CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND

Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions

CEPF Grant 111815

Wildlife Conservation Society

Introducing SMART in the Khan-Tengri Corridor, Kyrgyzstan

1. **Grantee organization:** Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
2. **Grant title:** Introducing SMART in the Khan-Tengri Corridor, Kyrgyzstan
3. **Grant number:** 111815
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5. **Proposed dates of grant:** June 2021 – May 2023
6. **Location (country):** Kyrgyzstan
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8. **Project background**

This project will address the following issues:

- Lack of spatial monitoring data on law enforcement and biological monitoring efforts required for effective management at Khan-Tengri National Park and Sarychat-Ertash Strict Nature Reserve.
- Lack of experience with use of spatial monitoring data in combination with adaptive management processes at Khan-Tengri National Park and Sarychat-Ertash Strict Nature Reserve.
- Lack of local capacity in Kyrgyzstan for SMART work.
- Lack of equipment for patrols and biological monitoring at Khan-Tengri National Park and Sarychat-Ertash Strict Nature Reserve.
- Ineffective law enforcement efforts.

SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) is a protected area management platform, encompassing desktop, mobile and online software and a powerful analysis and mapping interface that is developed through a partnership of conservation organizations, including WCS. It is an excellent tool for monitoring and effective management of law enforcement and other conservation field activities (e.g., biological monitoring) conducted in protected areas. Nearly all protected areas around the world face financial, technical, and logistical constraints and face pressures from the surrounding environment, from poaching, encroachments, and a general interest in the resources they are supposed to protect. When used in association with adaptive management systems, SMART can help increase the efficiency of law enforcement and biological monitoring efforts. When used effectively, SMART can greatly improve the quality of law enforcement efforts in protected areas. SMART based adaptive protection management is fundamentally different from traditional protection management without SMART. Successful introduction of SMART will demonstrate to government authorities that a partnership of local and international NGOs can substantially contribute to enhancing the quality of protection management of protected areas. Although introduction of SMART protection management to protected areas run by government entities does not in itself engage local communities, patrol data that will be collected on violators can be used to establish accurate violator profiles and increase understanding of their motives for conducting violations. Provided that violations are conducted by local community members, this increased understanding can be used at a later stage (not during the 2-year project) to design community based projects with interventions aimed at improving attitudes and reducing violations.

Introducing SMART forms an essential first step towards optimizing the use of limited conservation resources available to protected areas. Since its launch in 2013 SMART has been implemented in more than 800 sites in more than 60 countries worldwide. Unfortunately, Central Asian countries are, in comparison to other Asian countries, lagging behind in the introduction of SMART. There are currently only UNDP-led pilot projects initiated in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where SMART is not yet fully

operational. Local stakeholders (i.e. local NGOs, central government agencies, and protected areas) have little or no experience with SMART and presently lack a capacity for successful design, introduction and management of SMART. There is therefore a need for successful pilots in order to create both awareness of the potential benefits of SMART and capacity among local stakeholders for successful introduction of SMART-based conservation monitoring and management.

Aligned with CEPF strategy and anticipated investments, WCS intends to pilot the development of SMART in two sites in Kyrgyzstan.

In consultation with the responsible central agency, the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas of Kyrgyzstan, and in partnership with Ilbirs, SMART will be piloted in two protected areas within the Khan-Tengri and Tomur Mountains priority corridor, as defined by CEPF. Khan-Tengri National Park (IUCN category II, 275,800 hectares) was established in 2016 and has presently 24 rangers conducting patrols. This protected area directly borders Kazakhstan and China, and links Sarychat-Ertash State Nature Reserve and Karakol National Park in Kyrgyzstan with Tomur Reserve in Xinjiang, China. Sarychat-Ertash State Nature Reserve (IUCN category Ia, 134,140 hectares including 72,080 hectares of core area) to the west was established in 1995 and presently has 15 rangers conducting patrols. Both sites host significant populations of snow leopard (Panthera uncia), a priority species for CEPF investment in the Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity hotspot and also populations of argali (Ovis ammon) (IUCN Red list status; near threatened) and Siberian ibex (Capra himalayensis) (IUCN Red list status; near threatened), which are primary prey species for snow leopards. The main threats to snow leopards are direct poaching for skins and body parts used in traditional Asian medicines, poaching of prey species for meat and trophies (subsistence hunting by local villagers, illegal trophy hunting), illegal livestock grazing which leads to competition with wild ungulates and habitat degradation.

A preliminary analysis shows that the selected sites meet minimum requirements for successful introduction of SMART, including: there exists valuable biodiversity and populations of priority species that are under pressure from poaching and other illegal resource uses; there is an endorsement and positive attitude towards SMART from the central state agency responsible for law enforcement in these areas; Ilbirs is a dedicated and motivated conservation NGO with on-site conservation experience; there already exists an established patrolling system; there exists the potential for quality protection effort; there is good ranger discipline, and available staff onsite with the computer skills needed to operate a SMART database. We therefore believe it will be possible to successfully introduce SMART monitoring and SMART-based adaptive protection management at these two pilot sites. We expect that this pilot project will create awareness of the potential of SMART and will create both support and capacity within the central agency for expanding SMART to other sites and, in the long-term, establish SMART as a standard protection management tool for protected areas as well as outside protected areas across Kyrgyzstan.

To address the issues described here, WCS will work with a local partner, Ilbirs, to:

- Introduce SMART systems to the two reserves.
- Introduce adaptive management practices in the reserves based on SMART monitoring data.
- Create capacity for SMART more broadly in the country.
- Provide equipment for patrols and biological monitoring.
- Improve the effectiveness of law enforcement and biological monitoring.

