

Process Framework: “Forward Together: Fostering Wildlife Guardians Outside Thap Lan National Park through Grassroots Capacity-Building”

**Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
Process Framework**

Project Title: Forward Together: Fostering Wildlife Guardians Outside Thap Lan National Park through Grassroots Capacity-Building

Organization: Freeland Foundation

Application Code:

Date: 21/03/2014

A. Project background

The goal of this one-year project is to empower local communities as a positive, integrated partner in the protection of Thap Lan National Park’s globally important fauna and flora.

The focal site, Thap Lan National Park, is part of the Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex (DPKY), one of the few large contiguous forested landscapes remaining in Thailand. Noted for its outstanding, globally important biodiversity, this UNESCO World Heritage Site supports a rich community of 112 mammal species, including threatened species such as the Indochinese tiger, Asian elephant, clouded leopard, banteng, gaur, sambar, dhole, Asiatic black-bear, Malayan sunbear, and two species of gibbon. It has also become one of two priority landscapes for the conservation of the Indochinese tiger (*Panthera tigris corbettii*) under Thailand’s Tiger Action Plan (2010-2022); as few as 190-250 of these tigers remain in Thailand.

The project’s most direct stakeholders and beneficiaries are community members located along the northern edge of Thap Lan National Park, specifically in Soeng Sang district in southeastern Nakhon Rachasima province. The area includes a number of villages whose means of income and subsistence include cassava and sugar cane farming, as well as small scale collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

Evidence collected by FREELAND surveys indicates that encroachment for cattle-grazing and poaching of wildlife in Northern Thap Lan is widespread and frequent. A growing trend is the presence of large outside poaching groups seeking lucrative species such as Siamese rosewood (*Dalbergia cochinchinensis*), displacing traditional NTFP collection by local community members through intimidation. The area is also plagued by violent human-elephant conflict (HEC), which has previously strained relationships between community members and Thap Lan.

Many among local communities are aware of the importance of conservation of local ecology and ecological services. More recently, these communities have sought avenues to participate more fully in the conservation of their shared natural heritage; however, previously lacking have been the resources and experience available for these individuals to become more involved.

FREELAND has been working in the complex for over 14 years, which has included community outreach, alternative livelihoods and HEC mitigation activities with local communities adjacent to Northern Thap Lan. This has built foundations upon which greater conservation collaboration between stakeholders can occur. However, representation of local community members remains informal and unorganized, limiting the extent to which they can leverage and manage resources for community-centric conservation activities.

This project seeks to develop the capacity of community members to formally organize and access resources for community-based conservation activities and assist communities in identifying and implementing solutions for common conservation challenges. This will include assisting and advising community members on the formation of a community environmental NGO, collaborative human-elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation, and community-based environmental patrols.

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An Indigenous People’s Planning Framework is unnecessary for this project. All measures to mitigate negative impacts to local communities described in this Process Framework apply only to local ethnic Thais.

B. Participatory implementation

Realistic, comprehensive solutions are required to prevent the loss of Thap Lan’s critically important flora and fauna, and must be based on a multidisciplinary strategy that incorporates and empowers all major stakeholders. The most successful solutions to complex conservation problems involving local communities are those that are developed and supported by local people.

In the past two years, FREELAND has supported multi-stakeholder meetings with participation from local communities, Thap Lan staff, and other NGOs. These meetings have provided an opportunity to assess socio-economic conditions of communities affected by the park, land tenure, restrictions on certain activities, extent and type of allowable resource use, and threats to both biodiversity and local livelihoods. They have also been a forum to resolve conflicts pertaining to use of the park’s resources and conflict with local wildlife (specifically, HEC)

These meetings have helped guide strategies for local participation in conservation activities and act as a forum for direct contact and problem-solving between communities outside Thap Lan, park officials, and NGOs. Numerous recommendations for addressing local challenges have been developed and resulted in a number of creative, mutually-beneficial solutions being proposed. There is a common agreement to pursue value-added solutions that promote more substantial involvement of community members in conservation activities, mitigate conflict, generate income, and can be sustainable.

