**Improving the Coverage and Management Efficiency**

**of Protected Areas in the Steppe Biome of Russia**

***Russian Federation***

**GEF Agency: United Nations Development Programme**

**Executing Agency: Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment**

**GEF Biodiversity Focal Area, Strategic Objective BD-1**

**Full-size Project: GEF ID: 3745, UNDP PIMS: 4194**

**UNDP Atlas Project Number: 00072294**

**Mid-term Evaluation**

**May 13, 2013**



*Photo: Feathergrass typical of the meadow steppe biome.*

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**Acronyms**

APR Annual project review

CBD Convention on Biological Diversity

CCZ Centralno Chernozemniy Zapovednik

CEO Chief Executive Officer

CZZ Chernye Zemli Zapovednik

FSP Full-sized Project

GEF Global Environment Facility

GIS Geographical Information System

ha Hectares

Km Kilometers

M&E Monitoring and evaluation

METT Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool

MNRE Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Federal)

N/A Not applicable

N/S Not specified

NBSAP National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

NEX National Execution

NIM National Implementation

NGO Non-governmental organization

NPD National Project Director

PA Protected area

PIF Project Information Form

PIR Project implementation Review

PMIS Project Management Information System

PMU Project Management Unit

PPG Project Preparation Grant

PSC Project Steering Committee

SMSA Specially Managed Steppe Areas

TOR Terms of Reference

TRA Threat Reduction Assessment

UA Unable to assess

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

USD United States dollars

WWF World Wildlife Fund

# Executive Summary

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Project Title: | Improving the Coverage and Management Efficiency of Protected Areas in the Steppe Biome of Russia | | | |
| GEF Project ID: | 3745 |  | *At endorsement (million US$)* | *At completion (million US$)* |
| UNDP Project ID: | 4194 | GEF financing: | 5.31 | N/A |
| Country: | Russian Federation | IA/EA own: | 0.01 | N/A |
| Region: | ECA | Government: | 14.20 | N/A |
| Focal Area: | Biodiversity | Other: | 0.69 | N/A |
| FA Objectives: | GEF-4: SO-1, SP-3  GEF-5: SO-1, Outcome 1.1 | Total co-financing: | 14.90 | N/A |
| Executing Agency: | Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment | Total Project Cost: | 20.21 | N/A |
| Other Partners Involved: | Implementing entity (for financial management): Non-commercial Partnership for Zapovedniks (Partnyorstvo dlya Zapovednikov) | ProDoc Signature (date project began): | | February 27, 2010 |
| (Operational) Closing Date: | Proposed: March 1, 2015 | Actual: N/A |

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW**

1. The Russia Steppe project is classified as a Global Environment Facility (GEF) Full-sized Project (FSP), with total GEF support of $5.31 million (not including $0.15 in project development funding), and originally proposed co-financing is $14.90 million United States dollars (USD), for a total project budget of $20.21 million USD. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the GEF Agency, and the project is executed under UNDP’s national implementation (NIM, former NEX) modality, with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) as the National Implementing Partner. The project is to be executed over five years, from February 2010 through February 2015.
2. According to the project document, the project objective is *“to develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome.”* The project’s overall goal is highlighted in the latest version of the project logframe as *“Conservation and sustainable use of globally significant steppe biodiversity.”* The project is in-line with the GEF’s first strategic objective to catalyze sustainability of protected area systems, and supports the corresponding strategic priority on strengthening terrestrial protected area systems. The project objective was planned to be achieved through three main outcomes:
3. **Outcome 1: Consolidation and expansion of [Steppe Protected Area**] **system.**
4. **Outcome 2: [Steppe Protected Area**] **know how for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened.**
5. **Outcome 3: Strengthened [Steppe Protected Area**] **system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice.**
6. The project activities are focused in four pilot protected areas in four regions across Russia, representing four categories of steppe biome: Centralno Chernozemniy Zapovednik (CCZ) in Kursk Oblast; Chernye Zemli Zapovednik (CZZ) in Kalmykia Republic; Orenburgskiy Zapovednik in Orenburg Oblast; and Daurski Zapovednik in Zabaikalskiy Krai.
7. According to GEF and UNDP evaluation policies, mid-term evaluations are required practice for GEF funded FSPs, and the mid-term evaluation was a planned activity of the monitoring and evaluation plan of the Russia Steppe project. This mid-term evaluation reviews the actual performance and progress toward results of the project against the planned project activities and outputs, based on the standard evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results and sustainability. The evaluation assesses project results based on expected outcomes and objectives, as well as any unanticipated results. The evaluation identifies relevant lessons for other similar projects in the future in Russia and elsewhere, and provides recommendations as necessary and appropriate. The evaluation methodology was based on a participatory mixed-methods approach, which included two primary elements: a) a desk review of project documentation and other relevant documents; and b) interviews with key project participants and stakeholders. The evaluation is based on evaluative evidence from the start of project implementation (February 2010) through May 2013 (with expected project closure in March 2015), and includes an assessment of issues prior to approval, such the project development process, overall design, risk assessment and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) planning. The desk review was begun in April 2013, and the evaluation mission was carried out from May 10 – May 21, 2013.

**MAIN EVALUATION CRITERIA**

1. Based on the results thus far, and progress toward the Russia Steppe project outcomes and objective, the **overall project outcome rating** is considered ***satisfactory***. The project has produced a number of key results (highlighted below), and is on track to reach the expected results by project end. There are no currently identified critical risks for the remaining implementation period. The project has reached the planned mid-term targets for a majority of indicators, while progress is limited for a few others, but a revision and clarification of the logframe is required for more specific and relevant assessment of project results.
2. The mid-term evaluation ratings table for the Russia Steppe project may appear somewhat bland, with almost all “satisfactory” ratings in all respects. However, this does reflect the current situation of the project, which is generally on track, and is well-managed and implemented. Perhaps the most significant question for the Russia Steppe project for the second half of implementation is: will the project manage to really go above and beyond in delivering results, and exceed expectations? Will it be able to produce truly catalytic results for steppe conservation in Russia? Or will it just barely manage to achieve the minimum expected results before completion? Considering the positive progress thus far on a number of activities the project certainly has the potential to achieve truly significant results, particularly with respect to supporting expansion of steppe protected areas, and on species-based conservation measures. But much work remains, and in order to achieve outstanding project performance, the second half of project implementation will need to be more intensive than the first half to achieve the expected results while maintaining efficiency.
3. With respect to **relevance**, the Russia Steppe project is ***relevant*** for addressing the biodiversity threats and conservation barriers in Russia’s steppe ecosystems, at local, national and international levels. In particular, the project is directly linked with and supportive of the federal MNRE’s strategy for expansion of the national protected area system for the period 2010-2020. Overall, steppe ecosystems are underrepresented in Russia’s protected area system, as well as globally, and the project seeks to support Russia in improving the representation of steppe protected areas. The project is also supportive of Russia’s commitments for implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and is in line with the GEF biodiversity focal area’s strategic objectives and priorities.
4. Based on all aspects of project implementation and financial management, project **efficiency** is rated ***satisfactory***. The project implementation arrangements are well-structured to support the project design, covering the four pilot regions, which are geographically spread from one side of the country to the other. In particular, the use of highly capable local coordinators who are directly linked to the pilot protected areas is an important and valuable approach, and is one of the key elements of success thus far. In addition, the Project Management Unit (PMU) consists of professional, efficient, and technically excellent staff, who have cultivated good working relationships with UNDP and the MNRE, as well as the full range of stakeholders at the regional level. The project is being implemented in a cost-effective manner, with good reporting, budgeting and workplanning; in addition, thus far management costs have been less than anticipated. There are two issues for attention at the mid-term: the low rate of disbursement (37.4% as of the mid-term) and the low rate of co-financing (17.9%), though the latter may be partially a reporting issue. The annual rate of disbursement has been improving from year to year, but increased implementation intensity is required to ensure that the project does not require a long extension, which would decrease cost-effectiveness.
5. Based on the extent of results achieved, project **effectiveness** is considered ***satisfactory.*** The Russia Steppe project is making reasonable progress toward the expected outcomes, and the project is generally on track to reach the project objective by the end of the project. Keeping in mind that less than half of the project budget has been disbursed as of the mid-term evaluation, a number of important activities have been completed, and progress is continuing under each of the outcomes. Key results achieved thus far include:

* Support for expansion of 277,747 ha of steppe zone under protection, spread across the four pilot regions, and significant strengthening of management capacity in the pilot sites;
* Significant increase in fire management capacity in each of the four pilot regions, with the purchase of fire-fighting equipment and specific fire management trainings held in each pilot protected area;
* Work on bird safety in partnership with power utilities in Orenburg and Dauria
* Steppe species-specific conservation work, including preparation for reintroduction of steppe marmot in CCZ and reintroduction of Przewalski’s horse in Orenburg;

1. While mid-term evaluations are typically not well-positioned to make assessments of the sustainability of project results (as many more activities will be carried out that may affect sustainability), the overall **sustainability** for the Russia Steppe project results thus far is considered ***likely***.

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The following are the mid-term evaluation’s key recommendations, with the target audience in brackets following the recommendation. Additional lower level recommendations are also included at the end of the evaluation report, in Section VII.B on recommendations.
2. ***Key Recommendation 1:*** The project covers a wide range of activities and geographic spread in the second half of the project activities the workplan should be consolidated a little and streamlined to focus on those activities that are critical for achieving planned outcomes and those that have shown promise, while dropping those that have lagged. In this respect, the evaluation recommends that the project formally drop the Specially Managed Steppe Areas (SMSA) activity (Output 2.5). There appear to be a number of legal and policy issues with this activity, and in one of the primary locations for developing this approach the context has changed. The project does not appear to be in a position to establish a nationally replicable private land conservation model, and individual unique instances have limited strategic value. As advocates for steppe ecosystems, project stakeholders are free to opportunistically pursue (as time and resources allow) specific opportunities for steppe protection in collaboration with private land owners, but this should be dropped as an official expected result of the project to allow the project team to focus on other key results. [MNRE, Project Team, PSC]
3. ***Key Recommendation 2:*** The evaluation recommends the project logframe indicators and targets be revised, with a number of specific revisions proposed in Annex 7. The intention is to improve the results-focus and SMARTness of indicators, while also reflecting some changes to project workplanning and improving the alignment of the logframe with the assessment of project results. While there are a number of specific logframe revisions proposed, there are two overall logframe revisions suggested: i.) The project should consider adding a Threat Reduction Assessment (TRA) indicator for each of the pilot sites, as an additional means of assessing impact level results. There are a variety of natural factors that can influence the population status of species, but, taking a theory-based approach, a project’s efforts to directly reduce specific biodiversity threats should result in improved biodiversity status. Adding a TRA indicator at this stage would require re-constructing baseline values, but this should be feasible, based on the data available and knowledge of project experts for each of the regions. Ii.) The project team should review the logframe indicators and targets to clearly rationalize targets and define all key terms. This could involve completing a table such as the below example:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Definition of key terms** | **Normative state target** | **Target for project scope and timeframe** |
| METT | N/A | To maintain the ecological integrity of their specified areas and achieve their basic function as protected areas, PA management should have an effectiveness score of at least (80? May be different for different PAs, depending on their context and circumstances). | Based on an analysis of the areas of management effectiveness that the project is targeting and what can be achieved in the project time frame, the project should be able to help protected area X reach a METT score of 75 from the baseline of 50. (The GEF biodiversity focal area target for GEF-5 is a 15%-20% increase in PA management effectiveness). |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

1. ***Key Recommendation 3:*** The project should scale down the planned activities relating to restoration (Output 2.2) and integrated fire management (Output 2.1) to a scope that is realistic during the life of the project, but which could still generate some positive experiences and lessons for further replication. Cost-effectiveness of restoration activities unclear, and other activities could have greater conservation value – e.g. establishing nature monuments in some steppe remnants in Kursk could have as much value as restoration of small plots. In Orenburg there are plans to support natural regeneration through seeding fallow lands with native perennial grasses, to enhance natural processes. While the project’s only input would be purchasing the seeds (with other required inputs provided in-kind by local governments and land-users), this is still a relatively expensive activity, and the cost-effectiveness should be weighed against the investment required to increase protection for steppe areas that are still in good condition but not protected. The experience of developing the integrated fire management plan in Orenburg has shown that this is a complex process requiring significant time, and as such it would not be possible for the project to produce seven such plans. Further, the value of this approach should be demonstrated before significant additional resources are spent to produce additional plans. After the first year of implementation of the Orenburg integrated fire management plan a survey should be carried out among stakeholders to identify the value this approach. If it is found to be positive, stakeholders from Orenburg could disseminate their experience to other regions through presentations and other means of information sharing. [MNRE, Project Team, PSC]
2. ***Key Recommendation 4:*** The project must ensure the annual budget delivery rate is increased and maintained, to maintain the efficiency of the project. While many projects do have short extensions, extensions beyond six months can have a negative influence on efficiency as an increasing proportion of project resources are required for administrative and management overhead costs. [MNRE, Project Team, UNDP]
3. ***Key Recommendation 5:*** In the second half of the project the project team and immediate stakeholders should increase the focus on aspects related to scaling-up and replication of project experiences and lessons - for example, relating to the project experience developing integrated fire management plans. The goal should be to have some replications or scaling-up actually initiated by the end of the project, not just information disseminated. [Project Team]
4. ***Key Recommendation 6:*** Since the project did not conduct a structured capacity needs assessment for the four pilot areas, the project should analyze the recommendations of the three pilot area management audits to identify capacity needs at the site level, in order to support the development of appropriate training modules. [MNRE, Project Team, Pilot Site Managers]
5. ***Key Recommendation 7:*** The project should work with the Kalmykia pilot site team and key national and regional stakeholders to develop a structured long-term approach to address the issue of saiga management in Kalmykia (e.g. dealing with poaching, etc.). The project should support engagement of all key stakeholders to move toward implementation of the saiga conservation management plan that has already been developed for the region. [MNRE, Project Team, Kalmykia Pilot Site Team]
6. ***Key Recommendation 8:*** There has been some engagement of communities in the areas surrounding pilot site protected areas, but this is an area that needs additional work as the project progresses in supporting effective management of steppe protected areas. Successful and effective management of protected areas is usually accomplished through developing positive relationships, communication, and input mechanisms with surrounding communities. One model pursued in some parts of the world is a community advisory council, which may not have decision-making power, but which provides a formal channel linking communities with protected area management. Other models include partnerships with community organizations such as local hunting associations in a form of community-based management for monitoring and enforcement in areas around protected areas. Community-based environmental monitoring programs are another useful potential mechanism. [MNRE, Project Team, Pilot Site Managers]

**Russia Steppe Project Mid-term Evaluation Rating Summary**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Evaluation Ratings:** | | | |
| **1. Monitoring and Evaluation** | ***rating*** | **2. IA& EA Execution** | ***rating*** |
| M&E design at entry | MS | Quality of UNDP Implementation | S |
| M&E Plan Implementation | S | Quality of Execution - Executing Agency | S |
| Overall quality of M&E | S | Overall quality of Implementation / Execution | S |
| **3. Assessment of Outcomes** | **rating** | **4. Sustainability** | **rating** |
| Relevance | R, S | Financial resources | L |
| Effectiveness | S | Socio-political | L |
| Efficiency | S | Institutional framework and governance | L |
| Overall Project Outcome Rating | S | Environmental | L |
|  |  | Overall likelihood of sustainability | L |

*Note: The ratings for the main evaluation criteria are narratively highlighted in the report; other ratings are not.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Ratings for Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation and Execution***  6: Highly Satisfactory (HS): no shortcomings  5: Satisfactory (S): minor shortcomings  4: Moderately Satisfactory (MS): moderate shortcomings  3. Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): significant shortcomings  2. Unsatisfactory (U): major problems  1. Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe problems | ***Sustainability Ratings***  4. Likely (L): negligible risks to sustainability  3. Moderately Likely (ML): moderate risks  2. Moderately Unlikely (MU): significant risks  1. Unlikely (U): severe risks | ***Relevance Ratings***  2. Relevant (R)  1. Not relevant (NR)  ***Impact Ratings***  3. Significant (S): Large-scale impacts  2. Minimal (M): Site-based impacts  1. Negligible (N): Little or no impacts |
| ***Additional ratings where appropriate***  Not Applicable (N/A)  Unable to Assess (U/A) | | |

# Introduction: Evaluation Scope and Methodology

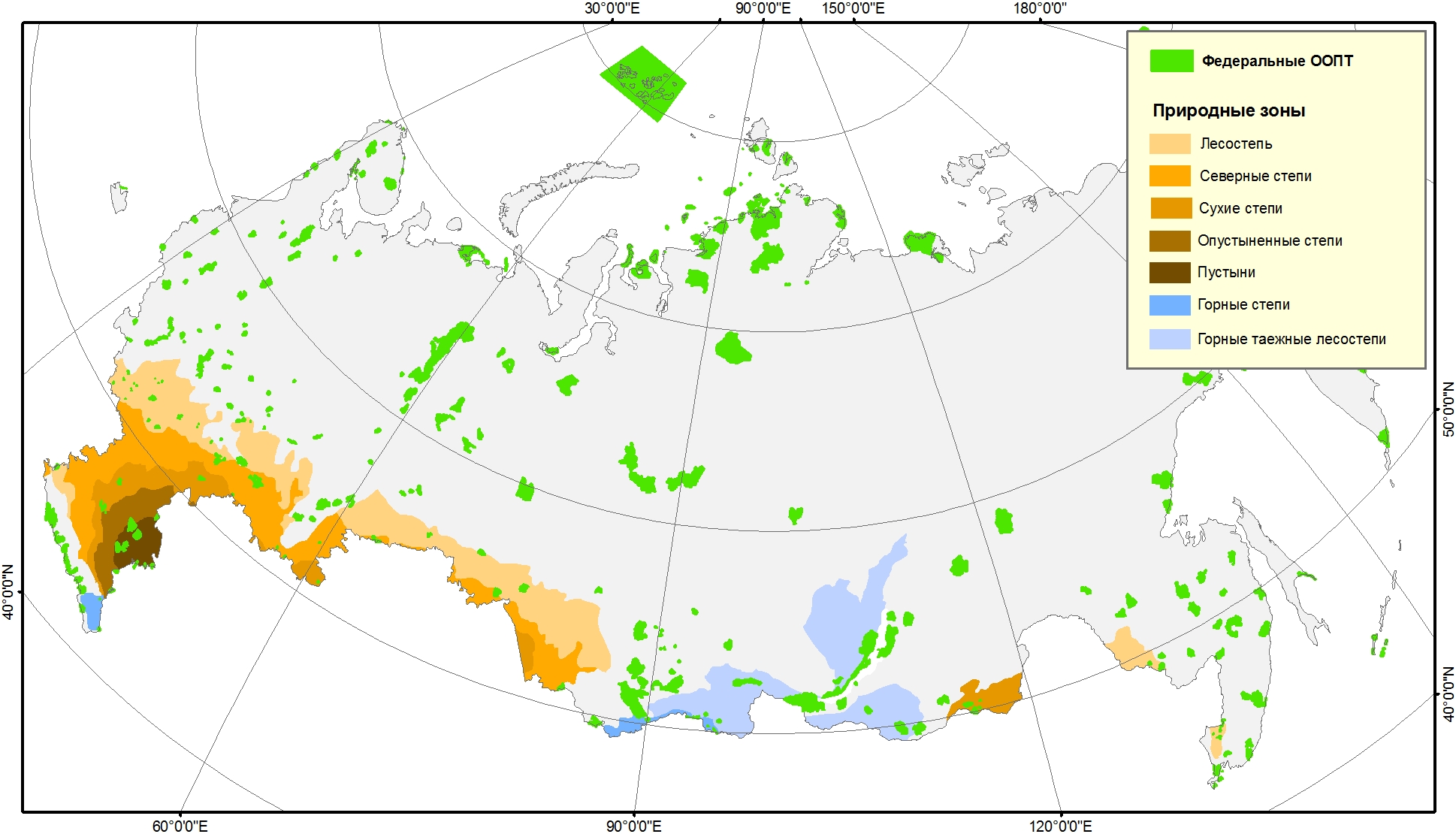
1. According to GEF and UNDP evaluation policies, mid-term evaluations are required practice for GEF funded FSPs, and the mid-term evaluation was a planned activity of the monitoring and evaluation plan of the Russia Steppe project. The UNDP Russia Project Support Office initiated the mid-term evaluation near the mid-point of the project’s five-year implementation period. As per the evaluation Terms of Reference (TORs) (see Annex 1) this mid-term evaluation reviews the actual performance and progress toward results of the project against the planned project activities and outputs, based on the standard evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results and sustainability. The evaluation assesses project results based on expected outcomes and objectives, as well as any unanticipated results. The evaluation identifies relevant lessons for other similar projects in the future in Russia and elsewhere, and provides recommendations as necessary and appropriate.
2. In addition to assessing the main GEF evaluation criteria, the evaluation provides the required ratings on key elements of project design and implementation. Further, the evaluation will, when possible and relevant, assess the project in the context of the key GEF operational principles such as country-drivenness, and stakeholder ownership, as summarized in Annex 2. The evaluation also covers the mainstreaming of UNDP program principles, as required, with discussion in Annex 9.
3. The evaluation methodology was based on a participatory mixed-methods approach, which included two primary elements: a) a desk review of project documentation and other relevant documents; and, b) interviews with key project participants and stakeholders, including those in the four project pilot areas. The evaluation is based on evaluative evidence from the start of project implementation (April 2010) through May 2013 (with expected project closure in May 2015). The desk review was begun in April 2013, and the evaluation mission was carried out from May 14 – May 24, 2013. The list of stakeholders interviewed is included as Annex 10 to this evaluation report, and documents reviewed are listed in Annex 11.
4. All evaluations face limitations in terms of the time and resources available to adequately collect and analyze evaluative evidence. Also, as is understandable, some documents were available only in Russian language, although key documents were available in English, and the composition of the evaluation team, with an expert interpreter, ensured that language was not a barrier to the collection of evaluative evidence. Altogether the evaluation challenges were not significant, and the evaluation is believed to represent a fair and accurate assessment of the project.
5. The evaluation was conducted in accordance with UNDP and GEF monitoring and evaluation policies and procedures, and in-line with United Nations Evaluation Group norms and standards.
6. The intended users of this mid-term evaluation are the Russian Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment as the project executing organization (including the project team), the stakeholders of the four project pilot areas, the UNDP Russia Project Support Office, and the UNDP-GEF network. As relevant, the mid-term evaluation report may be disseminated more widely with additional stakeholders to share lessons and recommendations.

# Project Overview and Development Context

## Development Context[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. The world’s largest zone of the steppe biome - the vast Eurasian Steppe - is found in southwest Russia (European Russia and southern Siberia) and neighboring countries in Central Asia. There are two major sub-regions of the steppe region of Russia: Pontic-Kazakh Steppe Subregion and East Siberian Inner-Asian Steppe Sub-region. The Pontic-Kazakh steppe occupies a vast area stretching for almost 3,500 kilometers (km) from west to east and for more than 1,200 km from north to south and stretches from Romania and Ukraine in the west to the Altay Mountains in the east. Forbs and bunchgrass dominate this steppe biome, while broadleaf forests are often intermixed with the grasslands in the north and along river valleys in the south. The East Siberian Inner-Asian Sub-region of the Russian steppe stretches from the intermountain depressions of Altai Mountains in the west almost 2,000 km to the Amur River basin in the east. Eight of the thirteen steppe eco-regions that make up the Steppe Biome are present in Russia (Pontic steppe, Kazakh forest steppe, Kazakh steppe, Sayan Intermontane steppe, Daurian steppe, Mongolian-Manchurian grassland, Selenge-Orkhon forest steppe, and South Siberian forest steppe).
2. Russia is recognized as the most important European country for the conservation of steppe birds, harbouring 21 of the 27 bird species whose European populations are 75% or more concentrated in steppe habitats. Russia supports 39% of the total European breeding population of these 27 species—the largest percentage of any European country. Ten of these 27 breeding steppe species are of global conservation concern; Russia harbours nine of them – more than any other European country. These nine species are: Pallid Harrier (*Circus macrourus),* Imperial Eagle *(Aquila heliaca),* Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni),* Saker (*Falco cherrug),* Great Bustard (*Otis tarda),* Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax),* Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarious),* Slender-Billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*) and Black-winged Pratincole (*Glareola nordmanni).* Other bird species of global concern found in steppe zones include Siberian crane (*Grus leucogeranus*), Hooded crane (*Grus monachus*), White-naped crane (*Grus vipio*), Common crane (*Grus grus*), and Demoiselle crane (*Anthropoides virgo*), and the Swan goose (*Anser cygnoides*). There are 88 Important Bird Areas in the steppe regions of Russia that contain significant steppe areas and/or are important for steppe birds. Russia’s steppe regions provide habitats for 11 mammal species of global conservation concern including two of the world’s most charismatic ungulate species, saiga antelope and the Mongolian gazelle. Two ungulates have become extinct in the wild, the European bison and the Przewalski horse. The saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*) is an Annex II species under the Bonn Convention and is categorized as "Critically Endangered" by IUCN’s Red List (2002). Mongolian gazelle (*Procapra gutturosa)* represent the largest and most globally significant migratory population of ungulates in the northern temperate regions worldwide. Other mammal species of global concern include: Steppe cat (*Felis manul*), the Daurian hedgehog (*Mesechinus dauuricus*), and the Mongolian marmot (*Marmota sibirica*).
3. Prior to the project, there were 50 protected areas within Russia’s federal system of protected areas that included some steppe area: 27 *zapovedniks* (strict protected areas); 8 national parks; and 15 federal *zakazniks* (wildlife refuges). In total, these 50 areas encompassed approximately 70,000 km2 or approximately 3.5% of Russia’s entire national system of protected areas, but many of these 50 protected areas have less than 20% of their territory in steppe habitat. Fifteen of these 50 protected areas are comprised of at least 25% steppe lands. It is these 15 areas that are referred to in the project document as “steppe protected areas”. Counting only the estimated steppe lands within each of these 15 steppe protected areas, the total estimated area of proactively protected steppe lands drops from 70,000 km2 to less than 20,000 km2 (1,834,161 ha): the equivalent of less than 0.15% of the total protected area patrimony of Russia, and approximately 0.11% of all steppe zones, the lowest percentage of any biome in Russia. Figure 1 below highlights the steppe zones of Russia within the federal protected area network (green highlighted areas). Due to the overall relative underrepresentation of the steppe biome in the Russian protected area system, at the time this project was conceived and developed, increasing steppe protected area coverage was a priority (and remains so) of the Federal Ministry of Natural Resources, as documented in the government’s plan for development and expansion of the national protected area system from 2010-2020.

Figure Steppe Zones of Russia and Federal Protected Areas



1. The socio-economic context of Russia’s steppe protected areas is characterized overall by a human population density that ranges from 45 people/km2 in Kursk to 17.5 people/km2 in Orenburg to 3.8 people/km2 in Kalmykia to 2.7/km2 in Zabaikalski Krai. Most steppe protected areas occur in districts with a population density under 15 persons/km2 and over 90% of the steppe protected areas occur in districts with a population density under 10 persons/km2. Nearly all of the steppe protected areas are located in districts where agriculture (farming and raising livestock) is a primary economic activity involving the local population. In considering the socio-economic context of steppe lands and steppe protected areas in Russia, it is important to note the level of decline in agricultural production and activity in Russia since the early 1990s. The main domestic animals utilizing temperate grasslands in Russia are beef cattle, sheep, goats, and horses.
2. Russian legislation does not identify steppe as a separate category for legal regulation like it does for forests for example. Nor does it specifically provide for steppes to be treated as a special case when applying any legislation. In addition, there is no federal program that considers steppes, or grasslands in general, as a special subject. In reality, steppes do not exist in Russian federal legislation. The same situation exists in most Russian provinces. The legal regulation of steppe ecosystems is determined by the legal status of an area depending on where it is located. Most steppe communities in Russia occur on farmland, which is defined here to mean all those areas where agriculture is the dominant form of land use, or was in the recent past. Therefore, agricultural law and policy determine the regulation of most steppe ecosystems in Russia.

## Concept Development and Project Description

### Concept Background

1. According to the project team and UNDP, the project concept originated in collaborative discussions between the government (MNRE) and UNDP representatives, presumably in early-mid 2008. Representatives from both parties were traveling between pilot sites of another GEF project, the Lower Volga Wetland project (GEF ID #1068), and while crossing Kalmykia they were inspired by the steppe landscape, and concerned by difficulties shared by local stakeholders, with regards to adequately managing steppe protected areas and fighting for the plight of the saiga antelope in this region. The GEF portfolio in Russia was evolving to be ecosystem-based, and the steppe biome was under-represented globally and within Russia’s protected area system; the official national plan for development of Russia’s protected area system from 2010-2020 included establishment of a number of steppe protected areas. Thus a confluence of factors, most notably strong linkage with national government protected area priorities and strategies, led to the development of the Russia steppe project.

### Threats and Barriers Targeted

1. The project document identifies three major overall threats to steppe ecosystems: climate change, conversion of steppe landscapes from direct or indirect anthropogenic impacts, and over-harvesting of wild steppe species. According to the project document, “Climate change is the overarching challenge to long-term conservation effectiveness for Russia’s steppe protected areas. The primary threat to steppe ecosystem health is the conversion of steppe habitats as a result of direct or indirect anthropogenic impacts emanating largely from the agricultural sector. Over-harvesting of wild steppe species is a third threat, albeit a lower level one.” Conversion of steppe landscapes comes in multiple forms, including plowing, lack of grazing/overgrazing, infrastructure, lack of fire/too much fire, afforestation, mining, and oil and gas production.
2. The normative long-term solution to addressing the threats to steppe ecosystems is a well-managed system of steppe protected areas, but there are a number of barriers to achieving this normative status. The project document identifies these as:
3. Incomplete representation of Russia’s steppe biomes within the PA system;
4. Limited operational capacities for individual steppe protected area management;
5. Limited institutional capacities to manage an expanded steppe PA system;

### Project Description

1. The Russia Steppe project is classified as a GEF FSP, with total GEF support of $5.31 million (not including $0.15 in project preparation funding), and originally proposed co-financing is $14.90 million USD, for a total project budget of $20.21 million USD. UNDP is the GEF Agency, and the project is executed under UNDP’s national implementation modality (NIM, former NEX), with the MNRE as the national implementing partner.[[2]](#footnote-2) The project is to be executed over five years, from February 2010 through February 2015.
2. According to the project document, the project objective is *“to develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome.”* The project’s overall goal is highlighted in the latest version of the project logframe as *“Conservation and sustainable use of globally significant steppe biodiversity.”* The project is in-line with the GEF’s first strategic objective to catalyze sustainability of protected area systems, and supports the corresponding strategic priority on strengthening terrestrial protected area systems. The project objective was planned to be achieved through three main outcomes:
3. **Outcome 1: Consolidation and expansion of system of Steppe Protected Areas (SPA) and Specially Managed Steppe Areas (SMSA) in the steppe biome**
4. **Outcome 2: [Steppe Protected Area] know how for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened**
5. **Outcome 3:** **Strengthened [Steppe Protected Area] system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice**
6. Under the three outcomes, the project has 14 main outputs/activities, as summarized in the project document and project inception report workplans.
7. The project is focused in four pilot sites in four regions across the country, summarized in Table 1 below.

