

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

1 December 2020

CEPF Grant 110812

Panthera

**Engaging communities to safeguard rural livelihoods and cultivate conservation partnerships
in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan**

Grant Summary

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2. **Grant title:** Engaging communities to safeguard rural livelihoods and cultivate conservation partnerships in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
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8. Introduction

The Turkestan-Alai Mountains of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are home to ~10% of the global population of snow leopards and are essential for range-wide connectivity of the species. Protecting snow leopards here will have global implications for their future persistence. However, because snow leopards and other carnivores in the landscape exist at low densities, their conservation requires action at large geographic scales. The success of snow leopard conservation hinges on three overarching needs: 1) reliable, specific knowledge of snow leopard (and other species) distributions, interactions with people, and threats; 2) empowerment of local communities, protected areas, and other conservation stakeholders through that knowledge by networking, communicating, and collaborating; and, 3) scalable and effective solutions to address conservation challenges while elevating human livelihoods and well-being. We address these needs in unison, and in close partnership with local communities, to inform meaningful and lasting conservation that truly benefits people.

We propose activities across four landscapes in the Pamir and Turkestan Ranges. Each landscape was identified and selected based on previous assessments indicating high snow leopard density or probability of occupancy, high probability of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) and other unsustainable threats, or a large extent of probable habitat with uncertain occupancy status. These landscapes are: 1) Turkestan-Alai Mountains of Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan; 2) Zighar, Darvaz District, Tajikistan; 3) Bartang Valley, Rushon District, Tajikistan; and 4) Murghab District, Tajikistan. Each site is culturally, ecologically and economically distinct yet linked by the needs identified above.

1. Batken Oblast, Kyrgyzstan

Conservation of mountain ecosystems in the Turkestan-Alai Mountains corridor is limited by insufficient capacity and collaborative engagement of local resource user communities and conservation constituencies, and by inadequate understanding of the social and ecological challenges facing those communities. Simultaneously, the status and distribution of snow leopards in the transboundary landscapes of the Turkestan-Alai Mountains of Batken Oblast in Kyrgyzstan are poorly understood, as are the nature and scale of regional threats to the species, thus exacerbating the challenge of resolving and mitigating those threats. Without this project, baseline data will not exist, relationships allowing conservation activities benefiting local people will not be built, and regional conservation capacity will not be developed.

2. Zighar, Darvaz District, Tajikistan

Effective sustainable-use trophy hunting efforts to recover markhor populations in Darvaz (KBA 24), spearheaded by the private business M-Sayod, LLC, have simultaneously benefitted the overlapping snow leopard population. More ungulates now support more carnivores and are thus indirectly driving increased conflict with local livestock herders. Translating this focal-species sustainable-use conservation strategy into ecosystem and community-wide benefits requires tools to not only reduce HWC, but also to monitor populations of non-harvested species. Fortunately, the infrastructure and governance mechanisms in Zighar provide an opportunity for engaged management of all wildlife species. Rigorous monitoring of populations to detect change through time is central to sustainable wildlife management and will allow for rapid responses to changing conditions. Without funding, HWC will continue to increase, compounding the tension between M-Sayod and pastoralists who bear the HWC burden while intensifying the retaliatory killing of cats. Additionally, without the capacity to monitor snow leopards and other wildlife, M-Sayod will be unable to respond to, nor prevent, population changes.

3. Bartang Valley, Rushon District, Tajikistan

The Bartang Valley, where 25 of Tajikistan's most isolated and impoverished communities coexist with 10-20% of the country's snow leopards, is a regional hot spot for HWC between people and snow leopards (publication in prep). This conflict is devastating for local communities, exacerbating widespread poverty and food insecurity. Among interviewed Bartangi villagers, 29% experienced at least one attack in the past five years, in which they lost an average of eight animals or approximately 60% of their livestock to snow leopards, representing a major proportion of household food and wealth. In the western Pamirs, more than 90% of documented livestock losses to snow leopards, and 65% of snow leopard depredation events, occur inside nighttime corrals or barns. Snow leopards that enter these barns are often unable to escape. In return, Bartangi herders remove roughly one in three "conflict animals" annually. Reducing these rates of conflict and loss requires proven solutions that can be widely implemented throughout the western Pamirs, solutions that must be scalable and evidence-based to ensure efficacy. Yet, available predator deterrents and predator-proofing retrofits have not been tested or proven. This project will develop and test low-cost, accessible and effective methods to reduce HWC that can be scaled to the broader region. The lessons learned will benefit the people and snow leopards throughout the western Pamirs through our future regional expansion of this work. Without funding, economic and food insecurity for three communities will likely continue, as will the cycle of conflict and retaliation in the project area.

