

Protected Area Status in Mongolia

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Policy and Legislation

Under the present constitution that was revised in 1992 all land, forests, water, fauna, and flora and other natural resources in Mongolia belong exclusively to the people and are under State protection. Apart from some limited areas given to the citizens of Mongolia for private ownership, the land as well as the subsoil with its mineral wealth, forests, water resources, and game, is State owned.

The tradition for protecting nature goes back to the 13th century when many forested hills were protected as holy areas. Kublai Khan, grandson of Ghengis Khan (Chinggis Khaan), extended protection to forests and also decreed a law in the 13th century forbidding hunting of any game during the summer months under penalty of death. The introduction of Buddhism from Tibet in the 16th and 17th centuries provided further protection for animals and for the establishment of the first protected areas in the late 1700s (Nowak, 1970).

The Great Khural (Parliament) passed the Decree on the Rational Utilization of Natural Resources and the Protection of the Natural Environment on 30 June 1972. This law requires every person to act for the good of nature and for the protection of natural resources (Borisov *et al.*, 1985; Kosmider, 1985).

In the early 1970s a number of laws relating to environmental protection were introduced: a second Law on Land Use in 1971 (revised November 1994); a Law on Hunting 6 January, 1972 (originally drawn up in 1934, revised in 1944, issued in 1962) (revised in May 1995); a Law on Water and a Law on Forests 1974 (revised in 1995). The Mongolian Law on Special Protected Areas (adopted 1994), the Law on Special Protected Area Buffer Zones (1997), the Mongolian Law on Environmental Protection (1995), the Mongolian Law on Natural Plants (1995), the Law on Protection from Toxic Chemicals (1995), the Mongolian Law on Water and Mineral Water Use Fees (1995), the Law on Fees for Harvest of Forest Timber and Fuel Wood (1995), the Mongolian Law on Natural Plant Use Fees (1995).

The Mongolian Law on Environmental Protection of March 1995 proclaims that 'land and its soil, underground resources and their mineral wealth, water, plants, animals, and air will be protected from any adverse effects to prevent ecological imbalance'. The purpose of this law is to regulate the interrelations between the state, citizens, economic entities and organizations in order to guarantee the human right to live in a healthy and safe environment, with ecologically balanced social and economic development, protection of the environment for present and future generations and proper use of natural resources. Environmental impact assessment is incorporated into Article 9 of the Mongolian Law on Environmental Protection in which it is stipulated that 'environmental impact assessment shall be conducted for the development of proposals and programs, as well as for establishing contracts for the operation, initiation, and expansion of production or services which may have adverse environmental impacts'. It clarifies the state organizations plenary rights on environmental protection as well as rights and obligation of citizens on environment protection.

The National Program on Special Protected Areas was enacted in April 1998 by the Great Khural (Parliament) Act Number 29. This program defines the main policy of Mongolian Government and implementation strategy related to the Special Protected Area for the next 20 years. Mongolian government plans to extend the network of protected areas in the future by gradually placing under state special protection areas of ecological importance and which support threatened wildlife and biodiversity. The plan aims to increase the territory of protected areas up to 20 % of the total area of Mongolian territory by 2001-2005, 25% by 2006-2010, and 30% by 2011-2030. The implementation strategy describes guidelines for protected areas designation and expansion of the protected areas network, legislation enforcement and the organizational structure of protected area administration. It is also provides guidance on research and monitoring in protected areas, public

awareness, local participation in protected area buffer zones, funding and international co-operation. It describes expected outputs for the next 20 years.

The Law on the Special Protected Areas Buffer Zones of 23 October 1997 covers the establishment of buffer zones for Special Protected Areas and regulates activities within those buffer zones. According to Article 3, Special Protected Area Buffer Zone is an area established for the purpose of reducing, eliminating and preventing adverse impacts to Strictly Protected Areas or National Conservation Parks through the appropriate use of natural resources by local citizens. The buffer zone is also designed to broaden local citizen participation in environmental protection and to ensure proper living standards. The law also covers the criteria for establishing a buffer zone, boundary determination, buffer zone council, funding, buffer zone management plan and the implementation of the law.

State protected areas are covered under the jurisdiction of Protected Area Division, Ministry of Nature and Environment and funded by State central budget and other resource of funding.

The Law on Protected Area was adopted in November 15th 1994. The purpose of the Law on Protected Area is to regulate the use and procurement of land for special protection and the preservation and conservation of its original condition. This is to preserve the specific traits of the natural zones, unique formation, rare and endangered plants and animals, historic and cultural monuments and natural beauty, as well as research.