Table Russia Steppe Project Pilot Protected Areas

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Protected Area** | **Region** | **Size (at project approval)** | **Steppe Type** | **IUCN Protected Area Category** |
| Centralno Chernozemniy Zapovednik | Kursk Oblast | 5,287 ha core (six plots); 28,662 ha buffer | European meadow steppe (Pontic steppe) | I |
| Chernye Zemli Zapovednik | Kalmykia Republic | 121,482 ha core (two plots); 91,170 ha buffer | Dry and desert steppe (Pontic steppe) | I |
| Orenburgskiy Zapovednik | Orenburg Oblast | 21,653 ha core (four plots); 12,208 ha buffer | Steppe and dry steppe (Trans-Volga-Kazakh steppe) | I |
| Daurski Zapovednik | Zabaikalskiy Krai | 45,790 ha core (nine plots); 163,530 ha buffer | Mountain, bunchgrass, and floodplain meadow steppe (Far Eastern steppe) | I |

1. A table highlighting the key characteristics of the four pilot sites, and maps of the four protected areas in their wider landscape are included in Annex 5. Three of the specific sub-regions (Kalmykia, Orenburg, Dauria) were chosen as pilot regions based on the following criteria: Total Steppe Area; Biome Units; Large Untransformed Areas; Land Potential for Steppe Restoration; Biodiversity Hotspots; and Endangered Flagship Steppe Species.
2. According to project documentation, the fourth pilot area (CCZ in Kursk oblast) was included based on additional criteria, and “to make the project’s results more representative and widely applicable.” The CCZ in Kursk oblast was included based on the fact that it has a high level of loss of steppe ecosystems, high levels of ecosystem disturbance and domestication, while also representing the European meadow steppe biome, which has been nearly completely lost – therefore the conservation significance is disproportionately high. In addition, the CCZ is the oldest steppe zapovednik in Russia, and the staff possesses “unmatched knowledge and experience in meadow steppe ecosystem management and restoration.”

### Project Timing and Milestones

1. The project’s key milestone dates are shown in Table 2 below. The project development and approval process stuck to a strict timeline, and there was only a few months of slippage from the project’s planned to actual implementation start. The project information form (PIF) was initially submitted in late-August 2008, and the PIF and project preparation grant (PPG) were approved in early September 2008. The PPG was for $150,000 USD, and was carried out over 14 months with the project document receiving GEF CEO Endorsement in November 2009. Three months passed before the project received Prodoc signature, with final official approval by the Russian government, and then another two and a half months passed before the start of project implementation in May 2010. In total, the project went from PIF submission to implementation start in approximately 19 months, which is impressive for a five-year $5.31 million USD project, at least by historical GEF standards.
2. The project is planned for five years, with completion expected in May 2015. However, as further discussed in Section IV.B.iii on project financial management, financial disbursement, especially in the first year of the project, has been slower than planned, and it is possible additional time will be required to complete the expected project activities. The potential need for a no-cost project extension is further discussed in Section IV.B.ii on project management and implementation.

Table Project Key Milestone Dates[[3]](#footnote-3)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Milestone** | **Expected date [A]** | **Actual date [B]** | **Months (total)** |
| 1. PIF Submission | N/A | August 27, 2008 |  |
| 2. PIF Re-submission | N/A | September 5, 2008 | 0 (0) |
| 3. PIF Approval | September 2008 | September 10, 2008 | 0.5 (0.5) |
| 4. PPG Approval | September 2008 | September 10, 2008 | 0.5 (0.5) |
| 5. GEF Council Approval (Work Program) | November 2008 | November 13, 2008 | 2 (2.5) |
| 6. CEO Endorsement | October 2009 | November 17, 2009 | 12 (14.5) |
| 7. UNDP Prodoc Signature | December 2009 | February 28, 2010 | 2.5 (17) |
| 8. National Project Director appointed by National executing agency (MNRE) | N/S | April 12, 2010 | 1.5 (18.5) |
| 9. Project manager contracted | N/S | April 15, 2010 | 0 (18.5) |
| 10. Implementation Start (First Disbursement) | January 2010 | May 2010 | 0.5 (19) |
| 11. Inception Workshop | N/S | May 13, 2010 | 0.5 (19.5) |
| 12. Mid-term Evaluation | February 2013 | May 2013 | 26 (45.5) |
| 13. Project Operational Completion | March 2015 | N/A | N/A |
| 14. Terminal Evaluation Completion | April 2015 | N/A | N/A |
| 15. Project Financial Closing | December 31, 2015 | N/A | N/A |

## Russia Steppe Project Relevance

1. Based on the assessment of project relevance to local and national priorities and policies, priorities related to relevant international conventions, and to the GEF’s strategic priorities and objectives, overall project **relevance** rating is considered to be ***relevant / satisfactory***. The project supports establishment and strengthening of steppe protected areas, which are underrepresented globally and within Russia’s protected area system. Notably, the project is directly linked to significant national policies and priorities related to Russia’s protected area system, including the national strategic plan of development of the protected area system for 2010 – 2020.

### Relevance at Local and National Levels

1. The Russian steppe project focuses on a different variety of activities in each of the four pilot regions and specific pilot protected areas. Working in close collaboration with the management of each of the four pilot sites, the local and regional governments in each region, and the local communities, the project is ensuring its relevance at the local level, and making adaptive changes when necessary to reflect local needs and priorities. For example, the Project Steering Committee includes a key representative of the Zabaikalskiy Krai regional government. In Orenburg and Dauria the local project coordinators will shortly be appointed as the directors of the respective zapovedniks, and in Kursk the local project coordinator is the director of the CCZ. In Kalmykia the project employs two local coordinators, neither of whom are staff of the CZZ, but who work in direct contact and communication with the zapovednik staff. In each of the pilot sites the project is focusing on the particular needs and priorities of each site. For example, in Kursk the project has supported establishment of regional protected areas, some demonstration efforts on steppe restoration, and provided fire-fighting and mowing equipment. In Kalmykia the project is supporting strengthening of the protected area management, and helping to address the critical situation with the saiga, as well as studies of other endangered/keystone steppe species, and working to protect steppe birds from electrocution on power lines. Locally relevant approaches are also carried out in the Orenburg and Dauria sites.
2. During the mid-term evaluation mission, the National Project Director (the project representative of the MNRE) stated that the project was directly linked to and supportive of the government’s priorities – otherwise the government would not have worked with UNDP to develop and approve the project. The project supports Russia’s national biodiversity strategies and priorities, as outlined in its 2001 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). The NBSAP emphasizes the importance of the establishment and effective management of protected areas as mechanisms for biodiversity conservation, and the NBSAP clearly identifies steppe ecosystems as a national conservation priority, as one of the most modified and threatened biomes in Russia. The project is in-line with and supports key Russian national policies and legislation relating to protected areas, at outlined in the 1995 Federal Law on Protected Areas (with revisions in 2001, 2004, and 2005), and the Ecological Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2002). As previously highlighted, the project is also directly related to and supportive of Russia’s strategic plan for protected area network expansion for 2010-2020. The project document includes a table (Table 6, pp. 12-14) highlighting the key pieces of federal legislation relevant to steppe protected areas.

### Relevance to Multilateral Environmental Agreements

1. The CBD, established in 1992, provides the framework and overall objective for biodiversity conservation projects supported by the GEF. The GEF is a designated financial mechanism for the United Nations CBD. As such, projects funded by the GEF must be relevant to and support the implementation of this convention. Russia is a party to the CBD, having ratified the agreement on April 5, 1995. The Russia Steppe project is relevant to Russia’s implementation of the CBD on multiple fronts, most notably in supporting the CBD’s protected areas program of work. The project also meets CBD objectives by supporting the Convention's Articles 6 (General Measures for Conservation and Sustainable Use), 7 (Identification and Monitoring), 8 (In-situ Conservation), 10 (Sustainable Use of Components of Biological Diversity), 11 (Incentive Measures), 12 (Research and Training), 13 (Education and Awareness), and 17 (Exchange of Information).
2. At the 10th Conference of Parties in 2010 member nations adopted decision X/2, the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which included the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Russia Steppe project is broadly supportive of most, if not all of the targets, but is specifically relevant to the following targets:

* *Target 1: By 2020, at the latest, people are aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve and use it sustainably.*
* *Target 2: By 2020, at the latest, biodiversity values have been integrated into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes and are being incorporated into national accounting, as appropriate, and reporting systems.*
* *Target 4: By 2020, at the latest, Governments, business and stakeholders at all levels have taken steps to achieve or have implemented plans for sustainable production and consumption and have kept the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits.*
* *Target 5: By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.*
* *Target 7: By 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity.*
* *Target 8: By 2020, pollution, including from excess nutrients, has been brought to levels that are not detrimental to ecosystem function and biodiversity.*
* *Target 12: By 2020 the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained.*
* *Target 14: By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.*
* *Target 18: By 2020, the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and their customary use of biological resources, are respected, subject to national legislation and relevant international obligations, and fully integrated and reflected in the implementation of the Convention with the full and effective participation of indigenous and local communities, at all relevant levels.*
* *Target 19: By 2020, knowledge, the science base and technologies relating to biodiversity, its values, functioning, status and trends, and the consequences of its loss, are improved, widely shared and transferred, and applied.*

1. Other relevant multilateral environmental agreements include the Ramsar Convention (as both the Kalmykia and Dauria pilot regions include Ramsar sites), Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species, and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species. The project could be considered supportive of the Berne Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, although Russia is a non-signatory to the convention.

### Relevance to GEF Strategies, Priorities and Principles

1. The GEF has limited financial resources so it has identified a set of strategic priorities and objectives designed to support the GEF's catalytic role and leverage resources for maximum impact. Thus, GEF supported projects should be, amongst all, relevant to the GEF's strategic priorities and objectives. While strategic priorities are reviewed and proposed for each four-year cycle of the GEF, in practice the overall approach of the GEF's support in the biodiversity focal has remained roughly focused on the same broad areas of intervention.
2. The project was approved under the strategic priorities for GEF-4 (July 2006 – June 2010),[[5]](#footnote-5)and is being implemented under the strategic priorities for GEF-5 (July 2010 – June 2014).[[6]](#footnote-6) The project is aligned under the first GEF-4 Strategic Objective for the biodiversity focal area: “Catalyzing the Sustainability of Protected Areas”, and under this objective, it is focused on the third Strategic Program: “Strengthening Terrestrial Protected Area Networks.” The overall objective of the Russia steppe project is directly relevant to and supportive of this GEF strategic objective. As previously highlighted, steppe ecosystems are underrepresented globally, and within Russia’s protected area system. Under the GEF-5 biodiversity strategic objectives, the project supports Objective 1: “Improve the Sustainability of Protected Area Systems,” and contributes to Outcome 1.1: “Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas.” The project is supporting the strengthening of management effectiveness of Russia’s steppe protected areas at the systemic level, and specifically for the four main pilot protected areas. As further discussed in Section V on project results, the project is directly contributing to the relevant GEF biodiversity results framework indicator targets relating to protected area coverage and management effectiveness.

# Project Design and Implementation

## Key Elements of Project Design and Planning

1. On the whole the Russia steppe project is a well-designed and well-planned project; the project document specifically addresses and covers the main issues of consideration, and includes detailed aspects such as stakeholder analysis (section I.6., pp. 25-28), risk analysis (table 14, pp. 52-53), and M&E plan (Part IV, pp. 64-68). The project document would have benefited from a specific threat matrix or logic chain analysis, clearly articulating how elements of the planned project activities are intended to respond to the identified threats and barriers of the desired normative status.
2. Key specific weaknesses in the project design are a.) lack of a specific education and awareness activity; and b.) lack of a training needs assessment to inform the intended project work on steppe protected area management training. Education and awareness activities are a key component of any environmental conservation project, and in the May 2013 Project Steering Committee meeting it was agreed to add a new item covering education and information dissemination under Outcome 3, making the budget up from other project activities that required less funding than originally planned. It remains to be seen how the project will address the various training activities foreseen in the project document, as the only significant training carried out thus far has been the fire management workshops held in each of the pilot regions.
3. The risk analysis in the project document was adequate, with eight risks identified covering operational, strategic, and technical aspects of the project. The risk analysis was further elaborated in the project inception phase, with the inception report containing nine additional risks; a number of these appear to overlap with those in the project document, but some are newly identified risks. The identification of many new risks at the inception phase can be an indicator of weakness in risk assessment during the project design phase; in the case of the Russia Steppe project, the project document risk assessment is well-considered with extensive and reasonable risk mitigation strategies identified, and the new risks identified at inception are not numerous.
4. One broad weakness is that the project design risks over-ambition, in its geographic and topical spread. The project includes four pilot sites that are widely geographically spread, from Russia’s western border with Ukraine to the far eastern border with Mongolia and China. The project takes on a range of issues, including steppe vegetation restoration, species reintroduction, fire management, transboundary protected area management, protected area management effectiveness, protected area establishment, legislative aspects, illegal hunting, climate change, and more. Some specific activities are clearly too ambitious, such as integrated fire management planning, which sought to produce seven integrated fire management plans, when the project will be pressed to produce and test pilot just one such plan.
5. Nonetheless, the project has thus far mostly successfully navigated this spread by having strong stakeholder support at regional and national levels, and by having highly capable local project coordinators in each of the pilot regions, as well as a strongly dedicated central project team. As discussed in Section VI.A on stakeholder participation, the strong stakeholder ownership and support – beginning in the project design phase – is one of the project’s great assets, and a highlight of project implementation thus far.
6. As discussed in Section IV.B.iii below on financial management, and Section V.A on project results, a few aspects of the project workplan have lagged somewhat behind schedule, for a variety of reasons – potentially including the fact that the project has so many lines of work. This evaluation recommends eliminating a few items in the project workplan (particularly related to outputs 2.1 and 2.2), to streamline the project focus, and emphasize those activities that have shown promise thus far.

## Project Management and Cost-Effectiveness (Efficiency)

1. Overall the **efficiency** of the project is rated ***satisfactory***. The project is being implemented in an efficient and results-focused manner, with highly capable and professional staff. The project management arrangements are well-suited to the project design, and project daily operations, reporting, and financial management are conducted in an appropriate manner. Thus far, project management has been highly efficient, delivering results with fewer management dollars than planned. The two main concerns with respect to cost-effectiveness are the lower than planned rate of disbursement (37.4% of the total budget as of the mid-term evaluation) and the low rate of delivery of planned co-financing (17.9% of planned co-financing, as of the mid-term evaluation).

### Russia Steppe Project Implementation Arrangements

1. UNDP is the project’s GEF Agency, and is responsible for high-level oversight and financial and administrative backstopping. According to the project document, UNDP is responsible for: (i) financial management; and (ii) the final approval of payments to vendors, the procurement of goods, the approval of TORs, recruitment of consulting services, and sub-contracting upon request of the National Implementing Partner. Also, as the GEF Agency, UNDP bears a portion of responsibility to the GEF for the overall delivery and results of the project – stated in the project document, “The UNDP Country Office will also monitor the project’s implementation and achievement of the project outputs and ensure the proper use of UNDP/GEF funds.”
2. The project is executed under NIM (former NEX) arrangements, with the MNRE as the National Implementing Partner, and with the appropriate MNRE official serving as National Project Director (NPD). The NPD has specific oversight of the project and its activities, and is responsible for approving project workplans and budgets. According to the project document, the NPD “will be responsible for carrying out the directives of the PSC and for ensuring the proper implementation of the project on behalf of the Government. In doing so, the NPD will be responsible for project delivery, reporting, accounting, monitoring and evaluation, and for the proper management and audit of project resources.” The NPD is the “Deputy Director of the State Policy and Regulation for Environment Protection and Safety” of the MNRE, which is the body directly responsible for protected areas. The current NPD assumed the position February 28, 2011 approximately one year after initial government approval of the project, replacing the initial NPD, the Deputy Director of the MNRE’s International Cooperation Department.
3. To facilitate administrative and financial aspects for the project between UNDP and the government, the non-government organization (NGO) “Partnership for Zapovedniks” serves as the project implementing organization, or project “Responsible Party” in UNDP “NIM terminology”. This is purely an administrative role.
4. The central project team consists of a project manager (home-based in Moscow) and a Chief Technical Advisor (home-based in Novosibirsk), along with administrative support from UNDP. The central project team has been cost-conscious, and has limited their travel on behalf of the project[[7]](#footnote-7) (considering the wide geographic spread of project activities); working by email, phone, and skype has served the project well thus far, along with the critical element of having highly capable local project coordinators for each of the pilot regions.
5. The local project coordinators for each of the four pilot regions make up the next level of project implementation structure. The project has contracted local project coordinators for each region (actually two for Kalmykia), and, based on the agreed workplans and budgets for each region, the local project coordinators have primary responsibility for carrying out project activities at the site level. The project also contracts external companies and consultants for specific activities and responsibilities, as necessary (following appropriate procurement procedures). For example, the project contracted the Biodiversity Conservation Centre and Greenpeace Russia to carry out work on developing integrated fire management plans, and fire management trainings. Also, for example, the project contracted the Kursk State University (sub-department of Plant and Animal Biology) to support activities for creation of steppe nature monuments in Kursk oblast.
6. The Project Steering Committee (PSC) is the main project oversight body, and membership includes the local project coordinators and key representatives of the pilot regions. According to the project document, the PSC is tasked with reviewing “project progress and setting major policy and implementation directions as required” and “will monitor project implementation to ensure timely progress in attaining the desired results, and efficient coordination with other projects.” The PSC members were drawn from key relevant stakeholder organizations (Box 1). In addition, the four pilot protected areas have observer status.

Box Russia Steppe Project Steering Committee Membership *(source: Inception Report, updated)*

1. Department of Environmental Safety and Nature Use of Kursk oblast
2. Department of Economics and Finance, Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation
3. Ministry of Public and External Relations of Orenburg Region
4. Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Energy of Kalmykia Republic
5. Committee of Orenburg Region Legislative Assembly on Proprietary Rights, Nature Resource Use, and Construction
6. Ministry of agriculture and food processing industry of Orenburg Region
7. United Nations Development Programme
8. Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Property Relations of Orenburg Region
9. Department of State Policy and Regulations of Environmental Protection and Safety, Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation
10. Project National Director, Head of the SC
11. Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Zabaikalsky Region
12. Institute of Steppe with the Russian Academy of Science
13. According to the project document the PSC was to meet twice per year (although the M&E summary table states “at least once a year”), though this seems ambitious given the necessity of bringing representatives together from the four pilot regions. The PSC has met twice total in the 36 months of project implementation, on October 19, 2010 and May 14, 2013. The project inception workshop in May 2010 could also be considered as a PSC meeting. In fact, given the logistical and financial considerations of bringing a large number of PSC members together from across Russia, in practice oversight decisions have sometimes been limited to the “Project Implementation Group” consisting of the NPD, the central project team, the project implementing organization, and UNDP. The “Project Implementation Group” met January 23, 2012 in lieu of the 2011 PSC meeting.
14. While the infrequency of the PSC meetings is partly due to the logistical challenges and due to the fact that the project has progressed relatively smoothly without major problems,[[8]](#footnote-8) the fact that only two of six expected PSC meetings have been held must be considered a minor shortcoming. It would be preferable if the PSC at least reviewed and approved by email the annual workplan and budget, in addition to the “Project Implementation Group.”

### Project Management and Implementation

1. The Russia Steppe project has been thus far characterized by professional and efficient project management, and it is fully anticipated that this will continue to be the case through the second half of the project. Since the beginning of project implementation the same capable individuals have held the positions of project manager and Chief Technical Advisor; project implementation generally benefits when there is low personnel turnover, and this is no different for the Russia Steppe project – a project of this size and complexity would likely have had much greater difficulty if there had been turnover in key positions.
2. As discussed in the previous section on implementation arrangements, the project’s management structure is well designed to support good implementation in each of the four pilot areas, which are widely dispersed across the country. A lesson learned in many GEF projects is that it when the central project team is based far from project field sites, it is highly important to have locally-based project staff to ensure continued progress with project activities, liaise with local stakeholders, and act as the primary communication channel from the local to the central level.
3. On the whole, project reporting is good with clear and comprehensive annual Project Implementation Reports (PIRs), good documentation of PSC meetings, and quarterly operational reports submitted by the project team to UNDP. Project finances are managed with UNDP support through UNDP’s global ATLAS system. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the project has had regular and well-documented workplan and budget revisions, based on the needs of changing circumstances and the feedback from project stakeholders.
4. As discussed in the subsequent section on financial management, while the management structure is cost-effective, implementation progress has been somewhat slower than planned, with total financial delivery at 37.4% of the full project budget as of the mid-term evaluation. According to the project team, there are a variety of reasons for this, including changing of the institutional arrangements during the first year of the project (switching the NPD in one department of the MNRE for one in a different department), the original ambitiousness of the project document, and some changing circumstances and assumptions that has required the project to adjust workplanning. The project team has not yet formally requested a project extension, however, the following concerns were shared with the mid-term evaluation with regard to the potential necessity for a six-month project extension. In addition to the initial delays due to the MNRE institutional arrangements, the project outputs and activities mentioned below are taking longer than originally expected:

* Project work for creation of regional refuges in Dauria and Kalmykia, as well as creation of transboundary protected area in Orenburg, has just commenced and will require at least one year and a half to be finalized.
* Expansion of the Orenburg zapovednik and reintroduction of Przewalski’s horse cannot be completed until autumn 2015. The progress depends on creation of a new site of the Orenburg zapovednik that will take at least another six months. Infrastructure development and reintroduction itself will take at least a year. This output can therefore be completed not earlier than the summer 2015.
* Guidelines on fire management and organization of regulated grazing and hay-making in steppe protected areas are to be drafted and submitted for approval to the MNRE in spring/summer 2014. Approval procedures will take approximately one year.
* Testing and validation of national strategies and regional plans on action for the conservation of steppe eagle, little bustard and Mongolian gazelle are unlikely to be completed before the end of summer 2015. These documents are to be drafted and submitted for approval to the MNRE and the regional authorities not earlier than spring 2014, whereas approval procedure will take at least another year.
* The project is becoming more and more active in initiating, promoting and coordinating federal level activities on saiga conservation. The longer the project will be able to fulfill this role, the more likely is the implementation of specific long-term measures to protect the saiga population.

1. As further discussed in Section IV.B.iii below, while financial delivery is behind schedule, disbursement of the project management budget has been even slower than disbursement for project activities, indicating that the project is delivering greater results per management dollar than expected, a positive measure of project efficiency. Planned project management costs were 10% of the overall project budget, while project management costs thus far equal only 7.7% of total expenditures (see Figure 4 in the subsequent section). This is a notable circumstance, and this evaluator has evaluated perhaps only one previous project that actually had a lower cost of management than anticipated; typically projects just meet or somewhat exceed expected management costs. This situation may not remain for the Russia Steppe project, as the low delivery rate implies a longer project timeframe than anticipated, and the longer the project timeframe the greater share of resources management costs consume, since the overall project budget is fixed. This does not mean that the project will not be cost-effective at the end of implementation, only that it may not be as cost-effective as of the mid-term evaluation, per this one specific measure of cost-effectiveness.
2. Further, the Russia Steppe project management has been adaptive and results-based, as further discussed in Section IV.B.v below, on the principle of flexibility.

### Financial Planning by Component and Delivery

1. Table 3 below provides an overview of originally planned budget and actual expenditure to May 31, 2013. Figure 1 below shows the originally planned budget, revised budget, and actual expenditures by year. Figure 2 below shows annual project financial delivery against the annual (revised) budget plans. Annual budget revisions have been undertaken each year, to reflect the previous years’ budget delivery and project activities, and update the workplan for the subsequent year. The project has had two audits thus far, covering calendar years 2011 and 2012, conducted by the firm FinExpertiza. No significant issues were reported in financial management and controls for the project.

Table Project Planned Budget and Actual Expenditure Through May 31, 2013 (USD)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **GEF amount planned** | **% of GEF amount planned** | **GEF amount actual** | **% of GEF amount actual** |
| OUTCOME 1: Consolidation and Expansion of the System of Steppe Protected Areas | 1.56 | 29.4% | 0.74 | 47.3% |
| OUTCOME 2: Operational Management Capacities for Protected Areas Site Management | 1.65 | 31.1% | 0.74 | 44.7% |
| OUTCOME 3: Institutional Capacities for Managing an Expanded Protected Areas System | 1.57 | 29.5% | 0.36 | 22.9% |
| Monitoring and evaluation\* | 0.37 | 6.9% | N/A | N/A |
| OUTCOME 4: Project coordination and management | 0.53 | 10.0% | 0.15 | 28.8% |
| **Total** | 5.31 |  | 1.99 |  |

*Sources: Financial documents provided by UNDP, based on project ATLAS records.*

*\*The M&E budget is drawn from all components of the project budget, and is not additional to the amounts shown for project components and management.*

Table Project Planned and Actual Co-financing Through June 30, 2013 (USD)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Co-financing (Type/Source)** | **UN Agency** | | **Government\*\*** | | **NGOs** | | **Other Sources\*** | | **Total Co-financing** | | **Percent of Expected co-financing** |
|  | Proposed | Actual | Proposed | Actual | Proposed | Actual | Proposed | Actual | Proposed | Actual | Actual share of proposed |
| Grant | 0.01 | 0.00 | 11.40 | 0.00 | 0.30 | 0.00 | 0.39 | 0.00 | 12.10 | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| Credits |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Loans |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Equity |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| In-kind |  |  | 2.80 | 2.66 |  |  |  |  | 2.80 | 2.66 | 95.0% |
| Non-grant instruments |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other types |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total** | 0.01 | 0.00 | 14.20 | 2.66 | 0.30 | 0.00 | 0.39 | 0.00 | 14.90 | 2.66 | 17.9% |

*Sources: Project Document Table 21 (p.62) for planned amount; data provided by project team for actual amount.*

*\*Planned “Other Sources” were from private sector companies in Orenburg and Kalmykia regions.*

*\*\* According to the project document Table 21, planned government cash co-financing is from “MNRE & Regional Governments, regional sectoral institutions (Ministries of Natural Resources and Agriculture), Russian Academy of Sciences Steppe Institute.”*

1. As can be seen in Figure 1, the annual budget has been revised downward from the originally planned annually expenditure in each year except 2013, but actual expenditure still has not reached the revised budget figure in the first three years of implementation. As can be seen from Table 3, Figure 1, and Figure 2 below, actual financial delivery has been significantly below the originally planned annual expenditure, and also below the revised budget plans for the years to date. Total delivery against the originally planned budget is 37.4% - at the mid-point of the project, it would be expected to be approximately 50%. Based on the annual revised budget plans, financial delivery has averaged 67.5% of the planned budget in 2010-2012, or 55.4% including 2013. For 2013, as of May 31st (approximately 42% of the year), 32.8% of the planned budget had been delivered, suggesting that under-delivery of the planned budget may occur again in 2013 as well.
2. It may be noted that the originally planned budget for 2010 ($1.15 million in year 1) was planned for a full calendar year, whereas the project inception workshop only took place in May of 2010. Thus, some budget revision was expected; a proportional budget for the first year of the project would have been approximately $0.67 million, while the budget revision was for $0.40 million, and actual delivery for year 1 was around $0.22 million. According to the project team, some of the initial slow implementation was due to the project’s original institutional positioning, with the NPD from the international affairs department of the MNRE, which did not facilitate quick orientation and movement on the variety of common start-up and implementation issues often expected as new projects get up and running.

Figure 2 Russia Steppe Project Planned vs. Actual Expenditure by Year

Figure Russia Steppe Project Annual Budget Delivery vs. Planned Revised Annual Budget

1. When considering the revised annual budget figures, there has not been significant variation among project outcomes in the rate of delivery. Table 5 below shows delivery by outcome against the total planned budgeted amount for each outcome, and delivery through May 31, 2013 against the revised annual budgets through 2013.

Table Russia Steppe Project Financial Delivery

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Against Total Planned** | **Against Revised Annual Budgets Through 2013\*** |
| **OUTCOME 1: Consolidation and Expansion of the System of Steppe PA** | 47.3% | 62.7% |
| **OUTCOME 2: Operational Management Capacities for PA site Management** | 44.7% | 52.5% |
| **OUTCOME 3: Institutional Capacities for Managing an Expanded PA System** | 22.9% | 51.6% |
| **Management** | 28.8% | 49.7% |
| **Total** | 37.4% | 55.4% |

\*Note: Delivery for 2013 was calculated based on expenditure only through May 31, 2013.

1. As can be seen from the table, against the revised annual budgets, Outcome 1 has the highest rate of delivery thus far, with 62.7% of the revised budget for Outcome 1 delivered (through May 31st, 2013). Outcome 2 and Outcome 3 have delivery rates of 52.5% and 51.6%, respectively. The project management budget has the lowest delivery rate, at 49.7% of the revised budget, and only 28.8% of the total planned project management budget. This indicates that although overall financial delivery has been less than planned (a negative indication of efficiency), in another measure of efficiency – delivery per dollar of management costs – the project has actually been highly efficient, and has delivered more activities per management dollar than planned. Figure 3 below shows the ratio of delivery of project activities relative to management costs. As can be seen, the actual management cost share of total delivery (7.7%) has been lower than originally planned (10.0%) and lower than in revised annual budgets (8.6%).

Figure Russia Steppe Project Management Cost Share of Total Budget Delivery

### Project Planned and Actual Co-financing, and Leveraged Financing

1. The Russia Steppe project’s planned and actual co-financing are shown in Table 4 above. Total planned cash and in-kind co-financing was $14.90 million USD, with the majority ($12.10 million) of this defined as “cash” in the project document, and only $2.80 million defined as in-kind. According to project team documentation, only $2.66 million in co-financing has been delivered through June 30, 2013. This is the direct federal MNRE budgetary financing “of works to enhance the protection and fire management, to purchase capital and other equipment for the four pilot reserves.”
2. The $2.66 million documented co-financing delivered thus far represents only 17.9% of planned co-financing, and represents co-financing from only one of the four planned sources. The co-financing reported thus far likely does not constitute the full extent of co-financing actually contributed; for example, there were indications during the mid-term evaluation that private sector companies in Kalmykia and Dauria have made contributions supporting the project. The project team is in fact reporting an additional $1.15 million in “leveraged” financing, some of which may represent some of the originally planned co-financing – for example, listed amongst the “leveraged” financing is $38,357 from Shell NefteGaz in Kalmykia for saiga protection in 2012-2013, which seems to fall under the planned private sector co-financing contribution in the project document.
3. Nonetheless, even if all of the “leveraged” financing identified by the project were in fact considered straight co-financing, this would still only equal $3.81 million, or 25.6% of planned co-financing – still only half of the approximately 50% of co-financing that would be expected by the project mid-term. The bulk of absent co-financing thus far is the $11.40 cash co-financing from various government sources. Yet, during the mid-term evaluation mission the NPD specifically stated that the government is meeting and will continue to meet its co-financing commitments. Clearly there is some level of miscommunication or mis-documentation of planned or actual co-financing. UNDP, the project team, and the MNRE should work together to clarify the co-financing issue, and ensure that at least the originally planned level of co-financing is delivered by the end of the project, as co-financing is one important indicator relating to various evaluation criteria, including relevance and sustainability, as well as stakeholder ownership.

