

Annual Portfolio Overview

Mountains of Central Asia Biodiversity Hotspot

November 2019 – July 2020

1. Introduction

The Mountains of Central Asia Hotspot—covering 860,000 square kilometers centered on the major mountain ranges of the Pamir and the Tien Shan—is remarkable for its relatively large amount of remaining natural habitat, high endemism, and charismatic megafauna, particularly the iconic snow leopard. With peaks rising to over 7,000 meters, 20,000 glaciers, and isolated arid environments and valleys fed by snow melt, diverse ecosystems support the wild crop relatives of many valuable fruits, nuts, and herbaceous plants, and overall, upwards of 5,000 plant species, of which 1,500 are endemic to the region. The region also includes 144 key biodiversity areas, per the IUCN global standard, covering 149,000 square kilometers.

The hotspot includes parts of seven countries: southeastern Kazakhstan; most of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; eastern Uzbekistan; western China; northeastern Afghanistan; and a small montane part of southeastern Turkmenistan. This area of great cultural diversity and dynamic political history is facing dramatic changes that present a threat to its biodiversity. Economic development, driven both from countries to the east and the west, is leading to huge investments in natural resource extraction and transport and energy generation infrastructure, while political pressures create the need for more export-oriented agriculture and lead to loss of transparency on issues of land management.

The state of civil society in each of the countries is also varied. The level of capacity ranges from relatively high (e.g., in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz) to relatively low (e.g., in Afghanistan) and the legal environment in which groups work is also varied; for example, in terms of ability to receive foreign funds or in the ability to engage in management of public lands.

In this, the first year of the program, the challenge for CEPF has been to engage viable partners in whom national governments have a high degree of trust, while also building the capacity of numerous small organizations that have not previously received international funds. This has entailed making stakeholders aware of the goals of CEPF and sensitizing them to CEPF operations. This challenge was made no easier with the outbreak of a global pandemic, effectively limiting the ability of the Regional Implementation Team (RIT) to hold the large in-person events normally conducted at the beginning of an investment. Nonetheless, the program is underway, with the goal for CEPF and the RIT to create a grants program that is more than the sum of its parts.

CEPF grant-making in the region formally began in November 2019. This portfolio overview goes through the close of the most recent CEPF fiscal year, ending in June 2020.

2. Niche for CEPF Investment

2.1. Overview

The ecosystem profile for the region was formally approved in August 2017 and the five-year investment period began in November 2019 with the commencement of the RIT grant, led by WWF-Russia in collaboration with ARGO Civil Society Development Association. The total allocation to the region is US\$8,000,000.

Over the period of May 2016 through March 2017, Zoï Environment Network of Geneva, Switzerland, led and prepared the ecosystem profile with contributions from over 250 stakeholders from civil society, government and donor institutions to gather and synthesize data on biodiversity, socioeconomic and institutional context, climate change, ecosystem services, and ongoing and planned conservation investments in the hotspot countries. The profile identifies 68 globally threatened species, 144 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and 26 corridors.

To match the level of funding available from CEPF with a concomitant geographic scope, CEPF and the consulted stakeholders prioritized 33 species, 28 KBAs and five corridors. The terrestrial priority sites represent 3.8 million hectares, or 25 percent of the total hectares of Key Biodiversity Area, although less than 1 percent of the total hotspot area. Criteria used to prioritize these targets included number of globally threatened species, presence of threatened habitat types, resilience to climate change, status of protection, provision of ecosystem services, threats, and opportunities for conservation action.

While there are absolutely transboundary elements to conservation in the region, with the countries being so politically distinct, CEPF thinks of the hotspot in terms of each of the seven countries. As of this writing, CEPF has GEF Operational Focal Point approval to work in all the countries except for China.