C. Criteria for eligibility of affected persons

This project’s activities, particularly community patrolling activities, may affect certain members of the local communities who are engaged in clearly prohibited, destructive activities inside Thap Lan that are in violation of national law. Impacts of this project on local communities and resource use of these communities have been assessed and it has been concluded that this project will have no adverse impacts for legal resource users in local communities.

D. Measures to assist the affected persons

A number of measures to assist affected persons are implemented through complementary activities under existing projects conducted by Freeland and funded by other donors. These include:

- **Community Outreach:** Freeland, through its Surviving Together Program, actively engages with schools and community members located outside protected areas, including outside Thap Lan, through its mobile education unit. The mobile education unit implements fun, interactive activities such as educational talks, music, plays and games designed to raise awareness about local wildlife, ecosystems and the benefits they provide. Raising awareness of the importance of wildlife and ecology among youth in key communities is a key step in helping shift communities away from environmentally destructive activities by highlighting alternatives among existing and future generations.
- **Alternative Livelihoods:** Poverty and an absence of sustainable economic opportunities in communities surrounding protected areas often drive encroachment and poaching. Direct assistance to vulnerable communities is a vital part of any compassionate and realistic long-term part of biodiversity conservation. Freeland’s Surviving Together program has been working with communities bordering in the complex to implement a number of income-generating activities. These activities are designed to steer villagers away from poaching of wildlife and timber products in the park and towards a legal, sustainable livelihood. This includes organic farming of mushrooms, a crop in high demand throughout the year. FREELAND assists community members by providing planning, training, start-up costs and access to urban markets. It is also possible that, through this project’s HEC-mitigation activities, elephant-friendly bee farming may also provide alternative income activities.

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E. Conflict resolution and complaint mechanism

The development of a community environmental NGO, in addition to boosting participation in local conservation initiatives, will also help act as an important link between local community members and Thap Lan officials. The NGO will act as a point of contact for conflict resolution between community members in that locale and the park headquarters during and after the project. Part of capacity-building activities will include mentoring community NGO personnel in organizing meetings between affected parties. This will formalize existing grievance mechanisms already established through Freeland-supported multi-stakeholder meetings between community members and Thap Lan officials. Awareness of these processes and the emergence of the community NGO have already been promoted by Freeland and community members in relevant areas. As such, community members can report any grievances directly to the community NGO, Freeland, if required, may assist in conflict resolution with Thap Lan National Park or other local parties.

During interactions with the community NGO and other relevant stakeholders such as the Department of National Parks Freeland staff will advise them that if any disagreements or complaints arise concerning Freeland, as implementing agency, they may contact the CEPF National Coordinator for Thailand at the Regional IUCN office in Bangkok to direct specific complaints. These may be put in writing and emailed directly to Saroj.Srisai@iucn.org.

Freeland (including the community NGO liaison and outreach staff) will report all known complaints to the above referenced CEPF National Coordinator.

F. Implementation Arrangements

Freeland Foundation will take overall responsibility for managing the project and ensuring appropriate mitigation measures are taken. Freeland project staff, who work full-time at the project location, will conduct on-going monitoring of project activities and implementation of this process framework at all sites where Freeland is coordinating activities.

Thap Lan National Park, administered by Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP), will act as the primary government counterpart to the project and will be involved in all field aspects of project implementation. As in previous activities, this represents further capacity-building for conflict resolution between community members and the national park.

As part of capacity-development objectives, the community NGO will be involved throughout the project in planning, meeting reporting requirements, and coordinating activities between community members and the national park. They will support the project to identify needs of local communities and identify solutions to resolve conflicts. The group will also monitor activities of the community patrol teams.

It is very unlikely that activities of the project will adversely impact the livelihoods of local communities. Nevertheless monitoring implementation of this process framework will mainly be included within regular oversight and coordination visits to the project site.