposed site for Asia’s first Transboundary Ramsar Site includes the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve (DPRK), the Khasansky Nature Park (the Russian Federation) and the Fangchuan National Scenic Area (China), and SOM-22 considered the initial idea for project activities, such as organizing regular exchange of staff, experience sharing, coordinated annual surveys, information exchange and joint education activities (see figure below).

⁸ *ibid.*

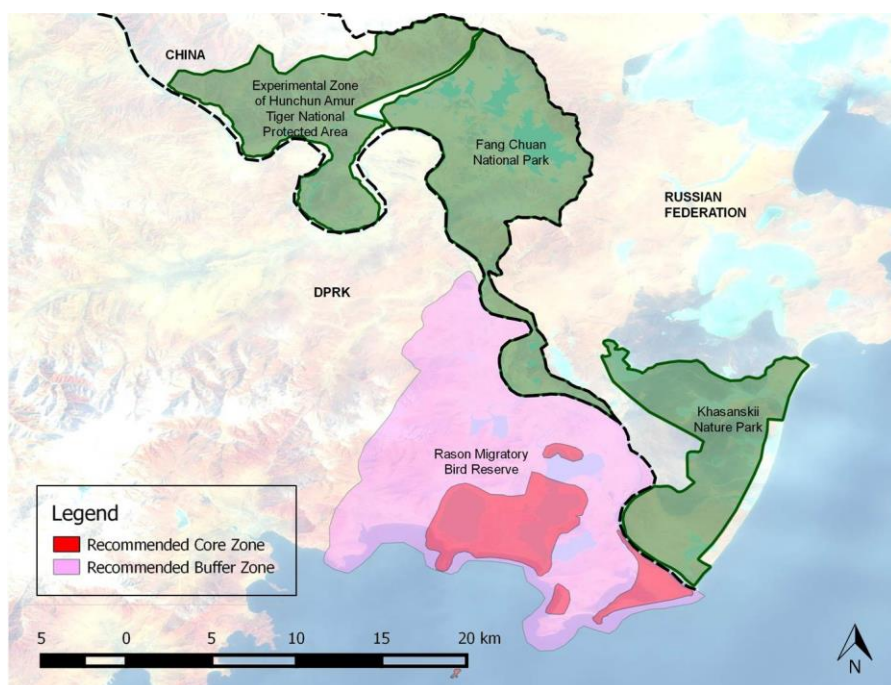


Figure 1 Wetlands and Key Protected Areas in China, DPRK and the Russian Federation at the Tumen River Estuary

20. Following to the discussion at SOM-22, the Secretariat has worked with national experts from China and the Russian Federation to develop a preliminary study on transboundary cooperation among protected wetlands in the Tumen River Estuary. The objective of the study is to review the conservation of targeted sites and their socio-economic conditions, evaluate the feasible steps towards strengthening and institutionalizing the transboundary cooperation among the protected wetland areas, and develop concrete recommendations. The concept note of the study is contained in Annex IV to the present document.

21. As the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve was designated as Ramsar site in 2018 by the DPRK, the study focuses on desk research and consultations with key stakeholders in Khasansky Nature Park (Russia) and the Fangchuan National Scenic Area (China). The table below provides a brief overview of the status of the targeted sites.

Table 4. Protected wetlands in Tumen River Estuary

Country	Targeted sites	Status	Area (hectare)	Coordinates
DPRK	Rason Migratory Bird Reserve (Rason Special Economic Zone)	Ramsar site (designated 16-01-2018)	3,525.7 ha	42°20'N 130°35'E
China	Fangchuan National Park (Yanbian Korean	National key scenery area (2002)	1,416.13 ha (areas of lakes: Qi&Badaopaozi,	

	autonomous prefecture)		Wudaopaozi, Sandaopaozi)	
	Jingxin wetland (including Fangchuan) (Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture)	Included in “Hunchun Tumen River National Forest Park” (1997)	8,000 ha	129°52'00"~ 131°18'30"E, 42°25'20"~ 43°30'18"N
Russian Federation	Khasansky Nature Park (Primorsky Krai)	Prefectural level protected area established by the Primorsky Krai Administration (1997)	Main (southern) cluster: 9,885.8 ha	130°38'25"~ 130°47'25"E, 42°18'70"~ 42°28'25"N
			Maloye Mramornoye Lake (northern): 83.3 ha	130°46'47"E, 42°33'15"N

22. The Lake Khasan and Tumen Delta, where the Khasansky Nature Park is located, was identified as one of the six large transboundary wetland systems located near the national border meeting the Ramsar Criteria according to Russia’s National Report submitted to the Ramsar Convention COP-12⁹.

23. Apart from directly contributing to the transboundary conservation of internationally important wetlands, such progress towards setting up a transboundary Ramsar site at the Tumen River Estuary could also contribute to the CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets, especially to Target 11 that calls upon the protection of areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services through well connected systems of protected areas beyond national borders.

24. As the complete draft report of the preliminary study on *Transboundary Cooperation Among Protected Wetlands in the Tumen River Estuary* will become available in late October 2019, the Secretariat wishes to propose holding an Expert Group Meeting by early 2020 to review the report and deliberate on the concrete steps towards setting up a transboundary Ramsar site at the Tumen River Estuary joined by member Governments, authorities at national and sub-national levels, experts, and other international organizations.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

25. [Conservation of tigers and leopards] The Meeting may wish to request member States to provide their views on specific approaches and activities to be carried out.

⁹ See page 31-32,
https://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/library/cop12_nrform_e_russian_federation.pdf

26. [Conservation of migratory birds and habitats] The Meeting may wish to request member States to provide further views on the proposed approaches and activities and invite member States to express their interest in holding the proposed Expert Group Meeting.

27. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to indicate their intended contributions to the new project and other relevant activities.

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