The Legislation on Special Protected Areas of Mongolia shall consist of the constitution of Mongolia, the Mongolian Law on Land, the present Law and their legislative acts issued in conformity with them. According to the Mongolian Law on Special Protected Areas, areas under protection are classified under the following categories:

- 1. Strictly Protected Areas:** areas that can represent unique features and characteristics of natural zones, have preserved their original conditions, and are of special scientific and cultural significance.
- 2. National Conservation Parks:** areas where the original natural condition is relatively preserved and which have historical, cultural, scientific, educational and

ecological importance. They are designated for tourism development.

- 3. Nature Reserves:** areas designated to create conditions for protecting, preserving and restoring certain natural features as well as any natural resources and wealth.
- 4. Monuments:** areas of natural unique formations designated to protect historical and cultural monuments. Also aimag (province), capital city, soum or duureg (district) may take certain areas within the territory under local special protection.

Chapter 6, Article 29, 28, 26, 25 of the law provide for the establishment of the protected areas. Governor of aimag (province), capital city, soum (local district) and duureg (district within capital city) have plenary right to prepare proposals for taking certain parts of their territory under state or local protection and submit it to the appropriate organization. The citizens representatives khural for aimag, capital city, soum and duureg decide on taking certain parts of their territory under local protection and set out its boundary and protection rules. The state government establishes boundaries for Nature Reserves and Monuments. At the request of the government, the state Ikh Khural (parliament) decide on taking territory under state special protection and include the territory under one of the State Special Protected Area classifications as well as approving or changing Strictly Protected Area and National Conservation Park boundaries.

International activities

On 2 February 1990, Mongolia became a party to the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), accepting the terms of the Convention. Since then Uvs Lake Basin, the ancient desert layer of Gobi Gurvansaikhan, part "A" of the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area, Khovsgol lake together with the area supporting reindeer people of shaman religion, and Otgontenger, Bogdkhaan, Burkhan Khaldun mountains are being accepted as word heritage sites. In 1991 the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area and in 1997 the Bogdkhan Uul Strictly Protected Area were included in the UNESCO MAB site. Also some areas were recorded on the Ramsar Convention List of Wetlands of International Importance. These included Mongol Daguur Strictly Protected Area

in 1997, Terkhyn Tsagaan Lake, Ogy Lake, Lakes Valley (Orog lake, Tatshyn tsagaan lake, Boon tsagaan lake, Adgyn Tsagaan lake) in 1998, and Khar Us Nuur National Park, Airag lake in 1999. Mongolia joined the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Administration and management

In the 3rd century BC Mongolian ancestors, the 'Hunnus', protected and worshipped the highest peak of the Hangai mountain range, named Otgontenger (Adiyasuren Ts, 1998). In the Code of Chinggis Khaan's 'Ikh Zasag' (Great Rule) and in many other laws and regulations of the 16th century such as the Code of Oirods and 'Khanlkha Regulation' there were 14 mountains recognised as sacred including Bogdkhaan Mountain, Khan Khentee, Khognokhaan, Jargaltkhaan, Bayan, Suman Ulaan and Tovkhonkhaan, where hunting, cultivation and logging were completely restricted.

The first reserve, Bogdo ula, was declared in 1778; others were declared by separate decrees in 1957 (two sites), 1965 (eight sites), 1975 (one site), 1977 (one site) and 1978 (one site). One national park, Great Gobi National Park, was established in 1975 and given legal status under Decree No. 283 of 1976; a second national park was created in the southern part of Ar Toul Game Reserve in 1984 and two hunting reserves in 1983 and 1984. In 1991 the Mongolian government approved a 'Procedure on Protected Areas', established the network of protected areas and their protection rules and regimes, and classified protected areas into four categories, which became an initial step towards forming an integrated network of protected areas. In 1992 (8 sites), in 1993 (7 sites), in 1996 (9 sites), in 1997 (3 sites), in 1999 (4 sites) and in 2000 (6 sites) were designated. Between 2001-2005 24 more sites are planned to be protected and a further 51 between 2006 – 2015.

Responsibility for protected areas used to lie with the Academy of Sciences (IUCN, 1971). In 1972 the government established several organisations concerned with conservation issues:

- Wildlife Management Department was established within the Ministry of Forestry and Forest Industries;
- Department for Nature Protection was brought into being within the Council of Ministers State Committee of Science and Technology

- by the Council of Ministers;
- Wildlife Management Section was initiated in the Forest Research Institute (Anon., n.d. b).

At the local level legislation is administered by the aimag and soum authorities.

