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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. In accordance with the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy adopted by the 12th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) in 2007, NEASPEC implemented the project *“Establishing Coordination Mechanisms for Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia”* in 2010-2012, with the aim to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation for nature conservation in transboundary areas in North-East Asia.

2. **Conservation of Amur tigers and leopards:** Based on the outcomes from the project and a further situation analysis by the Secretariat regarding the proposal of the Russian Federation at SOM-17 in 2012 to conduct a study on the transborder movement of Amur tigers and leopards, SOM-18 in November 2013 came to a conclusion to support the new project, *“Study on Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis”*.

3. The Study involved two expert group meetings in April 2014 and September 2015, respectively, field visits for camera trapping and non-invasive sample collection, comparative analysis of results from camera trapping from China and the Russian Federation, and laboratory work for molecular genetic analysis, etc. The mid-term progress and the final outcomes were reported to the last three SOMs. A key outcome of the Study was the identification of Amur tigers and leopards crossing the border of China and the Russian Federation, which include 19 out of 45 Amur tigers and 15 out of 89 Amur leopards captured by cameras during 2013-2015 in the two countries. This result generated new information on the patterns of cross-border movements including the number of encounters in each country, number of border crossings, maximum distance moved from the border. The Study also presented specific areas of transboundary cooperation as presented to the SOM-21 and concluded the significance of habitat conservation in the two countries as well as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) to ensure more effective conservation and genetic diversity of two species.

4. **Conservation of migratory birds:** The project *“Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Migratory Birds in North-East Asia”* approved by the SOM-17 in 2012 had been implemented during 2014 to 2016. The project mostly involved national survey and study on key habitats of migratory birds including Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley and Russian part of the Daurian International Protected Area for White-naped crane; Xingrentuo/Yuanbaotuo (China), Hakata Bay (Japan) and Incheon (Republic of Korea) for Black-faced Spoonbill; and Lindian (China), Izumi (Japan) and Cheonsu Bay (Republic of Korea) for Hooded crane. The project also carried out a joint study of experts from most member countries on the southern part of Korea’s Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in January-February 2015, and provided the opportunity of a field survey at the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve in DPRK in March 2014 and a side event on North-East Asian cooperation at the 12th Conference of the Parties (COP-12) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in October 2014.

II. CONSERVATION OF AMUR TIGER AND LEOPARD

5. Following-up to the recommendations by the report of the previous NEASPEC project “*Study on Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis*” as well as the Workshop on Nature Conservation and Transboundary Cooperation in November 2016 in Beijing, the Secretariat organized “NEASPEC Consultation Meeting on Transboundary Nature Conservation” on 26 February 2018 to develop a follow-up joint project. Prior to the meeting, national experts submitted 4 proposals which were developed based upon the recommendations made in the project report and the Beijing workshop. During the meeting, experts also reviewed the previous project including ways to strengthen further cooperation for the subsequent project and jointly discuss project proposals.

6. Recommendations for the follow-up project on the Amur tiger and leopard can be summarized as below:

i. Joint assessment of habitats and corridors in range countries

- a. The Study revealed that population distribution and reintroduction to the area with smaller population are needed to enhance genetic diversity and avoid abrupt decrease in population by outbreak of infectious diseases. Habitats for the concerned species also need to be expanded further to the inner land by removing obstacles for species movement.
- b. Considering the northern parts of DPRK provide habitats for Amur tigers and leopards, it is also necessary to unite the efforts of all three countries for the accurate assessment of habitat condition and the potential for restoring natural ranges.
- c. Recommended activities include (1) widen international and national ecological corridors, (2) joint habitat assessment on population dynamics of two species and human disturbance, and (3) establishment transboundary ecological corridors connecting all range countries.

ii. Unified monitoring methodology

- a. Although the Study applied the same methodology to analyze scientific data jointly or separately collected, it is critical to develop a unified monitoring methodology which can be utilized among key stakeholders in order to increase credibility. Establishing a database sharing platform under an intergovernmental mechanism was also proposed.