CEPF's niche in the Mountains of Central Asia Hotspot is to support grants that ensure biodiversity conservation supports local and national economic development agendas, complement public sector managers of protected areas, and build the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to engage in conservation in the hotspot. This is expressed via six Strategic Directions with an initial expectation of funding as follows:

Table 1. Strategic Directions and Funding Allocation per 2012 Ecosystem Profile

No.	Strategic Direction	Funding
1	Address threats to priority species.	\$1,000,000
2	Improve management of priority sites with and without official protection status.	\$2,300,000
3	Support sustainable management and biodiversity conservation within priority corridors.	\$1,500,000
4	Engage communities of interest and economic sectors, including the private sector, in improved management of production landscapes (i.e., priority sites and corridors that are not formally protected).	\$1,000,000
5	Enhance civil society capacity for effective conservation action.	\$1,000,000
6	Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of conservation investment through a regional implementation team.	\$1,200,000
	Total	\$8,000,000

2.2. Portfolio Status

CEPF grant-making formally began with the RIT Grant to WWF-Russia for US\$1,200,000 in November 2019. This grant was for the full amount of Strategic Direction 6.

The RIT used the first half of 2019 to engage local civil society and host country agencies, in effect “launching” the program by sensitizing potential partners to the goals of the ecosystem profile and the CEPF proposal process. While this work was slowed by the coronavirus pandemic, the RIT and Secretariat released the following calls for letters of inquiry (LOIs) seeking small and large grants.

Table 2. MCA Calls for Letters of Inquiry

No.	Focus	Release Date	Due Date	LOIs Received	
				Large	Small
1	Kyrgyz Republic	16 March 2020	20 April 2020	n/a	22
2	Kazakhstan	20 April 2020	20 May 2020	n/a	17
3	Uzbekistan	20 April 2020	20 May 2020	n/a	6
4	Turkmenistan	22 April 2020	22 May 2020	n/a	3
5	Tajikistan	24 April 2020	25 May 2020	n/a	21
6	Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan	6 May 2020	18 June 2020	47	n/a
Total				47	79
				126	

No awards were made prior to 30 June 2020, the period of this report, although reviews and negotiations were underway.

In future annual portfolio overviews, the tables below, showing grants by strategic direction and country, will reflect those LOIs that were reviewed positively and moved on to full proposal stage and eventual award as grants.

Table 3. Awarded (Active and Closed) Large and Small Grants by Strategic Direction

Strategic Direction	Allocation	Large Grants		Small Grants		Total		Percent - Obligation: Allocation
		Count	Obligation	Count	Obligation	Count	Obligation	
1. Species	\$1,000,000	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0	-%
2. Protect KBAs	\$2,300,000	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0	-%
3. Corridor management	\$1,500,000	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0	-%
4. Production landscapes	\$1,000,000	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0	-%
5. Capacity building	\$1,000,000	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0	-%
6. RIT	\$1,200,000	1	\$1,200,000	-	\$0	-	\$0	100%
Total	\$8,000,000	1	\$1,200,000	-	\$0	1	\$1,200,000	15%

Percent (without RIT)		0%	0%	0%	0%			
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Table 4. Awarded (Active and Closed) Large and Small Grants by Country

Country	Large Grants		Small Grants		Total	
	Count	Obligation	Count	Obligation	Count	Obligation
Afghanistan	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
China	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
Kazakhstan	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
Kyrgyz Republic	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
Tajikistan	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
Turkmenistan	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
Uzbekistan	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
Multi-country	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
RIT	1	\$1,200,000	0	-	1	\$1,200,000
Total	1	\$1,200,000	0	\$0	0	\$1,200,000

While no grants were awarded by 30 June, the apparent pipeline of potential awards, as of that date, is reflected below.

Table 5. Pipeline Large and Small Grants by Strategic Direction

Strategic Direction	Allocation	Large Grants		Small Grants		Total		Percent - Request: Allocation
		Count	Request	Count	Request	Count	Request	
1. Species	\$1,000,000	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0	-%
2. Protect KBAs	\$2,300,000	5	\$750,000	13	\$260,000	18	\$1,010,000	44%
3. Corridor management	\$1,500,000	1	\$120,000	-	\$0	1	\$120,000	8%
4. Production landscapes	\$1,000,000	2	\$160,000	-	\$0	2	\$160,000	16%
5. Capacity building	\$1,000,000	1	\$150,000	-	\$0	1	\$150,000	15%
Total	\$6,800,000	9	\$1,180,000	13	\$260,000	22	\$1,440,000	22%

