

**Process Framework
for restrictions on access to natural resources**

22 March 2023

CEPF Grant 114071

Center for Large Landscape Conservation

***Improving capacity and connectivity between reserves in Turkmenistan
and Uzbekistan***

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Grant Summary

1. **Grantee organization.** Center for Large Landscape Conservation
2. **Project title.** Improving capacity and connectivity between reserves in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan
3. **Grant number.** 114071
4. **Grant amount (US dollars).** Approximately \$150,000
5. **Proposed dates of grant.** June 2023 – February 2025
6. **Countries where activities will be undertaken.** Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
7. **Date of preparation of this document.** 22 March 2023
8. **Summary of the project [copy and paste Project Rationale and Project Approach from proposal].**

Project Rationale

Thanks to a CEPF grant received for activities during 2021-2023 for the project “Connectivity, Capacity, and Cats: Building Resiliency in the Mountain Ecosystems of Koytendag, Turkmenistan”, we have had the opportunity to start important work in the Mountain Ecosystems of Koytendag (MEK), located in southeast Turkmenistan on the border with Uzbekistan. Covering a total area of 934 km², the MEK includes the Koytendag Reserve (zapovednik) and three contiguous State Sanctuaries that are designated under Turkmenistan law as Wildlife Sanctuaries (zakazniks). The Koytendag State Nature Reserve (SNR) is categorized as an IUCN Protected Area Category Ia and all four Sanctuaries are categorized as Category IV. With this follow-up project proposal, we intend to build on progress made in 2021-2023; further refine, deploy, and replicate approaches; and inform more consistent and long-term progress across MEK, the adjoining Surkhan Strict Nature Reserve (SNR) in Uzbekistan, an IUCN Category Ia area, and the buffer zone. Jointly we will refer to them as the Kugitang Mountain Range (KMR).

The previous grant enabled us to advance conservation activities in and around Koytendag SNR in MEK, which is one of the most distinctive and biodiverse landscapes in Central Asia. Achievements have included the introduction of SMART as a tool for more effective patrolling by rangers, as well as training of team members to compile, interpret, and apply SMART data for adaptive management. Furthermore, ongoing wildlife and pasture surveys have generated initial baseline estimates of the population status of important focal species urial, lynx, and markhor, as well as the status of pasture degradation. Important headway has also been made developing relationships with local communities of neighboring villages and pasture users, including enhancing understanding about the importance of protecting wildlife, being proactive to reduce wildlife-livestock conflict, respecting the protected area laws (e.g., not grazing areas within the core zone of MEK), and the ecological connectivity of the landscape for better meeting the needs of wildlife and local communities through nature-based and more sustainable socio-economic approaches. Based on these ongoing accomplishments, we have prepared the necessary groundwork to detect trends, make science-based recommendations, and measure and monitor the effectiveness of efforts toward identifying conservation priorities and formalizing actions that enhance the overall ecological connectivity of MEK via related corridors and wildlife sanctuaries.

Within the frame of developing the Regional Strategy for the Conservation of the Persian Leopard, we have also discussed increasing synergies with colleagues in Uzbekistan. Considerations explicitly include the opportunities to enhance capacity to more consistently manage the 238.02 km² Surkhan SNR adjoining the MEK and the possibility of proposing a transboundary UNESCO World Heritage nomination that covers KMR.

Due to COVID restrictions, some of the work intended in MEK has been delayed. However, thanks to a no-cost extension, the current project is expected to be completed in May 2023. To "institutionalize" project outcomes, this follow-up proposal seeks a further large grant to build on, strengthen, and replicate established project approaches to acquire more biological and ecological data, deepen relationships with local communities, fund conservation interventions to generate support for MEK, and enhance alignment for Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and the wider region to meet and exceed global conservation commitments, especially as it concerns connectivity planning and management. This would be in line with strengthening partnerships and relationships between government and civil society, enhancing technical capacity and capability, sharing lessons learned, and engaging in similar capacity and monitoring initiatives in Surkhan SNR that also benefit the larger landscape and region.

Project Approach:

The project will continue the approach successfully employed under CEPF Grant 111692.

Under Component 1, we will continue to build the capacity of Koytendag SNR and Surkhan SNR personnel and improve reserve monitoring systems through SMART training. This will include customizing SMART training to the needs of those stakeholders, commitments by reserve authorities to update their management plans, and updated METT scorecards.

Under Component 2, we will undertake more biological surveys of the Mountain Ecosystems of Koytendag to build on prior data. This involves further wildlife data collection and incorporation of this into larger analyses. We will present these analyses to park authorities and community members to better understand the impacts of their actions.

Under Component 3, we will use the data to propose options for connectivity between Koytendag SNR, Surkhan SNR, and buffer zones within and across the international boundary. This will involve a "vision mapping" exercise so that stakeholders can understand what such an area would look like and how it would function. - Using available data and information, undertaking an initial connectivity analysis and vision mapping exercise for better understanding and informing Koytendag SNR, Surkhan SNR, transboundary, and buffer zone connectivity planning. In particular, this would have value for the Convention on Migratory Species.

Under Component 4, we will explore nature-based tourism opportunities in the Kugitang Mountain Range -- the larger area transboundary area inclusive of MEK and Surkhan and surrounds. This will involve meetings in Ashgabat and Tashkent with government authorities, tourism operators, and community representatives to understand the potential market: are there tourists, what "product" do they want, can the communities provide it?

Under Component 5, we will transfer experience on SMART from Turkmenistan to Uzbekistan, specifically fostering links between relevant stakeholders while incorporating learning from the above components, including biological survey methods, buffer zone management, community engagement, and protected area governance.

The final component (6) will work to nominate the Kugitang Mountain Range as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This requires compiling the justification and facilitating preparation of an updated management plan.