iii. Technical cooperation on joint disease monitoring

- a. Recent studies showed that some of big cat populations in the subregion have been faced a great risk of disease which could cause a huge decrease of total population, and experts recommended to conduct joint disease monitoring.
7. Emphasizing the importance of close collaboration among the range countries, the Consultation Meeting agreed the need of a joint habitat management plan in the transboundary habitat areas to conserve the Amur tiger and leopard timely and more effectively. The meeting concluded to develop a new project proposal in line with both the submitted proposals and discussions as well as the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020.
8. ***Proposal for joint habitat management plan for the Amur tiger and leopard in North-East Asia:*** Aiming to develop a joint habitat management system for the Amur tiger and leopard among all range countries in North-East Asia, the proposed project mainly includes three joint activities.
9. ***Joint assessment of transboundary habitat areas:*** The outcome of the previous NEASPEC project and recent studies showed a strong requirement of promoting transborder movement and diffusing population out of the core area within the Sino-Russia border areas to prevent the population overcrowded and isolation. This joint assessment aims to determine a specific, key transboundary corridor(s) not only for the transborder movement but for effective population dispersals among range countries, including DPRK as well to avoid any fragmented population distribution.
10. ***Joint scientific monitoring methodology:*** To provide credibility of collected data and be utilized for further studies by any stakeholders, joint scientific monitoring methodology should be developed. Based on previous exercises conducting joint studies on camera trapping and molecular genetic analysis, project partners will devise a standardized joint monitoring methodology which can be an integrated and long-term monitoring system among range countries including DPRK.
11. ***Capacity building among range countries to strengthen transboundary management:*** There is growing global recognition that effective biodiversity conservation in border areas depends on an ecosystem management approach that integrates various national protected area management into wider land- and water-use planning and habitat conservation practices. Thus, a coordinated management among protected areas and habitats along the national borders is essential to conserve the Amur tiger/leopard and their habitats in, especially, Lower Tumen River area.
12. The capacity building programme aims to (a) increase capacity of participating countries to collaborate on cross-border conservation, (b) develop and implement more sustainable management practices and (c) in a long-term perspective, create a transboundary management system. Activities include (a) assessment of national legislation and policies on transboundary protected areas (TBPAs) and (2) establishment of working groups to develop TBPA management strategies, regulations and procedures by reviewing existing TBPAs.

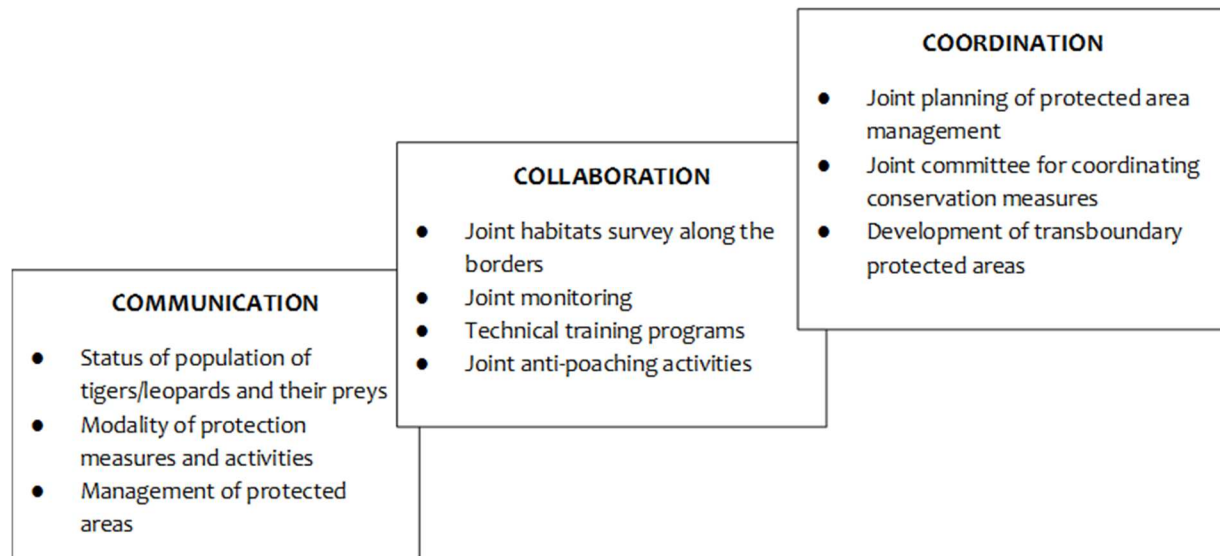
III. CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRD HABITATS

