North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)

Workshop on Nature Conservation and Transboundary Cooperation

28-29 November 2016, Beijing, China

Report of the Workshop

1. NEASPEC and the Beijing Forestry University jointly organized the Workshop on Nature Conservation and Transboundary Cooperation on 28-29 November 2016 in Beijing, China, to bring together project partners as well as key stakeholders to review outcomes of two NEASPEC projects and international cooperation in the subregional, and to discuss the way forward on follow-up activities by NEASPEC and its partners.

2. The Workshop gathered participants from governments, academia and civil society organizations all six member States of NEASPEC, as well as subregional networks and international organizations working in the subregion. Participants shared information on national progress and various activities carried out including joint activities with other organizations.

3. **[Review of nature conservation and international cooperation in Northeast Asia]** China has been active in international cooperation on nature conservation, and joined hands with key actors in conservation such as the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), as well as domestic actors including the National Bird Banding Centre and Beijing Forestry University. China has continuous bilateral cooperation with Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), with increasing emphasis on crane conservation to be reflected in bilateral agreements.

4. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has a range of habitats including wetlands that support internationally important populations of endangered waterbirds. DPRK has a number of laws and policies in place to protect marine and coastal habitats, and established legal framework for the protection and rational use of wetlands. Habitats in DPRK are however, challenged by land reclamation, lack of awareness, lack of management plan and population growth. DPRK has carried out a number of activities with international organizations and agencies to enhance cooperation, including joint surveys, national and local workshops, and training sessions. It is proposed to have future activities to increase public awareness and education such as through establishment of wetland education center; build capacity to monitor migratory birds and on wetland management; and create demonstration sites in wetland management.

5. Mongolia supports about a quarter of the total wild population of snow leopards in the world, which is threatened by prey reduction, retaliatory killing, poaching and mining in Mongolia. Mongolia has been working local and international partners to monitor snow leopards population including community-based monitoring project, trap elimination campaign, establishing snow leopard enterprises and livestock insurance scheme etc. Cranes in Mongolia, in the other hand, are closely related to agricultural land as well as herding activities, which were emphasized as priority in conservation approaches.

6. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as researchers have implemented various activities and carried out research to support conservation and international cooperation. The Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSS) has been supporting nature conservation, forestry and agriculture in DPRK through carrying out joint surveys, workshops and capacity building programs. The Beijing Forestry University (BFU) has been carrying out research to inform policy-making and to develop guidelines and standards. BFU has also actively supported various international and regional mechanisms including NEASPEC, EAAFP, IUCN and the Ramsar Secretariat.

7. **[NEAPSEC Project – Study on Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Amur Leopards using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis]** Under this Project, 949 camera traps were installed in over 470 spots in the Russian Federation and China during 2013-2015.

8. Camera traps have identified at least 89 leopard individuals, 15 of which were observed in both the Russian Federation and China. Some leopards were found to be frequently crossing the border between the Russian Federation and China (for example, up to 9 times during 2013-2014). Analysis of images has identified 55 Amur tiger individuals, 19 of which were observed in both the Russian Federation and China. It also shows a clear trend of dispersion of young individuals from the Russian Federation to China.

9. Molecular genetic analysis has also been carried out under the Project which identified 25 Amur leopard individuals (9 in China and 16 in the Russian Federation) from 161 fecal samples, and 31 Amur tiger individuals (19 in China and 12 in the Russian Federation) from 152 fecal samples.

10. The Project concludes that the transboundary movements of Amur tigers and leopards are frequent on the Sino-Russian border of the Changbai mountains. There is a trend of dispersion from both species further into the Chinese forests (from the border) yet there has been obstacles limiting their dispersion which require further investigations.

11. For the conservation of Amur tiger, there is need to conduct further research on the potential connections between the small populations in the Changbaishan mountains and the main population in the Sikhote-Alin mountains to avoid the collapse of the smaller populations due to the risk of diseases. Amur leopard, on the other hand, is in need of greater attention as it

has a much lower population number and less competitive than Amur tigers. Specific attention needs to be paid on expanding their habitat range to sustain a viable population.

12. Camera trapping has been found to be the most effective method to monitor and understand the transborder movement of Amur tigers and leopard. It can cover a large area to conduct all-weather monitoring. Genetic analysis is needed to estimate the genetic diversity of the populations in order to provide information for managing cross-border ecological corridors especially between the Sihot-Aline and Wandashan tiger population. Overall, a wel-developed, continuous and unified monitoring methodology needed to be developed to ensure efficient monitoring for conservation.

13. **[Recommendations on Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard]** Recommended areas of action include: (i) widening and managing international and national eco-corridors; (ii) joint assessment of corridors and habitats of Amur leopards in China, the Russian Federation and DPRK; (iii) joint habitat assessment to control human disturbances; (iv) joint monitoring on dynamics of the entire populations; (v) information sharing and coordination for new tiger and leopards national parks; (vi) international expert group for unified monitoring methodology; (vii) database sharing mechanism; and (viii) disease monitoring and management.