Table 6. Pipeline Large and Small Grants by Country

Country	Large Grants		Small Grants		Total	
	Count	Request	Count	Request	Count	Request
Afghanistan	1	\$150,000	-	\$0	-	\$0
China	-	\$0	-	\$0	-	\$0
Kazakhstan	2	\$300,000	3	\$60,000	4	\$310,000
Kyrgyz Republic	2	\$300,000	3	\$60,000	5	\$360,000
Tajikistan	2	\$160,000	3	\$60,000	5	\$220,000
Turkmenistan	-	\$0	2	\$40,000	-	\$0
Uzbekistan	-	\$0	2	\$40,000	-	\$0
Multi-country	2	\$270,000	-	\$0	2	\$370,000
Total	9	\$1,180,000	13	\$260,000	22	\$1,440,000

2.3. Coordinating CEPF Grant-Making

The RIT consists of WWF-Russia (formally based in Moscow) as the lead organization, working in collaboration with ARGO of Almaty as a sub-grantee. WWF-Russia has a long-running Central Asia program with permanent staff based in Almaty and has deep experience in the five former Soviet Republics. Meanwhile, ARGO's strength is in building the capacity of grassroots NGOs throughout those five countries and Afghanistan. (If work should begin in China, WWF-Russia will engage its Beijing-based partners through the WWF network for assistance, if necessary.) The RIT headquarters is based in Almaty, with staff arrayed per the table below.

Table 7. RIT Staffing Structure as of June 2020

Position	Name	Location
Team Leader	Lizza Protas	Almaty
Small-Grants Manager	Tatyana Reznikova	Almaty
Kazakhstan Country Coordinator	Lina Valdshmit	Almaty
Kyrgyz Country Coordinator	Mihail Yakovlev	Bishkek
Tajikistan Country Coordinator	Khirsav Shermatov	Dushanbe
Turkmenistan Country Coordinator	Begench Atamuradov	Ashgabat
Uzbekistan Country Coordinator	Aleksandr Grigoryants	Tashkent
Senior Administrator	Oksana Pavlova	Moscow
Senior Biodiversity Advisor	Olga Pereladova	Moscow
WWF-Russia Regional Advisor	Grigory Mazmaniants	Almaty

2.4. Performance Assessment

CEPF measures performance from several perspectives, including via the ecosystem profile logical framework shown in Section 7, with indicators and targets that aggregate the results of every grantee. However, at this early stage of the program, with no grants awarded other than to the RIT, we assess performance by other measures:

- **Team mobilization.** WWF-Russia and ARGO had all necessary staff members in place by the time of this report. Seven of the team attended training by the CEPF Secretariat in December 2019. The team then established a bilingual website, www.mca.earth, with appropriate documentation and links for civil society groups interested in accessing CEPF funds.
- **Engagement of civil society.** Individual country coordinators briefed national government agencies in person, by phone and electronically to ensure understanding of CEPF objectives in working directly with CSOs. The team then held an outreach even in mid-March in Bishkek to sensitize Kyrgyz NGOs on specific biogeographic and thematic goals in advance of the release of the first call for LOIs. While subsequent in-person events in the other countries were cancelled due to the pandemic, team members held analogous online sessions.
- **Working in the context of the pandemic.** Over the period of March to June, the RIT faced challenges experienced by many around the world, being required to work from home, or in the case of two Almaty-based staff who were traveling when quarantine orders went into effect, being unable to return to Kazakhstan. This prevented direct

engagement of CSOs, delayed release of calls for LOIs, and delayed further training by the CEPF Secretariat.

In the coming year, the portfolio will begin active granting and implementation, implying multiple work streams for the RIT and Secretariat, including:

- Negotiation, award and start-up of up to 22 large and small grants prior to January 2021.
- Release of a second call for LOIs with approximately 10 more awards prior to July 2021.
- Establishment of working relationships among the team and between team members and grantees while using CEPF electronic systems and adhering to CEPF contractual requirements.
- As large and small grants begin, the RIT will need to consult with national-level authorities in each country to determine how work can proceed in the context of the pandemic. This could mean no crossing of international borders by needed technical experts, prevent simple travel from capital cities to field sites, prevent stakeholder meetings, or prevent engagement of officials whose support is required.

