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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda)

Development of the Cooperation Mechanisms for Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North East Asia

Note by the secretariat

CONTENTS

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I. OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS

1. In view of the significance of transboundary cooperation on nature conservation, the 14th SOM reviewed the project proposal on "Establishing Coordination Mechanisms for Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia" and approved the project. The Meeting noted multilateral and bilateral initiatives being carried out on the relevant subjects among member countries and the need to expand the geographical scope of the project in order to include the tripartite border area of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation. In this regard, the Meeting requested the Secretariat to undertake further consultations among member countries on the final arrangement of the project.

2. As a response to the request of the 14th SOM, the Secretariat had further consultations with national experts on the project approach and geographical scope which will include thee major transboundary areas, i.e., the Lower Tumen River Basin, Dauria International Protected Area (DIPA) and Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve. The Lower Tumen River Basin encompasses parts of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. The Basin is home to both Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard, and part of either breeding grounds or migration corridors of White-naped Crane and Hooded Crane. All four are identified as the subregion's flagship species in the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy. DIPA is established at the junction of the borders between the Russia Federation, Mongolia and China. Four protected nature areas of the three countries were combined to create the DIPA.[1] Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve is located on the border of China and the Russian Federation. This expansion of target areas will help relevant initiatives and experiences in existing mechanisms for transboundary cooperation serve as a good reference for the creation of multilateral/bilateral cooperation mechanisms in the Lower Tumen River Basin. It will also support strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation on DIPA and Khanka-Xingkai Lake.

3. The project aims to explore ways in which the following areas of focus can be effectively addressed and demonstrated:

[1] The four protected nature areas include Daursky Zapovednik (statenature reserve) and Tsasucheisky Bor National Wildlife Refuge under Zapovednik management in Chitinskaya oblast of Russia; Mongol Daguur strictly protected nature area in Dornod aimag of Mongolia, which borders on the Russian reserve; and Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China.

- Cross-border efforts on biodiversity monitoring, data collecting and sharing, particularly on those flagship species within protected areas and along migrating routs;
- Establishment of operational transboundary cooperation mechanisms; and
- Knowledge sharing and dissemination.

Specific outputs that the project will generate include

- Review of subregional and location-specific conditions for nature conservation in selected protected areas adjacent to national borders and international protected areas is available for strengthening transboundary cooperation.
- Framework for a transboundary cooperation mechanism in the Lower Tumen River Basin is available for the preparation of endorsement by concerned NEASPEC member states.
- Major stakeholders are aware of the benefits of strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms and have an improved channel for transboundary cooperation

4. The secretariat received the final confirmation of the Russian Government's approval of the project in November 2009 and funding for the activities in 2010. The project will be implemented from mid 2010 for two years with the budget of US$198,170, which consists of US$48,170 from the Core Fund as approved by the 14th SOM and US$150,000 from the Government of the Russian Federation.[2]

II. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

5. The Meeting may wish to express its appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for the new initiative of joint action and financial support.

6. The Meeting may wish to request the nomination of national implementing agencies in the member countries directly involved in the target areas of the project and participating agencies in other member countries.

[2] The contribution of US$75,000 from the Russian Federation for the first year of the project implementation has been officially confirmed but the budget for the second year is subject to the approval of the Government late 2010.

Annex I. Summary of the Project on the Development of the Cooperation Mechanisms for Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas in North-East Asia

1. Executive Summary

The 12th Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC unanimously endorsed the NEASPEC Resolution on the Framework of Nature Conservation Programme and NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy. The Strategy identifies a concrete subregional conservation approach with specific strategies to protect six flagship species, which are critically endangered and unique to the subregion.

Having developed the Strategy, NEASPEC is determined to take a further step to promote the Strategy by piloting some of its key recommendations in a transboundary area of high biological importance. Based on the core principle of the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Programme, the important linkage between nature conservation and sustainable development, as well as cross-border cooperation will be the main driving forces of the piloting.

As transboundary areas are often the periphery of major socioeconomic development, they have potentials to keep untouched nature from human activities. But this situation also causes lacking the appropriate enforcement of legal and administrative provisions pertaining to biodiversity conservation. Thus, multilateral and bilateral cooperation for the protection of natural resources and endangered species in transboundary areas have been perceived as a significant means to achieve national and global mandates on biodiversity conservation. Practical approaches for such cooperation are suggested to create coordination mechanisms between national protected areas adjoining international borders or unified protected areas such as Transboundary Protected Areas or Transboundary Biosphere Reserves, which contribute to not only coordinated actions on biodiversity conservation but also environmental confidence building among states as well as local stakeholders sharing an international border.