14. **[NEASPEC Project – Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Migratory Birds in North-East Asia]** With five national partners, the Project carried out scoping survey at seven sites and joint study at two transboundary sites. Alongside the studies, this Project also trained fifteen young scientists in a 5-day training programme, held public education activities such as the International Black-faced Spoonbill School in Ganghwa Island and expert conference also attended by locals in Cheorwon county.

15. **Black-faced Spoonbill (BFS)** nests have significantly increased in Xingrentuo and Yuanbaotuo (China) from 7 in 2013 to 21 in 2015. A BFS banded in ROK had been spotted in Zhuanghe Estuary Intertidal Zone in China suggests the close relationship of the Zhuanghe and Korean breeding populations.

16. The scoping survey in Mongolia has covered over 80% of potential crane habitat in eastern Mongolia, which is the first time this type of survey has taken place. The survey identified critical sites for four species of cranes and indicated that three important congregation sites in Mongolia support 46-60% of regional **White-naped Crane (WNC)** population.

17. The survey in Lindian wetland (China) for **Hooded Crane (HC)** noted the lack of effective management measures for crane protection, industrial pollution has been observed in the area and illegal hunting also poses serious threats to cranes. Cheonsu Bay has observed rapid growth of HC in the area from about 2500 in 2013 to over 4400 in 2015, it has become an increasingly important wintering site for over 2000 HCs. Rice fields in Izumi, Japan is noted to

be important in providing for cranes, alongside with artificial feeding. Number of wintering cranes has also increased thus pushing migration earlier from mid-October to early October.

18. At the transboundary habitats, the Russian part of **Dauria** is where all breeding sites of the western population of WNC in Russia and aerial census with helicopter has covered about 35,000km^2. Most of the breeding sites are located outside of the Daursky Nature Reserve, thus facing a number of threats from human activities such as hunting, herding and and grassfires, to natural threats including drought. WNC were also found to use different breeding sites in wet and dry years, more nests were found outside of the protected areas during the dry years thus they face higher risk. Breeding success has been very low during the recent dry years, in 2016, only 36% of territorial pairs have been observed with chicks.

19. The other studied transboundary habitat is the **Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)**, where rice paddies and riverine wetlands have been the main habitats supporting wintering cranes. The DMZ area has become an increasingly important wintering site for cranes, the number of winter cranes has continued to increase from over 2032 cranes (of which 1295 were WNCs) in 2011 to 3877 cranes (of which 3166 were WNCs) in 2014. However, the area is pressured by development and intensifying habitat fragmentation. Rapid urbanization, changes in water regime by construction projects and overuse of groundwater are the major threats. Meanwhile, disturbance from birdwatchers and wildlife photographers has been emerging and requires attention.

20. **[Recommendations on Migratory Birds]** In view of the Project outcomes and discussions, key recommended areas for action include: (i) information exchange and sharing, especially on recent monitoring data sharing; (ii) agro-biodiversity management; (iii) best practices on data collection and management; (iv) joint monitoring including multi-national coordinated census; (v) stopover and staging sties management guidelines; (vi) capacity building of young scientists such as regular international nature school; (vii) public awareness and education; and (viii) linkages of scientific knowledge and application on site management/ practices.

21. **[Way Forward and Proposals]** To continue the implementation of the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy as well as the Strategic Plan 2016-2020, a proposal of activities under the theme of **connectivity conservation** has been developed and presented by the NEASPEC Secretariat and the Korea Environmental Institute (KEI). It aims to enhance coordinated actions; to strengthen science-policy linkages; to promote bi-/ multi-lateral cooperation among all stakeholders; and to support the implementation of national, regional and global goals for sustainable development, especially environment-related Sustainable Development Goals.

22. Proposed activities include: (i) an **analytical study of environmental and institutional context of connectivity conservation** to review transboundary cooperation in nature conservation within the subregion and worldwide experiences, with **case studies** of key

transboundary habitats at different stages of transborder cooperation such as the Dauria International Protected Area (DIPA) and the Tumen River and Delta; and (ii) **activities to coordinate multi-stakeholder activities** for Amur tiger and leopards, and migratory birds, according to the recommended areas of action mentioned earlier in the report.

23. The Workshop supported the proposed activities and noted the importance to promote connectivity conservation in terms of physical, ecological and human connectivity. In addition, the Workshop suggested to incorporate considerations of existing operation and plans of the study areas such as the annual planning of DIPA; and conservation of key habitats that are out of the protected areas.

24. **[Next Steps]** Further to the views and suggestions received at the Workshop, NEASPEC Secretariat will consult for further inputs from key stakeholders to revise the proposal to be presented for review and approval at the upcoming NEASPEC 21st Senior Officials Meeting to be held in 2017.