### Flexibility and Adaptive Management

1. Flexibility is one of the GEF’s ten operational principles, and all projects must be implemented in a flexible manner to maximize efficiency and effectiveness, and to ensure results-based, rather than output-based approach. Thus, during project implementation adaptive management must be employed to adjust to changing circumstances.
2. The Russia Steppe project has thus far been managed in a flexible, adaptive, and results-based manner. As with any project, there have been various changes in circumstances and priorities between project development and project implementation, and the project budget and workplan have been revised and modified accordingly. As previously highlighted in Section IV.B.iii above, the project undergoes an annual budget revision to reflect current year activities and financial delivery in planning for the upcoming year. The project inception workshop report highlights a number of changes in the project context and changes to the project design that were agreed at the inception workshop by participating stakeholders. The project objective and outcomes have not changed, but changes to planned activities have been made. For example:

* *Section 1.2 was further detailed by inclusion of several measures aimed at prevention of unreasonable afforestation of steppes;*
* *Section 3.5 was extended by inclusion of publication of awareness materials for PAs (based on consultations with the MNRE and pilot PAs);*
* *Section 2.4 was added with the activity aimed at support to establishment and functioning of the law enforcement and compliance working groups for each of the pilot PAs.*
* *Based on the additional consultations, the preparation of National stakeholder involvement guidelines no longer seems relevant for the project.*
* *Transboundary project activities with Kazakhstan and Mongolia (section 3.4) were further detailed based on bilateral consultations.*

1. Additional information on changes at the inception phase is available in the project inception report, pp. 8-10. Further workplan changes have been made at subsequent PSC meetings. At the October 2010 PSC meeting, it was re-iterated that project budgeting and workplanning should be based on the principles of a). ensuring maximum effectiveness and real on-the-ground results for the pilot protected areas; and b). maintaining the budget as close as possible to the original version included in the project document. Further clarifications and revisions were again made in March 2011 following installation of the current NPD.
2. The project team has prepared an excellent document with a table tracking specific changes or additions to individual workplan items. Such a document is greatly beneficial for project management, and is highly useful for project evaluation. Some important overall changes include:

* *Streamlining of the workplan under activity 2.3, relating to preparation of management and conservation plans for individual species of concern, to consolidate the activity into a single workplan item and reduce the number of species addressed;*
* *Shifting focus of establishment of SMSAs in Orenburg, as the government decided to make the Orenburgskaya Tarpania site a government protected area, instead of an area managed by an NGO;*
* *Increased focus on powerline safety for birds.*

1. At the project inception phase a number of revisions and additions were made to the project results framework. These were not significant, consisting mainly of the addition or updating of baseline information (e.g. at the objective level, baseline values for key indicator species provided), and the clarification or reformulation of some indicators (e.g. under Outcome 2: “% reduction in area (*within the pilot PAs*) swept by ecologically & economically destructive grassland fires within pilot PA during hazardous seasons April/May– Sept/Oct.”). One indicator, under Outcome 3, was also added: ““# of scientific/methodological publications (incl. Internet-based) based on/related to the project activities”, to document project results related to awareness raising and knowledge sharing.
2. In addition to workplan and results framework modifications, the project has also had to take an adaptive approach in relation to management and human resource issues. For example, adjustments have been made vis-à-vis the local coordinator positions in Orenburg and Kalmykia, to great benefit.
3. All projects face some changes in context, or shifts in assumptions, but impressively, these have not had a significant negative effect on the Russia steppe project, except for some slowing of implementation of activities. The project team, PSC, UNDP and MNRE have dealt with changes in a structured, transparent, and efficient manner, and the project has greatly benefited from this approach.

### UNDP Project Oversight

1. UNDP is the responsible GEF Agency for the project, and carried general backstopping and oversight responsibilities, as well as handling the financial accounts. As stated in the project document,

*“The UNDP Country Office will support the project’s implementation by maintaining the project budget and project expenditures, contracting project personnel, experts and subcontractors, carrying out procurement, and providing other assistance upon request of the National Executing Agency. The UNDP Country Office will also monitor the project’s implementation and achievement of the project outputs and ensure the proper use of UNDP/GEF funds. Financial transactions, reporting and auditing will be carried out in compliance with the national regulations and UNDP rules and procedures for national execution. The UNDP Country Office will ensure the implementation of the day-to-day management and monitoring of the project operations through the appointed official in the UNDP Environment Unit and Project Officer based in Moscow.”*

1. To present UNDP has fully and ably carried out its responsibilities vis-à-vis the Russia Steppe project, as indicated by the fact that the project has been able to flexibly and efficiently address arising issues, and is continuing toward successful implementation. Stakeholders interviewed for this mid-term evaluation indicated that UNDP has been an excellent implementation partner, with good communication and transparent operations. The Russian federal government has also indicated their positive working relationship with UNDP by continuing to partner with UNDP on GEF-financed initiatives in the country.
2. There are some minor areas that could use continued attention and focus in the second half of the project. These include: i.) Improved documentation of and assurance of receipt of co-financing, and/or leveraged financing; ii.) Continued emphasis on increasing the project’s financial delivery rate; and iii.) Ensuring regular meetings of the PSC, for discussion and documentation of project workplans, budgets, and strategic issues. Beyond the need to ensure adequate oversight, the involvement of stakeholders through PSC meetings is an important way to continue building and to maintain stakeholder ownership of project activities and results, contributing to strengthened results and sustainability by the end of the project.

# Russia Steppe Project Performance and Results (Effectiveness)

## Progress Toward Achievement of Anticipated Outcomes

1. The Russia Steppe project has made good progress toward the overall project outcomes and objective, as described further below. While overall implementation has thus far been slower than planned, the project has achieved a number of important results, and is intently continuing work on multiple workstreams. Based on progress toward the overall project objective and expected outcomes, **effectiveness** is rated **satisfactory**. The sub-sections below review the key results achieved thus far under the three outcomes, and identify key outputs.
2. The stated project objective is *“to develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome.”* Supporting this objective are the three project outcomes.
3. The project logframe (results framework) indicators and targets are designed to facilitate assessment of project results, and the logframe supports a results-oriented implementation approach. While the logframe indicators and targets are adequately designed, there remains a need for revision and clarification of most of the indicators and targets, to improve the “SMART-ness” of the logframe. The complete project logframe is included in Annex 7, with a summary mid-term evaluation assessment of project results thus far (to the extent possible), and suggested revisions and clarifications for the logframe. With revisions to the logframe, the potential to assess project results and progress is expected to improve for the terminal evaluation.
4. Based on the results so far, the specific indicator targets have been reached as such: 14 achieved; 10 partially achieved; 7 not achieved; 3 unclear.
5. There are three main types of objective level indicators:

* Expansion of steppe area under protection in hectares;
* Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) scores for steppe protected areas; and
* Impact-level results as assessed by the population status of seven keystone or indicator species.

1. With respect to expansion of protection for steppe protected areas, the project’s overall target is to increase area under expansion by 867,400 ha – an increase of 42% over the baseline of 2,068,829 ha. As of the mid-term evaluation the project achieved an increase of 277,747 ha. This is short of the mid-term target for the project, though this indicator and target have been affected by changes to some of the baseline circumstances that occurred prior to project implementation. Additional areas are under expansion, and it is generally anticipated that the project will reach, if not exceed, the target before the end of the project. According the related indicator under Outcome 1 of the logframe, the project team indicates that approximately 830,000 ha of steppe PAs have been established or are under establishment.[[9]](#footnote-9) There is always a risk that the target will not be reached due to unforeseen circumstances, but from the present perspective, progress is satisfactory.
2. With respect to the METT scores for steppe protected areas, the current logframe includes “indirect” influence on protected areas at the objective level of the logframe, and “direct” influence on protected areas (in the four pilot areas) under Outcome 2; this evaluation recommends these emphases be reversed to highlight the project’s direct influence at the objective level. For each of the four pilot zapovedniks, the mid-term target METT score has been met or exceeded. It is unclear if the end of project targets are reachable, but this evaluation recommends a revision and clarification of the METT score targets to ensure targets are based on concrete analysis and clear rationale.
3. Regarding the impact level indicators, there are numerous scientific and technical issues with the indicators and targets selected, and multiple revisions and clarifications are required. As such, it is not appropriate at this time to assess impact-level results for the Russia Steppe project. In addition, the nature the project’s strategy is such that statistically significant impact level results to which the project has contributed would not be expected at this stage of implementation.
4. As discussed in Section III.C.i on project relevance at the national level, a core aspect of the Russia Steppe project’s design is its integration with national protected area strategies and priorities, including the national plan for expansion of the protected area system from 2010-2020. This is a critical tenant of the project design, and positions the project well for success. At the same time, it presents some challenges in assessing the “incrementality” of project results: The project is supporting the establishment and strengthening of steppe protected areas that the government already planned to establish and support. However, according to key stakeholders, the project has been critical for the success of this work, and has also contributed to more rapidly implementing levels of protection for certain steppe areas. For example, in Zabaikalsky Krai the regional government plans to establish some new regional zakazniks in 2017-2018, but with the project’s support this may be moved up three years to 2014-2015. This evaluation report includes a Table in Annex 8 that summarizes all of the protected areas the project is supporting, and the nature and added value of the project’s contribution. This Table represents an updating of Table 12 (pp. 40-42) in the project document.
5. While it is only the mid-term of the project, key results thus far include:

* Support for expansion of steppe zone protection covering 277,747 ha, including:
  + Support for establishment of Dolina Dzerena protected area (federal zakaznik) in Dauria, covering 231,442 ha;
  + Support for establishment of Akzharskaya steppe protected area (regional natural monument) in Orenburg, covering 14,604 ha;
  + Orlovskaya steppe - Orenburgskaya Tarpania protected area (additional cluster of Orenburg zapovednik), 16,537 ha (federal zapovednik)
* Critical support for establishing and officially registering steppe protected area boundaries in the land cadastre;
* Support for carrying out of protected area management audits in two of the pilot regions, Orenburg and Dauria, which resulted in a focus on increasing management capacity and increased budget allocation for the protected areas from the federal MNRE;
* Strengthening of management capacity for CZZ in Kalmykia through provision of equipment, as the zapovednik has taken responsibility for management of three additional steppe protected areas covering 462,300 ha;
* Installation of bird-safe equipment on 42 km of power lines in Dauria, and partnership with the *Chita Energo* power utility to continue installing this equipment in the future;
* Monitoring/census of key steppe species – e.g. Mongolian gazelle and steppe cat, in Dauria, Steppe eagle in Kalmykia, Orenburg and Dauria; Saiga antelope in Kalmykia; Little bustard in Kalmykia and Orenburg;
* Transboundary work in Orenburg with Kazakhstan: Bilateral Orenburg-Aktyubinsk Commission on the Conservation of Biodiversity was created, determined to create nine regional soon-to-be-created transboundary PAs were determined. The bilateral commission is an official body, responsible, among others, for the creation of these protected areas;
* Transboundary work in Dauria, with Mongolia and China: Participation in a comprehensive regional ecological and climate monitoring network;
* An excellent and informative website (<http://savesteppe.org/project>), including extensive content in English, plus steppe web portal (<http://savesteppe.org>), both of which include highlights and details of various project results and activities;
* Substantial work on the atlas of steppe protected areas, including plans for development of the atlas as an open Geographic Information System (GIS) based resource that will be used to inform planning for development of the steppe protected area network in the long-term;

1. *Potential risks and priorities for the remainder of implementation:* There are no noted critical risks for the implementation of the project; there are only risks for some project activities: E.g. as mentioned, there is a risk that the reintroduction of the Przewalski’s horse in Orenburg will not be completed before the end of the project. Key priorities for the second half of the project will be continued pressure for expansion and establishment of steppe protected areas, and activities to support replication and catalytic results of the project.
2. Perhaps the most significant question for the Russia Steppe project for the second half of implementation is: will the project manage to really go above and beyond in delivering results, and exceed expectations? Or will it just barely manage to achieve the minimum planned results before completion? Considering the positive progress thus far on a number of activities the project certainly has the potential to achieve more than originally anticipated, particularly with respect to supporting expansion of steppe protected areas, and on species-based conservation measures. But much work remains, and the second half of project implementation will need to be more intensive than the first half to achieve the expected results while maintaining efficiency.

### Outcome 1: Consolidation and expansion of [Steppe Protected Area] system

1. Outcome 1 was successfully achieved, and completion is rated ***satisfactory*.** Outcome 1 includes the following outputs:

* *Output 1.1. Steppe Landscape Conservation Plan (SLCP) for Consolidating and Expanding the SPA network.*
* *Output 1.2. Steppe Protected Area Expansion Strategy and Implementation Plan*
* *Output 1.3. Steppe Protected Areas establishment and consolidation process completed.*
* *Output 1.4. Strengthening the institutional capacities for coordinating and implementing the SLCP.*

1. Under Output 1.1 the project experts are working to produce the “Steppe Atlas”, which will be the definitive work identifying Russia’s steppe areas, and identifying remaining gaps for coverage of protected areas. This work includes the identification and mapping of key steppe areas of Russia, steppe protection level analysis, protected area system gap analysis, preparation of proposals for protected area coverage enhancement/optimization to improve steppe protection and outlining other measures to effectively conserve major steppe areas of Russia. The project plans to produce the Steppe Atlas as an open GIS resource available online. While there is not significant scope to influence federal protected area system expansion strategy for 2010-2020, the “Steppe Atlas” (and associated steppe protected area proposals for the future) is expected to take a long-term view (including planning for strategic development of Russia’s protected area system beyond 2020) for the conservation of the steppe in Russia. It is also possible that the project could influence the ongoing revision of the current federal protected area system strategy for the current ten-year period.
2. Under Output 1.2 the project has supported the drafting of eight amendments to three federal acts: Land Code, On Agriculture Development, On Changing Land Status. The amendments were recommended by the Public Chamber of Orenburg Oblast to be adopted by the State Parliament, Federal Government, and Ministry of Agriculture. As an input to this work, the project held an electronic conference “Legal protection of steppe ecosystems outside protected areas of land” from 17-31 March 2011, and a round table discussion “The legal basis for the protection of the steppes” on April 7, 2011. While progress remains slow on this line of work, there is a positive outlook for some important legislative changes to occur at the regional level, in Orenburg Oblast. It is, however, not optimistic at this point that the project will succeed in effecting any discernible change in federal legislation or policy related to steppe ecosystems. Other aspects of Output 1.2 overlap significantly with output 2.5 (SMSAs).
3. Under Output 1.3 the Russia Steppe project has supported the creation and expansion of steppe protected areas in each of the four pilot regions. In some cases the main pilot zapovednik has been expanded, while in some cases additional protected areas have been established, ranging from regional nature monuments to federal zakazniks. The summary Table in Annex 8 shows the full list of specific protected areas supported by the project in each of the pilot regions. Types of project support has included financing preparation of supporting documents for state land survey and delineation, preparatory biological and geographical field surveys, conducting stakeholder consultations, completion of official technical justification documentation, preparation of documents for state ecological expert panel review, clarification of land tenure with the Cadastral House and Rosreestr, and definition of relevant regulations and bylaws.
4. Table 6 below includes highlights of the protected area expansion and establishment work by region.

Table Steppe Protected Area Expansion Highlights at Mid-term

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Kalmykia Republic** | * Support for strengthening technical capacity for monitoring and management of three additional steppe protected areas (covering 463,300 ha) that were assigned to the CZZ administration around the time of project start-up * Initial work on a proposed new steppe protected area, Saigachiy, as a regional zakaznik that would cover approximately 600,000 ha |
| **Kursk Oblast** | * 463 ha added to core zone for CCZ, expansion of ~9% for the protected area * Ongoing establishment of between two and six regional nature monuments covering an additional 200-500 ha |
| **Orenburg Oblast** | * Support for establishment of Orenburskay a Tarpania protected area as an official expansion of Orenburg zapovdenik, covering 16,537 ha (expected late 2013/early 2014), increasing the core area by ~76% * Support for land survey and delineation for cadastral “legalization” of regional nature monument Akzharskaya steppe, covering 14,604 ha * Support for ongoing establishment of two to five regional nature monuments covering approximately 2000 ha |
| **Zabaikalsky Krai** | * Key support for establishment of Dolina Dzerena federal zakaznik of 231,442 ha; * Ongoing support for planned expansion of Daurskiy zapovednik, 14-30,000 ha to be added to core area and 20-50,000 ha to be added to the buffer zone (expected late 2013/early 2014), representing potential expansion of the core area by ~30-65%, and ~12-30% for buffer zone * Support on clarification of land tenure for establishment of Semonovskii regional zakaznik covering 47,615 ha |

1. In addition, under Output 1.4 the project has supported strengthening of protected area technical capacity in each of the four regions through provision of necessary equipment. In Kursk the project supported the purchase of hay-making equipment in Kursk (see Photo 1), which is necessary for the ecological management and maintenance of meadow steppe. The CCZ protected area administration and MNRE have confirmed that the government will provide for maintenance and operational costs of the equipment. In Kalmykia the project supported the purchase of vehicles, cameras, and other equipment according to the technical needs for monitoring and managing the large steppe areas under protection in this region. In addition, the project supported the development and training for a GIS system for the CZZ protected area administration.

Photo CCZ Hay-Making Equipment for Meadow Steppe Management

1. Other than practical aspects of supporting increased operational capacities of the pilot regions (summarized above), under Output 1.4 the project document is extremely vague with respect to specific planned results and activities under this output. According to the project workplan, other expected activities under this output include “development of instruments for cooperation, coordination, exchange of experience and other activities to enhance protected area system management capacity”, domestic study tours on steppe conservation and management best practices, and multi-stakeholder workshops on new approaches to steppe area management.

### Outcome 2: [Steppe Protected Area] know how for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened

1. The achievement of Outcome 2 is considered ***satisfactory*.**

* *Output 2.1. Integrated fire management plans developed for at least 7 expanded/consolidated SPA.*
* *Output 2.2. Cost effectiveness of different rehabilitation and restoration measures for grassland habitats tested and best practices documented.*
* *Output 2.3. Species management and conservation plans for key endemic grassland species.*
* *Output 2.4. PA staff competence levels cover key skills required for the operational management of SPA.*
* *Output 2.5. The NGO-operation of a new type of SPA is tested and best practices captured.*

1. Under Output 2.1 the project document foresaw the development of integrated fire management plans[[10]](#footnote-10) in seven different steppe areas. As the project has initiated this work, it has become apparent that the project document was much too ambitious in this regard. The process for developing an integrated fire management approach can take at least a year, according to project stakeholders engaged in this activity. The project initiated the first integrated fire management development process in the Orenburg pilot region, with the support of an NGO, the “Biodiversity Conservation Center”. Even after the first integrated fire management plan is produced, it will not be much quicker to replicate this in other regions because a). the specifics of each region require a tailored approach; and b.) development of the plan is a process that the relevant stakeholders must go through. It is anticipated that the first integrated fire management plan, in Orenburg, will be finalized by mid-late 2013, and then can be test-implemented for the 2014 fire season. This evaluation recommends that the value of this approach be demonstrated before significant additional resources are spent to produce additional plans. After the first year of implementation of the Orenburg integrated fire management plan, a survey should be carried out among stakeholders to identify the value this approach. If it is found to be positive, stakeholders from Orenburg could disseminate their experience to other regions through presentations and other means of information sharing, and the integrated fire management approach can be replicated in the other pilot regions, and in other relevant steppe protected areas. To facilitate replication the project should ensure good documentation of the approach and process of developing the integrated fire management plan with the engagement of all relevant stakeholders, and knowledge products produced inform other regions that would like to go through a similar process. Thus, this evaluation recommends a scaling-back but more strategic approach to this issue in the second half of the project.
2. Other work under this output is the procurement of fire equipment for the protected area administrations in each of the pilot regions (see Photo 2 and Photo 3). In addition, the project organized, in partnership with Greenpeace Russia (an NGO that is active on fire issues), trainings at each of the pilot sites on the proper use and techniques for fighting steppe fires.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Photo Fire Equipment in Dauria | Photo Fire Equipment in CCZ (Kursk) |

1. Under Output 2.2 the project supported pilot testing of some steppe restoration techniques in Kursk (see Photo 4). While moderately successful, these restoration approaches require significant human and financial resources investment, for relatively little gain. The pilot restored area in Kursk is only a few hectares. The Russia Steppe project document emphasizes the potential value of steppe restoration, particularly for a steppe zone such as European meadow steppe, of which relatively little area remains. That said, in the view of this evaluation the project resources would be better invested in catalyzing protection of those steppe areas that do remain that are not yet protected (such as through the creation of the regional nature monuments in Kursk oblast). The project still plans to invest in “assisted natural regeneration” in Orenburg oblast, in partnership with farmers. The project expects to purchase the necessary seeds for native grass species, and the farmers will spread the seeds and allow the designated areas to regenerate naturally. This is a different approach than was piloted in Kursk, and may bring some benefits, depending on the potential size of the area to be restored, but cost-effectiveness needs to be carefully analyzed; this is still a relatively expensive activity, and the conservation benefits should be weighed against the investment required to increase protection for steppe areas that are still in good condition but not protected.

Photo CCZ Pilot Restoration Test Plot

1. Output 2.3 was to focus on species-level conservation plans and actions, and the inception workshop project workplan anticipated 14 different conservation plans for a variety of species in the pilot regions. This is one of the main areas of the workplan that has been subsequently revised and adjusted, and the project activity on developing species conservation plans has been consolidated into a single task, and streamlined to focus on fewer species. According to the project team, the funds made available through this revision have been refocused toward a number of high impact practical conservation tasks on the ground, including for example the project’s work on powerlines hazardous for birds.
2. The project is supporting a number of species-specific conservation actions, including:

Photo Bird-safe Measures Installed on Power Line Poles

* Work toward reintroduction of Przewalski’s horse in Orenburg;
* Reintroduction of the steppe marmot in CCZ (Kursk) (initial reintroduction in July 2013);
* Assessment in Dauria of 200 km of power line threats for raptors, and work with power company to install bird safe measures (see Photo 5);
* Assessment in Kalmykia of 678 km of power line threats for raptors;
* Assessment in Kalmykia of 200 km of sociable lapwing migration route to analyze threats to migrating birds, and prepared recommendations for protection of sociable lapwing in Kalmykia and Russia;
* Steppe eagle population assessment in Kalmykia, and development of recommendations for protection;
* Saiga census in Kalmykia;
* Little bustard survey in Kalmykia and Orenburg (migratory population in Kalmykia).

1. The project’s work on improving the safety of power lines in Dauria is a highlight in that it is one of the activities that has generated impact level results at this stage: Installation of the bird protection measures can be estimated to have directly and significantly reduced mortality of raptors in this region; for example, it is anticipated that installation of bird-safe measures in one 20 km section has reduced saker falcon mortality by six individually annually. In addition, the project team has successfully engaged the responsible power utility company in the region, *Chita Energo*, to take responsibility for continuing to install bird safe measures on power lines during regular power line maintenance in the future.
2. On the other hand, the plans to reintroduce the Przewalski’s horse in Orenburg is one of the few areas of notable risk in the project workplan, in terms of the potential to successfully complete this activity before the end of the project. This is mainly because of the complex logistical aspects required to bring horses to Orenburg for reintroduction from Eastern European zoos, and for all of the regulatory aspects for the reintroduction site. The timeline for the necessary steps is such that if there are any significant issues to overcome that the full reintroduction may not happen until after the project is completed.
3. One of the key results areas of the project is the strengthening of steppe protected area management capacity, which is the focus of Output 2.4. Considering that the four pilot sites are specific steppe protected areas, and the local project coordinators are directly connected with the protected area administration, much of the project’s work does have a positive influence on management capacity. A specific and significant activity for increasing management capacity are the protected area management audits that have been carried out for Dauria and Orenburg, with the project’s support. These are comprehensive exercises sponsored by the MNRE but carried out by an independent third party to assess the specific strengths and weaknesses of the protected area management regimes for the individual protected areas.[[11]](#footnote-11) The audits produce an extensive list of recommendations for improving management capacity, which has provided a catalyst and focal point for concrete actions for improvement. In addition, the audit process provides a rationalization and justification for increased investment in the protected area from the MNRE. According to project stakeholders in Dauria, the audit resulted in a doubling of the zapovednik budget from to 20 million roubles ($0.61 million USD) from 2011 to 2013.
4. The relevant indicator for this are of project activities is the METT score for each of the pilot protected areas (also a portfolio level indicator for the GEF biodiversity focal area). As seen in the specific logframe assessment in Annex 7, each of the four pilot sites has met the mid-term METT score target, with Dauria significantly surpassing the target. Additional details and information are included in the notes section for this indicator in Annex 7.
5. The project document foresaw development of more specific protected area management training modules, but limited steps have thus far been taken in this regard. The only specific training exercises completed under the project thus far are the four fire trainings carried out in partnership with Greenpeace Russia. A specific capacity needs assessment for the four pilot protected areas was not included in the project workplan; as such, to support the development of appropriate training modules the project should analyze the recommendations of the three pilot area management audits to identify capacity needs at the site level.
6. Output 2.5 relates to the project’s intention to catalyze a new approach to protected areas, taking advantage of particular circumstances in Orenburg related to former military lands, and an NGO that was active in the area. This output also partially overlaps with Output 1.2, as discussed previously under Section V.A.i on Outcome 1. In addition to the specific NGO-managed “specially managed steppe area” (SMSA), the project sought to develop other similar private-public partnerships approaches for steppe conservation. One of the key potential SMSA areas, Orenburg Tarpania, is being incorporated by the MNRE in the Orenburg zapovednik, and thus, while the conservation benefit is ostensibly the same, the opportunity no longer exists to establish a new model of known as “SMSA”. There remain some other opportunities to develop private landholder steppe conservation approaches, but because of the uniqueness of these circumstances, they do not lend themselves to a highly replicable conservation model for Russia. Significant additional policy work would be required to establish a nationally replicable model for SMSAs. This is still a worthy goal, but at this stage, this evaluation considers it to be beyond the scope and capacity of this project to achieve, and thus it is recommended that the project’s formal work on SMSAs be curtailed. As advocates for steppe ecosystems, project stakeholders are free to opportunistically pursue (as time and resources allow) specific opportunities for steppe protection in collaboration with private land owners, but this should be dropped as an official expected result of the project to allow the project team to focus on other key results.

### Outcome 3: Strengthened [Steppe Protected Area] system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice

1. Overall, achievement of this outcome is rated ***satisfactory***.

* *Output 3.1. Capacities for co-management of SPA are developed and strengthened through training and the development co-management frameworks.*
* *Output 3.2. Collaborative, steppe-specific SPA management plans.*
* *Output 3.3. Collaborative agreements between SPA and other sectoral government agencies.*
* *Output 3.4. Collaborative steppe conservation agreements developed or improved and implemented in transboundary areas.*
* *Output 3.5. National SPA knowledge management and development program.*

1. Co-management approaches, as intended under Output 3.1, also relate to Outputs 1.2 and 2.5, addressing SMSAs. Since this line of work has lagged under these previous outputs, little has been done in relation to co-management arrangements as well. The project has supported the Dauria zapovednik in establishing an ecological council in partnership with the local government in the Dauria region.
2. Under Output 3.2 the project is seeking to develop steppe-specific management measures, and ensure these are incorporated in the management plan, regulations, and by-laws for steppe protected areas. Under current approaches, generic management measures relevant for protected areas in other biomes have been included in steppe protected area management regimes. Some work on by-laws and regulations has been completed, but much additional work remains. According to the inception report workplan, this output also relates to the management audits for the pilot protected areas, as previously discussed under Output 2.4.
3. Under Output 3.3 the project planned to development Inter-agency management agreements on steppe protection, and disseminate protection practices in protection and cooperation zones in Orenburg and Dauria zapovedniks. The primary target for such interagency cooperation is the Ministry of Agriculture, given the historical and practical important links between agriculture and steppe ecosystems. Little progress has been made on formal interagency cooperation and coordination, and according to project stakeholders, at the central level at least, there is little interest from the Ministry of Agriculture towards cooperation. At the regional level in Orenburg Oblast, in more practical contexts, the project has had better luck communicating with Ministry of Agriculture field staff, though it is not clear that any concrete formal measures or agreements have yet been developed.
4. The project’s work under Output 3.4 on transboundary cooperation, though a small portion of project activities, is one of the particularly interesting elements of the Russia steppe project. Two of the project pilot sites – in Orenburg, and Dauria – have international boundaries. While the project is only one of many contributing stakeholders to the transboundary cooperation work in these areas, there has been consistent and notable progress toward a vision of transboundary conservation for the steppe zones in these areas. In Orenburg a transboundary commission has been established through a series of meetings (1st on November 23, 2011 in Aktobe, Kazakhstan and then on February 2, 2012 in Orenburg) in partnership with the neighboring Aktubinsk region of Kazakhstan, and there are plans for the commission to coordinate the establishment of four new transboundary protected areas covering 85,000 ha. In Dauria, the Dauria zapovednik administration has been part of a comprehensive regional (including the Mongolian and Chinese portions of the Daurian ecoregion) transboundary environmental monitoring program focusing on adaptation to climate change, under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’s transboundary water convention. The project has supported the development of a GIS database supporting the more than 200 monitoring sites throughout the region. This work is carried out in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Rivers Without Boundaries, the Ramsar Convention, and the Whitley Fund for Nature. Seven joint international monitoring expeditions were carried out in 2011, and three were conducted in 2012. A significant publication highlighting the results to date of this monitoring program was produced in 2013: “*Adaptation to Climate Change in River Basins of Dauria: Ecology and Water Management*.” The Dauria zapovednik is constructing an international research station near the border with Mongolia and China, though this is mainly being done with non-GEF resources. There have also been three meetings of the joint commission governing the international Dauria protected landscape. To disseminate information on this transboundary work, Dauria zapovednik staff have participated in nine international conferences, and produced 16 technical reports.
5. Work under Output 3.5 has included the development of the project’s two comprehensive and highly useful websites, the steppe conservation “web portal” <http://savesteppe.org>, and the corresponding project website, <http://savesteppe.org/project>. The websites are well-designed and filled with extensive data, information and publications on steppe conservation. At the same time, the websites are only attracting an average of 2,538 visitors per month and 6,873 page views (for the period April 2012-March 2013). It is impossible to estimate the potential audience for such a steppe conservation portal, but in the experience of the evaluator, such well-designed nature conservation websites do have the potential to attract somewhat larger audiences than the current figures for the steppe website, and this evaluation recommends that the project team make a specific effort to increase traffic to the website, through wider dissemination of links, dissemination of hardcopy materials with the steppe portal URL, etc.
6. The project has also supported production of a number of relevant publications, which can all be found on and downloaded from the steppe portal and project websites. Another example of activities under this output is the scientific conference on steppe protection regimes that was held in Kursk, from January 15th – 18th, 2012; the proceedings of the conference were subsequently published in a single volume.
7. One shortcoming of the project design was that it did not include a specific activity on environmental education and awareness building for steppe conservation, which is a critical part of the project. In the May 2013 PSC meeting a new item to address this was added to the project workplan under Output 3.5. Some work along these lines has already been carried out in some of the pilot regions; for example, in Kalmykia, the local project team has worked on raising awareness and environmental education through working with local kindergartens, and publishing materials in the local media. A publication on rare birds of Kalmykia was also produced in partnership with the regional Ministry of Education and Culture.

