

Asian Nations Meet In Thailand To Discuss Trans-Boundary Biodiversity Conservation

From August 16 – 21, 1995, 31 participants from five nations met for a workshop on regional trans-boundary protected areas for biodiversity conservation in the Indo-Malay Peninsula. The meeting, hosted in Bangkok by the Royal Forestry Department of Thailand, and funded by the Royal Forestry Department, Wildlife Conservation Society of New York (WCS), Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was a follow-up to the first meeting on trans-boundary biodiversity conservation held in Kunming, China the previous year. Government officials from Cambodia, China, Lao P.D.R., Malaysia and Thailand attended the meeting, while officials from Myanmar were unable to attend. Representatives were also present from FAO, UNDP, WCS and WFT.

The issues of trans-boundary biodiversity conservation, and trans-boundary protected areas have only recently been at the forefront of regional biodiversity planning. It has long been recognized that a significant portion of the region's remaining biodiversity occurs within three major ecological systems that form the present borders of many of the mainland Asian nations: the major river systems, marine and coastal areas, and forest and mountain habitats. The continued ecological integrity of these systems is of concern for both the preservation of biodiversity and the sustained economic development of the region. However, as the economies of many of the Asian nations, particularly in the Indo-Malay Peninsula, continue to surge ahead amidst growing population numbers, the remaining resources and natural habitats in these border areas are being rapidly lost or coming under increasing threat from uncontrolled development and exploitation. It is now being realized, with frightening clarity, that the activities of any country along a common border can have far-reaching effects on both its neighbors or on other countries in the region sharing that resource along the border (such as the Mekong River).

Workshops such as this one have allowed high-level government officials to meet and suggest activities that will enable bi-and multi-lateral cooperative planning and management for the remaining biodiversity along their common borders. It is with this in mind that the activities listed below were proposed by the delegates present at the workshop. The successful completion of these activities, to be funded by both the countries themselves and the international and NGO community, will have important and far-reaching effects on biodiversity conservation in the Indo-Malay region, and can serve as a model for other regions of the world.

Activities proposed and approved by the delegates to the workshop:

Recognizing the need for information exchange and making available already published materials, it is proposed to:

- (1) Translate relevant books, publications and documents into the national language so that they can be used by government officials and protected area staff within the different countries of the region. Such publications could include training manuals, management plans or reports, and field guides.

- (2) Translate documents into English that clearly set out the wildlife and forestry laws, laws regarding trade issues, and biological inventory reports (and/or biological database information). These will be circulated among the relevant government offices for each of the countries of the Indo-Malayan region.
- (3) Set up an exchange of already published journals which are in English or with English abstracts among the different wildlife and parks departments for the various countries of the region. Such journals could initially include:
 - Malaysian Journal of Wildlife and Parks
 - The Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society of Thailand
 - Chinese Biodiversity Journal
 - Zoological Research Journal (In Chinese with English abstracts)
- (4) Translate already existing Mekong River development and project reports for China, from Chinese into English. Such reports will be circulated among the different countries utilizing the Mekong River, as well as to the relevant committees and NGO's concerned with the Mekong River development.
- (5) Exchange information (ie. names, positions, addresses, etc.) and/or organizational charts about the protected area staff on both sides of the border between Malaysia and Thailand.
- (6) Exchange information about the government agencies and personnel involved in the handling of trade issues, protected area management, and CITES between Lao P.D.R. and Thailand, and between Cambodia and Thailand.