13. The NEASPEC projects “*Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Migratory Birds in North-East Asia*” demonstrated the diversity of habitats and ways in which they are connected, such as physically adjacent to each other and those that are ecologically connected by migratory birds. Differences in such connectivity, however, require different management and cooperation.

14. **KEI-NEASPEC Joint Project:** As presented to and supported by the SOM-21, the Secretariat and Korea Environment Institute (KEI) conducted a joint project on “*Connectivity Conservation and Transboundary Cooperation in North-East Asia*” in 2017, focusing on Dauria International Protected Areas (DIPA)¹ where major physically connected transboundary habitats are under management and cooperation of various stages, including the communication, collaboration and coordination amongst targeted areas (see Figure 1).

15. As an interdisciplinary analysis of connectivity conservation with case studies at DIPA, the objective of the joint project includes to: enhance coordinated actions to conserve key species and their habitats in transboundary areas of North-East Asia; strengthen science-policy linkages; strengthen bi/multi-lateral cooperation among all stakeholders and their capacities; and contribute to the implementation of global, regional and national goals for sustainable development, especially environment-related SDGs.

Figure 1. Cooperation for managing connectivity conservation



¹ DIPA consists of Daursky State Nature Reserve (Russian Federation), Mongol-daguur Specially Protected Nature Area (Mongolia), Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve (China), and the Tumen River Area is home to a large number of national protected areas including the Leopard National Park, Kedrovaya Pad Nature Reserve, Khasanskii Nature Park (Russian Federation), Hunchun Nature Reserve, Wangqing Nature Reserve, Fangchuan National Park, (China), and Rason Migratory Bird Reserve (DPRK).

16. Apart from examining transboundary cooperation between cross-border areas that are physically connected in DIPA, the joint project also examined habitats that are ecologically connected through physical proximity and ecological movements, such as the breeding sites, stop-over sites and wintering sites of migratory birds. Another highlight of the report was on how human connections can sustain and enhance natural connectivity.

17. Adopting a Pressure-State-Response (PSR) Framework as its research methodology, the joint project analyzed the environmental and institutional context of connectivity conservation. The analytical study for DIPA included literature review by national experts from China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation, and joint field research in DIPA from late July to early August in 2017.

18. With a thorough review on socio-economic and environmental pressures on biodiversity, the Project identified a huge loss of habitats due to, inter alia, desertification and distribution of key threatened protected species (e.g. White-naped Crane) accordingly. In response to the worsened habitat conditions, diverse stakeholders from international, subregional, national to local, academia and business have been engaged to improve the status, and the Project recommended to enhance subregional cooperation scheme to complement existing mechanism such as DIPA Joint Commission and its Working Group established in 1994. The Project also recommended to incubate a regional cooperative mechanism of “North-East Asia Transboundary Protected Areas Network” to ensure the long-term conservation of the most threatened species and valuable habitats in the subregion, similar to “Natura 2000”, a network of core breeding and resting sites for rare and threatened species and habitat in the EU².

19. The joint project developed more specific recommendations, including to: 1) Enhance cooperation on a comprehensive monitoring system incorporating socio-economic and environmental factors impacting the biodiversity of DIPA with long-term stable financial support; 2) Establish a “DIPA Comprehensive Information Center” to accommodate existing monitoring data and that to be generated through the monitoring system and facilitate share information; and 3) Expand the community on DIPA biodiversity conversation to include multi-stakeholders and partners.