9. **Restrictions on access to natural resources:** This section will describe how the project will introduce new or more stringent restrictions on access to natural resources. It should also describe the process by which affected persons participated in the project design.

Strictly speaking, the project will not introduce new restrictions to Koytendag or Surkhan. The project will promote improved patrols by rangers responsible for these formal “state” protected areas.

In the case of the state protected areas, these are all legally established reserves with existing personnel. They are marked by signs and fences at strategic entry points and are all known to the public. No new or more stringent restrictions are being introduced: no new limitations. Rather, existing restrictions will be better enforced via more efficient and transparent patrols.

There are several thousand people in multiple communities surrounding these reserves. The “affected” people would be people illegally hunting (i.e., poachers) and illegally grazing livestock. These people did not participate in the project design, but as noted above, all should be aware of the existence of these reserves and the limitations on access to resources that they already create.

10. **Participatory implementation:** This section will establish a process of meaningful consultation whereby affected persons will be involved in identifying adverse impacts and assessing of the significance of any impacts. It will also establish the criteria for eligibility for identifying persons eligible for any mitigation or compensation measures necessary.

Among other goals of the project, the purpose of better patrols is not interdiction of illegal activities, per se, but to improve the management of protected areas, with the understanding being that better managed protected areas have better collaboration with the communities surrounding them. SMART allows for patrols, and resulting actions (e.g., law enforcement) to be more transparent. Protected area authorities (e.g., park staff, police) will have better communications with community leaders and community members so that people understand: if law enforcement is happening, it is for legitimate reasons; for reasons that are not arbitrary or capricious.

The people who will suffer adverse impacts will be those engaged in illegal activity and, in theory, will not be eligible for any mitigation or compensation. However, the improved collaboration between park authorities and community members should ultimately lead to less enforcement and fewer affected people.

Further, this grant is about patrols and recording and reporting violations. It is not about enforcement, per se, or stricter penalties. In fact, in each community and around each park, rarely do “first offenses” or “minor offenses” lead to immediate formal action by law enforcement. Warning processes and education for the offender are standard processes.

11. **Measures to assist affected persons:** This section will describe the mitigation measures to minimize and, where possible, avoid adverse impacts on income and

livelihoods. Where needed, measures will be identified to assist affected persons in their efforts to improve their livelihoods or restore them, in real terms, to pre-project levels. This section will also describe methods and procedures by which communities will identify and choose potential mitigation or compensation measures to be provided to persons adversely affected, and the procedures by which adversely affected community members will decide among the options available to them.

CLLC anticipates improved patrols by reserve staff to ensure local adherence to already existing limits on grazing and entry into the reserve. There will be no new laws or regulations put in place. Nevertheless, it is possible that individuals currently grazing their animals in the reserve, illegally, will now be instructed by the reserve staff to take their animals to other available public land.

CLLC project personnel will work to minimise any impact on local people through the following activities.

Firstly, through facilitation of joint-stakeholder meetings, we aim to mediate improved communication between the reserve staff and the local grazing communities so that they can work together to resolve and develop solutions to illegal grazing through dialogue, reducing the likelihood of the need for enforcement by the reserve staff. We anticipate that results of these meetings would include (1) reserve staff have greater understanding of situation faced by local herders leading to proportionate responses to illegal grazing; (2) grazers have better understanding of reserve management and increasingly opt to use pasture land outside of the reserve and (3) the reserve commits to work with and support local grazing communities to adopt improved pasture management techniques in public lands outside of the reserve, lessening the need for people to use the reserve territory.

Secondly, CLLC will help pastoral communities to address barriers they face to grazing in the areas outside of the reserve. Working closely with the local grazing associations and with the support of local pasture experts, we will develop an action plan for sustainable pasture management. The plan will include clear guidance to support those people currently using grazing areas in the reserve on how to make better and more efficient use of pasture areas outside of the reserve. The plan will be based on improved understanding of pasture use in the landscape (including the physical, social and economic barriers to greater use of pasture areas outside of the reserve) and this will be developed following completion of interviews with at least 40 local people and through meetings with the local Pasture Committees.

12. **Timeline and resources**: This section will present an implementation timeline for each measure listed in Section 11, together with an estimate of resource needs.

Outreach and education for communities already exists. That being said, as SMART is implemented in each area, there will be renewed efforts to engage with communities and inform them of existing rules and new protocols.

13. **Monitoring and evaluation**: This section will outline arrangements for participatory monitoring of project activities as they relate to (positive and adverse) impacts on persons at the project site(s), and for monitoring the effectiveness of the measures listed in Section 11.

The CLLC team leader will be responsible for ensuring that patrols follow existing standards and global best practice regarding human rights in the context of enforcement activities. These people will monitor the work of the authorities and immediately stop project activities if adverse practices are noted.

14. **Disclosure:** CEPF requires that process frameworks are disclosed to affected local communities and other stakeholders. Please describe your efforts to disclose this plan.

We will continue to have the same mechanism as set up under the first CEPF project wherein.

Local people and other stakeholders will be reminded that they can raise a grievance at any time with CLLC, Koytendag SNR reserve personnel, Surkhan SNR or CEPF about any issue relating to the project.

Any project related communication will have contact information of the Regional Implementation Team and CEPF. If CLLC receives a grievance, it will communicate the grievance, together with a proposed response, to CEPF and the RIT within 15 days.

We will include the following contacts:

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- Project Coordinator Uzbekistan, mgritsina@gmail.com, +998 93 338 39 66
- Team Leader, CLLC, naryntrosen@gmail.com, +993 63823843
- Regional Implementation Team via <https://www.mca.earth/en/contacts/>
- Conservation International Ethics Hotline: +1-866-294-8674 / secure web portal: <https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/10680/index.html>