## Remaining Barriers to Effective Management of Steppe Protected Areas in Russia

1. The project is designed to address key barriers to the normative status for long-term steppe ecosystem conservation, though there has been more significant progress in addressing some barriers compared to others. It is anticipated that by completion the project will have made a significant contribution to the conservation of steppe ecosystems, and through the strengthening of the network of steppe protected areas, these results will be sustained. At the same time, there will remain huge areas of the steppe biome that are unprotected.
2. The most significant continuing barrier to steppe conservation in Russia through protected areas is the lack of specific legal status for “steppe” as a type of land category – in contrast, for example, to forestland. As summarized in the project document, “*Russian legislation does not identify steppe as a separate category for legal regulation like it does for forests for example. Nor does it specifically provide for steppes to be treated as a special case when applying any legislation. In addition, there is no federal program that considers steppes, or grasslands in general, as a special subject. In reality, steppes do not exist in Russian federal legislation. The same situation exists in most Russian provinces.*” In addition, “*Because [steppe protected areas] exist in an agricultural landscape as defined by law in Russia, agricultural laws and policies, as well as Land Code provisions and land-use categorizations will deeply affect how future efforts to conserve steppe lands in Russia progress.*” Steppe areas are disadvantaged outside of protected areas as well, as “*Existing agricultural and land law and policy do not provide innovative ‘non-protected area’ kinds of tools for sustainably utilizing and conserving steppe lands outside of protected areas. The Land Code does not specify conservation areas or areas of high conservation value. These areas therefore have no basis for protection, unlike high value farmland, and special measures to regulate the use of such land, taking into account their high natural value, cannot be developed under the Land Code.*” The project is expected to produce some positive progress on legislative and policy issues, particularly in Orenburg Oblast, but overall the contributions will be small and are not expected to influence the federal level. Thus, for long-term steppe biome conservation in Russia the legislative and policy context will remain an important issue.
3. Another remaining barrier is institutional cooperation and coordination, which is critical for steppe ecosystem conservation, particularly with the agriculture sector. As stated in the project document, “*There is minimal cooperation and co-ordination between conservation agencies and agricultural agencies or oil/gas and border patrol authorities at national and oblast levels. The productive landscape context of most [steppe protected areas] is a critical element in the long-term viability and effectiveness of any [steppe protected area]. Cooperation across sectors is critical to any landscape-scale vision of steppe conservation, as well as to effective monitoring and enforcement work and proactive, prevention-oriented efforts.*” This remains an important issue, and the project has not yet made significant inroads in addressing institutional coordination. There has been some engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture at the regional level, but much more substantive institutional cooperation for the long-term healthy future of Russia’s steppe regions, as effective and environmentally sustainable land policy and land use requires a multi-stakeholder vision in terms of rationalized planning and priorities, and cooperation to implement such a vision over time.
4. Other remaining barriers primarily relate to the management capacity and effectiveness for steppe protected areas. The project will make a significant contribution to the management capacity of the four pilot areas, but there are a number of other protected areas that include steppe biome coverage (in the project document 15 specific sites were identified as “steppe protected areas”), and enhancing the management capacity of these protected areas as well will remain a long-term necessity. Part of the challenge in managing steppe protected areas relates to the often large areas under protection – for example, in Kalmykia, the CZZ administration is responsible for nearly 600,000 ha, and the capacity required for monitoring and enforcement of protected area boundaries and regulations across such a large area is significant.

# Key GEF Performance Parameters

1. Please note that the required discussion of mainstreaming of UNDP program principles is included in Annex 9 to this report.

## Stakeholder Participation

1. The involvement of different stakeholder groups is summarized in Annex 5. On the whole, stakeholder participation for the Russia Steppe project has been excellent, with a few exceptions. Within the PSC, and in each of the regions the project has engaged the key stakeholders and developed collaborative working relationships. The two areas that require ongoing attention are engagement with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, and enhanced communication with the Steppe Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences (based in Orenburg).
2. *National Government –* The MNRE is actively engaged and strongly supportive of the project. As mentioned above, there remains a need for increased cooperation and communication with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture on issues related to steppe conservation; however, this is a two-way street, and cooperation requires some willingness and interest from the other side.
3. *Regional Government –* The regional governments in each of the four pilot regions are represented in the PSC and in project activities, and are supportive of the project. There are other excellent examples of cooperation at the regional and local level as well; for example, in Dauria the zapovednik has established a partnership with the state hunting inspector for mutual support in enforcement of wildlife-related regulations in the area.
4. *Private Sector –* The private sector is peripherally engaged, although one highlight is the cooperation with the *Chita Energo* power utility on bird protection measures for power lines, in Dauria. Some financial support has been received from oil and gas companies such as Shell in Kalmykia for saiga conservation. Meaningful long-term engagement with the agriculture sector, from small household farms to larger commercial entities, will always be a priority in the realm of steppe conservation.
5. *Civil Society –* The project has contracted the NGO Biodiversity Conservation Centre to work on the integrated fire management planning activity. In addition, the project has partnered with Greenpeace Russia to carry out fire management training in each of the pilot areas. Other NGOs and civil society organizations are also engaged – for example, WWF is supporting steppe conservation in Dauria, and is an important partner of project stakeholders in that region. WWF is also involved in the development of a possible regional refuge for saiga in Kalmykia. The NGO Partnership for Zapovedniks has also been involved in supporting the MNRE “management audits” of individual protected areas.
6. *Local Communities –* Engagement at the community level thus far has not been a significant focus of the project, though it is part of the every day work carried out by the protected area administrations that comprise the project pilot sites. For example, the Dauria zapovednik has supported establishment of an environmental working group within the government of the relevant local district. No significant community-level conflicts with respect to steppe protected areas have been identified, though agricultural land use is an ongoing point of dialogue in relation to steppe conservation. There are some small site-specific issues as well, such as the prevalence of poaching in and around CCZ in Kursk Oblast, partially due to the protected area’s proximity to significant population centers – i.e. approximately 11 km from the city of Kursk.
7. *Research Institutes –* A highlight is the contracting of the Kursk University biological department for carrying out fieldwork important for the establishment of new steppe protected areas in Kursk oblast. Another key partner is the “Steppe Institute” of the Russian Academy of Sciences, based in Orenburg. The Steppe Institute has contributed to a number of important project activities in the region, including providing inputs for creation of the steppe nature monument, development of a business plan for sustainable tourism in Orenburg Tarpania protected area, and cross-border steppe conservation activities. At the same time, according to project stakeholders there are opportunities for increased communication and coordination with the Steppe Institute to leverage the institute’s technical expertise, and it is hoped this working relationship will be strengthened in the second half of the project.

## Sustainability

1. While a sustainability rating is provided here as required, sustainability is a temporal and dynamic state that is influenced by a broad range of constantly shifting factors. It should be kept in mind that the important aspect of sustainability of GEF projects is the sustainability of results, not necessarily the sustainability of activities that produced results. In the context of GEF projects there is no clearly defined timeframe for which results should be sustained, although it is implied that they should be sustained indefinitely. When evaluating sustainability, the greater the time horizon, the lower the degree of certainty possible.
2. In addition, by definition, mid-term evaluations are not well-positioned to provide ratings on sustainability considering that many more activities will be undertaken before project end that may positively or negatively affect the likelihood of sustainability. Based on GEF evaluation policies and procedures, the overall rating for sustainability cannot be higher than the lowest rating for any of the individual components. Therefore the overall **sustainability** rating for the Russia Steppe project for this mid-term evaluation is ***likely*.**

### Financial Risks to Sustainability

1. At present there are no significant financial risks to sustainability, and sustainability in this aspect is considered *likely*. On the positive side, the steppe protected areas supported by the project have planned budget allocations from the MNRE through 2015, and it is fully expected that the MNRE will continue to support these protected areas at an adequate level beyond this time. The management audits carried out with project support in Dauria and Orenburg resulted in approximately a doubling of annual federal funding for these zapovedniks from the 2011 baseline. At the same time, it is not clear if the anticipated co-financing from the government and other sources will be fully met by the end of the project (see previous Section IV.B.iv for further discussion), but even the current situation does not present any concrete financial risks for the sustainability of the project results. One notable exception may be the situation in Kalmykia, which would certainly benefit from increased financial resources for saiga protection. It is hoped that by the end of the Russia Steppe project a more rationalized and sustained approach to financing saiga conservation in Kalmykia will be established.

### Sociopolitical Risks to Sustainability

1. The Russia Steppe project has had strong engagement with the full range of key stakeholders, particularly at the regional and local level, and there do not appear to be significant sociopolitical risks. At the national level, the MNRE has proven itself a strong partner with good ownership of the Russia Steppe project results. The rating for this element of sustainability is considered *likely*. There are some local level sociopolitical issues that require ongoing attention, but this is expected for any protected area, and they currently do not threaten the overall results of the project. For example, successful saiga conservation in Kalmykia requires a comprehensive sociopolitical strategy, to engage regional political leaders and communities in a region-wide effort to address legislative loopholes and external threats for saiga.

### Institutional Framework and Governance Risks to Sustainability

1. There are no critical institutional or governance risks to the sustainability of the Russia Steppe project results, and this aspect of sustainability is considered *likely*. The most pertinent issue for the project in this regard is the overall institutional capacity of the MNRE to manage the protected area system. The MNRE is consistently and continuously working to strengthen itself as an institution, to oversee Russia’s wide network of protected areas, including those that include steppe ecosystems; however, there are no institutional weaknesses significant enough to threaten the main results of Russia Steppe project. The other notable issue, which has already been mentioned throughout this evaluation report, is the situation with respect to poaching of saiga in Kalmykia, which requires increased attention and enforcement capacity to address.

### Environmental Risks to Sustainability

1. There are currently no significant environmental risks to the sustainability of project results, and sustainability in this respect is considered *likely*. There are a number of relevant ongoing broad environmental threats, but the project is working to position steppe conservation efforts to better respond to such threats. For example, a key long-term threat to steppe ecosystems is climate change, although it is not yet clear how climate change will affect the steppe and the variety of steppe species. The protected areas being established and the research conducted under the project should help protected area managers and other relevant parties to adapt steppe management measures in the face of climate change. Other environmental risks are also being addressed, such as the power line safety issue for raptors, and fire management to reduce the number and extent of catastrophic fires. An ongoing threat is the poaching of the great bustard in the Dauria region. One potentially significant threat that is not yet manifest relates to water management and climate change in the Dauria transboundary region, with Mongolia and China. According to the publication “*Adaptation to Climate Change in River Basins of Dauria: Ecology and Water Management*”, produced with project support, China has large scale plans to modify water flows in the Dauria region, to support its ongoing development of coal power. It is unclear how this may affect water resources in Russian Dauria, including the Tory Lakes basin that has a natural climate cycle of approximately 30 years for one complete cycle including both wet and dry phases. A final environmental threat in the Dauria region is the international border fence between the three countries, which interrupts the natural migratory paths of the Mongolian gazelle. However, for the time being, the gazelle population in Russian Dauria appears stable or increasing, though the carrying capacity of the region is limited when the gazelles cannot undertake large-scale migrations.

## Catalytic Role: Replication and Scaling-up

1. The catalytic influence of the project is as yet limited, since this is only the mid-term evaluation. This aspect will be one of the important focus areas in the second half of the project, as the project seeks to replicate initial important results. For example, the experience with integrated fire management in Orenburg could be replicated in other regions. Disseminating and replicating some of the good practices for steppe protected area management from the four project pilot areas will also be important, as there are many other steppe protected areas that would benefit from shared experience. The extent to which the project is able to at least initiate some catalytic results may be another measure to assess at project completion in consideration of whether the project has produced some truly exceptional results, or if it just achieves the minimum level aimed for.

## Project Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation

1. The Russia Steppe project M&E plan is outlined in the project document (Part IV, pp. 64-68). The M&E plan describes the roles and responsibilities of all parties with respect to M&E activities, including project oversight and reporting. Also included is the summary table of the M&E plan (Table 22 of the project document, p. 67), which includes the types of M&E activities, the responsible parties, budget for each activity, and timeframe of the planned activities. Overall the M&E plan is based on standard UNDP-GEF project M&E procedures, and conforms to UNDP and GEF minimum standards and norms for project M&E. The M&E plan includes: inception workshop and report, Annual Progress Report/Progress Implementation Report (APR/PIR), steering committee meetings and minutes, quarterly status reports, technical reports, supervision field missions, independent mid-term and terminal evaluations, a terminal report, lessons learned, and an annual audit. The total indicative cost of the M&E plan is $365,000 which is fully adequate for a project of this size, equating to 6.88% of the total GEF allocation; however, the project document does not indicate if the entire M&E budget will be covered by GEF resources or also partly funded by partner co-financing, i.e. particularly from the MNRE as the responsible project executing agency.
2. As of the mid-term, the M&E plan is being fully implemented as envisioned, with comprehensive and timely reporting by the project team and partners. The annual PIRs are comprehensive, and have received good ratings from the UNDP regional office (the 2013 PIR received an internal assessment of highly satisfactory for completeness, and satisfactory for consistency). One minor exception, as discussed in previous Section IV.B.i on project implementation arrangements, is that the full project steering committee has not met as often as envisioned, with only two meetings thus far. The project team is appropriately supported by UNDP through both the UNDP Russia Project Support Office staff, and the UNDP Bratislava regional office.
3. A key element of the project M&E system is the project logframe with indicators and targets supporting a results-oriented implementation approach. According to GEF and UNDP guidelines, logframe indicators are supposed to meet “SMART” criteria. Unfortunately many projects still struggle with this at the design stage, and this evaluator has suggested logframe revisions for virtually every project encountered over many years. Practically speaking, designing SMART indicators is not an easy task when dealing with large scale ecosystems and associated biodiversity. While this evaluation does make revision suggestions to improve the SMARTness of indicators and targets, the Russia Steppe project has taken the design of logframe indicators and targets to the level beyond the standard approach of most GEF biodiversity projects, and should be recognized and commended for this, and this experience should be further disseminated in the UNDP system. Notable aspects of the Russia Steppe project logframe relate to the impact level indicators: For example, the impact level indicators that consider key species populations consider trends over time (e.g. “within 25% of the long-term mean”), rather than just one-time assessments. Also considered are the biological nuances of certain species populations, such as the ratio of males to females in a population, or the percentage of population of a certain age (e.g. juveniles, etc.). There remains room for improvement, but the logframe of the Russia Steppe project represents a welcome advancement in logframe design among UNDP-GEF projects.
4. The Russia Steppe project logframe does also include reporting on the protected area METT for protected areas influenced by the project. Since this is one of the portfolio level indicators for the GEF biodiversity focal area, this will facilitate higher level reporting for UNDP and the GEF.

## Project Impacts and Global Environmental Benefits

1. For the GEF biodiversity focal area project impacts are defined as documented changes in environmental status of species, ecosystems or genetic biodiversity resources. Global Environmental Benefits in the biodiversity focal area have not been explicitly defined, but are generally considered to involve sustained impact level results of a certain scale or significance.
2. The project document of the Russia Steppe project identifies the project’s Global Environmental Benefits in multiple ways. To start, in relation to the GEF biodiversity focal area strategic results framework, “the project will contribute to the achievement of the programmatic Indicators, Expected Long Term Impacts, and Outcomes of GEF’s Biodiversity Strategic Objective #1 (SO-1) and Strategic Program #1, including:

* *Improved extent and new habitat protected in the SPA system that enhances ecosystem representation in Russia’s SPA network.*
* *Improved coverage of steppe ecosystems through the expansion of steppe areas under protection by an additional 867,400 hectares.*
* *Support for Russia’s strengthening PA system to ensure its long-term sustainability.*
* *Improved management effectiveness of individual SPA with direct impact on 1.8 million hectares and indirect impact on 4.6 million hectares.*
* *Conservation of biodiversity in Russia’s steppe protected areas.*

1. In addition, global benefits are expected due to the global significance of Russia’s steppe biomes, particularly the Daurian steppe, which is one of the four project pilot areas. In addition, at the species level, the project aims to conserve globally significant species, including multiple species classified as critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable and threatened, such as the saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*), saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*) and sociable lapwing (*Vanellus gregarious*).
2. As highlighted above, the project logframe does include impact level indicators, which should provide some insight on potential project impacts, although changes at the impact level often take years after a project intervention to manifest.
3. While the mid-term is quite early to consider any potential impact level results, there are at least a few examples from the Russia Steppe project. The fact that impact level results have been generated at this stage is a notable achievement, though also indicative of the project’s strategy of implementing some practical on-the-ground measures, while also addressing the larger strategic objectives. One impact level result is the implementation of bird-safe measures on power lines in Dauria. The project analyzed over 200 km of power lines to identify the most hazardous areas for birds, and worked with the *Chita Energo* power utility company responsible for the lines to install protection measures over 46 km of lines. Based on previous assessments over time of bird mortality, it can be estimated that the project’s measures are saving at least six sakar falcons per year (sakar falcons are particularly susceptible to electrocution for some reason), which is significant for this globally endangered population.
4. Another example of impact level results is the re-introduction of the steppe marmot in CCZ in Kursk Oblast. The steppe marmot had gone locally extinct in the late 19th century, likely due to anthropogenic pressures. The first family of steppe marmots was reintroduced to their former range in Streletskaya plot of CCZ on July 10, 2013.
5. A final example of impact is from the project’s provision of fire fighting equipment, which was mainly completed before the 2012 fire season. Fire incidence depends significantly on the particular climatic conditions of any given year, and on some random factors as well, such as human activities. However, in Kalmykia, for example, in 2012 fire incidence was limited to one significant fire that burned 1,000 ha, compared to six fires in both 2010 and 2011 that burned 22,000 ha and 7,200 ha, respectively.
6. Ultimately the project’s impact will need to be assessed years in the future to appropriately consider how the conservation measures implemented across Russia’s Steppe biome are adequately supporting biodiversity conservation.

# Main Lessons Learned and Recommendations

## Lessons from the Experience of the Russia Steppe Project

1. Below are lessons considered by the mid-term evaluation to be some of the more significant lessons drawn from the project experience, but these should not necessarily be considered comprehensive. The project team and stakeholders should continue analyzing and drawing on the project experience to identify additional or more comprehensive lessons, and support dissemination of these lessons through documentation in knowledge products.
2. ***Lesson 1:*** The value of a well-qualified and technically adept project team for successful project implementation cannot be overstated. The Russia Steppe project has an experienced project manager, a well-qualified Chief Technical Advisor, and highly competent and technically well-qualified regional project coordinators. As has been seen in many other projects, the capacity of the personnel involved is highly directly correlated with project success.
3. ***Lesson 2:*** The Russia Steppe project has reinforced a lesson found in many other UNDP-GEF projects in relation to project implementation arrangements: When the project sites are geographically located far from the central project management unit, it is of great value to have local project coordinators who can be directly responsible for ensuring ongoing implementation of activities on the ground, and who can serve as a communication link with local stakeholders.
4. ***Lesson 3:*** The Russia Steppe project logframe indicator design still has room for improvement, but it has demonstrated that impact level indicators can be developed that reflect technical nuances related to the particular biology and natural variations of the species and ecosystems targeted. The use of impact indicators with targets based on long-term population trends, and other factors such as characteristics of a certain population, is an important example and precedent for other GEF projects.
5. ***Lesson 4:*** It can be efficient to rely on external partners that have specific technical expertise required by a project. For example, in the Russia Steppe project, the project has contracted and partnered with NGOs that have experience working on fire management, and has contracted the biology department of Kursk University to do assessments necessary to designate nature monuments.
6. ***Lesson 5:*** Ecosystem restoration and species reintroductions are complex processes that require significant investment of human and financial resources when they are piloted and tested. In the Russia Steppe project the restoration activities in Kursk have proven to be too resource intensive relative to the amount of area restored to be worth pursuing further, and the introduction of the Przewalski’s horse in Orenburg may take longer than initially planned. As such, these types of activities’ cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit must be carefully assessed relative to other conservation activities to ensure that they should be pursued. These types of activities do have potentially significant scientific and public relations benefits that should be considered in any cost-benefit analysis.
7. The project documentation has also provided some lessons identified by the project team, which are fully supported by this evaluation, and are listed in Box 2.

Box Project Generated Lessons from the 2012 PIR

1.Selecting the PPG national consultant for a Chief Technical Advisor for the main phase is the best way to ensure the continuity and efficiency at the inception period.

2. Having a detailed workplan at the project preparatory stage is a very beneficial exercise. The more detailed and precise the Prodoc is, the better picture of the project it gives to different stakeholders, i.e. its rationale, objectives and framework. For the first 9 months of the project, the national project leadership was passed on to the new federal-level stakeholders whose comprehension of project's objectives was somewhat different from what was initially approved by the GEF and supported by other stakeholders who are closer to the needs on the ground. The detailed workplan in the Prodoc, as well as perfect rationale behind the project strategy and development workplan at the PPG stage, served as the main instrument to introduce project to the new stakeholders. This kept the project focus unchanged.

3. The Prodoc Workplan, highly detailed and thoroughly prepared, however lacked some essential elements like awareness activities, PR etc. With the detailed and thoroughly calculated budget, it is quite difficult to find additional funds and ensure adequate financing of new ideas.

4. Every project on the ground should do its best to ensure most of the project resources go locally, not to the federal center where the project management and key governmental stakeholders usually are.

## Recommendations

1. The following are the mid-term evaluation’s recommendations, with the target audience in brackets following the recommendation.
2. ***Key Recommendation 1:*** The project covers a wide range of activities and geographic spread in the second half of the project activities the workplan should be consolidated a little and streamlined to focus on those activities that are critical for achieving planned outcomes and those that have shown promise, while dropping those that have lagged. In this respect, the mid-term evaluation recommends that the project formally drop the SMSA activity (Output 2.5). There appear to be a number of legal and policy issues with this activity, and in one of the primary locations for developing this approach the context has changed. The project does not appear to be in a position to establish a nationally replicable private land conservation model, and individual unique instances have limited strategic value. As advocates for steppe ecosystems, project stakeholders are free to opportunistically pursue (as time and resources allow) specific opportunities for steppe protection in collaboration with private land owners, but this should be dropped as an official expected result of the project to allow the project team to focus on other key results. [MNRE, Project Team, PSC]
3. ***Key Recommendation 2:*** The mid-term evaluation recommends the project logframe indicators and targets be revised, with a number of specific revisions proposed in Annex 7. The intention it to improve the results-focus and SMARTness of indicators, while also reflecting some changes to project workplanning and improving the alignment of the logframe with the assessment of project results. While there are a number of specific logframe revisions proposed, there are two overall logframe revisions suggested: i.) The project should consider adding a TRA indicator for each of the pilot sites, as an additional means of assessing impact level results. There are a variety of natural factors that can influence the population status of species, but, taking a theory-based approach, a project’s efforts to directly reduce specific biodiversity threats should result in improved biodiversity status. Adding a TRA indicator at this stage would require re-constructing baseline values, but this should be feasible, based on the data available and knowledge of project experts for each of the regions. Ii.) The project team should review the logframe indicators and targets to clearly rationalize targets and define all key terms. This could involve completing a table such as the below example:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Definition of key terms** | **Normative state target** | **Target for project scope and timeframe** |
| METT | N/A | To maintain the ecological integrity of their specified areas and achieve their basic function as protected areas, PA management should have an effectiveness score of at least (80? May be different for different PAs, depending on their context and circumstances). | Based on an analysis of the areas of management effectiveness that the project is targeting and what can be achieved in the project time frame, the project should be able to help protected area X reach a METT score of 75 from the baseline of 50. (The GEF biodiversity focal area target for GEF-5 is a 15%-20% increase in PA management effectiveness). |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

1. ***Key Recommendation 3:*** The project should scale down the planned activities relating to restoration (Output 2.2) and integrated fire management (Output 2.1) to a scope that is realistic during the life of the project, but which could still generate some positive experiences and lessons for further replication. Cost-effectiveness of restoration activities unclear, and other activities could have greater conservation value – e.g. establishing nature monuments in some steppe remnants in Kursk could have as much value as restoration of small plots. In Orenburg there are plans to support natural regeneration through seeding fallow lands with native perennial grasses, to enhance natural processes. While the project’s only input would be purchasing the seeds (with other required inputs provided in-kind by local governments and land-users), this is still a relatively expensive activity, and the cost-effectiveness should be weighed against the investment required to increase protection for steppe areas that are still in good condition but not protected. The experience of developing the integrated fire management plan in Orenburg has shown that this is a complex process requiring significant time, and as such it would not be possible for the project to produce seven such plans. Further, the value of this approach should be demonstrated before significant additional resources are spent to produce additional plans. After the first year of implementation of the Orenburg integrated fire management plan a survey should be carried out among stakeholders to identify the value this approach. If it is found to be positive, stakeholders from Orenburg could disseminate their experience to other regions through presentations and other means of information sharing. [MNRE, Project Team, PSC]
2. ***Key Recommendation 4:*** The project must ensure the annual budget delivery rate is increased and maintained, to maintain the efficiency of the project. While many projects do have short extensions, extensions beyond six months can have a negative influence on efficiency as an increasing proportion of project resources are required for administrative and management overhead costs. [MNRE, Project Team, UNDP]
3. ***Key Recommendation 5:*** In the second half of the project the project team and immediate stakeholders should increase the focus on aspects related to scaling-up and replication of project experiences and lessons - for example, relating to the project experience developing integrated fire management plans. The goal should be to have some replications or scaling-up actually initiated by the end of the project, not just information disseminated. [Project Team]
4. ***Key Recommendation 6:*** Since the project did not conduct a structured capacity needs assessment for the four pilot areas, the project should analyze the recommendations of the three pilot area management audits to identify capacity needs at the site level, in order to support the development of appropriate training modules. [MNRE, Project Team, Pilot Site Managers]
5. ***Key Recommendation 7:*** The project should work with the Kalmykia pilot site team to develop a structured long-term approach to address the issue of saiga management in Kalmykia (e.g. dealing with poaching, etc.). The project should support engagement of all key stakeholders to move toward implementation of the saiga conservation management plan that has already been developed for the region. [MNRE, Project Team, Kalmykia Pilot Site Team]
6. ***Key Recommendation 8:*** There has been some engagement of communities in the areas surrounding pilot site protected areas, but this is an area that needs additional work as the project progresses in supporting effective management of steppe protected areas. Successful and effective management of protected areas is usually accomplished through developing positive relationships, communication, and input mechanisms with surrounding communities. One model pursued in some parts of the world is a community advisory council, which may not have decision-making power, but which provides a formal channel linking communities with protected area management. Other models include partnerships with community organizations such as local hunting associations in a form of community-based management for monitoring and enforcement in areas around protected areas. Community-based environmental monitoring programs are another useful potential mechanism. [MNRE, Project Team, Pilot Site Managers]
7. ***Recommendation 9:*** While the management of the CCZ pilot site is considered to be strong, the project should support the MNRE in conducting a protected area financing assessment of this site to ensure that the CCZ has adequate financial resources to ensure effective management. The management audits in the three other project pilot sites have facilitated the identification of key management areas requiring additional resources, and helped rationalize and justify the use of resources for effective protected area management. As a result, the MNRE has been able to increase the planned annual budget for each of these protected areas. The CCZ in Kursk would benefit from a similar process to rationalize and ensure adequate financing. [MNRE, PSC, Kursk Pilot Site Managers]
8. ***Recommendation 10:*** The project should ensure comprehensive documentation of co-financing, and increase emphasis to ensure the expected level of co-financing is reached by the end of the project. The planned co-financing was $15.30 million USD, and to the mid-point of the project, $2.66 million USD in co-financing has been documented – approximately 17% of the expected co-financing resources. It may be that documentation of co-financing needs to be improved, but the current reported amount of co-financing is quite low for this point of the project. UNDP, the project team, and the MNRE should work together to clarify the co-financing issue, as co-financing is one important indicator relating to various evaluation criteria, including relevance, efficiency, stakeholder ownership, and sustainability. The project should ensure that that at least the originally planned level of co-financing is delivered by the end of the project. [MNRE, Project Team, UNDP]
9. ***Recommendation 11:*** The project should emphasize the value of the production of peer-reviewed scientific publications related to the project’s work, and should support the extra effort required for project stakeholders to produce such publications, as appropriate. There are a number of project activities that could be further developed as peer-reviewed scientific publications (e.g. steppe restoration in Kursk, climate monitoring in Dauria), and it would be beneficial if these were produced instead of just being published as “gray literature.” [MNRE, Project Team, UNDP]
10. ***Recommendation 12:*** The project is supporting some work on policy and legislation development with regional governments. The goal for this work, within the timeframe of the project, should be actual government adoption of some changes with positive influences for steppe ecosystems – not just production of draft materials. Adoption of legislation is generally an ambitious effort for projects with limited time, as government approval processes can be complex, long and bureaucratic; but reaching actual adoption of legislation (or relevant amendments) is the critical measure for demonstrating positive results for this particular small aspect of the project. [Project Team]
11. ***Recommendation 13:*** The project should work to increase visitation to the project website, which is well-done and is an excellent resource relating to steppe conservation. The current levels of website visitation are acceptable, but the potential audience for the website is certainly larger. [Project Team]
12. ***Recommendation 14:*** The project team should work to improve the project branding. It is necessary to have UNDP-GEF logos on publications supported by the project (and in other appropriate contexts), but other aspects of branding are important also. For example, the vehicles of protected areas should have the protected area logo visible, which contributes to increasing local community and government awareness about protected areas. [Project Team, Pilot Site Managers]

## Russia Steppe Project Mid-term Evaluation Ratings

| **Criteria** | **Rating** | **Qualitative Summary** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Project Formulation |  |  |
| *Relevance* | *S* | *The Russia Steppe project is relevant to Russia’s national strategies and priorities, to regional government policies, and to GEF biodiversity focal area strategies and priorities.* |
| Conceptualization / design | HS | The project is generally well-designed, with a few minor shortcomings. The implementation arrangements are well-structured to support the project, given the broad geographic spread of the project pilot sites. |
| Country-drivenness | HS | The MNRE is fully supportive of the project approach and objective. |
| Stakeholder involvement in design | S | No particular issues have arisen in this respect. |
| *IA & EA Execution* |  |  |
| *Quality of UNDP Implementation* | *S* | *Overall good support and oversight. Additional attention required for co-financing reporting.* |
| *Quality of Execution – Executing Agency* | *S* | *The project team is highly professional and technically well-qualified. The main issue is for more timely financial delivery rate, to ensure efficiency.* |
| *Overall Quality of Implementation / Execution*  (Efficiency) | *S* | *Based on above.* |
| Use of the logical framework | HS | Excellent use of the logframe as a reporting and internal monitoring tool to drive a results-oriented implementation approach. |
| Financial planning and management | MS | Good efficiency, but low financial delivery thus far, and low reported co-financing. |
| Adaptive management | HS | Excellent responsiveness and adjustments to changing conditions. |
| Use and establishment of information technologies | HS | Excellent use of GIS and internet websites. |
| Operational relationships between the institutions involved | S | Good operational relationship between UNDP, MNRE, regional governments. Could be improved with Ministry of Agriculture and Steppe Institute. |
| Technical capacities | HS | The project involves highly qualified individuals in the project team and among the project partners. |
| *Monitoring and Evaluation* |  |  |
| *M&E Design at Entry* | *S* | *There is room for improvement in the logframe, but overall it represents a positive evolution in impact indicator design.* |
| *M&E Plan Implementation* | *S* | *No significant issues, though the PSC has met fewer times than planned.* |
| *Overall Quality of M&E* | *S* | *Based on above.* |
| Stakeholder Participation |  |  |
| Production and dissemination of information | HS | Numerous publications produced and available on the website. |
| Local resource users and civil society participation | S | The project has partnered with multiple NGOs. The engagement of local resource users remains an area of opportunity for the future in the pilot regions. |
| Establishment of partnerships | S | Good collaboration with various organizations, including, for example, Kursk University. Positive work with *ChitaEnergo* power utility. |
| Involvement and support of governmental institutions | HS | Appears to be strong at the federal and regional levels. |
| *Assessment of Outcomes* |  |  |
| **Outcome 1:**  Consolidation and expansion of system of Steppe Protected Areas (SPA) and Specially Managed Steppe Areas (SMSA) in the steppe biome | S | Good progress in steppe protected area expansion thus far, much additional work to be completed. |
| **Outcome 2:** SPA know how for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened | S | Good improvement in protected area management capacity to the mid-point, but significant opportunities remain, particularly in Kalmykia. |
| **Outcome 3: S**trengthened SPA system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice | S | Highlights include the project steppe conservation portal website, various publications, conferences, etc. Replication, catalytic effects, and further dissemination will be a priority for the second half of the project. |
| *Overall Project Outcome Rating (Effectiveness)* | *S* | *The project is well on-track as of the mid-term evaluation; the only question is if the project will just barely manage to achieve the planned results by the end of the project, or if it will manage to go above and beyond to produce some truly remarkable results that have a strong catalytic effect for steppe conservation in Russia.* |
| **Objective**: To develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling, tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome | S | The project is making a significant positive contribution to the conservation of steppes and steppe biodiversity in Russia. |
| *Sustainability* |  |  |
| *Financial Resources* | *L* | *No significant threats in this regard.* |
| *Socio-political* | *L* | *No significant threats in this regard.* |
| *Institutional Framework and Governance* | *L* | *No significant threats in this regard.* |
| *Environmental* | *L* | *No significant threats in this regard.* |
| *Overall Likelihood of Sustainability* | *L* | *Based on the above.* |
| *Progress Toward Impact* |  |  |
| *Environmental Status Improvement* | *N* | *A few positive site-specific impact level results contributing to improved environmental status.* |
| *Environmental Stress Reduction* | *M* | *A few positive site-specific impact level results contributing to environmental stress reduction.* |
| *Progress Towards Stress/Status Change* | *M* | *Progress toward large-scale change is good, but actual changes will likely be some years in the future.* |
| ***Progress Toward Overall Project Results*** | *S* |  |

# Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation Terms of Reference

Annex 2: GEF Operational Principles

Annex 3: Evaluation Matrix

Annex 4: Interview Guide

Annex 5: Project Stakeholders Table

Annex 6: Russia Steppe Project Pilot Region Characteristics and Maps

Annex 7: Russia Steppe Project Results Framework Mid-term Evaluation Assessment, and Summary of Suggested Logframe Revisions and Clarifications

Annex 8: Summary Table of Steppe Protected Areas Supported by the Russia Steppe Project

Annex 9: Russia Steppe Project’s Mainstreaming of UNDP Program Principles

Annex 10: Itinerary and List of Persons Met and Interviewed During Evaluation Mission

Annex 11: Documents Reviewed

## Annex 1: Mid-term Evaluation Terms of Reference

*Note: For space considerations the annexes of the TORs have not been included.*

**Terms of Reference**

for the mid-term evaluation of the UNDP/GEF Project

**“Improving the Coverage and Management Efficiency of Protected Areas in the Steppe Biome of Russia”**

00072294

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**Standard UNDP/GEF Monitoring and Evaluation requirements**

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy at the project level in UNDP/GEF has four objectives: i) to monitor and evaluate results and impacts; ii) to provide a basis for decision making on necessary amendments and improvements; iii) to promote accountability for resource use; and iv) to document, provide feedback on, and disseminate lessons learned. A combination of tools should be used to ensure effective project M&E. These might be applied continuously throughout the lifetime of the project – e.g. periodic monitoring of indicators -, or as specific time-bound exercises such as mid-term review, audit reports and independent evaluations.