New Parliament and Government formed as a result of the first democratic free election in 1990, have taken the first steps for integration of environmental protection with economic and social issues (Adiyasuren Ts. 1998). The Agency for Protected Areas and eco-tourism was established by the Ministry of Nature and Environment in 1993 and became a fundamental beginning of involvement of state administrative bodies in nature conservation activities. With regard to the structural change in the governmental organizations, the Environmental Protection Agency-Government Regulatory Agency was put in charge of protected area related issues. The Protected Area bureau was established in 1996.

Over 270 people work in protected area administrations including 150 rangers and 30 specialists (Myagmarsuren, 2000). At the same time there are some additional rangers, who work under local province administration. One park ranger working in a protected area is responsible for 107,100 ha area on average. 87.1% of the specialists working in special protected areas have university degrees; 79.9% are people professionally qualified in biology and ecology. Half of all rangers are professionally qualified and possess appropriate working experience and skills (Myagmarsuren, 2000).

Among the special protected areas, strictly protected areas and national parks are financed from the state budget and other funding sources including tourism, donations and aid from citizens, economic entities and organisations. Also, fines from citizens who break the law contribute to the protected areas budget.

Eleven park administrations and one branch office are currently operating in different parts of Mongolia (Myagmarsuren, 2000). Two of them are operating from Ulaanbaatar. The Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area Administration was established in 1975. Size and location: 5.3 million hectares in two parts, including 4.4 million hectares of the Southern Altai Gobi and Khovd provinces. Bogd Khan Mountain Strictly Protected Area Administration was established in 1778 and re-

established in 1988. It covers 41,651 hectares just south of Ulaanbaatar. The Lake Khuvsgul National Park Administration is located outside of the Khuvsgul Lake National Park and it was established in 1992. Khan Khentee Strictly Protected Area Administration was established in 1993. It is operated from Ulaanbaatar. Eastern Mongolia Strictly Protected Area Administration was established in 1993. It covers 1,896,328 hectares in Sukhbaatar and Dornod aimags. Otgontenger Strictly Protected Area Administration was established in 1996 and it is located in central Mongolia in Zavkhan aimag.Uvs Lake Basin Strictly Protected Area Administration was established in 1994. South Gobi State Protected Area Administration was established in 1996 and it is operated from South Gobi aimag. Khangai Nuruu National Park Administration was established in 1996. Mongol Altai Mountain State Protected Area Administration was established in 1996. Khar Us Lake National Park Administration was established in 1998. Khustai Nuruu National Park Administration was established in 1994.

Several countries and international projects play a key role in strengthening protected areas management by providing necessary equipment, strengthening institutional capacities, conducting training and public awareness, improving living conditions in local communities in the buffer zones, disseminating information on protection of rare and endangered species. 163.3 million tugrugs have been spent for strengthening protected areas management within the framework of the Mongolian biodiversity Project which is funded by the United Nations Development Program and Global Environmental Faculty. The project also assisted in environmental lawmaking, institutional capacity and community support building, as well as public awareness activities in environmental protection and the development of the National Action Plan on Biodiversity Conservation for Mongolia.

The German Technical Assistance and Cooperation Agency is running a twelve-year 'Environmental Protection and Buffer Zone Development' project. The project is working on possibilities to improve the protection and management of the Khan Khentee Strictly Protected Area and Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park by developing management plans for these protected areas, improving the institutional capacity and strengthening local community

participation in conservation.

Since 1992 WWF has been working in Mongolia to assist the Ministry for Nature and the Environment to expand its network of protected areas and protect the country's biodiversity. Specifically WWF is working with the Government of Mongolia to identify and extend protected areas network to cover 30 percent of Mongolia. Several additional protected areas were established based on recommendation made by WWF. Since 1997, under the Law of NGO, the office has obtained official status as an independent representative office of WWF International. The WWF Mongolia Country Office is part of the WWF's global network, active in more than 96 countries around the world. In June 1997, a Mongolia Conservation Programme of WWF for the next 5 years has been developed with clear objectives, outline of activities and tasks required to meet the objectives. The Programme will focus on the Altai Sayan and Daurian Ecoregions both Global 200 Ecoregions and 80 percent of WWF's resources will be invested in these regions.