To this end, the project plans to carry out a follow-up project at the Lower Tumen River basin, which encompasses parts of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. The basin is home to both Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard, and part of either breeding grounds or migration corridors of White-naped Crane and Hooded Crane. All four are identified as the subregion's flagship species in the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy.

Undertaking this project will particularly take advantage of initiatives lead by UNESCO, the Secretariat of Greater Tumen Initiative and UNDP to strengthen transboundary cooperation. While those initiatives were not able to create formal mechanisms for environmental cooperation in the transboundary area, the processes and outcomes of the initiatives provide NEASPEC with a valuable ground for further work. Thus, NEASPEC will ensure that this project fully reflects all important experiences and lessons-learnt from previous initiatives into its goals and approaches.

2. Situation Analysis

North-East Asia encompasses some of the most diverse mixture of ecosystems in the world, characterized by tundra, taiga, boreal forest, steppe, desert, alpine, wetland, costal and marine environments. These ecosystems provide a complex mosaic of habitats for many critically endangered species – as captured by the NEASPEC project on the Nature Conservation Strategy, flagship species such as Amur Tiger, Amur Leopard, Snow Leopard, Black-faced Spoonbill, White-napped Crane, and Hooded Crane, represent some of the most highly endangered species in this subregion, which require immediate protection. As a whole, the subregion hosts nearly 50,000 species of flora and fauna, of which almost a half is endemic to the subregion. There are over 1,000 species listed as endangered.

Despite its high biological importance, these ecosystems and species are under serious threat. The subregion's increasing intensity of land and natural resource use in recent decades, coupled with increasing population, has put immense human pressure on its environments through rapid urbanization, agricultural encroachment and native forest destruction, and has resulted in the destruction and fragmentation of habitats of many important species such as those flagship species identified in the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy. In addition, illegal hunting of endangered feline animals and birds in the subregion continues to put those species under serious threat of extinction due continuing pressure from illegal wildlife trade.

With regard to the NEASPEC flagship species, there are nearly a dozen or more key protected areas along the international borders in the subregion, particularly along the borders with the Russian Federation. Those protected areas include: (i) the Tunkinskiy Natural Park of Mongolia, and Daurskiy Zapovednik and Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina Zapovednik of the Russian Federation; (ii) Jilin Hunchun Nature Reserve and Heilongjiang Mudanfeng Nature Reserve of China, and Kedrovaya Pad Zapovednik,

Bolshekhekhtsirskiy Zapovednik, and Khankaiskiy Zapovednik, Leopardoviy Federal Zakaznik of the Russian Federation; and (iii) the Far East Marine Zapovednik and Khansanskii Nature Park of the Russian Federation and Rason Migratory Bird Reserve of DPPK; (iv) Changbai Biosphere Reserve of China and Paekdu Bioshere Reserve of DPRK.

However, there are only a few systems installed for coordination and management of the adjacent protected areas. To address this issue, UNESCO with UNDP, in consultation with experts and government officials from China and the Russian Federation presented a proposal for establishing a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve in the Lower Tumen River basin among China, DPRK and the Russian Federation in 2004. The basin is home to both Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard, and part of either breeding grounds or migration corridors of White-naped Crane and Hooded Crane. Nevertheless, the proposal had not been materialized as it was not endorsed by all authorities involved in the establishment of a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve.

Elsewhere in North-East Asia, cooperation mechanisms have already been successfully installed to benefit conservation. For instance, in 1994 a trilateral agreement was signed by China, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation to establish Dauria International Protected Area to protect globally important grasslands in the headwaters of the Amur-Heilong basin. Under the agreement, the Daurian Forest Steppe Ecoregion extends over the Daurskii Zapovednik territories in the Chita region of the Russian Federation, the Daguur Strictly Protected Area in Mongolia, and the Dalai Nor Nature Reserve in China. In 1996 a China-Russia agreement was signed for the establishment of Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve. The agreement envisioned a broad range of cooperative activities and established a Mixed Chinese-Russian Commission on Lake Khanka-Xingkai International Nature Reserve. Recently, there have been new bilateral initiatives including those between Russia and China, Russia and Mongolia, and China and Mongolia to establish transborder protected areas. For example, in 2008 Russian-Chinese Environment Joint Subcomission agreed to develop a Joint Strategy for Transborder Protected Areas System. Russia and Mongolia have been working on a bilateral agreement on transborder protected areas including Ubsunur-Uvsnuur, Tunkinsky-Huvsguul, Sohondinsky-Han-Henty and Onon-Baldzh.