In accordance with UNDP/GEF M&E policies and procedures, all projects with long implementation period are strongly encouraged to conduct mid-term evaluations. In addition to providing an independent in-depth review of implementation progress, this type of evaluation is responsive to GEF Council decisions on transparency and better access to information during implementation.

Mid-term evaluations are intended to identify potential project design problems, assess progress towards the achievement of objectives, identify and document lessons learned (including lessons that might improve design and implementation of other UNDP/GEF projects), and to make recommendations regarding specific actions that might be taken to improve the project. It is expected to serve as a mean of validating or filling the gaps in the initial assessment of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency obtained from monitoring. The mid-term evaluation provides the opportunity to assess early signs of project success or failure and prompt necessary adjustments.

This evaluation is to be undertaken taking into consideration the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation policy (<http://www.thegef.org/gef/node/4184> ) and the UNDP/GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (<http://www.undp.org/gef/monitoring/policies.html> ).

**Project objectives**

In 2010, with funding from the Global Environment Facility, UNDP launched a project targeting to remove barriers to securing the long-term conservation of Russia’s steppe biological diversity in Russia.

The project Objective is to develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome. The three main outcomes of the project are: (i) Consolidation and expansion of the system of steppe protected areas (SPA); (ii) Strengthened operational management capacities for PA site management; and (iii) Strengthened institutional management capacities for managing an expanded PA system. The project is designed to improve management effectiveness of a network of 15 SPA across Russia covering over 1.8 million ha. The project will expand this system and its coverage of steppe ecosystems by nearly 50% or 867,400 hectares through: a) consolidating three zakazniks into Chernye Zemli Zapovednik in Kalmykia, expanding the Zapovednik by 496,200 hectares, b) facilitating the expansion or establishment of five SPA in Kursk, Orenburg and Dauria regions covering an additional 305,200 hectares; and c) creating the enabling environment for the protection of an additional 30,000 ha of steppe ecosystems in the Orenburg steppe. The project is also designed to catalyze innovation in steppe-land conservation beyond traditional protected areas into “specially managed steppe areas” or SMSA and will pilot the establishment of two SMSA covering 36,000 ha in the Central Russian steppe. Cumulatively, these results represent an important step in securing the long-term conservation of globally significant northern temperate grassland/steppe ecosystems, one of the least protected biomes in the world.

Project location: Russian Federation

Project pilot sites: Kursk Oblast, Orenburg Region, Zabaykalsky Krai (Dauria), Republic of Kalmykia

The implementation of project activities is coordinated by the Project implementation Unit based in Moscow. The overall management of the project is the responsibility of Project Manager, who is a full time employee of the project.

The project was launched in 2010 and is supposed to be implemented within five years. The project funding provided by the GEF amounts to USD US$ 5,304,545. Pledged cofinancing is estimated at USD 14,900,000.

The project is implemented by the Government of Russia (GOR) represented by the federal Ministry of Natural Resources & Ecology (MNRE) and operates according to UNDP National Implementation Modality (NIM).

Project website: <http://savesteppe.org/>

**II. OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION**

This Mid Term Evaluation is initiated by the UNDP Project Support Office in Russia and it aims to provide managers (at the Project Implementation Unit, UNDP Russia Project Support Office and UNDP/GEF levels) with strategy and policy options for more effectively and efficiently achieving the project’s expected results and for replicating the results. It also provides the basis for learning and accountability for managers and stakeholders.

The evaluation will play a critical role in the future implementation of the project by providing advice on: (i) how to strengthen the adaptative management and monitoring function of the project; (ii) how to ensure accountability for the achievement of the GEF objective; (iii) how to enhance organizational and development learning; and (iv) how to enable informed decision – making.

The evaluation will have to provide to the GEF Secretariat complete and convincing evidence to support its findings/ratings. The consultant should prepare specific ratings on seven aspects of the project, as described in the 'Reporting' section of this Terms of Reference. Particular emphasis should be put on the current project results and the possibility of achieving the objective and outcomes in the established timeframe, taking into consideration the speed, at which the project is proceeding.

The evaluation is intended to provide a comprehensive overall assessment of the project and provides an opportunity to critically assess administrative and technical strategies issues and constrains associated with large international and multi-partner initiatives. The evaluation should also provide recommendations for strategies, approaches and/or activities to improve the potential of the Project to achieve expected outcomes and meet the objective within the Project timeframe. Findings of this evaluation will be incorporated as recommendations for enhanced implementation of the current project phase in the future years.

The purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation is:

* To assess overall performance against the Project objective and outcomes as set out in Project Document and other related documents
* To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the Project
* To analyze critically the implementation and management arrangements of the Project
* To assess the progress to date towards achievement of the outcomes;
* To review planned strategies and plans for achieving the overall objective of the Project within the timeframe;
* To assess the sustainability of the project’s interventions.
* To list and document initial lessons concerning Project design, implementation and management
* To assess Project relevance to national priorities
* To provide guidance for the future Project activities and, if necessary, for the implementation and management arrangements.

In particular, this evaluation will assess progress in establishing the information baseline, reducing threats, and identifying any difficulties in project implementation and their causes, and recommend corrective course of action. Effective action to rectify any identify issues hindering implementation will be a requirement prior to determining whether implementation should proceed.

Project performance will be assessed based on Project’s Logical Framework Matrix (see Annex 2), which provides clear performance and impact indicators for project implementation along with their corresponding means of verification. Success and failure should be determined in part by monitoring changes in baseline conditions.

The Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation will be stand-alone document that substantiates its recommendations and conclusions.

**3. EVALUATION**

The evaluation should assess:

Project concept and design: The evaluators will assess the project concept and design. He/she should review the problem addressed by the project and the project strategy, encompassing an assessment of the appropriateness of the objectives, planned outputs, activities and inputs as compared to cost-effective alternatives. The executing modality and managerial arrangements should also be judged. The evaluator will assess the progress in achievement of indicators and review the work plan, planned duration and budget of the project.

Implementation: The evaluation will assess the implementation of the project in terms of quality and timeliness of inputs and efficiency and effectiveness of activities carried out. Also, the effectiveness of management as well as the quality and timeliness of monitoring and backstopping by all parties to the project should be evaluated. In particular, the evaluation is to assess the Project team’s use of adaptive management in project implementation.

Project outputs, outcomes and impact: The evaluation will assess the outputs, outcomes and impact achieved by the project as well as the likely sustainability of project results. This should encompass an assessment of the achievement of the immediate objectives and the contribution to attaining the overall objective of the project. The evaluation should also assess the extent to which the implementation of the project has been inclusive of relevant stakeholders and to which it has been able to create collaboration between different partners. The evaluation will also examine if the project has had significant unexpected effects, whether of beneficial or detrimental character.

The Mid-term Evaluation will also cover the following aspects:

**3.1. Progress towards Results**

Changes in development conditions*.* Address the following questions, with a focus on the perception of change among stakeholders:

* Have critically endangered species been properly and adequately protected within the steppe protected areas within the Project sites in Russia?
* Have there been changes in local stakeholder behavior (i.e. threats…) that have contributed to improved conservation? If not, why not?
* Is there distinct improvement in biodiversity information turnover and use in decision making among Steppe PAs related stakeholders?
* Has awareness on biodiversity conservation and subsequent public participation in biodiversity monitoring and management increased as a result of the project?
* Is there adequate territorial planning in place, or in progress, ensuring long-term conservation of biodiversity and cultural values?

Measurement of change*:* Progress towards results should be based on a comparison of indicators before and after (so far) the project intervention. Progress can also be assessed by comparing conditions in the project site to conditions in similar unmanaged sites.

Project strategy: how and why outcomes (listed as outputs in the project document) and strategies contribute to the achievement of the expected results. Examine their relevance and whether they provide the most effective route towards results.

Sustainability: Extent to which the benefits of the project will continue, within or outside the project domain, after it has come to an end. Relevant factors include for example: development of a sustainability strategy, establishment of financial and economic instruments and mechanisms, mainstreaming project objectives into the local economy, etc.

**3.2. Project’s Adaptive Management Framework**

Monitoring Systems

* Assess the monitoring tools currently being used:
  + - Do they provide the necessary information?
    - Do they involve key partners?
    - Are they efficient?
    - Are additional tools required?
* Reconstruct baseline data if necessary. Reconstruction should follow participatory processes and could be achieved in conjunction with a learning exercise
* Ensure the monitoring system, including performance indicators, at least meets GEF minimum requirements. Apply SMART indicators as necessary.
* Apply the GEF Tracking Tool and provide a description of comparison with initial application of the tool.

Risk Management

* Validate whether the risks identified in the project document, PIRs and the ATLAS Risk Management module are the most important and whether the risk ratings applied are appropriate. If not, explain why. Describe any additional risks identified and suggest risk ratings and possible risk management strategies to be adopted.
* Assess the project’s risk identification and management systems:
  + Is the UNDP/GEF Risk Management System appropriately applied?
  + How can the UNDP/GEF Risk Management System be used to strengthen project management?

Work Planning

* Assess the use of the logical framework as a management tool during implementation and any changes made to it: (i) Ensure the logical framework meets UNDP/GEF requirements in terms of format and content; and (ii) What impact did the retro-fitting of impact indicators have on project management?
* Assess the use of routinely updated workplans.
* Assess the use of electronic information technologies to support implementation, participation and monitoring, as well as other project activities
* Are work planning processes result-based[[12]](#footnote-12)? If not, suggest ways to re-orientate work planning.
* Consider the financial management of the project, with specific reference to the cost-effectiveness of interventions. Any irregularities must be noted.

Reporting

* Assess how adaptive management changes have been reported by the project management
* Assess how lessons derived from the adaptive management process have been documented, shared with key partners and internalized by partners.

**3.3. Underlying Factors**

* Assess the underlying factors beyond the project’s immediate control that influence outcomes and results. Consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of the project’s management strategies for these factors.
* Re-test the assumptions made by the project management and identify new assumptions that should be made
* Assess the effect of any incorrect assumptions made by the project

**3.4. UNDP Contribution**

* Assess the role of UNDP against the requirements set out in the UNDP Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluating for Results. Consider: Field visits; Steering Committee/TOR follow-up and analysis; PIR preparation and follow-up; GEF guidance;
* Consider the new UNDP requirements outlined in the UNDP Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP)[[13]](#footnote-13), especially the Project Assurance role, and ensure they are incorporated into the project’s adaptive management framework
* Assess the contribution to the project from UNDP “soft” assistance (i.e. policy advice & dialogue, advocacy, and coordination). Suggest measures to strengthen UNDP’s soft assistance to the project management.

**3.5. Partnership Strategy**

* Assess how partners are involved in the project’s adaptive management framework: (i) Involving partners and stakeholders in the selection of indicators and other measures of performance; (ii) Using already existing data and statistics; and (iii) Analyzing progress towards results and determining project strategies.
* Identify opportunities for stronger substantive partnerships;
* Assess how local stakeholders participate in project management and decision-making. Include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted by the project and suggestions for improvement if necessary.
* Consider the dissemination of project information to partners and stakeholders and if necessary suggest more appropriate mechanisms;
* Assessment of collaboration between governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.
* Assessment of collaboration between implementation units of other related projects.
* Assessment of local partnerships
* Transfer of capacity to the national institutions;

**3.6. Project Finance:**

* Review the changes to fund allocations as a result of budget revisions and provide an opinion on the appropriateness and relevance of such revisions, taking into account the project activity timeframe;
* Review the effectiveness of financial coordinating mechanisms

**4. METHODOLOGY FOR EVALUATION APPROACH**

The mid-term evaluation will be done through a combination of processes including a desk study, site visit and interviews with Project Stakeholders.

Evaluator should seek guidance for his/her work in the following materials:

GEF Monitoring and Evaluation policy (<http://www.thegef.org/gef/node/4184>) and the UNDP/GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (<http://www.undp.org/gef/monitoring/policies.html>).

The methodology for the evaluation is envisaged to cover the following areas:

* Desk study review of all relevant Project documentation
* Consultations with MNRE, UNDP
* Field site visit within project territories
* Interviews with stakeholders

In preparation for the evaluation mission, the project manager, with assistance from UNDP project support office, will arrange for the completion of the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT). The tracking tool will be completed / endorsed by the relevant implementing agency or a qualified national research /scientific institution, and not by the international consultant or UNDP staff. The tracking tool (METT) will be submitted to the evaluation specialist, who will need to provide his/her comments on it. Upon incorporation of the comments from the evaluation specialist to the tracking tool, it will be finalized and attached as a mandatory annex to the final evaluation report.

**5. PRODUCTS**

The core product of the Mid-Term Evaluation will be a Mid-Term Evaluation Report.

The Mid-Term Evaluation report will include:

* Executive summary
* Introduction
* Findings and conclusions in relation to issues to be addressed identified under the Evaluation section of this TOR
* Recommendations
* Lessons Learned
* Annexes

The draft and final report will be written in the format outlined in ANNEX 1 of this TOR. The draft report will be submitted to UNDP/GEF and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology no later than June 20th 2013. Based on the feedback received from stakeholders a final report will be prepared by July 20th 2013.

The report will be submitted electronically in English.

The report will be supplemented by rate tables (ANNEX 3).

**6. EVALUATOR QUALITIES:**

The Mid-term evaluation will be carried by an individual consultant. Evaluator shall possess the following qualifications:

1. Recent experience with result-based management evaluation methodologies;
2. Experience applying participatory monitoring approaches;
3. Experience applying SMART indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
4. Recent knowledge of the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy;
5. Recent knowledge of UNDP’s results-based evaluation policies and procedures
6. Competence in Adaptive Management, as applied to conservation or natural resource management projects;
7. Familiarity with protected area policies and management structures in Eastern Europe/CIS/Russia;
8. Demonstrable analytical skills;
9. Work experience in relevant areas for at least 10 years;
10. Experience with multilateral or bilateral supported conservation projects;
11. Project evaluation experiences within United Nations system will be considered an asset;
12. Excellent English communication skills.

**7. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

**Evaluation management arrangements**

* Role of Project Manager (located in Moscow)
  + Coordination of evaluation activities and logistics
  + Arrangement of field site visits
  + Organization of meetings with selected stakeholders
* Role of UNDP
  + Coordination of evaluation activities in Moscow
  + Administrative and logistical support for the evaluator in Moscow

**8. Tentative timeframe**

* Selection of evaluator March 2013
* Briefings for evaluator April 2013)
* Desk review April-May 2013
* Debriefings in Moscow 13-14 May 2013
* Trip to the field sites (including allocation for travel), interviews with

local stakeholders (planned for 13-23 May 2013, tbc)

* Circulation of draft evaluation report for comments by 30June 2013
* Preparation of final evaluation report by 31 July 2013

Annex 1: Outline of the Mid-term Evaluation Report

Annex 2: Logical Framework Matrix

Annex 3: Rate Tables

Annex 4: List of Documents to be reviewed

## Annex 2. GEF Operational Principles

**http://www.gefweb.org/public/opstrat/ch1.htm**

**TEN OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

**AND IMPLEMENTATIONOF THE GEF'S WORK PROGRAM**

1. For purposes of the financial mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the GEF will **function under the guidance of, and be accountable to, the Conference of the Parties** (COPs). For purposes of financing activities in the focal area of ozone layer depletion, GEF operational policies will be consistent with those of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and its amendments.

2. The GEF will provide new, and additional, grant and concessional funding to meet the agreed **incremental costs** of measures to achieve agreed global environmental benefits.

3. The GEF will ensure the **cost-effectiveness** of its activities to maximize global environmental benefits.

4. The GEF will fund projects that are **country-driven** and based on national priorities designed to support sustainable development, as identified within the context of national programs.

5. The GEF will maintain sufficient **flexibility** to respond to changing circumstances, including evolving guidance of the Conference of the Parties and experience gained from monitoring and evaluation activities.

6. GEF projects will provide for **full disclosure** of all non-confidential information.

7. GEF projects will provide for consultation with, and **participation** as appropriate of, the beneficiaries and affected groups of people.

8. GEF projects will conform to the **eligibility** requirements set forth in paragraph 9 of the GEF Instrument.

9. In seeking to maximize global environmental benefits, the GEF will emphasize its **catalytic role** and leverage additional financing from other sources.

10. The GEF will ensure that its programs and projects are **monitored and evaluated** on a regular basis.

## Annex 3: Evaluation Matrix

| **Evaluation Questions** | **Indicators** | **Sources** | **Data Collection Method** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Evaluation Criteria: Relevance*** | | | |
| * Does the Russia Steppe project’s objective fit within the priorities of the local government and local communities? | * Level of coherence between project objective and stated priorities of local stakeholders | * Local government stakeholders * Local community stakeholders * Local private sector stakeholders * Relevant regional and local planning documents | * Local level field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Does the Russia Steppe project’s objective fit within national priorities? | * Level of coherence between project objective and national policy priorities and strategies, as stated in official documents | * National policy documents, such as National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, National Capacity Self-Assessment, etc. * National legislation such as National Forest Code, etc. | * Desk review * National level interviews |
| * Did the Russia Steppe project concept originate from local or national stakeholders, and/or were relevant stakeholders sufficiently involved in project development? | * Level of involvement of local and national stakeholders in project origination and development as indicated by number of planning meetings held, representation of stakeholders in planning meetings, and level of incorporation of stakeholder feedback in project planning | * Project staff * Local and national stakeholders * Project documents | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Does the Russia Steppe project’s objective fit GEF strategic priorities and operational principles? | * Level of coherence between project objective and GEF strategic priorities * Level of conformity with GEF operational principles | * GEF strategic priority documents for period when project was approved * Current GEF strategic priority documents * GEF operational principles | * Desk review * Field visit interviews |
| * Does the Russia Steppe project’s objective support implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity? Other MEAs? | * Linkages between project objective and elements of the CBD, such as key articles and programs of work | * CBD website * National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan | * Desk review |
| ***Evaluation Criteria: Efficiency*** | | | |
| * Is the Russia Steppe project cost-effective? | * Quality and comprehensiveness of financial management procedures * Project management costs share of total budget | * Project documents * Project staff | * Desk review * Interviews with project staff |
| * Are expenditures in line with international standards and norms for development projects? | * Cost of project inputs and outputs relative to norms and standards for donor projects in the country or region | * Project documents (budget files, audit, etc.) * Project staff * National stakeholders | * Desk review * Interviews with project staff |
| * Are management and implementation arrangements efficient in delivering the outputs necessary to achieve outcomes? | * Appropriateness of structure of management arrangements * Extent of necessary partnership arrangements * Level of participation of relevant stakeholders | * Project documents * Project staff * Local, regional and national stakeholders | * Desk review * Interviews with project staff * Field visit interviews |
| * Was the Russia Steppe project implementation delayed? If so, did that affect cost-effectiveness? | * Project milestones in time * Required project adaptive management measures related to delays | * Project documents * Project staff | * Desk review * Interviews with project staff |
| * What is the contribution of cash and in-kind co-financing to project implementation? | * Level of cash and in-kind co-financing relative to expected level | * Project documents * Project staff | * Desk review * Interviews with project staff |
| * To what extent is the Russia Steppe project leveraging additional resources? | * Amount of resources leveraged relative to project budget | * Project documents * Project staff | * Desk review * Interviews with project staff |
| ***Evaluation Criteria: Effectiveness*** | | | |
| * Is the project objective likely to be met? To what extent and in what timeframe? | * Level of progress toward project indicator targets relative to expected level at current point of implementation | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * What are the key factors contributing to project success or underachievement? | * Level of documentation of and preparation for project risks, assumptions and impact drivers | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * What are the key risks and priorities for the remainder of the implementation period? | * Presence, assessment of, and preparation for expected risks, assumptions and impact drivers | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Is adaptive management being applied to ensure effectiveness? | * Identified modifications to project plans, as necessary in response to changing assumptions or conditions | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Is monitoring and evaluation used to ensure effective decision-making? | * Quality of M&E plan in terms of meeting minimum standards, conforming to best practices, and adequate budgeting * Consistency of implementation of M&E compared to plan, quality of M&E products * Use of M&E products in project management and implementation decision-making | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| ***Evaluation Criteria: Results*** | | | |
| * Are the planned outputs being produced? Are they likely to contribute to the expected project outcomes and objective? | * Level of project implementation progress relative to expected level at current stage of implementation * Existence of logical linkages between project outputs and outcomes/impacts | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Are the anticipated outcomes likely to be achieved? Are the outcomes likely to contribute to the achievement of the project objective? | * Existence of logical linkages between project outcomes and impacts | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Are the key assumptions and impact drivers relevant to the achievement of Global Environmental Benefits likely to be met? | * Actions undertaken to address key assumptions and target impact drivers | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Are impact level results likely to be achieved? Are the likely to be at the scale sufficient to be considered Global Environmental Benefits? | * Environmental indicators | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| ***Evaluation Criteria: Sustainability*** | | | |
| * To what extent are project results likely to be dependent on continued financial support? What is the likelihood that any required financial resources will be available to sustain the project results once the GEF assistance ends? | * Financial requirements for maintenance of project benefits * Level of expected financial resources available to support maintenance of project benefits * Potential for additional financial resources to support maintenance of project benefits | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Do relevant stakeholders have or are likely to achieve an adequate level of “ownership” of results, to have the interest in ensuring that project benefits are maintained? | * Level of initiative and engagement of relevant stakeholders in project activities and results | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Do relevant stakeholders have the necessary technical capacity to ensure that project benefits are maintained? | * Level of technical capacity of relevant stakeholders relative to level required to sustain project benefits | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * To what extent are the project results dependent on socio-political factors? | * Existence of socio-political risks to project benefits | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * To what extent are the project results dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance? | * Existence of institutional and governance risks to project benefits | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |
| * Are there any environmental risks that can undermine the future flow of project impacts and Global Environmental Benefits? | * Existence of environmental risks to project benefits | * Project documents * Project staff * Project stakeholders | * Field visit interviews * Desk review |

## Annex 4: Interview Guide

*Overview: The questions under each topic area are intended to assist in focusing discussion to ensure consistent topic coverage and to structure data collection, and are not intended as verbatim questions to be posed to interviewees. When using the interview guide, the interviewer should be sure to target questions at a level appropriate to the interviewee. The interview guide is one of multiple tools for gathering evaluative evidence, to complement evidence collected through document reviews and other data collection methods; in other words, the interview guide does not cover all evaluative questions relevant to the evaluation.*

Key

**Bold** = GEF Evaluation Criteria

*Italic* = GEF Operational Principles

1. PLANNING / PRE-IMPLEMENTATION
2. **Relevance**
   1. Did the project’s objectives fit within the priorities of the local government and local communities?
   2. Did the project’s objectives fit within national priorities?
   3. Did the project’s objectives fit GEF strategic priorities?
   4. Did the project’s objectives support implementation of the relevant multi-lateral environmental agreement?
3. *Incremental cost*
4. Did the project create environmental benefits that would not have otherwise taken place?
5. Does the project area represent an example of a globally significant environmental resource?
6. *Country-drivenness / Participation*
7. How did the project concept originate?
8. How did the project stakeholders contribute to the project development?
9. Do local and national government stakeholders support the objectives of the project?
10. Do the local communities support the objectives of the project?
11. Are the project objectives in conflict with any national level policies?
12. Monitoring and Evaluation Plan / Design *(M&E)*
13. Were monitoring and reporting roles clearly defined?
14. Was there either an environmental or socio-economic baseline of data collected before the project began?
15. MANAGEMENT / OVERSIGHT
16. Project management
17. What were the implementation arrangements?
18. Was the management effective?
19. Were workplans prepared as required to achieve the anticipated outputs on the required timeframes?
20. Did the project develop and leverage the necessary and appropriate partnerships with direct and tangential stakeholders?
21. Were there any particular challenges with the management process?
22. If there was a steering or oversight body, did it meet as planned and provide the anticipated input and support to project management?
23. Were risks adequately assessed during implementation?
24. Did assumptions made during project design hold true?
25. Were assessed risks adequately dealt with?
26. Was the level of communication and support from the implementing agency adequate and appropriate?
27. *Flexibility*
28. Did the project have to undertake any adaptive management measures based on feedback received from the M&E process?
29. Were there other ways in which the project demonstrated flexibility?
30. Were there any challenges faced in this area?
31. **Efficiency** *(cost-effectiveness)*
32. Was the project cost-effective?
33. Were expenditures in line with international standards and norms?
34. Was the project implementation delayed?
35. If so, did that affect cost-effectiveness?
36. What was the contribution of cash and in-kind co-financing to project implementation?
37. To what extent did the project leverage additional resources?
38. Financial Management
39. Was the project financing (from the GEF and other partners) at the level foreseen in the project document?
40. Where there any problems with disbursements between implementing and executing agencies?
41. Were financial audits conducted with the regularity and rigor required by the implementing agency?
42. Was financial reporting regularly completed at the required standards and level of detail?
43. Did the project face any particular financial challenges such as unforeseen tax liabilities, management costs, or currency devaluation?
44. Co-financing *(catalytic role)*
45. Was the in-kind co-financing received at the level anticipated in the project document?
46. Was the cash co-financing received at the level anticipated in the project document?
47. Did the project receive any additional unanticipated cash support after approval?
48. Did the project receive any additional unanticipated in-kind support after approval?
49. Monitoring and Evaluation *(M&E)*
50. Project implementation M&E
51. Was the M&E plan adequate and implemented sufficiently to allow the project to recognize and address challenges?
52. Were any unplanned M&E measures undertaken to meet unforeseen shortcomings?
53. Was there a mid-term evaluation?
54. How were project reporting and monitoring tools used to support adaptive management?
55. Environmental and socio-economic monitoring
56. Did the project implement a monitoring system, or leverage a system already in place, for environmental monitoring?
57. What are the environmental or socio-economic monitoring mechanisms?
58. Have any community-based monitoring mechanisms been used?
59. Is there a long-term M&E component to track environmental changes?
60. If so, what provisions have been made to ensure this is carried out?
61. *Full disclosure*
62. Did the project meet this requirement?
63. Did the project face any challenges in this area?
64. ACTIVITIES / IMPLEMENTATION
65. **Effectiveness**
66. How have the stated project objectives been met?
67. To what extent have the project objectives been met?
68. What were the key factors that contributed to project success or underachievement?
69. Can positive key factors be replicated in other situations, and could negative key factors have been anticipated?
70. Stakeholder involvement and public awareness *(participation)*
71. What were the achievements in this area?
72. What were the challenges in this area?
73. How did stakeholder involvement and public awareness contribute to the achievement of project objectives?
74. **RESULTS**
75. Outputs
76. Did the project achieve the planned outputs?
77. Did the outputs contribute to the project outcomes and objectives?
78. Outcomes
79. Were the anticipated outcomes achieved?
80. Were the outcomes relevant to the planned project impacts?
81. Impacts
82. Was there a logical flow of inputs and activities to outputs, from outputs to outcomes, and then to impacts?
83. Did the project achieve its anticipated/planned impacts?
84. Why or why not?
85. If impacts were achieved, were they at a scale sufficient to be considered Global Environmental Benefits?
86. If impacts or Global Environmental Benefits have not yet been achieved, are the conditions (enabling environment) in place so that they are likely to eventually be achieved?
87. Replication strategy, and documented replication or scaling-up *(catalytic role)*
88. Did the project have a replication plan?
89. Was the replication plan “passive” or “active”?
90. Is there evidence that replication or scaling-up occurred within the country?
91. Did replication or scaling-up occur in other countries?
92. LESSONS LEARNED
    1. What were the key lessons learned in each project stage?
    2. In retrospect, would the project participants have done anything differently?
93. **SUSTAINABILITY**
94. Financial
95. To what extent are the project results dependent on continued financial support?
96. What is the likelihood that any required financial resources will be available to sustain the project results once the GEF assistance ends?
97. Was the project successful in identifying and leveraging co-financing?
98. What are the key financial risks to sustainability?
99. Socio-Political
100. To what extent are the project results dependent on socio-political factors?
101. What is the likelihood that the level of stakeholder ownership will allow for the project results to be sustained?
102. Is there sufficient public/stakeholder awareness in support of the long-term objectives of the project?
103. What are the key socio-political risks to sustainability?
104. Institutions and Governance
105. To what extent are the project results dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance?
106. What is the likelihood that institutional and technical achievements, legal frameworks, policies and governance structures and processes will allow for the project results to be sustained?
107. Are the required systems for accountability and transparency and the required technical know-how in place?
108. What are the key institutional and governance risks to sustainability?
109. Ecological
110. Are there any environmental risks that can undermine the future flow of project impacts and Global Environmental Benefits?