3. Portfolio Highlights by Strategic Direction

Future annual portfolio overviews will provide highlights in relation to each strategic direction.

4. Collaboration with CEPF Donors, Other Donors and Local Government

The CEPF Secretariat and RIT collaborate with donors and government counterparts in every hotspot with the goals of promulgating the approach of the ecosystem profile, mainstreaming conservation into their operations, leveraging further support for the work of grantees, and ensuring complementary work efforts. In this first year of work, the RIT actively engaged national government agencies in each country. At a broader level, the RIT team leader participates in an EU-sponsored Central Asia coordination program with the leaders of multi-lateral funded projects on water, environment, climate change, energy, remediation, monitoring, disaster mitigation and technology. The RIT will use this forum, which meets quarterly, to discuss our overall work and the initiatives of individual grantees.

5. Conclusion

The CEPF grants portfolio in the Mountains of Central Asia faced delays from March to June 2020, due to the pandemic, but stayed reasonably on course during what were, effectively, the first six months of the program. Multiple grants are in the pipeline for award in a region new to CEPF. The coming year will see the laying of the cornerstones of the portfolio, primarily around priority sites, and will establish the efficacy of the CEPF approach to working with civil society to support conservation efforts.

6. Summary Figures

Figure 1. Obligation by Strategic Direction

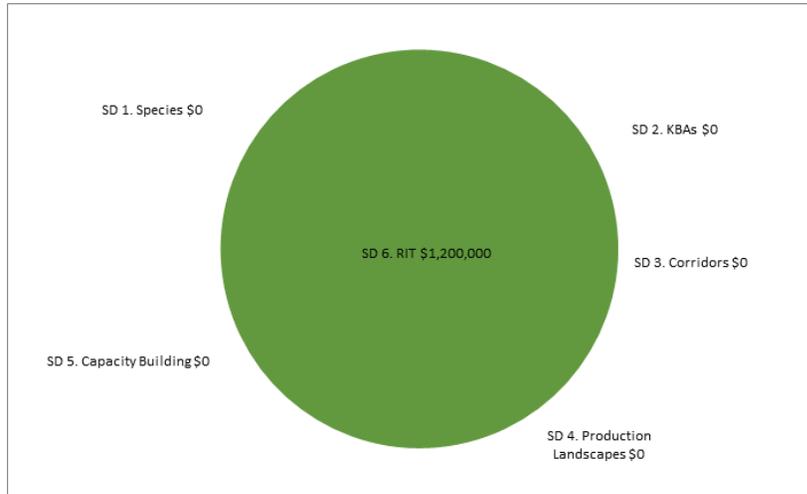
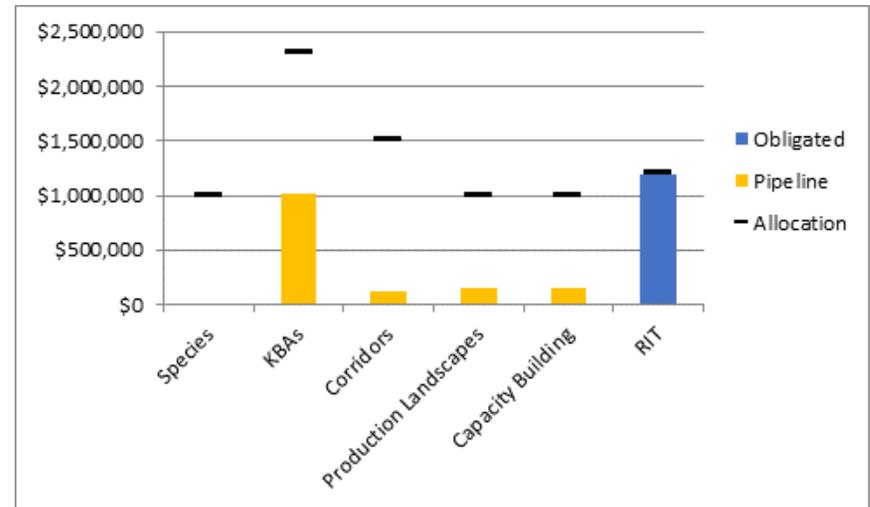