NEASPEC has attached great importance to this issue. The 2nd Senior Official Meeting (SOM) in 1994 identified "ecosystem management" as one of three priority areas of subregional cooperation. The 8th SOM in 2002 decided to establish a working group of national focal points on nature conservation to identify priority areas for development of projects. Following the recommendation of the 8th SOM, a concrete project proposal on

"Nature Conservation Programme in North-East Asia" was formulated, and it was endorsed at the 10th SOM in 2004 and successfully implemented from mid 2005 to early 2007. A key outcome of the project was the development of a NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy, which was adopted by the 12th SOM in 2007. The Strategy calls upon the NEASPEC member countries to work towards the implementation of proposed subregional and national actions; and requests ESCAP to facilitate developing further joint activities in the area. In this regard, ESCAP had consulted with the Russian Federation to include a project on nature conservation in transboundary areas into the ESCAP programme to be funded by the Government of the Russian Federation from 2009, and reported the preliminary result of the consultation to the 13th SOM in 2008. The 13th SOM welcomed the preliminary result and recommended to seek for a possibility to formulate the proposed activity as a full NEASPEC project with comprehensive participation by NEASPEC member countries. The full project proposal was developed and approved during the 14th SOM, which was held in April 2009.

Against this background, this project calls for the creation of transboundary coordination mechanisms to establish an extended protected area over international borders to maximize the entire area's conservation and protected areas' management effectiveness. Based on the relevant initiatives and experiences in existing mechanisms for transboundary cooperation including Daurian Forest Steppe Ecoregion and Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve, this project aims to create multilateral/bilateral cooperation mechanisms in the Lower Tumen River basin, thereby promoting the sound management of habitats of four flagship species of NEASPEC. Such mechanisms could carry out joint works for wildlife corridors protection, wildlife survey and forest patrol to prevent illegal poaching.

3. Results Framework

Project Goal

More coordinated and strengthened multilateral mechanisms have provided effective subregional responses to challenges in nature conservation in North-East Asia.

Outcome

Multilateral mechanisms for transboundary cooperation of nature conservation contribute to more coordinated and effective management for the sustainable development of the transboundary areas among China, DPRK, Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

Outputs and activities

Output A

Review of subregional and location-specific conditions for nature conservation in selected protected areas adjacent to national borders and international protected areas is available for strengthening transboundary cooperation.

Activity A-1: Review environmental, socioeconomic and institutional conditions and experiences in multilateral and bilateral cooperation on nature conservation in selected protected areas including Dauria International Protected Area, Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve and Tumen River area

Activity A-2: Organize an expert group meeting (EGM) to share experience and lessons learned from multilateral and bilateral cooperation on protected areas in transboundary areas.

Activity A-3: Prepare recommendations for effective management of protected areas in transboundary areas

Output B

Framework for a transboundary cooperation mechanism in the Tumen River basin is available for the preparation of endorsement by concerned NEASPEC member states.

Activity B-1: Identify shared methods and indicators for monitoring selected flagship species and undertake joint monitoring

Activity B-2: Share and exchange information of environmental, socioeconomic and institutional conditions concerning the conservation of selected flagship species.

Activity B-3: Prepare the framework for a transboundary cooperation mechanism in consultation with major stakeholders and facilitate the governments of

NEASPEC member countries concerned for the preparation of bilateral and/or multilateral arrangements for transboundary cooperation on nature conservation.

Output C

Major stakeholders are aware of the benefits of strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms and have an improved channel for transboundary cooperation

Activity C-1: Organize a subregional workshop of major stakeholders to share experience, knowledge and best practices as well as promote transnational interaction and cooperation at multiple levels

Activity C-2: Create and maintain a website on transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the subregion, which will be a useful knowledge management tool for provision of additional instructive references, examples of best practices, and project background materials.