## Annex 5: Project Stakeholders Table

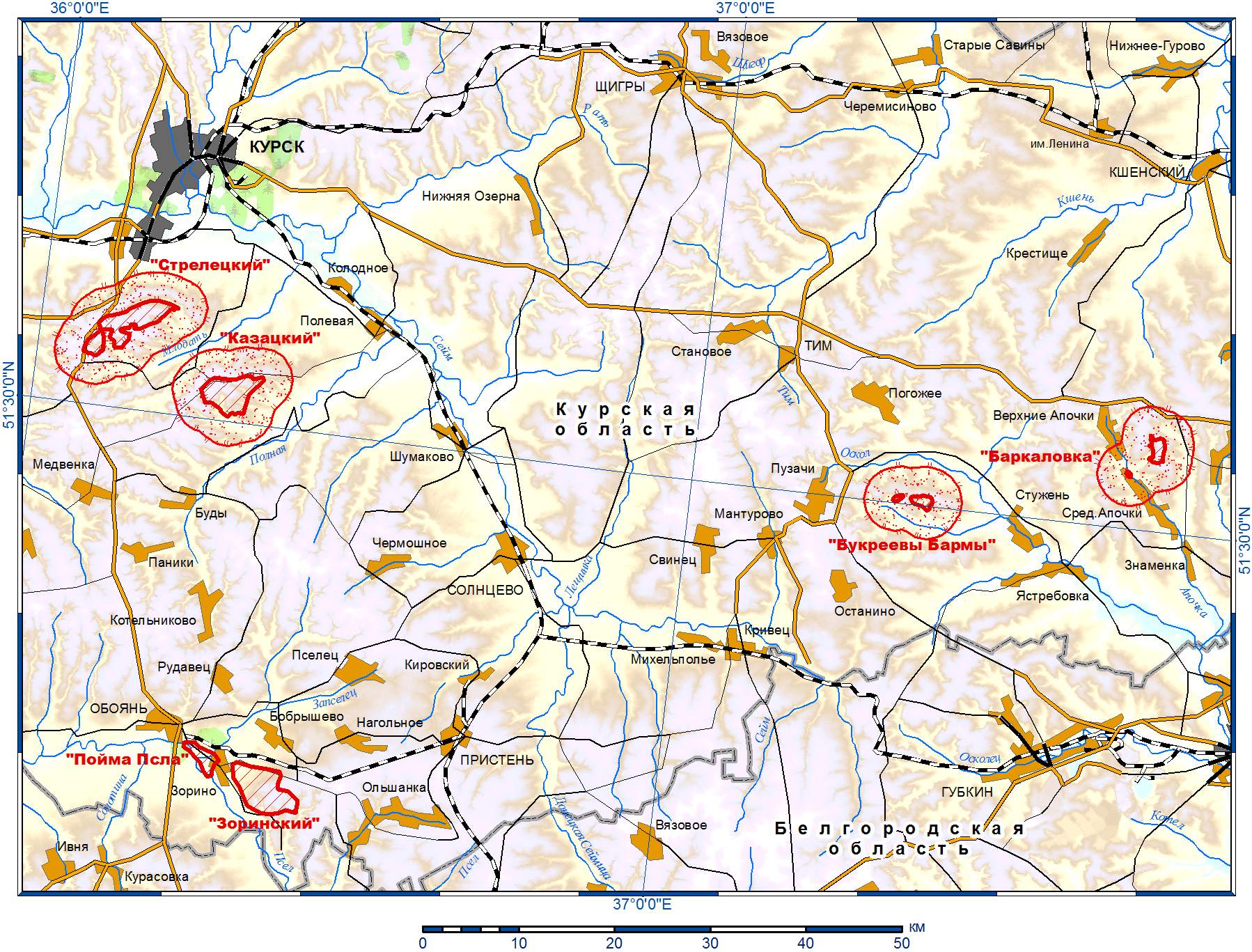
Table Russia Steppe Project Stakeholders[[14]](#footnote-14)

| **Stakeholders** | **Roles and responsibilities relevant to steppe ecosystem conservation and management.** |
| --- | --- |
| Regional Administrations/ Governments | Oversee resource use in local and regional lands. Establish and manage regional SPA and approve the designation and regulation of buffer zones. Often involved in supporting federal SPA. In the more developed regions may have environmental ministries or directorates with staff and budget. |
| **Kursk Oblast** |  |
| 1) Committee for Natural Resources and Environment Protection | Responsible for managing all regional protected areas that are potential partners for the federal SPA in Kursk Oblast. |
| **-**Department of environmental safety and nature use. | Control over regional PA functioning, species conservation at regional level, regional environmental legislation drafting and control over its compliance. |
| 2) Rosprirodnadzor regional department (federal) | Control over federal PA functioning. |
| **Kalmykia** |  |
| 1) Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment Protection and Energy Development | Regional environmental policy and legislation, species protection and biodiversity conservation. Establishment and operation of regional level SPA. |
| 2) Ministry of Agriculture and Land Relations Development | Land use regulations, implementation of regional policy for agricultural development. Participate in oversight of land-use regulation on agricultural lands and their conversion into other categories under the Land Code. |
| 3) Rosprirodnadzor Kalmykia (federal) | Control over protection functions assigned at a federal level, control over federal PA activities, control over land re-cultivation processes. |
| 4) Department of Federal Land Registration Service for Republic of Kalmykia | Land cadastre, land tenure, land-use planning and control, control over landuse legislation compliance. |
| **Orenburg** |  |
| 1) Orenburg Legislative Assembly | Drafting of legislation. |
| 2) Committee for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection | Responsible for managing and financing all regional protected areas that are potential partners for the federal SPA in Orenburg. |
| 3) Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Food and Manufacturing Industry | Develops regional agricultural policy and legislation. Regulates use of agricultural lands including grazing lands (i.e. steppes) strongly affecting all regional SPA and buffer zone of federal SPA (Orenburgsky Zapovednik). Responsible for wildlife and game management and forestry. Specially authorized to manage species listed in Red Data Book of Russia. |
| 4) Rosprirodnadzor Orenburg (federal) | Control over nature protection activities, biodiversity conservation, regional PA establishment and functioning, forests. |
| 5) Rosselkhoz regional department (federal). | Control over land use regulations compliance, hunting, reintroduction of species. |
| **Zabaikalksy Krai(Dauria)** |  |
| 1) Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of Zabaikalsky Krai (under the auspices of regional Government) | Nature resource management, environment protection, relevant legislation compliance, information management.  Facilitates and oversees the ecological expertise (EIA) process required for PA establishment or reorganization. |
| - State Institution “United Directory of Biological Zakazniks of Zabaikalsky Krai” (under MNRE of Zabaikalsky Krai) | Regional SPA management, arrangement of their protection, activities on SPA regime compliance, implementation of biotechnical activities, monitoring of wild life objects number. |
| **-** State Service of Protection, Control and Regulating of Wild Life Objects Use of Zabaikalsky Krai (under the MRNE) | Control of legislation compliance in the field of game wildlife protection. Control of regional SPA activity, wild life users; monitoring of population, implementation of activities on reproduction and habitat conservation. |
| 2) Ministry of Agriculture of Zabaikalsky Krai | Planning of agricultural lands use; establishment, protection and utilization of the state biological zakazniks of Krai significance; proposing on reservation of lands, which are supposed to be declared as the state biological zakazniks of Krai significance, and on limitation of economic activity within their borders. |
| 3) Rosprirodnadzor Zabaikalsky Krai (federal) | Control over biodiversity conservation activities, forest protection, species population status. Monitoring. Forest control (including forest fires), control over implementation of measures to improve soil fertility, control over changes in landuse categories, pollution control. |
| **SPA** |  |
| 1) “Daursky” Zapovednik &Biosphere Reserve (Zabaikalsky krai) | Initiation of process of and preparation of background environmental-economic documentation for expanding of there serve area, establishment of the federal zakaznik “Dzeren Valley”; participation in the development and implementation of programs for restoration of extinct ungulates and bird species of Daurian steppe eco-region; participation in activities to assess the impact of climate change on biodiversity and agriculture; implementation of model and demo projects on introduction of adaptive management mechanisms. |
| 2) “Chiornye Zemli” (Black Lands) Zapovednika & Biosphere Reserve and other SPA (Kalmykia) | Conservation and study of biological diversity within the Reserve area and its protection zone. Environmental awareness and educational activity at areas adjacent to the Reserve. |
| 3) Central-Chernozem Zapovednik and Biosphere Reserve (Kursk oblast) | Protection of some of the last remaining virgin “black soil” steppe regions of Russia; Emphasis on scientific studies, including maintenance of Annals of Nature; ecological monitoring; participation in environmental impact assessments; environmental awareness and education; preparation of scientific personnel and specialists in the field of environment protection. |
| 4) “Orenburgsky” Zapovednik (Orenburg oblast) | Development and implementation of demonstration projects aimed at establishment of effective steppe SPA management. |
| **Scientific Institutions.** |  |
| Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) Institutes and Regional Branches. | Severtsov’ Institute of Ecology and Evolution and Institute of Geography in Moscow, Zoological and Botanical Institutes in St. Petersburg, Institute of Ecology of Volga R. Basin in Togliatti, Institute of Ecology of Mountain Areas, Precaspian Institute of Biological Resources in Makhachkala, Institute of Water and Ecological Problems in Barnaul, Institute of Animal Ecology and Systematics and Central Siberian Botanical Garden in Novosibirsk, Baikal Joint Institute of Nature Management in Ulan-Ude, Institute of Geography in Irkutsk, Tuvinian Institute of Complex Development of Natural Resources in Kyzyl. |
| The Steppe Institute (also under the RAS) | Russia’s only academic institute dedicated to steppe studies, The Steppe Institute is affiliated with the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and has been a leader in steppe ecosystem studies for many years. With experts in a range of ecological and environmental disciplines, the Institute provides expert support to regional and federal conservation efforts and resource management. |
| Universities | Moscow State University, St. Petersburg, Saratov, Voronezh, Tomsk, Irkutsk State Universities, Southern Federal University in Rostov on Don, Bashkirian State University in Ufa, Altai State University in Barnaul. |
| Zabaikalsky State Humanitarian Pedagogical University; Chita Institute of Natural Resources (CINR of SB RAS); Chita State Technical University; Institute of Natural Resources, Ecology and Cryology of SB RAS; | Informational support, provision of baseline and monitoring. Other Zabaikalsky krai academic institutions: Zabaikalsky Agricultural Academy; A. N. Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution (SEVIN) of RAS; Komarov Botanical Institute of RAS. |
| Kalmykian State University and Natural Mathematics Institute | Informational support. Monitoring of landscape and biological diversity. Active in environmental and ecological issues in Kalmykia, the University is a potential source of new staff for SPA. |
| Kalmykian Institute of Integrated Arid Areas Studies | Develops integrated socio-economic and legal studies and scientific programs on the rational use of natural resources in the RoK. Studies biodiversity conservation and rational use of natural resources of the region aimed at conservation of etalon steppe and semi-steppe ecosystems. Environmental monitoring and study of arid ecosystem health. |
| Kalmykian Scientific Research Institute of Agriculture (of RAS); Institute of Integrated Arid Areas Studies | Improvement of technologies of prevention of Chiornye Zempli desertification; propaganda of scientific knowledge and best practices in the aforementioned areas. |
| Kursk State University; Kursk State Agricultural Academy; All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Agriculture and Soil Protection from Erosion. | Training of specialists in ecology; addressing of ecological problems of protection of water and vegetation resources of multiple use, melioration, land conservation and reclamation. |
| Institute of Steppes of UB RAS | Development of ecological-economic justification and background materials for SPA (traditional and new forms), their monitoring, scientific support for PA management. Development of mechanisms for establishing SPA under conditions of modern land use. |
| Kursk State Oblast History Museum; Chita Oblast History Museum | Scientific research, education, methodological support for environmental protection, study of oblast biodiversity. Education, strengthening of its role in the development of SPA, development of all forms of tourism for Kursk grasslands. Chita: Activities on information dissemination. |
| **Municipalities:** |  |
| Municipal administrations of Chita oblast districts | Promotion in inventory of steppe areas. |
| Gorshechensky district Administration - Kurskoblast | Assistance in interaction with land users under the establishment of new regional SPA. |
| Orenburg Oblast; SolIletsky, Beliaevsky, Akbulaksky, and Kuvandyksky district Administrations. | Promotion in formal registration of steppe SPA, wide participation of heads of local and district municipal entities in marketing of eco-friendly production of adaptive cattle-breeding. Development of adaptive steppe cattle-breeding, including horse-breeding. |
| **NGOs.** |  |
| WWF Russia | WWF-Russia has been active in promoting the expansion of Russia’s protected area system for many years. Recently, at the request of the MNRE, WWF has developed a report entitled, “National PA Development Plan up to 2020.” More than 120 of the suggested locations for new national PA contain steppe ecosystems. Gathers, analyses and publishes information on SPA; maintains long-term cooperation with particular SPA (Daursky Zapovednik). |
| Wetlands International, Russia office | Maintains a database on the important wetlands that are within either existing or planned SPA. |
| Biodiversity Conservation Centre (NGO) | Maintains a web-based resource on federal strictly protected nature areas in Russia. |
| Siberian Environmental Center (Sibecocenter, NGO) | Publishes one Russian-language periodical specially devoted to steppe conservation, restoration, and sustainable use. Elaborated Steppe conservation strategy for Russian NGOs (partnering with BCC). Maintains a database on steppe related institutions and experts. Monitors changes in national legislation for impacts on steppe areas. Collects data on the most valuable steppe tracts (nationally) and field monitors some in Altai region. Species program on some globally vulnerable steppe species like Pallas cat and Saker. Based in Novosibirsk. |
| Foundation for the Revival of Orenburg Steppes | Regional NGO based in Orenburg. Responsible for managing Tarpon Park on a 49-year lease from the Federal Agency for State Property. |
| **International Stakeholders:** |  |
| **Kazakhstan** |  |
| - Forestry& Hunting Committee, MoA (Akmola, Aktyubinsk, Kostanai, Pavlodar, Karaganda, and East Kazakhstan) | Makes recommendations, develops legislation, approves studies, manages PA, and cooperates internationally. It is currently executing a UNDP/GEF funded project on steppe conservation and management. |
| Association for Biodiversity Conservation (ACBK) | The largest conservation NGO in Kazakhstan and runs several conservation programmes and projects focused on steppe ecosystems. |
| **Mongolia** |  |
| - Ministry of Nature and Environment (Department of Protected Area Management | Responsible for all of Mongolia’s protected areas, the MNE is also responsible for wildlife management outside of protected areas. |
| Mongol Daguur strictly protected area, Dornod Aimag (Mongolian part of DIPA) | The strictly protected area in the Mongolian part of the Daurian steppe. Is located opposite the Russian Daursky Zapovednik. |

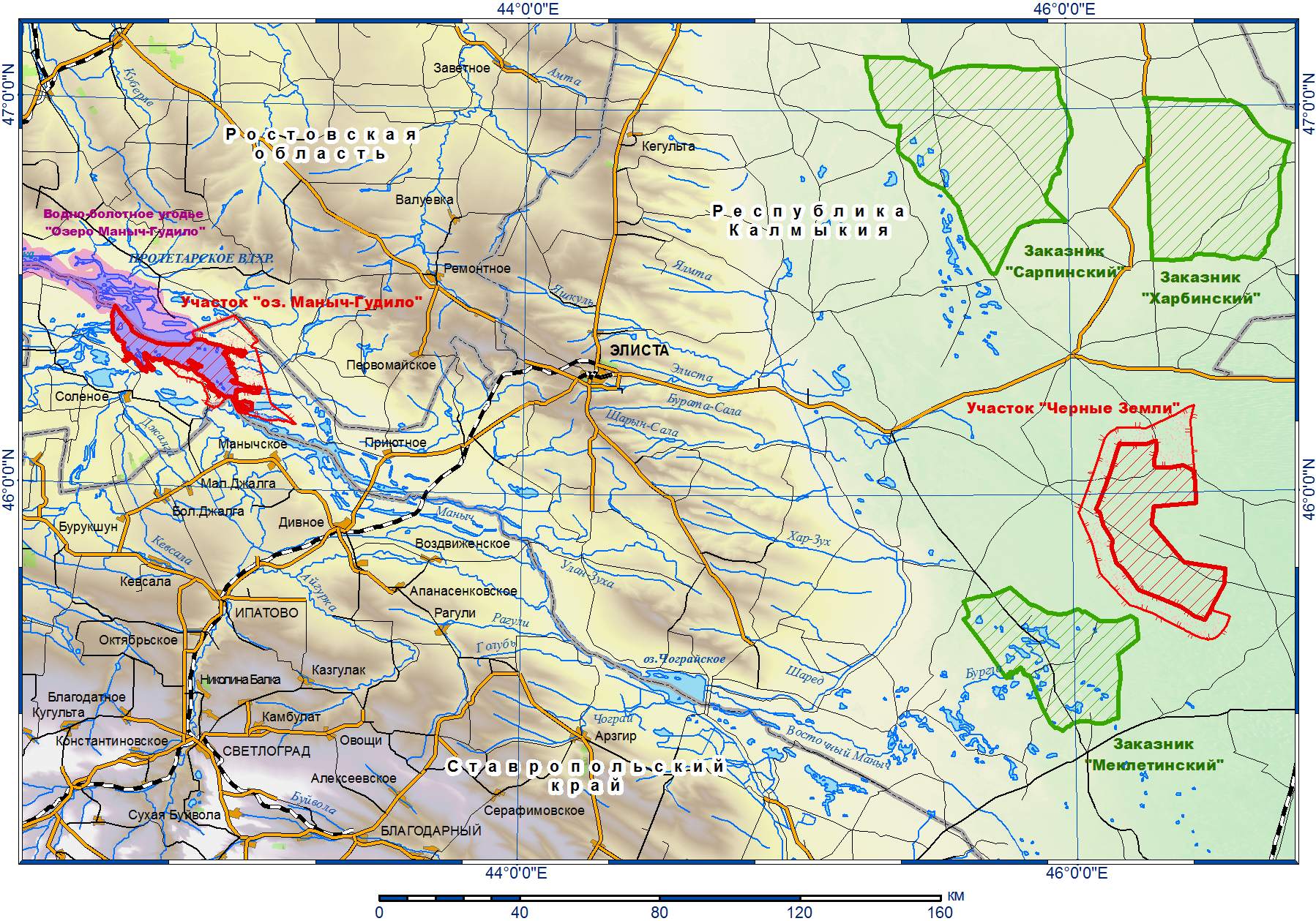
## Annex 6: Russia Steppe Project Pilot Region Characteristics and Maps (west to east)

| **Pilot Site** | **Demo value; Barrier removal; threat mitigation.** | **Biodiversity values** | **Significance of SPA within overall network** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Kalmykia** Pilot zapovednik: Chernye Zemli Zapovednik (CZZ) 121,482 ha core; 91,170 buffer | - Piloting sustainable grazing practices & collaborative management of rare, large ungulate (saiga).  - Monitoring partnership with local groups, regional academic institutes;  - Piloting bird-safe power line platforms. | - The best representation of dry and desert steppe of Pontic steppe region.  - Home to Russia’s only population of Saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*).  - Biosphere Reserve  - Ramsar site. | - Largest steppe zapovednik within SPA network offers useful context to demonstrate value of SPA;  - UNESCO Biosphere Reserve;  - Southern-most SPA in Russia; |
| **Kursk** Pilot zapovednik:  Centralno Chernozemniy Zapovednik (CCZ)  5,287 ha core; 28,662 buffer | - Integrated Fire Management;  - Monitoring partnership;  - Piloting small-scale steppe PA conservation practices.  - Agricultural landscape is primary context for expanding network.  - Steppe restoration pilot area. | - Meadow steppe (least dry) of Pontic steppe sector (similar to tall grass prairie in North America)  Last virgin meadow steppe with black earth soils “chernozem” in Russia, existing only in PA.  Unique moderate latitude species diversity with more than 80 species of vascular plants per 1 km2, including endemic and relic species of global significance (IUCN Red Book, Bern Convention): *Androsace kozo-poljanskii, Cotoneaster alaunicus, Schivereckia podolica, Hyssopus cretaceous, Scrophularia cretacea.* | - Oldest and most well-known SPA in Russia, created in 1935.  - UNESCO Biosphere Reserve;  - One of the smallest SPA, it is truly an island in a sea of agricultural land, posing interesting challenges to long-term management effectiveness. |
| **Orenburg**. Pilot zapovednik:  Orenburgskiy Zapovednik (OZ) (21,653 ha core; 12,208 ha buffer) ha | - Potential for future transboundary steppe conservation initiatives with Kazakhstan.  - Piloting incentives for steppe restoration and conservation of steppes on abandoned farmland and non-traditional SMSA for conservation and sustainable use. | - Genuine and dry steppe of Trans Volga-Kazakh steppe sector.  - Forbs and bunchgrass steppes of Kazakh steppe region.  - IBA harbors rare species of: Imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) & Steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), Great bustard western subspecies (*Otis tarda tarda*). | - One of the oldest SPA zapovedniks in Russia in one of the least protected steppe zones of Russia. |
| **Zabaikalsky Krai** Daurian Steppe; Daurski Zapovednik (DZ) (45,790 ha core; 163,530 ha buffer**)** | - Demonstration of cooperation with the authorities (Border Service, MNRE, MOA) in the field of steppe biological resources conservation.  - Incorporating climate change adaptation strategies into long-term PA management practices. | - Daurian steppe: Global 200 Ecoregion #95.  - Far Eastern Steppe region; *Stipa* dominated mountain forbe bunch-grass and floodplain meadow steppe.  - Only home of globally sig-nificant Mongolian gazelle in Russia (dzeren – *Procapra gutturosa*);  - Torey Lakes IBA: Eastern Great Bustard (*Otis tarda dubowskii*))(66% of global population), Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoides*)(75%), White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*)(29%), Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonenss*) (13%); Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) (37%), Relict Gull (*Larus relictus*)(20%), Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*)(13%), Asiatic Dowitcher (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*)(2%). | - Only steppe PA in Russia that is engaged in transboundary conservation work (Mongolia and China). This holds significant lessons for SPA in other border regions.  - UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.  - Different steppes of Eastern steppe sector: mountainous *Filifolium sibiricum* steppe, mountain forbs-bunchgrass, Leymus dominated bunchgrass in valleys, *Stipa* bunchgrass steppes, floodplain meadow grass-lands/shrubs, salt lakes. |

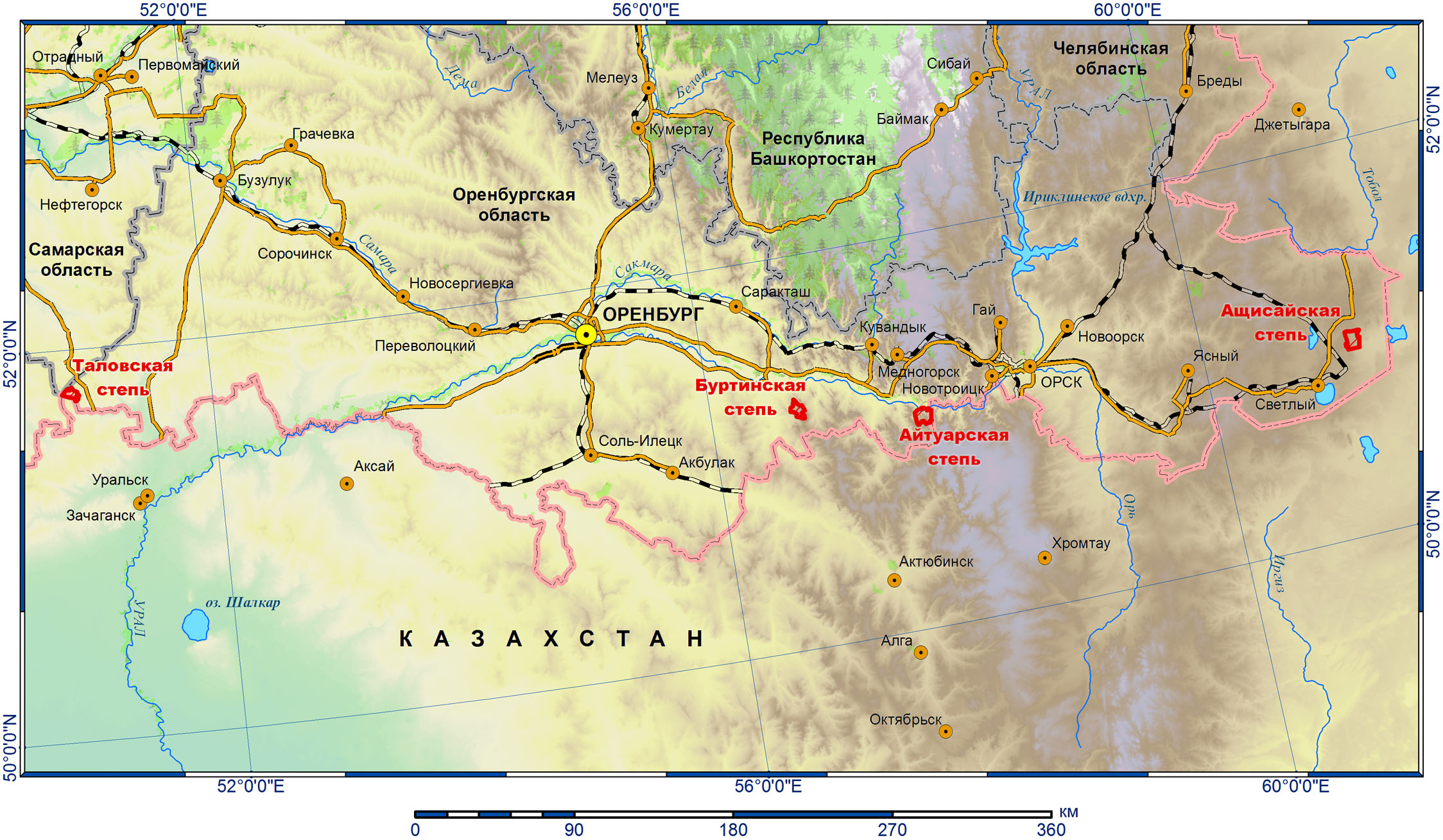
**Kursk Oblast – Centralno Chernozemniy Zapovednik**

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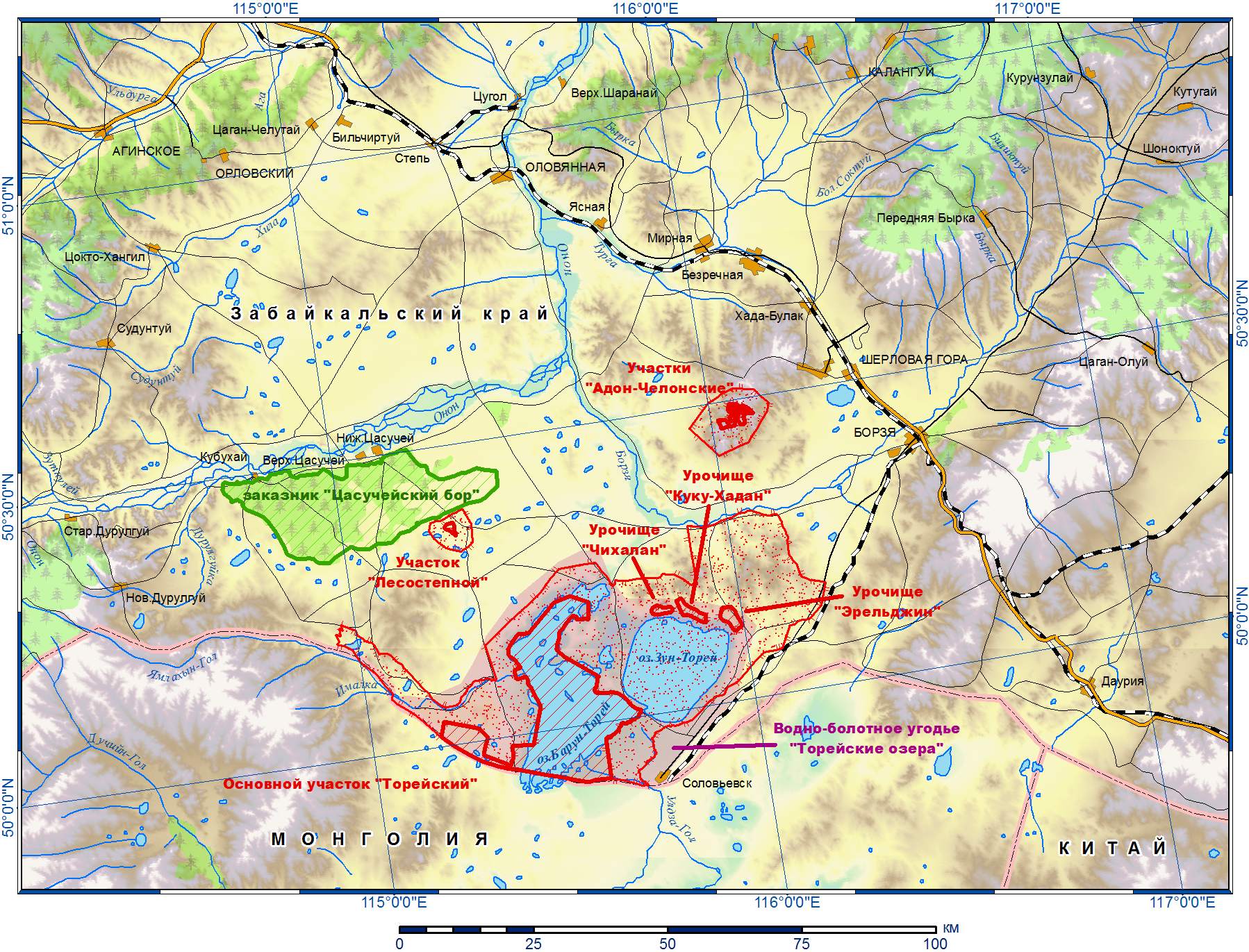
**Kalmykia Republic – Chernye Zemli Zapovednik**

