

Health and Safety Plan

18 March 2022

CEPF Application Code 111860

Turtle Survival Alliance

Back from the Brink: Recovering Two Critically Endangered Turtles in Myanmar

**Minzontaung, Shwe Settaw, and Chatthin Wildlife Sanctuaries
and Upper Chindwin River**

Grant Summary

1. Grantee organization: Turtle Survival Alliance
2. Grant title: Recovering Two Critically Endangered Turtles in Myanmar.
3. Grant number: 111860
4. Grant amount (US dollars). \$240,000
5. Proposed dates of grant: 1st June 2022 to 31st May 2024
6. Countries or territories where project is located: Myanmar
7. Full name, title, telephone numbers, and electronic mail address of Grantee personnel responsible for the health and safety plan: Turtle Survival Alliance, Myanmar Program. +959257040718, info@turtlesurvival.org
8. Summary of the project: Our project consists of two major components. First, we aim to restore viable populations of *Geochelone platynota* to three wildlife sanctuaries (Minzontaung, Shwe Settaw, and Chatthin wildlife sanctuaries) in Myanmar. Secondly we seek to restore viable populations of *Batagur trivittata* to the upper Chindwin River. Both components rely on a combination of ex-situ (e.g., captive-propagation, head-starting, and translocation) and in-situ (e.g., monitoring and patrolling) methodologies. We also conduct conservation education and outreach programs in local communities to raise awareness, explain our project, and inform of progress.
9. Date of preparation of the health and safety plan: 16-18 March 2022.
10. **Describe the component of your project that has raised health and safety issues:** This section should explain the activities that might cause concern about health and safety.

First, our staffs are conducting fieldwork under potentially dangerous security conditions that now prevail in post-coup Myanmar. Second, our staffs interact with each other, Community Conservation Volunteers (CCVs), and members of local communities during numerous routine activities (e.g., maintenance of assurance colonies, turtle husbandry, monitoring, patrolling, training, and community outreach). Presumably these frequent and sustained interactions raise the potential risk for transmission of COVID-19 between and among TSA/WCS staff, CCVs, and local communities.

11. **Actions to ensure health and safety:** Describe actions that will be taken to ensure the health and safety of project workers as well as local community members. Include a description of the precautions that will be taken against transmission of COVID-19.

There are two primary health and safety concerns involved with our work in Myanmar. Foremost is widespread civil unrest in many regions of Myanmar (including major urban centers) in the wake of the military coup on 1 February 2021. Subsequent to this event, TSA/WCS developed a risk mitigation protocol. This protocol is based on a risk mitigation hierarchy: 1) Avoid Risks, 2) Minimize Risks, and 3) Retrieve Detained Personnel. To briefly summarize, potential risks associated with any activity are first evaluated. Staffs are advised to avoid situations, places, and times where the probability of being investigated or detained by security forces is high. If avoidance is not

possible (e.g., in the case of unforeseen events), staffs should make all efforts to minimize the risk of being investigated or detained by security forces. Finally, if all else fails and staffs are detained by security forces, no effort will be spared by TSA/WCS leadership to retrieve these individuals from custody. To that end, a set of guidelines is provided to all staffs to aid in negotiating the legal system in post-coup Myanmar. Prior to undertaking any field work, staffs must complete an activity-specific Risk Assessment in which all potential risks are identified and mitigation measures are outlined. Each Risk Assessment must then be approved by the WCS Myanmar Program Director before the proposed activity can proceed.

The health and safety measures implemented by TSA/WCS to mitigate COVID risk are in close accordance with WHO Guidelines. First, all permanent TSA/WCS staff in Myanmar are fully vaccinated (CoviShield, Sinopharm, and Sinovac) against COVID. Additionally, all staffs received two booster injections (mixed CoviShield, Covaxin, and Sinopharm). We encourage our CCVs and village-level collaborators to do likewise and facilitate immunization upon request (namely assisting with travel arrangements to a vaccination site). Second, we adhere to WHO Guidelines on social distancing, especially during community outreach programs and trainings. These events are held in outdoor, open-air venues and participants are seated at least two meters apart. Thirdly, we stringently follow WHO masking guidelines; TSA/WCS are always masked when interacting with each other and with community members. Masks are required when riding in a vehicle with others. Masks are also required by all participants at training events and outreach programs. When masks are unavailable or in short supply, TSA/WCS will provide them. Finally, we aggressively test our staff for COVID using Rapid Test Kits. Tests are administered immediately prior to any travel or scheduled event. Staffs are tested again upon their return from a work assignment. A negative COVID test is required to participate in scheduled events. For the most part, TSA/WCS continue to work remotely from home, further minimizing the risk of transmitting COVID. TSA/WCS staff that test positive with COVID are required to self-isolate for two weeks and can only return to duty after submitting the results of a negative COVID test.

12. Budget: \$1800 to the cost of implementing the health and safety plan.

13. Monitoring and Evaluation: This section aims to outline what steps the grantee will take to monitor and evaluate the impact of the proposed intervention.
As explained above, TSA/WCS staffs are frequently tested for COVID using inexpensive and accurate Rapid Test Kits. Testing of staffs is conducted immediately prior to travel and upon their return from a work assignment. A negative COVID Test is required for participation in any TSA/WCS activity, especially those involving community members. Any staff testing positive for COVID or displaying symptoms (but testing negative) is required to self-isolate for two weeks and then submit negative results from a COVID Test.