4. Budget Plan

Budget Line	Description	Year 1	Year 2	Total
		US$	US$	US$
1100	Professional Project Staff / Consultants	15,686	15,686	31,372
1300	Research/Programme Assistants			
1500	Travel	6,000	6,000	12,000
2000	Subcontracts / Grants	15,000	15,000	30,000
3000	Group Training / Workshops	50,000	50,000	100,000
4000	Equipment			
5000	Reporting / Miscellaneous	1,000	1,000	2,000
	Subtotal	**87,686**	**87,686**	**175,372**
	Programme Support Cost (13%)	11,399	11,399	22,798
	Project Total	**99,085**	**99,085**	**198,170**

Annex II. Brief Description of DIPA and Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve

Transboundary cooperation on nature conservation in North-East Asia

There are nearly a dozen or more key protected areas along the international borders in North-East Asia, particularly along the borders with the Russian Federation. Those protected areas include:

- The Tunkinskiy Natural Park of Mongolia, and Daurskiy Zapovednik and Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina Zapovednik of the Russian Federation;
- Jilin Hunchun Nature Reserve and Heilongjiang Mudanfeng Nature Reserve of China, and Kedrovaya Pad Zapovednik, Bolshekhekhtsirskiy Zapovednik, and Khankaiskiy Zapovednik, Leopardoviy Federal Zakaznik of the Russian Federation;
- The Far East Marine Zapovednik and Khansanskii Nature Park of the Russian Federation and Rason Migratory Bird Reserve of DPPK; and
- Changbai Biosphere Reserve of China and Paekdu Bioshere Reserve of DPRK.

Recently, there are also bilateral initiatives including those between Russia and China, Russia and Mongolia, and China and Mongolia to establish transborder protected areas. For example, in 2008 Russian-Chinese Environment Joint Subcomission agreed to develop a Joint Strategy for Transborder Protected Areas System. Russia and Mongolia have been working on a bilateral agreement on transborder protected areas including Ubsunur-Uvsnuur, Tunkinsky-Huvsguul, Sohondinsky-Han-Henty and Onon-Baldzh. The remaining of this section reviews two cases of the transboundary nature conservations in the subregion. They are

- Daurian International Protected Area
- Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve

4.1. Daurian International Protected Area (DIPA)

DIPA is established at the junction of the borders between the Russia Federation, Mongolia and China on 29 March 1994 (see Figure 1). Four protected nature areas of the three countries were combined to create the DIPA including

- Daursky Zapovednik (statenature reserve) and Tsasucheisky Bor National Wildlife Refuge under Zapovednik management in Chitinskaya oblast of Russia;
- Mongol Daguur strictly protected nature area in Dornod aimag of Mongolia, which borders on the Russian reserve;

- Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China.

The DIPA was established by a trilateral agreement between the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Nature and Environment of Mongolia and the State Environment Protection Agency of China.

The International Commission for the Russian-Mongolian-China Zapovednik "Dauria" has been established to advice and guide joint activities under DIPA. By the Decision of the last IV Meeting of the International Commission the Russian-Mongolian-Chinese Zapovednik "Dauria" (25-28 October 2005, Chita, Russia), the preparation of draft Intergovernmental Agreement on the Russian-Mongolian-China Zapovednik "Dauria" was approved.

The creation of this trilateral protected area, consisting of functionally connected wetland and steppe habitats, was of special importance for biodiversity conservation in Dauria, particularly for the protection of migrant species of birds and mammals. To be specific, the major targeted endangered species include White-Napped, Hooded and Red-Crowned Cranes, Swan Goose as well as Mongolian Gazelle. Besides biodiversity and ecosystems conservation, the main target of the international protected area is monitoring of natural processes and phenomena in the Dauria steppe ecosystem.

Figure 1: Daurian International Protected Area

DIPA as a united international reserve has been a conservation success. Since its existence, it has managed to promote cooperation in science and environmental education. Major achievements include the following:

1. Joint inventory of animals and plants within the reserves: During the twelve years since its establishment, more than 300,000 km of the area has been investigated by joint scientific expeditions. Surveys also covered the upper reaches of the Amur-Heilong basin from the Khentii to the Great Hingan Mountains. The total length of the expedition routes has exceeded 100,000 km. This enormous tri-national survey was a great opportunity to acquire data on biodiversity and distribution of rare species, define conditions of regional ecosystems, and also to select key areas for conservation of a number of species.
2. A series of joint research on ecosystem fluctuations and redistribution of animal populations has enabled DIPA to propose a number of conservation measures. These included: (i) an interconnected multi-level regional network of protected areas; (ii) programs for conservation of critically threatened species, and (iii) integration of economic development planning with conservation planning to achieve sustainability.