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**Orenburg Oblast – Orenburgskiy Zapovednik**

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**Zabaikalsky Krai – Daurski Zapovednik (Daurian steppe)**

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## Annex 7: Russia Steppe Project Results Framework Mid-term Evaluation Assessment

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Results Framework Assessment Key** | | |
| *Green = Achieved* | *Yellow = Partially Achieved* | *Red = Not Achieved* | *Gray = Unknown* |

Bright green highlights are edits to the logframe compared to the inception report version.

| **Description** | **Description of Indicator** | **Baseline Level** | **Mid-term Target** | **End of Project** | **Self-reported Results (2013 PIR)** | **MTE Assessment** | **MTE Revision Suggestions** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Objective: To develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling, tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome | Area of steppe area under protection expanded. | 1,834,161 ha  Note: Baseline value is incorrect for some reason. Correct is 2,068,829 ha, including buffer zones. | 2,395,561 ha  Inaccurate target value. Correct is 2,630,229 ha. | 2,701,561 ha  Inaccurate target value. Correct is 2,936,229 ha. | 1,784,349 ha  Inaccurate target value. Correct is 2,346,576 ha. | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. Indicator/target requires additional revision. | See discussion below under “Area of consolidated new SPA”. |
|  |  | (+ 561,400 ha) | (+ 867,400 ha) | (+ 277,747 ha) |  |  |
|  |  | - Area of consolidated new SPA: 306,400 ha. | - Area of consolidated new SPA: 496,200 ha. | - Area of consolidated new SPA: 0 ha  (51,683 ha under formation). | Concur with self-reported results. Not yet achieved. Indicator/target requires additional revision. | The baseline and target figures for this indicator should be revised to reflect the fact that the three zakazniks in Kalmykia were consolidated with the Chernye Zemli Zapovednik in the very early stages of the project. The PPG phase of the steppe project did contribute to this process (as the PPG was itself a two year, $350,000 USD effort), but as the consolidation decision was reached prior to the implementation of the actual full-size steppe project, it is incorrect for the FSP to count the hectares of the three zakazniks under increased protection as a measure of success for this project. At this stage, a more relevant indicator for the success of the project would be the increase in METT score for these three zakazniks.  Alternatively, the project team could provide a detailed explanation in the PIR about exactly how the PPG for the project was the catalyst for and contributed to this consolidation process.  It is recognized that this may result in a decrease in the total hectares of expanded PAs that the project will be able to take credit for compared to the target figure proposed at project approval. It should be clearly articulated in the PIR or other management documents that this decrease was not due to any shortcoming of the project, but rather due a change in baseline circumstances that occurred prior to project implementation. This should be evident from the absolute number of total hectares of steppe PAs at the end of the project. |
|  |  | - Additional area new SPA created 240,000 ha | - Additional area new SPA created 305,200 ha | - Additional area new SPA created 261,453 ha | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator/target requires additional revision. | The project team should make adjustments in this indicator in combination with the above indicator of “consolidated new SPA” to ensure that the hectares for Dolina Dzerena are counted under one category only, not both. |
|  |  | - Enabling environment created for new SPA: 5,000 ha. | - Enabling environment created for new SPA: 30,000 ha. | - Enabling environment created for new SPA: 16,294 ha. | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. Indicator/target requires additional revision. | It is not clear what is meant by “enabling environment created or new SPA” (project designers don’t recall the intention of this specification).  This category of hectares should be consolidated under one of the previous two categories: i) area of consolidated SPAs, or ii) additional area of new SPA created. |
|  |  | - SMSA covering 10,000 ha | - SMSA covering 36,000 ha | - SMSA covering 0 ha | Concur with self-reported results. Not yet achieved. Indicator/target requires additional revision. | A significant portion of the originally intended target has been shifted to the above categories, as the government decided to formalize the PA status of the Orenburg site. It was otherwise anticipated that the project would be able to secure an additional 20,000 hectares of territory under SMSA status. This activity has progressed slowly and has not born significant fruit by the mid-term. In addition, it appears that the opportunities for achieving a kind of SMSA demonstration would be dependent on specific private landowner characteristics and would not be highly replicable. This indicator, along with Output 2.5 relating to SMSAs, should be dropped. |
| Indirect impact on improved management effectiveness in 1.9 million hectares of SPA through METT Score. | (see scores below) |  | **+ 40 - 50%** |  |  | The rationale for the 40-50% target should be clearly articulated – for example, that this target was identified based on UNDP and the MNRE’s previous years of experience using the METT in GEF projects in Russia, and is based on the project’s feasible contribution to reaching the level of METT score necessary for steppe PAs to achieve their biodiversity conservation objectives.  The indirect impact on management effectiveness for other steppe PAs should either be moved to Outcome 2, or at least the “direct” impact METT scores for the four pilot areas should be included at the objective level. Considering increases in the METT scores for PAs indirectly influenced by the project is a tenuous measure of project success, as most likely a range of other factors would have much more significant influence on the METT scores for these PAs. Nonetheless, increasing management effectiveness of all steppe PAs should continue to be a goal of the project, and METT scores for these PAs is most likely the most feasible indicator for assessing this result. |
| **Zapovedniks -**  Belogorye - 52 Galichya Gora - 45  Privolzhskaya Lesostep - 56 Rostovskiy - 67 Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 51 | **Zapovedniks -** Belogorye - 65  Galichya Gora – 60  Privolzhskaya Lesostep – 70  Rostovskiy - 70  Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 60 | **Zapovedniks -** Belogorye – 90  Galichya Gora – 90  Privolzhskaya Lesostep – 96  Rostovskiy - 73  Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina – 74 | **Zapovedniks -** Belogorye - 59  Galichya Gora - 56  Privolzhskaya Lesostep - 63  Rostovskiy – 73  Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 62 | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. METT indicators/targets require clarification. | The target values should be recalculated to actually reflect the 40-50% range, as some of the target values appear to have been miscalculated relative to the 40-50% target. For example, for the first PA, a 40% increase from the baseline value of 52 would be 73, not 90 (which would be nearly 40% from the mid-term target of 65). Galichya Gora should also be reduced to 63, Privolzhskaya Lesostep should be reduced to 73, and Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina should be reduced to 72. |
| National Parks Pribaikalskiy - 34 | **National Parks**  Pribaikalskiy - 40 | **National Parks**  Pribaikalskiy – 89 | **National Parks**  Pribaikalskiy - 53 | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. METT indicators/targets require additional clarification. | See above recommendation for revisions to the target value to accurately reflect the 40-50% target range. |
| Federal Zakazniks Kharbinskiy – 11 Mekletinskiy – 18 Sarpinskiy – 11 Saratovskiy – 9 Tsimlyanskiy – 12 | **Federal Zakazniks**  Kharbinskiy – 30  Mekletinskiy – 20  Sarpinskiy – 20  Saratovskiy – 9  Tsimlyanskiy -12 | **Federal Zakazniks**  Kharbinskiy – 51  Mekletinskiy – 55  Sarpinskiy – 51  Saratovskiy – 25  Tsimlyanskiy -25  + Dolina Dzerena – 67  Semenovsky – 47  Akzharskaya steppe – 11  Kuvayskaya steppe – 11  Nikolsky site - 11 | **Federal Zakazniks**  Kharbinskiy – 43  Mekletinskiy – 43  Sarpinskiy – 43  Saratovskiy – 24  Tsimlyanskiy -29  + Dolina Dzerena – 56  Semenovsky – 39  Akzharskaya steppe – 9  Kuvayskaya steppe – 9  Nikolsky site - 9 | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. METT indicators/targets require clarification. | See above recommendation for revisions to the target value to accurately reflect the 40-50% target range. |
| Number of SPA in Orenburg and Kursk pilots where feathergrass dominates.     Coverage of feathergrass on sampling sites (Orenburg/ Kursk). | 1 Federal PA (Central-Chernozem Reserve) consisting of 6 clusters in 4 of which feathergrass dominates.   No regional PAs.  Baseline on 4 sampling sites: Streletskaya steppe – 1-1,5%; Kazatskaya steppe fallow land – 7% Bukreevy Barmy – 15% Barkalovka – 9%. | Same or increased.  3 steppe nature monuments  Same. | Same or increased.     3 steppe nature monuments  Same. | Same.  2 steppe nature monuments are under formation (estimated completion time – 2013 and 2014)  Same. | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. Indicator requires additional clarification. | While feathergrass is a relevant ecotype in Orenburg, the specific sites referenced in the indicator are just for Kursk. The reference to Orenburg should be deleted.  The indicator is intended to show maintenance of or increase in ecosystem quality and quantity for feathergrass ecotypes in Kursk, which are typical of the project-targeted meadow steppe ecosystem in Kursk.  It should be specified that the target refers to the number of sites, as well as maintenance of the feathergrass coverage % at the sampling sites. Maintaining or increasing the baseline coverage is indicative of proper management (mowing, appropriate grazing levels, etc.) for the PAs specified.  The area of the sampling sites should be indicated, and the total area of PAs that the sampling sites are representing should be specified. |
| The number of sites where Spring adonis occurs (Kursk)    Density of adonis on sampling sites (Kursk) | 4 sites within Central-Chernozem Reserve; also sporadically occurs outside the PAs  Maximum density registered at Streletsky cluster (in areas used as pastures): 3-4 per m2;  For other areas does not exceed 1 per m2 | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of Long-Term Mean (LTM). | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of Long-Term Mean (LTM). | Stable (based on data from year 2012) | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires additional clarification. | The LTM should be more clearly specified in the baseline, as the current baseline figures only represent the level during the particular baseline sampling year, not the LTM (although this could be defined as the LTM if expert opinion supports such an assessment, if data on the LTM is not available).  The timeframe for the “long-term” mean should be specified – in 5 years prior to project? In 30 years prior? What is considered the ideal normative status for Adonis density?  It should be indicated that this indicator is for assessment of management effectiveness of 6,XXX hectares of 4 out of 6 plots of CCZ protected area. |
| Population # of little bustard and density/km2 during nesting season (Orenburg) and migration (Kalmykia) | Orenburg 2,000 Kalmykia 4,000 Density to be identified in year 1  Population data reassessed in year 1:  Orenburg 14,000-17,000  Kalmykia 609 (390-828)  Density identified in year 1:  Orenburg 0.1975 unit/km2 during nesting  Kalmykia 0.134 unit/km2 during migration | Stable or increasing. | Stable or increasing. | Data are to be obtained in May 2013 and processed by the end of June | Concur with self-reported results. Level not yet determined. Indicator requires additional clarification. | It should be clarified that this refers to the population in the entire area of the zapovedniks, not just within the zapovednik.  The target should be clarified that the population is stable or increasing over at least a 3-5 year period (or whatever period is considered appropriate by experts to reflect actual population trends), not just the population in the final year of the project. |
| Steppe Eagle - # and density/km2 during nesting season (Kalmykia / Orenburg / Dauria) and in migration (Kalmykia). | Kalmykia 500 pairs Orenburg 250 Dauria 125 Density to be identified in year 1.  Data from year 1:  Density during nesting  Kalmykia – 1.277 unit/100km2  Orenburg – 2.88/100km2 (2,26-3,68)  Dauria – 1.14/100km2 (0,83-1,56) | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | Kalmykia – no data  Dauria – no data  Orenburg – 289 pairs (233-345)  Density – 5.06 pairs/100km2 during nesting | Concur with self reported results. Unclear, but likely negative trend. Indicator requires clarification. | Given that there is actually no LTM baseline data available for these areas, the end of project target needs to be revised. According to expert opinion there is a negative population trend, in which case the project goal may simply be to slow or halt the rate of decline, but the overall targeted normative status should be at least a stable population (over a ~ 3 year period, or whatever timeframe is considered by experts necessary to assess population trends), so this should be the project goal, even if it will not be feasible by project completion.  It is recognized that it may not be possible to measure this indicator by the end of the project (or that project results may not yet have influenced the steppe eagle population), but it should be kept as a potential long-term ex-post impact indicator of project results. |
| Mongolian antelope in Daursky Zapovednik - population # and share of young in population. | 2,500 animals  35% young | 3,500 Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | 5,000 Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | 4550 (data from autumn 2012) - about 62% added to the baseline  32% of young in population | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires clarification. | Time period for “long-term mean” baseline value should be clearly specified – in the 3-5 years prior to the project? Project goal is an increasing population from project start, not necessarily achievement of a return to historical population (at least not by the end of the project).  The rationale for the absolute values indicated for the mid-term and end of project targets is not clear. The target should be revised (or clarified) as population increase in-line with natural population recruitment, with a maximum value of the estimated carrying capacity of the pilot area (10,000?).  Share of young in population seems to be unnecessary / duplicative – absolute population value over a minimum of 3 years should be sufficient to indicate population trend. |
| Saiga antelope in CZZ / Kalmykia – population # and share of males in population. | 15,000 animals 6% males | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | 10000 (beginning of 2012) – 67% decline from the baseline  7.2% are males (estrum 2011 / 2012) – about 20% added to the baseline | Concur with self-reported results. Not achieved. Indicator requires clarification. | Time period for “long-term mean” baseline value should be clearly specified – in the 3-5 years prior to the project? Project goal is an increasing (or at least ~stable) population from project start, not necessarily achievement of a return to historical population (at least not by the end of the project).  Census timing and methodology should be specified in PIR results to clarify the shifts in male % of population during the year.  It should also be clarified that even though mainly males are being killed, the natural recruitment of males is adequate to increase the % of males in the population even though the overall population is decreasing.  It should also be specified that the natural % of males in the population is 25-30%, and this would be the desired normative status long-term goal for this indicator. |
| Manul in Zabaikalsky Krai | 2500 animals  (including 200 animals in Daurian Reserve) | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. | 80 animals in Dauria Reserve (beginning of 2012) – 60% decrease from the baseline | Concur with self-reported results. Not achieved. Indicator requires clarification. | There can be significant natural stochastic variance in the population due to the cat’s dependence on the Siberian vole (pika), which can also have significant natural population swings. Therefore the target should be clarified as being for a stable or increasing long-term population trend (over at least 3 years), and/or + / - 50% of the LTM at project completion.  Due to the challenges with the baseline data, the indicator should be revised to include both the population in the region overall, and the population inside the reserve. |
| Outcome 1: Consolidation and expansion of SPA system. | Area of SPA in the process of establishment and established. | 561,400 hectares | 561,400 hectares | 867,400 hectares | Around 830,000 ha currently. | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires clarification, see comments under objective level indicators. | In reporting on this indicator the project should clearly distinguish between hectares of PAs “established” and those still in the process of establishment.  It would help if the rationale for the target were clarified in terms of the long-term goal for steppe PA coverage and how the target for the project was proposed. |
| Area/share (# ha) of regional-level PA correctly documented per the Land Code (surveyed, PA regime entered in the Property Register & State Register of Immovable Property Rights and Transactions). | Kursk: 0 ha | Kursk: at least 200 ha | Kursk: at least 3,000 ha | Kursk: 200 ha (one nature monument is under formation) | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires clarification, see comments under objective level indicators. | No specific revisions suggested, though it would help if the rationale for the target value were specified/clarified. |
| Kalmykia: 0 | Kalmykia: at least 102,500 ha (not regional) | Kalmykia: at least 200,000 ha (not regional) | Kalmykia: 46,2325 (3 federal reserves) | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. Indicator requires clarification, see comments under objective level indicators. | No specific revisions suggested, though it would help if the rationale for the target value were specified/clarified. |
| Orenburg: 0 | Orenburg: at least 5,000 ha | Orenburg: at least 20,000 ha | Orenburg: 32,794 ha (new site of the Orenburg reserve, 3 nature monuments) | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires clarification, see comments under objective level indicators. | No specific revisions suggested, though it would help if the rationale for the target value were specified/clarified. |
| Dauria: 0 | Dauria: at least 250,000 ha | Dauria: at least 500,000 ha | Dauria: 263,838 ha (1 federal and one regional refuges) | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires clarification, see comments under objective level indicators. | No specific revisions suggested, though it would help if the rationale for the target value were specified/clarified. |
| # of ha of steppe ecosystems conserved under contractual conditions or other obligations, without direct government involvement. | 0 | 10,000 | 36,000 | 0 | Concur with self-reported results. Not achieved. Indicator requires revision. | This relates to the project activity on SMSAs, and the evaluation recommends this indicator be dropped, along with corresponding Output 2.5. |
| # of possessors of land ownership rights (farmers and/or subsurface users) that have undertaken voluntary obligations to conserve steppe | 0 | At least 2 | At least 5 by EoP | 0 | Concur with self-reported results. Not achieved. Indicator requires revision. | This relates to the project activity on SMSAs, and the evaluation recommends this indicator be dropped, along with corresponding Output 2.5. |
| # of draft regulatory acts submitted to a legislative branch and # of standard-setting initiatives formally entered on govt agenda. | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 drafts are submitted to the Legislative Assembly of the Orenburg region, and 1 – to the State Duma of RF  Drafts submitted to executive authorities:  Kursk region – 1,  Orel region – 1,  Orenburg region – 2. | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires clarification. | It should be clarified in reporting on this indicator that these are amendments to legislation, not full original laws. A sense of the significance of these amendments should also be given when reporting on this indicator – the number of legal amendments is an output based indicator rather than a results-focused indicator; the number of draft regulatory acts the project supports doesn’t give any information on outcome level results that may contribute to steppe conservation. The specific barriers that these amendments are addressing should be discussed in reporting on this indicator. According to the project team, the main barrier is that there is no legal framework specifically for protection of “steppe” ecosystems (like there is for forests), and these amendments are focused, in various ways in addressing this issue. If all amendments are adopted it would be a significant result, though it is not optimistic that all amendments will be adopted. In addition, it is not anticipated that the project will be able to catalyze changes in federal legislation, which would be even more significant. |
| Outcome 2: SPA know how for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened. | Direct impact on improved effectiveness in pilot sites = improved management in 489,782 ha through METT Score. | Centralno-Cherno -53 | Centralno-Cherno - 65 | Centralno-Cherno - 79 | Centralno-Cherno - 67 | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires revision. | The METT scores for the project’s pilot PAs, which relate to the project’s direct impact, should be moved to the objective level of the logframe.  Overall, the METT scores should be calculated as a percentage of points achieved out of the applicable questions in the METT, as not all questions are relevant to the project’s PAs, and thus in terms of absolute value, the METT scores will never reach the full value – Please see the official METT completion guidance.  This evaluation also recommends that the METT scores for the PAs that are directly linked with the pilot PAs (i.e. Dolina Dzerena in Dauria, the 3 federal zakazniks with CZZ in Kalmykia, etc.) should be included in the indicator line under the project’s “direct” influence, rather than indirect.  The METT score target for Orenburg should be revised to be inline with the 40%-50% range increase for the other PAs, which would equate to a target of approximately 75. For all METT score targets however, it is preferred if the target is set based on a rationalized analysis of the METT for each PA to assess reasonable and achievable goals by the end of the project (this actually appears to be the case for the original target METT scores, as the target scores do not conform to a single % increase calculation).  Considering that Dauria has already surpassed the target, it could be worthwhile to set a new, more ambitious target to achieve by the end of the project, to ensure that progress continues. This is at the discretion of the project team and the Dauria local coordinator however. |
| Chernye Zemli - 42 | Chernye Zemli - 55 | Chernye Zemli - 67 | Chernye Zemli - 56 |
| Orenburgskiy - 52 | Orenburgskiy - 65 | Orenburgskiy - 90 | Orenburgskiy - 65 |
| Daurskiy - 49 | Daurskiy – 64 | Daurskiy - 75 | Daurskiy – 78 |
| # of IFM adopted by SPA by end of project. | 0 | At least 1 pilot PA | Four pilots plus 3 other SPA = 7 IFM adopted. | IFM plan for Orenburg reserve is to be finalized in 2013 | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. Indicator requires revision. | This task has turned out to be significantly more complex than originally anticipated, and the target is much too ambitious. The project team and technical experts estimate that it takes ~1 year to develop an IFM for an individual PA region.  With so much required effort, it is necessary to ensure that this process has value before it is significantly scaled up. Thus, this evaluation recommends this indicator target be revised to “1 IFM demonstration through full implementation.” A replication indicator should be added as “Number of steppe PA management authorities that have formally discussed the potential use and development of an IFM” with a proposed target of “6”, to correspond to the original logframe target of 7 IFMs. It is expected that to catalyze potential replication in other PAs, following the demonstration experience in Orenburg, a local stakeholder representative (i.e. relevant PA staff member) would present the results (effectiveness of IFM, or not…) of the Orenburg experience to other PAs. In addition, the project should produce (and disseminate) a generalized knowledge document on the process for development an IFM, based on the lessons and experience gained in Orenburg. |
| % reduction in area swept by ecologically & economically destructive grassland fires within pilot PA during hazardous seasons April/May– Sept/Oct. | Centralno-Cherno – 100 ha/yr (2,1%)  Chernye Zemli – 17500 ha/yr (15%)  Orenburgskiy – 3200 ha/yr (15%) Daurskiy – 2300 ha/yr (15% of terrestrial area) | 15% reduction | 50% reduction by EoP | Centralno-Cherno – <10 ha/yr (0,2%)  Chernye Zemli – 340 ha/yr (0,2%)  Orenburgskiy – 3200 ha/yr (stable)  Daurskiy – 2500 ha/yr (2012, stable) | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved, but depends on annual climatic conditions. | No revisions suggested, though it would be helpful if reporting on this indicator discussed the expert-analyzed level of appropriate natural annual average fire coverage as a % for each of the reserves (considering that fire is a natural and important element of ecosystem health, at appropriate levels). |
| # of SPA incorporating sustainable grazing best practice into their management regime for steppe areas. | 1 | At least two pilots. | At least three pilots. | 1 | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. | No revisions suggested. |
| # of hectares involved in rehabilitation and restoration activities in/around SPA | 0 | At least 10,000 ha of grassland habitat under rehabilitation in selected sites | At least 10,000 ha of grassland habitat under rehabilitation in selected sites | 0 | Concur with self-reported results. Not achieved. Indicator requires revision. | Recommended to delete indicator. Project has supported initial testing of restoration activities and found low cost-effectiveness. Restoration of 10,000 ha would be far too ambitious for the project resources and not a cost-effective use of project budget. Testing restoration techniques in small demonstration plots was a useful exercise, but further work on financing restoration can be canceled (under Output 2.2) as it has been demonstrated that restoration is far less cost-effective than investing in securing PA status for steppe ecosystems still in good condition. |
| Outcome 3. Strengthened SPA system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice. | The share of SPA area with management regime updated to include steppe ecosystem conservation priorities. | 1 | At least 4 of 15 SPA. | 7 of 15 SPA. | 8 SPAs – 4 pilot reserves and 4 refuges managed by them | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires clarification. | This indicator needs to be clarified and specified – as it is, it is not clear what it is referring to, and why it is important or why it matters. How will such changes improve steppe PA management?  Perhaps revise to something like “Steppe PA management by-laws and regulations revised to include steppe-specific context, and eliminate non-steppe relevant regulations.” |
| MNRE SPA Capacity Scorecard | (see categories and scores below) | n/a | (see categories and scores below) | n/a | Mid-term scorecard assessment not yet completed. | No specific revisions suggested, though the project should carry out a mid-term assessment of the scorecard to consider its practical utility in meeting SMART criteria as an indicator of project results. |
| Policy formulation  Systemic  Institutional | Policy Formulation 3 / 6 2 / 3 | n/a | Policy Formulation 5 / 6 2 / 3 | n/a |  |
| Implementation  Systemic  Institutional   Individual | Implementation 3 / 9 10 / 27 6 / 12 | n/a | Implementation 7 / 9 20 / 27  8 / 12 | n/a |  |
| Engagement & consensus  Systemic  Institutional   Individual | Eng. & consensus 3 / 6 2 / 6 1 / 3 | n/a | Eng. & consensus 5 / 6 4 / 6 2 / 3 | n/a |  |
| Info & knowledge  Systemic  Institutional   Individual | Info & knowledge 2 / 3 2 / 3 1 / 3 | n/a | Info & knowledge 3 / 3 3 / 3 2 / 3 | n/a |  |
| Monitoring  Systemic  Institutional   Individual | Monitoring 3 / 6 2 / 6 1 / 3 | n/a | Monitoring 4 / 6 4 / 6 2 / 3 | n/a |  |
| % improvement of SPA staff understanding of key steppe issues (grazing, fire, species conservation, agricultural context) before/after training. | TBD at beginning of each training workshop | At least + 25% in scoring at end of each training workshop | At least + 25% in scoring at end of each training workshop | At least + 50% in scoring at end of each training workshop | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Additional indicators suggested. | Recommended to revise to conduct follow-up survey with training participants six months after training to assess if/how knowledge is actually applied in professional duties.  Recommendation on project workplan to develop more training modules based on capacity needs identified through the completed PA management audits.  Recommendation on project workplan to conduct domestic study tours with relevant regional government officials to increase understanding of steppe PA management issues (and document increased awareness through survey). |
| # of scientific / methodological publications (incl. Internet-based) based on / related to the project activities | 0 | At least 20 | At least 50 | Over 50 (incl. conference publications) | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Clarification of reporting suggested. | Reporting on this indicator should specify the number of publications produced in peer-reviewed scientific journals or other sources. |
| Size of circulation for key steppe conservation such as Steppe Bulletin. | Current circulation - 1500 printed and 1300 circulated through mail. | 1700 printed and 1450 through mail | 2000 printed and 1700 through mail | 1750 printed in 2011-2012,  1550 – starting from autumn 2012,  1400 circulated through mail | Concur with self-reported results. Achieved. Indicator requires revision; this is an output level rather than results-based indicator. | This is an output-level indicator that does not provide insight on the significance of its results. It should either be revised to link to an outcome-level result (increase in knowledge base, documented replications, etc. etc.), or at least reporting on this indicator should provide insight on the relative value of the number of copies disseminated. Why does it matter if 2000 printed copies are produced and disseminated? What does this tell us? What does this achieve for steppe conservation? To explain the value of results it may be helpful to brainstorm a logic chain with publication of the steppe bulletin leading to the impact level result of actual conservation of steppe biodiversity. |
| # of visits of the steppe conservation website. | Current level of monthly site visitation 0 | # of visits up to 10,000 a month | # of visits up to 15,000 a month | Site visitation – 5086 visits a month (November 2012) | Concur with self-reported results. Partially achieved. | See notes on indicator 24 above. It may also be helpful to consider or discuss the size of the potential online audience, to understand the relative significance of the website visitation. It may also be helpful to report on visitation by country, or other relevant sub-metrics. |

**Summary of Suggested Logframe Revisions and Clarifications**

Overall recommendation – the project should consider adding an indicator for Threat Reduction Assessment (TRA) for each of the pilot sites, as an additional means of assessing impact level results. There are a range of natural factors that can influence the population status of species, but taking a theory-based approach, a project’s efforts to directly reduce specific biodiversity threats should result in improved biodiversity status. Adding a TRA indicator at this stage would require re-constructing baseline values, but this should be feasible, based on the data available and knowledge of project experts for each of the regions.

Overall recommendation – in general the logframe design has been done in a positive way. It would be helpful if the indicator targets were more clearly rationalized and had all key terms defined. To do so the project team may consider completing a table as such (with examples included):

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ***Indicator*** | ***Definition of key terms*** | ***Normative state target*** | ***Target for project scope and timeframe*** |
| METT | N/A | To maintain the ecological integrity of their specified areas and achieve their basic function as protected areas, PA management should have an effectiveness score of at least (80? May be different for different PAs, depending on their context and circumstances). | Based on an analysis of the areas of management effectiveness that the project is targeting and what can be achieved in the project time frame, the project should be able to help protected area X reach a METT score of 75 from the baseline of 50. (The GEF biodiversity focal area target for GEF-5 is a 15%-20% increase in PA management effectiveness). |
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**Objective Level:**

Indicator 1.a – “Area of consolidated new SPA”

* baseline and target figures should be revised to reflect consolidation of three federal zakazniks with CZZ in Kalmykia at the start of project implementation. Alternatively, project team could provide a detailed explanation in the PIR about how the project catalyzed and contributed to this consolidation process during the PPG, justifying this as part of the project results.
* Group METT score baseline and target values for three zakazniks with the METT score for CZZ under the indicator for “Direct impact” that will be moved from Outcome 2 to the “Objective” level
* Indicate in PIR that decrease in “increased hectares” target value is due to positive developments prior to project implementation (as indicated by the increase in baseline figure for overall steppe hectares), and not due to any shortcoming or “lowering of the bar” for the project.
* Ensure double-counting of Dolina Dzerena is avoided with indicator 1.b. below.

Indicator 1.b – “Additional area new SPA created”:

* Ensure double-counting of Dolina Dzerena is avoided with indicator 1.a. above.
* Other new expansions of the four project pilot zapovedniks should also be counted under only one or the other (even though these expansion areas are technically both “new SPA area created” and “consolidated”)

Indicator 1.c – “Enabling environment created for new SPA”:

* Unclear – should be eliminated and the hectares counted here (16,294) counted under either 1.a. or 1.b above.
* If there are PAs for which the project has supported the establishment process but which have not yet been fully approved before the end of the project, these PAs (and corresponding # of hectares) can and should be still documented among key project results, but this does not need to be included as an indicator for measuring success at project completion.

Indicator 1.d – “Specially management steppe areas (SMSA)” covering…”:

* This indicator should be dropped along with Output 2.5 (relating to SMSAs)
* Any significant achievement related to SMSAs by the end of the project would be considered “frosting on the cake”…

Indicator 2. – “Indirect impact on improved management effectiveness in 1.9 million hectares of SPA through METT Score”:

* Specify basis for 40-50% target (i.e. previous experience with METT in Russia, analysis of project’s potential contribution by end of project to necessary minimum level of PA management effectiveness for steppe PAs). Target should also preferably be specifically indicated as 40% or 50%, and target METT values adjusted to reflect this.
* Scores should be calculated as a percentage of relevant possible points, not in an absolute scale – see additional information under Indicator 15 on METT scores for “direct” impacts.
* Indicator should be moved to Outcome 2 (preferred), or at least should follow “direct impact” METT scores at the objective level (currently under Outcome 2)
* Target scores should be corrected to reflect a calculation against the baseline for a minimum 40% increase
* New PAs should be added, with those specifically linked to the four pilot zapovedniks (i.e. Dolina Dzerena, and 3 federal zakazniks in Kalmykia, any others…) included in the “direct impact” METT scores

Indicator 3.a. – “Number of SPA in Orenburg and Kursk pilots where feathergrass dominates”:

* Reference to Orenburg should be deleted
* Target should be specified as “same or increased number of SPAs”
* In the phrase “where feathergrass dominates”, the term “dominates” should be more clearly defined – does this mean greater than 50% coverage? Or something else?

