CLIMATE-SMART SNOW LEOPARD LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE NEPAL EASTERN HIMALAYA GSLEP PRIORITY LANDSCAPE

Nepal's Eastern Himalaya GSLEP Priority Landscape (EHL) covers 11,516 square kilometers of the eastern Himalaya, from Langtang National Park in the west to the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area in the east and includes Mt. Everest. Most of this landscape is home to the snow leopard, the top predator in this region. The landscape forms an important link between the western and eastern snow leopard populations of the Himalaya range and is a critical water tower for millions, but is among the most climate vulnerable regions on the planet. With funding from the WWF Asia High Mountains Project, WWF has worked with the Government of Nepal to develop a model climate-smart snow leopard landscape management plan for this landscape to guide Nepal's implementation of the 12-nation GSLEP Program.

A MODEL FOR SNOW LEOPARD CONSERVATION

Implementation of this management plan will contribute to the GSLEP goal of securing **20 snow leopard landscapes by 2020**, fulfilling part of Nepal's conservation commitment under the GSLEP Program. This plan features sections on future hydrological and climate scenarios, in-depth geo-spatial analyses, and alignment with the Government of Nepal's biodiversity, climate adaptation and landscape conservation policies. The plan is also aligned with relevant protected area management and species actions plans. In doing so, the EHL snow leopard landscape management plan and planning process serve as a truly climate-smart model for the protection of other GSLEP Priority Landscapes.

CLIMATE EFFECTS ON THE SNOW LEOPARD AND ITS HOME

It is predicted that the EHL will have a warmer and wetter climate as a result of climate change, with an anticipated annual temperature increase of 2.6°C and a 27% increase in total annual precipitation by 2070. These changes will have profound effects on the EHL's water budget, biological processes and livelihoods. The snow leopard will be one of the hardest hit species, and could lose over **half of its habitat** in the eastern Himalaya by 2070 due to upward shift of the tree line. In addition, ongoing anthropogenic threats to the snow leopards' habitat, such as highway construction, are also expected to exacerbate the cascading effects of climate change, with negative impacts for the natural, human and social capital of the eastern Himalaya region.

A CLIMATE SMART PLAN

Through examination of future climate projections and both climatic and anthropogenic stressors, **11 critical** conservation sites were identified as critical areas in need of intensive management in the Eastern Himalaya Landscape. Securing these sites will be key to achieving the overarching GSLEP goal of securing a population of at least 100 breeding-age snow leopards and their ecosystem in each GSLEP Priority Landscape by 2020. This goal will ultimately be achieved in the EHL by improving climate resilience and securing local livelihoods through an integrated program of snow leopard research, land use planning, human-wildlife conflict reduction, and improved transboundary cooperation. The EHL management plan has a comprehensive logic framework and is ready for implementation in two phases over the next 10 years, from 2017-2021 (near term) and 2022-2026 (long term).

This plan and process will be a model for securing 20 Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Program Priority Landscapes by 2020.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The Eastern Himalaya Landscape management plan has charted a course for achieving **8 critical outcomes** as follows:

OUTCOME 1

Important snow leopard habitats are secured using climate integrated approaches.

OUTCOME 2

Human-wildlife conflict is reduced.

OUTCOME 3

Poaching and illegal trade of snow leopards and associated wildlife is significantly reduced.

OUTCOME 4

The economic well-being of local communities is enhanced through green development.

OUTCOME 5

Strong local institutions and good governance is insured and community members, especially women and disadvantaged groups, are empowered.

OUTCOME 6

Risk and vulnerabilities due to climate change impacts on local livelihoods and the snow leopard's ecosystem are reduced.

OUTCOME 7

A benchmark database on snow leopards and their ecosystem is established and long-term monitoring and knowledge management ensured.

OUTCOME 8

Transboundary cooperation among neighbouring countries is enhanced and collaboration with international partners strengthened.

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IMPLEMENTATION

The EHL snow leopard landscape management plan was prepared with full stakeholder participation, ensuring the buy-in of government and non-government institutions, and includes a robust governance mechanism for implementation. A plan implementation budget for the next 10 years has been estimated. Potential sources of funding to implement the management plan are government sources, locally generated revenue, civil society organisations, and international donors. Likewise, innovative sustainable financing mechanism such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) have been identified as promising sources of funding for long-term implementation of management plan activities.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The overall performance of EHL management plan implementation will be evaluated in two phases; each lasting for a 5-year period. In each phase, reviews will take place at the end of the 3-year and 5-year periods, providing ample opportunities for adaptive management throughout the life of the project.