A number of lessons have been drawn from the experience of the establishment of DIPA. Firstly, it is especially important to consider the interaction between DIPA and other reserves of the region to construct a network of connected protected areas in Dauria. This will enable the design of more intelligent research projects and more targeted environmental educational programs while promoting cooperation among the three countries. At present, joint activities in different fields bind the international protected area with Huihe National Nature Reserve and Sokhondinsky Zapovednik (Bioshere Reserve) in China and with Alkhanai National Park in Russia.

Secondly, cooperative environmental education in DIPA is one of the biggest advantages over a traditional piecemeal approach to protected areas. It is important not only for popularizing the protected area and raising the level of ecological awareness, but also for strengthening public relations between the neighboring regions of Russia, Mongolia, and China. Cooperative conservation education began with joint presentations in Mongolia and Russia to describe the reserves. International environmental art competitions were organized for children. Examples of cooperative work now underway include the preparation and publication of jointly collected information in popular scientific editions, international environmental camps for children, seminars for protected area staff, the design of a joint web-site, and a base for the development of national and international ecological tourism. At present, all national parts: Daursky, Mongol Daguur, and Dalai Lake reserves are listed as UNESCO Man and the Biosphere reserves.

Thirdly, identification of commons interest is important for successful cooperation. Socio-economic features of the border regions differ considerably in the type of settlements, economic structure, and living standards. Yet the three countries share many social and ecological problems that DIPA can help resolve by promoting ecological and educational tourism in the region. Today all three reserves have worked out excursions and tourist routes and have constructed visitor centers.

The main problems identified concerning the operation of DIPA are:

- lack of state financing for international activities;
- communication problems (absence of translators from reserve payrolls);
- difficulties in crossing the borders to work cooperatively in the border zones, which is mainly due to under-funding of international reserves as a special form of protected area by the national governments of the three basin countries.

4.2. Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve

Lake Xingkai/Khanka is located on the border of China and the Russian Federation (see Figure 2). It is the largest lake in North-East Asia as well as a transboundary waterbody between China and the Russian Federation. The lake is called Khanka in Russian and Xingkai in Chinese. The lake consists of two parts "Small Xingkai Lake and Big Khanka-Xingkai Lake. Small Xingkai Lake lies completely within China and has an area of 180 km^2. The Big Khanka Lake watershed covers 16,890 km^2, of which 15,370 km^2 lie within Russia.

The lake is a habitat for important animal and plant species of both countries, particularly the wetlands surrounding the lake. The Russian Federation designated the lake as a Ramsar Convention wetland site, on the basis of its importance for migratory bird species. The reserve is the important breeding habitats for some of the first-class national protected species, such as Red-crowned Crane, Oriental Stork, White-tailed Sea Eagle, Golden Eagle. Some of the second-class national protected species, such as Red-necked Grebe, Chinese Egret, White Spoonbill, White-naped Crane, White-fronted Goose, Whooper Swan, Whistling Swan, Mandarin Duck are also breeding in the reserve.

Lake Khanka-Xingkai became an International Nature Reserve when the Agreement between the Governments of China and the Russian Federation on the Bilateral Cooperation of the Lake Khanka-Xingkai was signed on 25 April 1996. The cooperation mechanism is coordinated by a Mixed Chinese-Russian Commission on Lake Khanka-Xingkai International Nature Reserve.