Figure 2. Pipeline and Obligation by Strategic Direction



7. Update on Progress Toward Targets in the Portfolio Logical Framework

Objective	Targets	Results
Engage civil society in the conservation of globally threatened biodiversity through targeted investments with maximum impact on the highest conservation priorities.	15 Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), covering 600,000 hectares, have improved management.	All results to be assessed with the closure of each grant.
	60,000 hectares of protected areas are created or expanded.	
	2 initiatives launched with private sector stakeholders resulting in adoption or maintenance of biodiversity-friendly practices.	
	10 land-use plans or land-use management practices incorporate provisions for biodiversity conservation.	
	5 partnerships and networks formed or strengthened among civil society, and with government and communities, to leverage complementary capacities and maximize impact in support of the ecosystem profile.	
	At least 20 local organizations receiving CEPF grants demonstrate improved organizational capacity.	
	Number of women receiving direct socio-economic benefits through increased income, food security, resource rights, or other measures of human wellbeing from CEPF grants is no less than 40% the number of men.	

Intermediate Outcomes	Intermediate Indicators	Results
<p>Outcome 1: Address threats to priority species.</p> <p>\$1,000,000</p>	Main threats to at least 4 globally threatened species are reduced.	
	4 globally threatened species benefit from strengthened regulation of extractive uses.	
	7 informal species-specific reserves are created.	
<p>Outcome 2: Improve management of Key Biodiversity Areas with and without official protection status</p> <p>\$2,300,000</p>	600,000 hectares of KBA have improved management.	
	5 KBAs with official protection status have improved management.	
	10 KBAs without official protection status have improved management.	
<p>Outcome 3: Support sustainable management and biodiversity conservation within priority corridors.</p> <p>\$1,500,000</p>	Ecological restoration techniques that improve the functioning of forest ecosystems demonstrated in at least two priority corridors.	
	5 local level land use plans incorporate biodiversity conservation as a management objective.	
	1 major development project, sub-national plan, or national plan incorporates biodiversity conservation as a management objective.	
<p>Outcome 4: Engage communities of interest and economic sectors – including the private sector – in improved management of production landscapes; that is, priority KBAs and corridors that are not formally protected.</p> <p>\$1,000,000</p>	3 private companies adopt biodiversity-friendly practices.	
	Farming or grazing areas, covering at least 50,000 hectares, incorporate biodiversity conservation into operations.	
	10,000 hectares of forest fall under certification schemes, eco-labeling programs, or other market-based management methods.	
	Site safeguard requirements are incorporated into development projects in or around five KBAs or landscapes.	
	At least five conservation issues of concern to civil society are the subject of public debate.	
<p>Outcome 5: Enhance civil society capacity for effective conservation action.</p>	At least 10 local organizations demonstrate increased knowledge of international and regional conservation agreements and take steps to engage in action at the local level.	

Intermediate Outcomes	Intermediate Indicators	Results
\$1,000,000	At least 5 regional thematic experience sharing events allow for informal and formal networking in the hotspot.	
	5 new networks or partnerships for conservation are created and/or strengthened.	
	Information on at least 5 funding opportunities for civil society disseminated to relevant organizations, resulting in at least 5 successful funding proposals for continuation or extension of CEPF-funded work.	
	Programs delivered to primary/secondary learners in at least 3 priority KBAs.	
	10 advanced degree students receive structured training in applied biodiversity science and/or support for research that leads directly to Intermediate Outcomes 1, 2 or 3.	
Outcome 6: Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of CEPF investment through a regional implementation team. \$1,200,000	At least 25 local organizations actively participate in conservation actions guided by the ecosystem profile.	
	At least 20 local civil society organizations receiving grants demonstrate improved organizational capacity.	
	At least 10 local civil society organizations receiving grants demonstrate improved understanding of and commitment to gender issues.	
	At least 2 participatory assessments undertaken, documenting lessons learned and best practices from the hotspot.	
	Performance of the RIT assessed as satisfactory during the mid-term and final assessments.	

8. All Awarded Grants, by Start Date

No.	CEPF ID	Organization	SD	Country	Obligated Amount (USD)	Start Date	End Date
1	110214	WWF-Russia	6	Multi	1,200,000	Nov-19	Oct-24