The possible implications of this work will be more stringent enforcement of existing laws in relation to protected area management. Thus, WCS will work with authorities and surrounding communities to ensure community members are aware of existing boundaries and laws.

The landscape surrounding the pilot protected areas is very sparsely populated; there are no towns, only a few small villages. Three villages are located within a distance of 50 kilometers from Khan-Tengri Nature Park: Engilchek, Tash Koro and Echkili Tash with populations of 300 people, 100 people and 100 people respectively, and 120-130 people in total live in two villages, Uch-Koshkon and Ak-Shyirak, about 18 kilometers from the Sarychat-Eertash Reserve. As even the valleys are at an altitude of over 3000 metres, there are no crops cultivated and the main livelihood is livestock breeding and grazing. The attitude of the local villagers towards the two protected areas is positive as they provide job opportunities. First, because they attract tourists; villagers have established guesthouses to accommodate tourists and sell locally fabricated souvenirs to them. Second, because the majority of protected area staff members were recruited from nearby villages. The protected areas organize ecology classes for schoolchildren in an effort to foster the good relations with the local communities and a positive attitude to nature conservation.

9. Participatory implementation

WCS has ensured that it has proper government support as it developed this proposal, including endorsements from:

- A. Musaev, Director, Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Specially Protected Areas (26 February 2021).
- Zhyrgalbek Abdyldaev, Director of Kha-Tengri State Nature Park (25 February 2021).
- Musaev M.M., Director of Sarychat-Ertash State Nature Reserve (26 February 2021).

This work builds on Ilbirs' existing relationships with communities in the region.

During the first 18 months of the project, our work will be focused on the managers and enforcement staff of the two reserves. Beginning in Month 19, we will facilitate basic engagement with surrounding communities beyond the existing, currently positive, relationships they have with the managers. During this later phase, WCS and Ilbirs will facilitate engagement with surrounding communities to ensure that they know about:

- The boundaries of the reserves.
- The various laws and regulations regarding access to the reserves or use of reserve resources (e.g., ability to graze livestock within the reserve, hunt, or collect wood).
- Their rights to raise grievances with local representatives or reserve authorities.
- Processes followed by reserve staff in relation to patrols, interdiction, or prosecution.

10. Criteria for eligibility of affected persons

Eligible affected persons include the approximately 500, total, living in the villages of Engilchek, Tash Koro, and Echkili Tash near to Khan-Tengri Nature Park and the total of 120-130 living in the villages of Uch-Koshkon and Ak-Shyirak near to Sarychat-Eertash Reserve.

11. Measures to assist the affected persons

Anticipated "effects" are largely about denying people the ability to do things they are already not supposed to be doing: no further grazing of livestock in reserve boundaries; no hunting; no illegal extraction of resources from the reserves; no disposal of waste.

Measures to assist these people will be via:

- A series of engagements with local communities to ensure they understand regulations regarding access to the reserves or use of reserve resources;
- Identification of potential areas of conflict between needs of local communities and regulations of the protected areas.
- Continued facilitation of tourism to the region, benefiting those who own guesthouses, work as guides, and sell handicrafts.
- Continued employment of local residents to work in the reserves.
- Continued environmental education for local school children.

12. Conflict resolution and complaint mechanism

WCS will ensure that local stakeholders are aware of the work and understand how to voice complaints if any. We will:

- Post information in Kyrgyz, Russian, or any appropriate local languages in the offices of the reserves and in the villages of Engilchek, Tash Koro, Echkili Tash, Uch-Koshkon, and Ak-Shyirak, as well as at Ilbirs offices in Bishkek.
- Explain our activities at all stakeholder meetings.
- Create fliers about the project's objectives and planned activities. These fliers will include contact information for WCS and Ilbirs staff. We will distribute these fliers at all stakeholder meetings.

During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, WCS personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with WCS, local authorities, nature reserve personnel, or CEPF about any issue relating to the project. Local communities will be informed of the objectives of the grant during the first quarter of the project. They will be given telephone numbers and e-mails of contact persons at WCS, the reserve, and CEPF. This information will also be put on all education materials that will be produced during this project implementation including posters, brochures, and booklets. Contact information of the Regional Implementation Team and CEPF will be made publicly available in Kyrgyz or Russian, as appropriate. If WCS receives a grievance, it will communicate the grievance, together with a proposed response, to CEPF and the RIT within 15 days.

We will inform stakeholders that grievances should proceed in the following order below. If the stakeholder is unsatisfied with the response at any step, they may proceed further.

- Zairbek Kubanychbekov, Ilbirs Foundation, zaikonyl@gmail.com , +996-55827l08l
- Dale Miquelle, WCS project manager, dmiquelle@wcs.org, +7 914-969-0280
- Mikhail Yakovlev, RIT country coordinator, +996 708 148 015, mihey-painter@mail.ru
- Lizza Protas, RIT Team Leader, WWF-Russia, lprotas@wwf.ru

- CEPF Executive Director: cepfexecutive@conservation.org

13. Implementation Arrangements

The project will be coordinated from Iblirs offices in Bishek, with staff traveling to the field several weeks per year to engage with stakeholders and reserve authorities. The primary field-facing personnel will be:

- Rakhim Kulenbekov, project coordinator
- Atai Oskonbaev, project coordinator
- Igor Kolodin, SMART expert
- Michiel Hoette, SMART manager
- Dale Miquelle, project manager