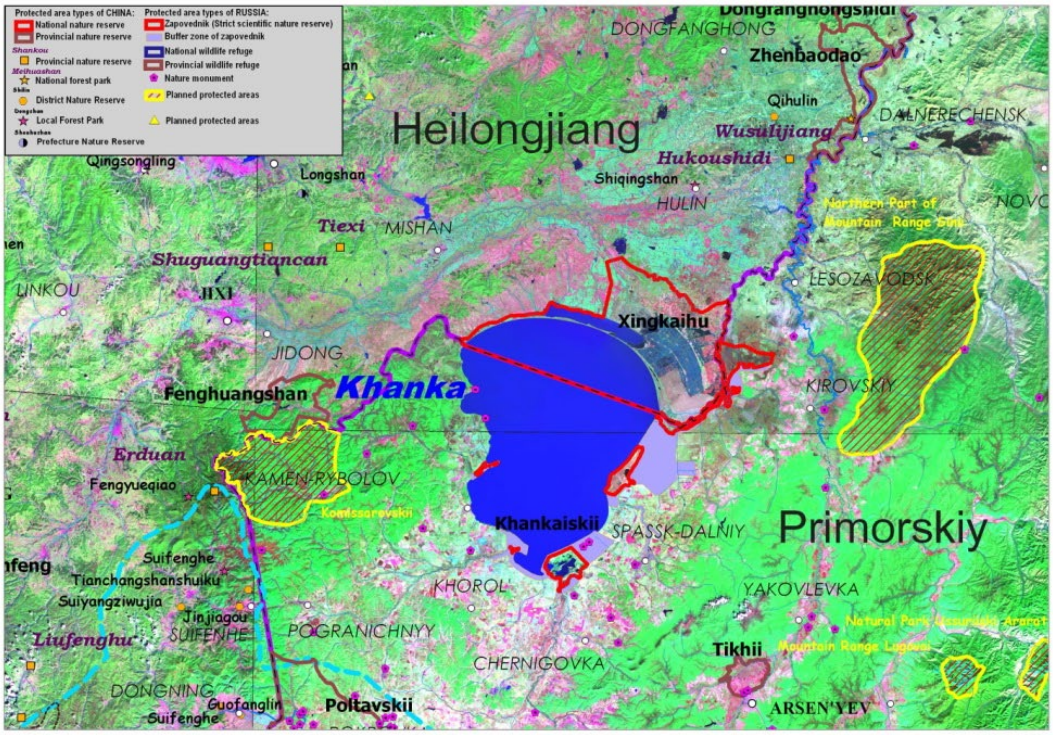

Figure 2: Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve

According to the bilateral agreement, the objectives for the establishment of the International Nature Reserve are:

- to protect biodiversity and ecosystems in the reserve;
- to promote bilateral cooperation on environment protection, rationalized utilization of natural resources, long-term monitoring and research on ecosystems and biodiversity; and
- to raise awareness on the purposes and importance of natural protection in the two countries.

Means of cooperation includes:

- information exchanges;
- personal exchanges;
- scientific research and monitoring;
- field and desk-based research;
- exchange of methods of scientific research;
- joint publications;
- organization of scientific seminars and conferences;
- organization of research and technical trainings; and
- other cooperative methods recognized by both parties.

From 1996-2001, a series of cooperative plans were developed including

- Master Plan of Xingkai Lake Nature Reserve;
- Conservation Plan of Xingkai Lake Biodiversity;
- Construction Plan of Xingkai Lake Resorts;
- Construction Plan of Ecological Demonstration Zone.

Eight urgent tasks were also identified as follows.

1. To establish a strong union conservation committee;
2. To strengthen environmental education activities;
3. To establish police station in the reserve;
4. To develop green-food industry and organic agriculture;
5. To centralized manage water resource;
6. To carry out eco-tourism;
7. To conduct general survey of the resources in the reserve;
8. To strengthen international cooperation.

According to the work plan of 2009-2010, the following activities will be conducted including

- To conduct a joint survey on birds in the reserve;
- To collect material and compile a brochure about the reserve in Chinese and Russian;
- To compile a comprehensive map on the reserve in Chinese and Russian;
- To make an assessment of the tourist industry in the reserve and provide tourist assessment report;
- To compile a mid- and long-term plan for the bilateral cooperation on the reserve; and
- To exchange information etc.

Although Khanka-Xingkai Lake International Nature Reserve has been established through the bilateral agreement, no concrete cooperative initiatives have emerged. The major problem identified is the fragmentation of responsibility. On the Chinese side, management is made difficult by the presence on the ground (and water) of different administrative levels and actors, including the military. Lake Xingkai and its drainage basin belong to the People's Government of Mishan City, the Xingkaihu State Farm, Xingkaihu Agriculture Factory of Heilongjiang Province and Army in China. The Russian side is in a state of economic freefall, reducing pressure on water consumption but making governance more problematic. The result is confused management lack of a unified plan or authoritative organization, transboundary cooperation, coordination and harmonization.