20. The outcomes of KEI-NEASPEC Joint Project were presented to the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Forum in November 2017 in Seoul and the project report is contained in Annex III of the present document.

21. ***DPRK’s accession to the Ramsar Convention and East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP):*** NEASPEC has played an instrumental role in DPRK’s accession to the Convention on Wetlands (the Ramsar Convention) and EAAFP in May and April 2018, respectively. As indicated in the para 4, NEASPEC Secretariat and Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF)

² http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm

carried out a field survey with a team of international experts at the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve in late March 2014 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. This field survey produced the first makings of baseline information of the habitat including key geographical information, and most importantly, it confirms that the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve meets Ramsar criteria as an "internationally important wetland"³. Facilitated through round of national and international workshops, DPRK submitted its application and became the 170th Contracting Party to the Ramsar Convention and designated the Mundok Migratory Bird Reserve and the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve as its first two "Ramsar Sites".

22. NEASPEC Secretariat also supported DPRK joining EAAFP in May 2018 with Kumya Wetland Reserve and Mundok Wetland Reserve listed as Flyway Network Site (FNS) and further sites being considered under EAAFP.

23. Drawing from outcomes and lessons learnt from the two projects, "Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Migratory Birds in North-East Asia" and "Connectivity Conservation and Transboundary Cooperation in North-East Asia", NEASPEC Secretariat suggests strengthening coordination among protected areas located along or near the national boundaries, for example by creating transboundary Ramsar site. Candidate transboundary areas are the Tumen River Estuary, involving the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve (DPRK), the Khasanskii Nature Park (Russian Federation), and the Fang Chuan National Park (China)

- i. Out of the three protected areas in Tumen River Estuary, the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve in DPRK has been designated as Ramsar Site and it also qualifies to be the FNS under the EAAFP.
- ii. Waterbirds surveys needs to be conducted at the Khasanskii Nature Park and the Fang Chuan National Park in order to quality them as Ramsar Sites.
- iii. By having all three protected areas become Ramsar Sites, the Tumen River Estuary will become the first transboundary Ramsar Site in Asia, that will offer greater opportunities and enable transboundary conservation collaboration.

24. At the proposed sites, the project could include, but not limited to, organizing regular exchange of staff and holding workshop to share experiences, carrying out coordinated annual surveys of waterbirds and other wildlife species, and sharing of the data, exchange visits by local officials and stakeholders, and joint education activities.

25. In this regard, the Secretariat proposes to hold a stakeholder workshop in Yanji in March 2019 to discuss (1) a detailed project plan for the Amur tiger and leopard as the Tumen River Estuary is the key habitat and ecological corridor for the concerned species, (2) activity plan to

³ "Rason Migratory Bird Reserve: Birds and Habitats", available at http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Rason%20migratory%20bird%20reserve_birds%20and%20habitats.pdf

conduct waterbirds survey in Khasanskii Nature Park and the Fang Chuan National Park to designate as Ramsar Sites and FNS, and (3) study visit to the key areas including the Rason Migratory Birds Reserve if possible.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

26. Bi- and multi-lateral cooperation on nature conservation in transboundary areas gradually strengthened in North-East Asia since mid-1990s. However, nature conservation in transboundary areas remains to be challenge, and needs to scaleup the institutional arrangement for transboundary cooperation. By doing so, North-East Asian countries can benefit from the experiences accumulated in subregional cooperation for conserving NEASPEC flagship species and their habitat towards achieving respective goals and targets in national plans related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

27. [Conservation of tigers and leopards] The Meeting may wish to request member States to provide their views on the proposed projects and invite member States to provide their views on specific approaches and activities.

28. [Conservation of migratory bird habitats] The Meeting may wish to request member States to provide their views on project outcomes and recommendations.

29. The Meeting may wish to invite member States for their views and decision on the proposed activities for transboundary nature conservation and nominate national focal points/experts for further consultations.

30. 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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