System reviews

Mongolia is a land locked country, which borders the Russian Federation to the north and the People's Republic of China to the south. The northern part of the country is covered by forested mountain ranges dominated by Siberian Larch (*Larix sibirica*), Siberian Pine (*Pinus sibirica*), and Scotch Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*). The southern part encompasses desert, desert-steppe and steppe open grassland areas with low mountains, rolling hills, hillocks with sparse vegetation cover, the western part is made up of snow-capped high mountains and glaciers, and the eastern part consists of an area of vast plains and grasslands. Physically, the country is a high altitude plateau, the lowest points being some 500m above sea level, almost all of the country lying above 1,000m. There are a number of mountain ranges, notably in the north and west of the country. The Altai Massif occupies the western borders; as this range runs southeastwards, it fades into a series of isolated fault blocks known as the Gobi Altai. The highest peak lies in this range and is some 4,231m above sea level. The Khangai Mountains occupy the centre of the country, while the Khentee Mountains run from just east of the centre up to the Russian border. Most of the southern borders run through the Gobi Desert, a

large desert of relatively low relief.

The country is divisible into four main phytogeographic zones: mountain forest/taiga (7% of the surface area) is found in the high altitude regions in the north of the country and is dominated by larch, cedar, pine and birch. There are also areas of natural forest on the edges of the Gobi Desert found along riverbanks, dominated by poplars and tamarisk. Steppe occupies a broad range across the country from east to west (51% of the surface area). Arid steppe/semi desert lies in a line to the south of this on the borders of the Gobi Desert (27% of the surface area), and desert on the southern border with China (15% of the surface area). The steppe category may be subdivided into mountain steppe with sparse forests (25% of the total surface area) and grassy steppes (26%) (Nowak, 1970). Forest cover of all types totals 15 million ha or 10% of the country.

Wetlands are an important habitat type – standing water covers some 15,000 sq. km and there are some 50,000km of rivers. These wetlands are also extremely diverse, ranging from cold, deep ultra oligotrophic lakes to temporary saline lakes. Many of the rivers have extensive floodplains (Scott, 1986).

Mongolia has a very low population density and this is unlikely to change very rapidly despite the high population growth rates, as one third of the population lives in the capital Ulaanbaatar. Traditionally, a large proportion of the economy was centred on livestock herding by the large numbers of nomadic people. Government efforts to transform the economy have led to the expansion of settled agriculture and to the development of industry. In response to the dramatic decline in wildlife during the 1930s and 1940s, conservation measures were enacted in the 1950s and 1960s (Hibbert, 1964). According to the resolution of the 17th Congress of the Mongolian Peoples Republic Party and the national economic and cultural development guidelines for 1976 to 1980, the five year and annual plans include sections on conservation and environmental protection. The five year plan section contained 140 projects and had a budget of 700 million tugrugs. Projects carried out in the five year plan to 1980 included pollution control, forest regeneration, forest belt planting, soil conservation and wild animal breeding. There are also longer term schemes for environmental protection and scientific programs to 1990 and to 2000.

Since 1975, two months, called Nature and Environment Protection Months, have been held annually (starting on 15 April and on 15 September for one month). These are supported by the Ministry of Nature and Environment Protection and are devoted to nature conservation related activities on any number of themes, such as protection of steppes and forests against fire, water conservation and so on. In 1980 a nature palace, which houses a museum and nature exhibitions was opened in Ulaanbaatar.

Threats to ecosystems are generally limited in extent and severity. A number should be mentioned, however. Mining, especially open-cast, is on the increase and is causing soil erosion and pollution in some areas. There is little or no environmental control. Open cast phosphorite mining 100km from Lake Huvsgul (Khovsgol) threatens to cause eutrophication of the delicate ecosystems of this important oligotrophic lake which is an integral part of the Lake Baikal (USSR) basin (Anon., 1988; Mavlet, 1988). Over utilisation of water resources is causing a problem in some urban and industrial areas and many rivers are apparently growing shallow (Mavlet, 1988). Deforestation is also taking place. Some 14,000ha of forest are cleared every year, while only 5,000ha are replanted (Mavlet, 1988). Due to desertification and aridification in recent decades some rodents, especially the Brandt's Vole (*Microtus brandti*), and some species of grasshoppers have caused deterioration in pastures. By 1997 the Brandt's Vole spread to 8 million hectares of a new area and there, it started to cause deterioration of 90 percent of the vegetation cover (First National Report, Biological Diversity in Mongolia, 1998). The policy on development of road networks is very poor. Consequently, at present, Mongolia has approximately one million hectares of land destroyed by the multiple off-road tracks of different vehicles. In the last few years the government of Mongolia has launched the 'Millennium Road' project which aims to construct a road network. At present, power stations, steam boilers using coal as fuel, ger townships producing smoke and soot, and cars are the main permanent pollution sources especially in urban areas. Ulaanbaatar's power plants consume up to 5 million tonnes of coal annually. In winter, the level of air pollution in Ulaanbaatar often exceeds the permitted levels by up to five times.

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