Recognizing the need for smaller bi-lateral and multi-lateral meetings and/or study tours to deal specifically with transboundary biodiversity conservation issues among neighboring countries, it is proposed to:

- (7) Hold meetings between protected area staff and relevant government officials of paired trans-boundary protected areas which result in a bi-lateral report on management and protection issues for the areas. Such meetings, subject to government approval, are to be initially held among the following countries:
 - Cambodia/Lao P.D.R., with Cambodia as the host.
 - Lao P.D.R./Vietnam, with Lao P.D.R. as the host.
 - Lao P.D.R./Thailand, with Thailand as the host. The first meeting between Lao/Thailand will concern the issue of the Mekong catfish. A second meeting will deal with border protected areas.
 - Malaysia/Thailand, with Malaysia as the host.
 - Cambodia/Thailand, with Thailand as the host.
- (8) Hold a multi-lateral meeting between Cambodia, Lao P.D.R., Thailand and Vietnam specifically to establish a committee for the protection of the kouprey and to schedule a series of surveys into known kouprey areas. This meeting will be hosted in Cambodia within approximately a year of this workshop.

- (9) Hold a meeting that deals only with the Mekong River and planned development activities along the river. Such a meeting would include representatives from the countries of Cambodia, China, Lao P.D.R., Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- (10) Bring Peninsula Malaysian state officers of Perak, Kedah and Perlis on two separate study tours into Thailand to examine both well-managed existing protected areas in Thailand and proposed areas between the borders of Thailand and Peninsular Malaysia.
- (11) Bring Cambodian officials on a study tour of the border protected areas in Thailand and Malaysia.
- (12) Bring Lao P.D.R. officials to Thailand on a study tour of both well-managed protected areas in Thailand, and the border protected areas between Thailand and Lao P.D.R.

Recognizing the need to gather biological data through surveys and research in border areas where such data are not already available, it is proposed to:

- (13) Form a bi-lateral survey team, subject to government approval, of Chinese and Lao P.D.R. scientists and protected area staff to survey the area in northern Lao P.D.R. along the Chinese border.
- (14) Conduct wildlife and habitat surveys, and surveys on trade issues along the borders of Cambodia, subject to government approval.
- (15) Help start a monitoring program on trade issues along the borders of Cambodia.
- (16) Use the Indo-Chinese tiger as an important flagship species for promoting trans-boundary biodiversity conservation. This species can be found throughout the border areas of all of the countries of the Indo-Malayan region, and can serve as a common thread for regional cooperation and for trans-boundary surveys. Other species of concern that should be given priority for conservation include: Asian elephant, gaur, and Sarus Crane.

Recognizing the need for training of protected area staff in basic field research and conservation techniques, it is proposed to:

- (17) Establish a series of training courses to be held in trans-boundary protected areas and to be attended by staff of neighboring countries. Due to the long history of surveys already carried out in Peninsular Malaysia, Malaysia should be considered as a possible site for training courses and as a source for regional trainers.

Recognizing the need to promote, review, and monitor the progress of the proposed activities of this trans-boundary meeting, it is proposed to:

- (18) Hold the next regional trans-boundary biodiversity conservation meeting within the next two years, with the specific objective to review the progress on the proposed activities outlined in this document.

Recognizing the need to inform already existing government agencies of planned or proposed trans-boundary conservation activities in border areas, it is proposed to:

- (19) Inform the border committees under the various Foreign Ministries for the countries of the Indo-Malayan region of on-going trans-boundary conservation activities. This will expedite government permission for certain border activities, and help place the issue of trans-boundary conservation on border committee agendas.

Recognizing the need for high level government attention to the issue of trans-boundary biodiversity conservation in the Indo-Malaya region, it is proposed to:

- (20) Draft a regional agreement, to be initiated by Thailand, on trans-boundary biodiversity conservation to be signed by the governments of the Indo-Malayan region including: Cambodia, China, Lao P.D.R., Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Such an agreement, with support by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will promote awareness of the importance trans-boundary biodiversity conservation at the highest government levels.

This document was agreed upon by the approved delegates from Cambodia, China, Lao P.D.R., Malaysia, and Thailand. The participants agreed that the information and proposals resulting from this workshop should be sent to countries of the region that were not present during this workshop, and to appropriate non-governmental organizations and United Nations programs that are concerned with biodiversity conservation in Asia. It is also agreed that this document and the proposed activities will be submitted to the relevant authorities of the governments represented at this meeting.

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