Indicator 3.b. – “Coverage of feathergrass on sampling sites”:

* Target should be more clearly specified as “Same level of coverage in sampling sites”
* The area of the sampling sites should be indicated, as well as the total area of each of the PAs that the sampling sites are representing (e.g. Streletskaya with X# of sampling sites of 1 ha each, representing feathergrass ecotype in Streletskaya plot of CCZ, covering 2,000 ha)

Indicator 4.a and 4.b – “The number of sites where Spring Adonis occurs (Kursk)” and “Density of Adonis on sampling sites (Kursk)”:

* The Long-term Mean should be more clearly specified in the baseline – the current value apparently only represents the value of the particular baseline sampling year, not the LTM
* The timeframe for the “long-term” mean should be specified – in 5 years prior to project? In 30 years prior? What is considered the ideal normative status for Adonis density?
* It should be indicated that this indicator is for assessment of management effectiveness of 6,XXX hectares of 4 out of 6 plots of CCZ protected area

Indicator 5 – “Population # of little bustard and density/km2 during nesting season (Orenburg) and migration (Kalmykia)”:

* Should be clarified that this refers to the population in the entire area surrounding the zapovedniks in these two regions, not just within the boundaries of the zapovedniks
* The target should be clarified that the population is stable or increasing over at least a 3-5 year period, not just the population in the final year of the project.

Suggested new additional impact indicator – “Number of avoided bird deaths resulting from installation of bird protection equipment on powerlines”:

* Baseline would be the number of bird deaths recorded (over a given period – per month, per year, etc.) before any protection equipment was installed as a result of project efforts
* Target value should be assessed based on an analysis of the kilometers of highly hazardous power lines in the vicinity of the relevant project pilot regions, and the rate of bird deaths per kilometer as established by project monitoring

Indicator 6 – “Steppe Eagle - # and density/km2 during nesting season (Kalmykia / Orenburg / Dauria) and in migration (Kalmykia).”:

* There is no baseline data for the LTM for these areas, so the target value should be revised as “stable population relative to year 1, as assessed over a minimum 3 year period” (Or whatever period is deemed necessary by experts to assess population trends)

Indicator 7 – “Mongolian antelope in Daursky Zapovednik - population # and share of young in population.”:

* Time period for “long-term mean” baseline value should be clearly specified – in the 3-5 years prior to the project? Project goal is an increasing population from project start, not necessarily achievement of a return to historical population (at least not by the end of the project).
* The rationale for the absolute values indicated for the mid-term and end of project targets is not clear. The target should be revised (or clarified) as population increase in-line with natural population recruitment, with a maximum value of the estimated carrying capacity of the pilot area (10,000?).
* Share of young in population seems to be unnecessary/duplicative – absolute population value over a minimum of 3 years should be sufficient to indicate population trend.

Indicator 8 – “Saiga antelope in CZZ / Kalmykia – population # and share of males in population.”:

* Time period for “long-term mean” baseline value should be clearly specified – in the 3-5 years prior to the project? Project goal is an increasing (or at least ~stable) population from project start, not necessarily achievement of a return to historical population (at least not by the end of the project).
* Census timing and methodology should be specified in PIR results to clarify the shifts in male % of population during the year.
* It should also be clarified that even though mainly males are being killed, the natural recruitment of males is adequate to increase the % of males in the population even though the overall population is decreasing.
* It should also be specified that the natural % of males in the population is 25-30%, and this would be the desired normative status long-term goal for this indicator.

Indicator 9 – “Manul in Zabaikalsky Krai”:

* This should also be clarified as requiring establishment of at least a three year trend of the population, not just the population status in the year the project ends. Considering the large natural fluctuations, when considering the indicator value at the end of the project, it should be considered as + / - 50% of the LTM (or whatever range is considered adequate by expert opinion to adequately reflect natural stochastic variation).
* Due to the challenges with the baseline data, the indicator should be revised to include both the population in the region overall, and the population inside the reserve.

**Outcome 1**

Indicator 10 – “Area of SPA in the process of establishment and established.”:

* In reporting on this indicator the project should clearly distinguish between hectares of PAs “established” and those still in the process of establishment.
* It would help if the rationale for the target were clarified in terms of the long-term goal for steppe PA coverage and how the target for the project was proposed.

Indicator 11 – “Area/share (# ha) of regional-level PA correctly documented per the Land Code (surveyed, PA regime entered in the Property Register & State Register of Immovable Property Rights and Transactions).”:

* No specific revisions suggested, though it would help if the rationale for the target value were specified/clarified for each of the four pilot regions.

Indicator 12 – “# of ha of steppe ecosystems conserved under contractual conditions or other obligations, without direct government involvement.”

* This relates to the project activity on SMSAs, and the evaluation recommends this indicator be dropped, along with corresponding Output 2.5
* In addition, this indicator is duplicative and unnecessary

Indicator 13 – “# of possessors of land ownership rights (farmers and/or subsurface users) that have undertaken voluntary obligations to conserve steppe”

* This indicator again relates to the SMSA activity and should be dropped.

Indicator 14 – “# of draft regulatory acts submitted to a legislative branch and # of standard-setting initiatives formally entered on govt agenda.”

* No revisions suggested, but in reporting on this indicator it should be clarified that these are amendments to legislation, and it should be discussed what barriers to steppe conservation these amendments are targeting, and the relative significance for steppe conservation, if they are passed.

Outcome 2

Indicator 15 – “Direct impact on improved effectiveness in pilot sites = improved management in 489,782 ha through METT Score.”

* The METT scores for the project’s pilot PAs, which relate to the project’s direct impact, should be moved to the objective level of the logframe.
* Overall, the METT scores should be calculated as a percentage of points achieved out of the applicable questions in the METT, as not all questions are relevant to the project’s PAs, and thus in terms of absolute value, the METT scores will never reach the full value. As stated in the official guidance for completion of the tracking tool: “The maximum score of the 30 questions and supplementary questions is 99. A final total of the score from completing the assessment form can be ***calculated as a percentage of 99 or of the total score from those questions that were relevant to a particular protected area****.* (As noted above if questions are believed to be irrelevant, this should be noted in the comment/explanation column). Thus if a protected area scores 65 out of a maximum score of 87 the percentage can be calculated by dividing 65 by 87 and multiplying by 100 (i.e. 65 ÷ 87 x 100 = 75%).”
* This evaluation also recommends that the METT scores for the PAs that are directly linked with the pilot PAs (i.e. Dolina Dzerena in Dauria, the 3 federal zakazniks with CZZ in Kalmykia, etc.) should be included in the indicator line under the project’s “direct” influence, rather than indirect.
* The METT score target for Orenburg should be revised to be inline with the 40%-50% range increase for the other PAs, which would equate to a target of approximately 75.
* Considering that Dauria has already surpassed the target, it could be worthwhile to set a new, more ambitious target to achieve by the end of the project, to ensure that progress continues. This is at the discretion of the project team and the Dauria local coordinator however.

Indicator 16 – “# of IFM adopted by SPA by end of project.”

* Recommend to revise End of Project target to “1 IFM demonstrated through full implementation”
* Recommend to add a replication target of “Number of steppe PA management authorities that have formally discussed the potential use and development of an IFM” with a proposed target of “6”, to correspond to the original logframe target of 7 IFMs.
* Also recommend to add an indicator on producing (and presenting/disseminating) a generalized knowledge document on the process for development of the IFM, based on the experience from the 1 pilot region (Orenburg).

Indicator 17 – “% reduction in area swept by ecologically & economically destructive grassland fires within pilot PA during hazardous seasons April/May– Sept/Oct.”

* No revisions suggested, though it would be helpful if reporting on this indicator discussed the expert-analyzed level of appropriate natural annual average fire coverage as a % for each of the reserves (considering that fire is a natural and important element of ecosystem health, at appropriate levels).

Indicator 18 – “# of SPA incorporating sustainable grazing best practice into their management regime for steppe areas.”

* No revisions suggested.

Indicator 19 – “# of hectares involved in rehabilitation and restoration activities in/around SPA”

* Delete indicator along with cancellation of any further activity under Output 2.2. Measures have been tested and proven to be less cost-effective than investment in securing PA status for steppe ecosystems still in good condition.

***Outcome 3***

Indicator 20 – “The share of SPA area with management regime updated to include steppe ecosystem conservation priorities.”

* This indicator needs to be clarified and specified – as it is, it is not clear what it is referring to, and why it is important or why it matters. How will such changes improve steppe PA management?
* Perhaps revise to something like “Steppe PA management by-laws and regulations revised to include steppe-specific context, and eliminate non-steppe relevant regulations.”

Indicator 21 – “MNRE SPA Capacity Scorecard”

* No specific revisions suggested, though the project should carry out a mid-term assessment of the scorecard to consider its practical utility in meeting SMART criteria as an indicator of project results.

Indicator 22 – “% improvement of SPA staff understanding of key steppe issues (grazing, fire, species conservation, agricultural context) before/after training.”

* Recommended to revise to conduct follow-up survey with training participants six months after training to assess if/how knowledge is actually applied in professional duties.
* Recommendation on project workplan to develop more training modules based on capacity needs identified through the completed PA management audits.
* Recommendation on project workplan to conduct domestic study tours with relevant regional government officials to increase understanding of steppe PA management issues (and document increased awareness through survey).

Indicator 23 – “# of scientific / methodological publications (incl. Internet-based) based on / related to the project activities”

* Reporting on this indicator should specify the number of publications produced in peer-reviewed scientific journals or other sources

Indicator 24 – “Size of circulation for key steppe conservation such as Steppe Bulletin.”

* This is an output-level indicator that does not provide insight on the significance of its results. It should either be revised to link to an outcome-level result (increase in knowledge base, documented replications, etc. etc.), or at least reporting on this indicator should provide insight on the relative value of the number of copies disseminated. Why does it matter if 2000 printed copies are produced and disseminated? What does this tell us? What does this achieve for steppe conservation? To explain the value of results it may be helpful to brainstorm a logic chain with publication of the steppe bulletin leading to the impact level result of actual conservation of steppe biodiversity.

Indicator 25 – “# of visits of the steppe conservation website.”

* See notes on indicator 24 above. It may also be helpful to consider or discuss the size of the potential online audience, to understand the relative significance of the website visitation. It may also be helpful to report on visitation by country, or other relevant sub-metrics.

## Annex 8: Summary Table of Steppe Protected Areas Supported by the Russia Steppe Project

| **Name** | **Region** | **Federal / Regional Status** | **Size (core / buffer)** | **Protection status / dates** | **Project contribution / Steps to establishment** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Chernye Zemli | Kalmykia Republic | Federal Zapovednik | 121,482 ha core; 91,170 buffer | Established before project start. | Strengthening of management capacity of CZZ for monitoring, enforcement, and other management measures for all areas under management responsibility. |  |
| Mekletinski | Kalmykia Republic | Federal Zakaznik | 102,500 ha | Established before project start, but had no management authority. Consolidated under management authority of CZZ | Strengthening of management capacity of CZZ for monitoring, enforcement, and other management measures for this area. |  |
| Sarpinski | Kalmykia Republic | Federal Zakaznik | 195,900 ha | Established before project start, but had no management authority. Consolidated under management authority of CZZ. | Strengthening of management capacity of CZZ for monitoring, enforcement, and other management measures for this area. |  |
| Kharbinsky | Kalmykia Republic | Federal Zakaznik | 163,900 ha | Established before project start, but had no management authority  Consolidated under management authority of CZZ | Strengthening of management capacity of CZZ for monitoring, enforcement, and other management measures for this area. |  |
| Tingutinsky | Kalmykia Republic | Regional Zakaznik | 197,800 ha | Established before project start. No management authority. | No contribution made. | The institutional capacity of the “Tingutinsky” regional zakaznik was also planned to be enhanced by transferring the zakaznik under the management authority of the federal zapovednik. However, this could not be fulfilled due to the land ownership complications: this area de-juro lies within the Kalmyk territory and de-facto is governed by the Astrakhan oblast (as its “Stepnoy” zakaznik), which also claims the ownership of the area and reconsideration of the territorial issue. This problem is clearly out of the UNDP/GEF project scope. |
| Saigachiy | Kalmykia Republic | Regional Zakaznik | 600,000 ha | Not established – proposed by Ministry of Nature Resources and Environment Protection of Kalmykia Republic. Creation will be started in 2013, approval expected mid-2014. | Project will finance preparing supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation. | WWF-Russia proposed to co-finance establishment of zakaznik |
| Centralno-Chernozemny | Kursk Oblast | Federal Zapovednik | 5,287 ha core; 28,662 buffer | Federal zapovednik established long before project approval. Expansion in progress, approval expected early 2014. 463 ha added to core area (the 7th part of Zapovednik or Biosphere polygon (also is zapovednik’s territory with other regime); | Project supports and finances:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation for expansion of CCZ.  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial and federal level;  3) Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation;  a) All necessary justifications.  b) Finalizing gazetting procedure by enabling the Russian Government to issue special order introducing new area to CCZ. | “8,000 ha added to buffer zone  28,700 ha of buffer zone legalized” –must be implemented by zapovednik itself. Originally the project was going to support establishing of mentioned buffer zones but in process of consultations it was decided the project will support biosphere polygon creation. |
| Melovoye | Kursk Oblast | Regional Nature Monument | ~150 ha | Completed proposal made to regional government, approval expected in late 2013/early 2014. | Project financed:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation. (COMPLETED)  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial (COMPLETED)  3) Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation; (COMPLETED)  a) All justifications completed.  b) Finalizing gazetting procedure by enabling the Kursk Oblast to issue special order for two new nature monuments. |  |
| Petrova Balka (in southwest Kursk Oblast) | Kursk Oblast | Regional Nature Monument | ~ 50 ha | Completed proposal made to regional government, approval expected in late 2013/early 2014. | Project financed:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation (completed);  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial and federal level (COMPLETED);  3) Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation (COMPLETED);  a) All justifications completed;  b) Finalizing gazetting procedure by enabling the Kursk Oblast to issue special order for two new nature monuments. |  |
| 3-4 other possible sites | Kursk Oblast | Regional Nature Monument | 240+ ha | 1. Near Soldatskoye village (in southwest Kursk Oblast)  2. Others will be identified.  Steps toward establishment as PAs not yet started. | Project will finance:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation;  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial and federal level;  3) Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation;  a) All necessary justifications;  b) Finalizing gazetting procedure by enabling the Kursk Oblast to issue special order for two new nature monuments. |  |
| Orenburgskiy | Orenburg Oblast | Federal Zapovednik | 21,653 ha core; 12,208 ha buffer | Established before project start. Expansion is in progress by establishing a new cluster of zapovednik – Orlovskaya steppe (see below) | See below |  |
| Orlovskaya steppe -Orenburgskaya Tarpania (a claster of Orenburgskiy zapovednik) | Orenburg Oblast | Federal Zapovednik | 16,537 ha core | In process of becoming federal protected area; final approval expected late 2013/early 2014 | Project finances:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation for expansion of OZ (in progress)  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial and federal level (completed)  3) Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation; (COMPLETED)  4) Preparing documents for State Ecological Expert Panel Review.  5) Organize public hearings.  - Convene state expert panel.  - Elaborate management arrangements and business plan for innovative financing.  - Secure Council of Ministers endorsement. | Originally it was planned to establish Non-governmental NPA under Public Fund “Conservation of Orenburg steppe” authority. Due to lack of financial stability after completion of project it was decided to establish a federal NPA as part of Orenburgskiy zapovednik |
| Akzharskaya steppe | Orenburg Oblast | Regional Nature Monument | 14,604 ha | Included to the list of regional NPAs before project start. Was not documented correctly. “Legalized” during project with project support | Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation (COMPLETED) |  |
| Kuvaiskaya Steppe | Orenburg oblast | Regional Nature Monument | 1500 ha | Included to the list of regional NPAs before project start. Was not documented correctly. “Legalized” during project with project support | Project financed:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation l (completed)  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial and local levels (completed)  3) Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation (completed); |  |
| Nikolskaya Steppe | Orenburg oblast | Regional Nature Monument | 311 ha | Included to the list of regional NPAs before project start. Was not documented correctly. “Legalized” during project with project support | Project financed:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation (completed)  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial and local levels (completed)  3) Provide supporting documents for State land-survey and delineation (completed) |  |
| 3 nature monuments | Orenburg Oblast | Regional Nature Monument | 33+50+tbd ha | Included to the list of regional NPAs before project start: Zmeinaya gora; Boyevaya gora; tbd. Was not documented correctly. Have to be “legalized” during project with project support | Project will finance:  1) Field studies and preparation of documentation  2) Stakeholder consultations on provincial and local levels |  |
| Daurskiy | Zabaikalsky Krai | Federal Zapovednik | 45,790 ha core; 163,530 ha buffer | Federal zapovednik established before project approval. Expansion in progress, approval expected late 2013/early 2014. Expand size of existing zapovednik’s core and buffer zone areas.  14,000 – 30,000 ha added to core area.  20,000 – 50,000 ha added to buffer zone. | The project finances the work on the stage of clarifying land tenure in the Cadastral House and Rosreestr (in progress).  Capacity strengthening of management authority to manage all areas under jurisdiction. |  |
| Dolina Dzerena | Zabaikalsky Krai | Federal Zakaznik | 231,442 ha | Established in 2012 with project support. Preparatory work carried out before project start. Management responsibility assigned to Daurskiy Zapovednik management authority. | The project supported a significant portion of the work on the stage of clarifying land tenure in the Cadastral House and Rosreestr, settling agreements with landowners, defining the statue of the refuge and its regime; expert consultations and follow-up with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Office of the regional government. It is fair to say that UNDP / GEF project’s involvement was in fact the last in line and the critical stimulus, which eventually led to the completing the establishment of a large steppe PA. |  |
| Semenovskii | Zabaikalsky Krai | Regional Zakaznik | 47,615 ha | Established in 2012 after project start. | The project supported a portion of the work on the stage of clarifying land tenure in the Cadastral House and Rosreestr. It is fair to say that UNDP / GEF project’s involvement was in fact the last in line and the critical stimulus, which eventually led to the completing the establishment of a forest and steppe PA. |  |
| Two or three additional regional zakazniks | Zabaikalsky Krai | Regional Zakaznik | TBD | Not established – in regional government plans for 2017-2018, regional government gave indication that they could be established earlier with project support. | The project will support the work on the stage of clarifying land tenure in the Cadastral House and Rosreestr. It is fair to say that UNDP / GEF project’s involvement will be the last in line and the critical stimulus, which eventually leads to the completing the establishment of a forest and steppe PA. | In case of project support zakazniks can be established in 2014-2015 |

## Annex 9. Russia Steppe Project’s Mainstreaming of UNDP Program Principles

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| **UNDAF / CPAP / CPD** | Russia did not go through a full UNDAF process, and the latest Country program is for the period 2008-2010, which was before the start of the Russia Steppe project. Nonetheless, the project supports the environmental sustainability component of the program, which includes elements focused on biodiversity conservation, such as sustainable financial mechanisms for biodiversity conservation, promotion of eco-friendly public-private partnerships, supporting national efforts in monitoring ecological standards. The project directly supports Output 3.2 of the country program results framework: “Conserved ecosystems are considered as important resources for sustainable development”. The indicator for this aspect of the country program focused on ecosystem services, which is not a major emphasis of the steppe project, although it is clear that a portion of the project’s objective is to conserve and support the ecosystem services that are provided by the steppe biome, including carbon sequestration, provisioning of food and fodder, and water resources. |
| **Poverty-Environment Nexus / Sustainable Livelihoods** | The Russia Steppe project includes attention to sustainable livelihoods among communities living in and around steppe protected areas. In this context the poverty-environment nexus revolves around balancing the trade offs between different agriculture systems (intensive plowing, pastoralism, etc.) and their potential negative and positive influences on biodiversity. |
| **Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Mitigation/Adaptation** | This is not a major focus of the project, although it is highly relevant. Only through healthy ecosystems can resilience to climate change effects be achieved. In steppe ecosystems the major potential disasters include severe drought and catastrophic fires. With its work on fire management the project is helping to address these issues, and this is clearly within the realm of climate adaptation work. |
| **Crisis Prevention and Recovery** | This is not significantly relevant in the context of the Russia Steppe project. |
| **Gender Equality / Mainstreaming** | The project is ensuring that professionals of both genders are directly involved in and contributing to project activities. For example, the Orenburg site coordinator is a woman, and multiple female scientists have been involved in the project’s work in the Kursk region. The project does not include a major focus on working directly with local resource users, but to any extent that the project’s work does extend in this direction there is consideration of gender issues. |
| **Capacity Development** | Capacity development is a significant focus of project activities, and is discussed throughout this report where relevant. |
| **Rights** | Rights aspects are not highly relevant in the context of the Russia Steppe project, though could be considered related in the context of any land rights issues related land tenure and expansion and establishment of protected areas. This evaluation is not aware of any significant issues in this regard. |

## Annex 10. Itinerary and List of Persons Met and Interviewed During Evaluation Mission

**UNDP Representatives**

Ms. Irina Bredneva, UNDP Program Associate, Energy and Environment Program, UNDP Russia Project Support Office

**Project Team**

Mr. Evgeny Kuznetsov, Project Manager

Mr. Ilya Smelansky, Chief Technical Advisor

Mr. Vsevolod B. Stepanitskiy, National Project Director, Deputy Director of the State Policy and Regulation for Environment Protection and Safety, Russian Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

**Orenburg representatives (May 14, 2013)**

Ms. Rafilya Bakirova – Project Coordinator in Orenburgskaya oblast, Head of Legal Department of Orenburg Agriculture University

Mr. Sergey Levykin – Project Scientific Advisor for Orenburg oblast, Head of Lab, Steppe Institute of the Ural Division of Russian Academy of Science

**Kalmykia representatives (May 15, 2013)**

Ms. Emma Gabuntschina – Project Coordinator in Kalmykia for federal organizations

Mr. Ruslan Medjidov – Project Coordinator in Kalmykia for regional organizations

Mr. Boris Ubushaev – Deputy Research Director, Zapovednik “Chernye Zemly”

Ms. Natalia Troitskaya **(May 16, 2013)** – NGO Partnership for Zapovedniks, Expert in improvement of NPA efficiency, Pilot zapovedniks audit

**Daursky Biosphere Reserve (May 17-19, 2013)**

Mr. Oleg Polyakov - Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Zabaikalskii Krai (Territory), Representative of the key stakeholder in the pilot region

Mrs. Natalya Kharchenko - Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of Zabaikalskii Krai (Territory), Representative of the key stakeholder in the pilot region, member of the Steering Committee

Mr. Vadim Kirilyuk - Deputy Director for General Issues, Daursky Biosphere Reserve, Local Coordinator, Pilot PA staff, Project contractor

Mr. Alexander Borodin - Director, Daursky Biosphere Reserve, Representative of the pilot PA

Mr. Vassiliy Jargalov - Deputy Director for Protection, Daursky Biosphere Reserve Pilot PA staff

Mr. Oleg Goroshko - Deputy Director for Researches, Daursky Biosphere Reserve Pilot PA staff, Project contractor

Mrs. Olga Kirilyuk - Researcher, Daursky Biosphere Reserve and Institute of natural resources, ecology and cryology of Siberian department of the Russian Academy of Science (INREC SD RAS), Pilot PA staff, Project contractor

Mrs. Tatyana Goroshko - Working in the Environmental Education Department of Daursky and Sokhondinsky Biosphere Reserves and the Visit Center of Federal PAs in Zabaikalskii Krai (Territory), Pilot PA staff

Mrs. Tatyana Tkachuk - Working in the Academic Department of Ecology and Environmental Education, Zabaikalsky State University, and Daursky Biosphere Reserve, Pilot PA staff. Contractor

Mr. Alexei Cherepitsyn - Key specialist/expert and state hunting inspector for Ononsky and Olovyannikovsky Districts, Zabaikalskii Krai (Territory) State Service for Protection, Control, and Regulation in the Wildlife Use, Partner Pilot Reserve

**Project Fire Management Team (May 20, 2013)**

Mr. Armen Grigorian – Biodiversity Conservation Centre, The Project Fire Management Activity Coordinator

Mr. Mikhail Kreindlin – Manager of NPA program of Greenpeace Russia, The Project Fire Management Trainings in Pilot NPAs

**Centralno-Chernozemny Zapovednik (May 21, 2013)**

Mr. Andrey Vlasov - Director

Mr. Oleg Ryzhkov – Deputy Research Director, General Questions, Feathergrass  
Mr. Nikolai Zolotukhin – Senior Researcher, Feathergrass  
Ms. Irina Zolotukhin – Researcher, Feathergrass  
Ms. Tatiana Filatova - Senior Researcher, Steppe Restoration  
Ms. Olga Vlasova – Researcher, Marmot Reintroduction  
Mr. Nikolai Maleshin – Deputy Director on Territory Protection, Fire Equipment demonstration  
Mr. Valentina Soshnina – Deputy Director on Ecological Education, Zapovednik’s site management, Public Relations Coordinator

**Kurskiy State University (May 22, 2013)**  
Ms. Elena Mikhailina – Pro-rector of the University on International Relations  
Steppe project’s Natural Monument Creation task implementers:  
Ms. Natalia Malysheva – Head of Subdepartment of Plant and Animal Biology, Professor  
Ms. Galina D’yachenko – Assistant Professor, Subdepartment of Plant and Animal Biology

Mr. Alexander Poluyanov – Assistant Professor, Subdepartment of Plant and Animal Biology  
Mr. Vladimir Mironov - Assistant Professor, Subdepartment of Plant and Animal Biology  
Mr. Alexander Elizarov - Assistant Professor, Subdepartment of Plant and Animal Biology  
Ms. Natalia Samofalova - Assistant Professor, Subdepartment of Plant and Animal Biology  
Mr. Nikolai Vagin – Researcher, Research Institute of Parasitology  
Mr. Egor Vlasov – Postgraduate of Subdepartment of Plant and Animal Biology  
Mr.Victor Baryshnikov – Director, **Department of Environment Safety and Nature Use of Kurskaya oblast Administration**Ms. Ekaterina Kusakina – Specialist of Environment Division of the same Department

**The Farm (Soldatskoye village, Gorshechensky rayon, Kurskaya oblast) (May 22, 2013)**

Mr. Sergey Ishkov – Farmer, future owner of visited piece of land

Mr. Andrey Tretiakov – General Director, EcoTekhProekt Limited (is arranging land cadastre works for mentioned piece of land)

## Annex 11. Documents Reviewed

This evaluation reviewed all major project-related management documents and outputs. These included:

* Project document including PIF and PPG documents, including logframe
* Annual Project Implementation Reports
* Inception Report
* Financial management documents, such as project budgets and audit documents
* Various reports and documents available on the steppe project website and steppe conservation portal website (<http://savesteppe.org>)
* Project Steering Committee meeting minutes
* Tracking tools

Other documents:

WWF. “National Protected Areas of the Russian Federation: Gap Analysis and Perspective Framework,” Moscow 2009.

UNDP Russia Country Program Document, 2008-2010.

Elliott, G. 2011. “Mapping the spring and winter distribution of Kalmykia’s Saiga population,” Thesis, December 1, 2011.

UNESCO. Chernyje Zemli Biosphere Reserve, MAB Directory website.

1. Portions of this section are drawn from the project document’s description of the development context. Changes to specific data have been made where necessary. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In the jargon of the GEF Secretariat, UNDP is the GEF Agency, formerly referred to as “implementing agency”, while the national partner responsible for carrying out and overseeing project activities is the “executing agency”. However, in UNDP jargon, the national responsible partner is the “national implementing partner”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sources: 1.A. N/A; 1.B. PIF Document; 2.A. N/A; 2.B. PIF Document; 3.A. 10 business day standard timeframe for GEF PIF approval; 3.B. GEF PMIS; 4.A. Generally approved at time of PIF; 4.B. GEF PMIS; 5.A. PIF document indicative calendar milestones expected dates; 5.B. GEF PMIS; 6.A. PIF document indicative calendar milestones expected dates; 6.B. PMIS; 7.A. PIF document indicative calendar milestones expected dates; 7.B. Project inception report; 8.A. N/S; 8.B. Project inception report; 9.A. N/S; 9.B. Project inception report; 10.A. PIF document indicative calendar milestones expected dates; 10.B. 2011 PIR; 11.A. N/S; 11.B. Project inception report; 12.A. PIF document indicative calendar milestones expected dates; 12.B. N/A; 13.A. PIF document indicative calendar milestones expected dates; 13.B. N/A; 14.A. Within three months of project completion; 14.B. N/A; 15.A. Based on UNDP standard procedures; 15.B. N/A. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See <http://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12268> for the full text of the decision, including the Aichi Targets. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For the focal area strategic approach for GEF-4, see GEF Council document GEF/C.31/1, “Focal Area Strategic and Strategic Programming for GEF-4,” July 16, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For the focal area strategic priorities for GEF-5, see GEF Council document GEF/R.5/31, “GEF-5 Programming Document,” May 3, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For example, the mid-term evaluation mission to Dauria represented the CTA’s first visit to the region, and the project manager has not visited the region. However, project representatives from the region have visited Moscow. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. According to project documentation, in the January 2012 meeting of the Project Implementation Group the NPD indicated that “considering the satisfactory evaluation of project progress in the years 2010-2011, he does not see any serious problems with project implementation and therefore believes it would be quite acceptable to approve the work plan for 2012 in a meeting of the Project Implementation Group, and not of the Project Steering Committee; the latter may be convened in early 2013 when the mid-term evaluation takes place.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. However, this includes the area of the three zakazniks in Kalmykia that were consolidated with the CZZ, although this consolidation actually took place prior to the start of project implementation. As can be seen in the specific recommendations for revisions in the project logframe (see Annex 7), this evaluation recommends that these area be excluded from being counted among project results, and the relevant baseline and target figures be adjusted accordingly. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. An integrated fire management approach involves engaging a full range of relevant stakeholders, and addressing all aspects of fire-related management. This can include, for example, development of community education and awareness campaigns. In other words, this is a broader, more complex approach than just increasing the technical capacity of emergency management authorities to fight fires that have been ignited. For additional information see <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/habitats/forests/howwework/integrated-fire-management.xml>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The protected area management audits are part of the broad UNDP-GEF engagement with the MNRE for strengthening protected areas across Russia, not just in the steppe zones. Audits have been carried out under other UNDP-GEF projects focusing on protected areas as well, including the marine and coastal protected areas project (GEF ID #3518), which supported an audit for the Commander Islands zapovednik that resulted in significant increased MNRE investment for that protected area. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. RBM Support documents are available at http://www.undp.org/eo/methodologies.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The UNDP POPP is currently only available on UNDP’s intranet. However UNDP can provide the necessary section on roles and responsibility from http://content.undp.org/go/userguide/ [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Source: Project Document, Table 10, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)