4. Murghab District, Tajikistan

The Murghab District of Tajikistan is at the center of what is projected to be the largest block of stable and suitable snow leopard habitat under the progressing and future impacts of climate change (Figure 3; Li et al. 2016), making it critical for the species here to ensure a healthy coexistence between snow leopards and people. Our best available estimates of snow leopard density, based on camera traps and spatial capture-recapture models, show that portions of the landscape support a considerable number of snow leopards, but their distribution is uneven (Figure 4; Kachel et al. 2016; with additional data from Karimov et al. 2018). Although we lack data for most of the region, the figure conveys the suggestion of a concerning pattern – snow leopards are missing from the most human-impacted areas of this landscape, despite putatively

suitable habitat conditions. While past efforts to ameliorate threats to snow leopard prey species have met with success, new threats are emerging (for example, from China's One Belt One Road Initiative and border expansion) and old threats may be intensifying. For example, the Murghab Hunting Company, LLC, a successful argali and ibex trophy hunting company, supports healthy populations of wild ungulates and, consequently, a robust and regionally important population of snow leopards. Yet, in recent years, intensifying pasture degradation due to livestock overgrazing poses a persistent and increasingly urgent threat to argali (and thus snow leopards), creating tension between pastoralists and the company. While we know less about relationships between communities and private hunting concessions in other portions of the Murghab District, they are likely to be similarly fraught. The current state of pasture management and user rights in Murghab is such that these tensions even exist between different pastoralist groups and have since privatization in 1999 (Vanselow et al. 2012). Practically, pastoralism is the foundation of nearly all livelihoods in Murghab. This ubiquity suppresses the market value of livestock products and creates a perverse incentive for communities to graze even more livestock to keep pace and earn a livable income. As this self-perpetuating cycle repeats, no livelihoods improve. Without funding, the situation will remain poorly understood, unsustainable grazing will likely remain or worsen, potential threats to ungulates and carnivores may go undetected and livelihoods will continue to decline along with ecosystem health, exacerbating economic and food instability and increasing antagonism between herders, conservationists and hunting concessions.

Panthera will work in each of the above locations on the issues identified. In Kyrgyzstan, Panthera will work with a local partner, Ilbirs Foundation. In summary:

- Batken: focus on collection of data on HWC to promote enabling conditions for conservation.
- Zighar: predator mitigation through better livestock management systems.
- Bartang Valley: predator mitigation through improved monitoring and livestock management.
- Murghab: focus on collection of data on HWC to promote enabling conditions for conservation.

9. Summary of Previous Stakeholder Engagement Activities

Panthera has long experience in Tajikistan and Ilbirs has long experience in Kyrgyzstan. Panthera has built 50 corrals in Tajikistan and, in preparation for this project, visited Zighar Village six times in the winter of 2019-2020. During these visits, our country director conducted 16 formal interviews with livestock owners and shepherds as well as several informal conversations with other community members. Throughout these conversations, the villagers expressed their desire to better protect their livestock. In particular, they identified the lack of adequate shelter for livestock and herders on mountain pastures as a major limitation on their ability to tend to their herds and prevent livestock losses to carnivores. Separately, we have worked in Murghab for ten years and have established working relationships with local stakeholders.

As part of this proposal process, we received the following letters of endorsement to at least initiate the process.

- O. Abdrahmanov, authorized representative of government, Batken Oblast Administration, 28 August 2020
- H. Ismatullo, village representative, Zighar, Nulvand Jamoat, Darvoz District, 29 August 2020

- A. Mulloyorov, Director, M-Sayod LLC, 29 August 2020

10. Project Stakeholders

Stakeholders are defined to include:

- Kyrgyzstan / Batken Oblast, Kadamjay and Lyailak Districts: the approximately 11,500 people living permanently or seasonal in or adjacent to potential snow leopard habitat in the rural mountainous areas of Batken, engaged in mountain ecosystem resource use, particularly in raising and herding livestock; Staff of Sarkent National Park and Surmatash State Nature Preserve.
- Tajikistan: Zighar, Darvaz District: the 93 households of the village of Zighar currently raising livestock.
- Tajikistan: Bartang Valley, Rushon District: the approximately 150 households of the villages of Razuji, Visav and Darzhomj currently raising livestock
- Tajikistan: Murghab District: the approximately 10,000 people, out of a total population of 15,900, living permanently or seasonally in the villages and rural areas of the Alichur, Murghab, Gozho Berdiboev, Qizilrobot, Karakul, and Rangkul jamoats, currently engaged in livestock grazing, guiding, hunting, and natural resources management.

11. Stakeholder Engagement Program

The goal of the project is to promote better livestock rearing practices and reduce human-wildlife conflict across four roughly contiguous areas. By design, this requires engagement of local stakeholders via:

- Pastoralist surveys in Batken.
- Community-based monitoring in Zighar.
- Improvements to livestock barns and shepherd shelters, to reduce the threat of predation, in Zighar.
- Community-based monitoring in Bartang.
- Retrofitting of corrals and installation of sensory deterrents in Bartang.
- Knowledge surveys of herders and hunting guides in Murghab.

12. Consultation methods

Panthera and Ilbirs engage a team of Kyrgyz and Tajik national scientists and community engagement experts. These experts will work with local leaders in each village, farmer cooperatives, religious leaders, and the heads of the two hunting concessions (M-Sayod in Zighar, Murghab Hunting Company in Murghab) to initiate discussions with communities. (That being said, Panthera and Ilbirs have parallel efforts underway, so these discussions will build on existing work.) These consultations will help identify informants for surveys, participants for monitoring efforts, and candidate households/individuals to receive improvements to barns, corrals, and shelters. Selection of participants or individual

beneficiaries will be transparent and documented, and recipients of physical benefits (e.g., barns) will sign agreements committing to support project goals.

We will document discussions and ensure that men, women, and any other sub-group are able to participate equally.

13. Other Engagement Activities

Panthera will work with the Kyrgyz State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry (responsible for management of Sarkent National Park and Surmatash State Nature Preserve) to coordinate monitoring activities and will work with the Batken Oblast Government to develop robust data baselines.

In Tajikistan, we will work with the Committee for Environmental Protection – GBAO Region.

14. Timetable

The project will proceed over 24 months. Timing of work in each of the four locations will be roughly parallel, with preliminary engagements starting in March 2021 and the bulk of stakeholder engagement processes taking place in the summer and fall months of 2021, then restarting in the spring of 2022.

15. Resources and Responsibilities

The team will include a Dushanbe-based team leader as well as multiple researchers, surveyors, logisticians, and field technicians who will all be closely engaged with the communities.

16. Grievance mechanism

We will share all grievances – and a proposed response – with the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days. If the claimant is not satisfied following the response, they may submit the grievance directly to the CEPF Executive Director at cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by surface mail.

Panthera will work to ensure that local stakeholders are aware of the work and understand how to voice complaints, if any. We will post contact information in local languages at appropriate locations in our offices and the offices of Ilbirs, plus in suitably public locations in each village in which we work.

We will hold public meetings explaining our activities. During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, Panthera personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with Panthera, government representatives, or CEPF about any issue relating to the project.

Panthera will post telephone numbers and e-mails of contact persons based at Panthera, government authorities, 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 local languages.

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

- Qobiljon Shokorov, Team Leader, Panthera, qshokirov@panthera.org; +992927778018
- Altynai Adabaeva, Project lead, Kyrgyzstan, Panthera, altynai.a@posteo.de, +49 17626271101
- Habibulloev Ismatullo Hamidullavich, Village head from Zighar, +992987317444
- Lizza Protas, RIT Team Leader, WWF-Russia, lprotas@wwf.ru
- CEPF Executive Director: cepfexecutive@conservation.org

17. Monitoring and Reporting

Panthera will report on this plan every six months, per the items above. This will include listing of activities and participants, grievances and their resolution, and changes to the project if these affect stakeholder engagement either positively or negatively.