"Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits"

Kazakhstan

(PIMS 5696)

Mid-Term Review FINAL Report

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACBK	Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan
APR	Annual Progress Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BD	Biodiversity
CDR	Combined Delivery Report
CO_2	Carbon Dioxide
CPD	Country Programme Document
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DO	Development Objective
DPS	Direct Project Services
FWC	Forestry and Wildlife Committee
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System
GSLEP	Global Snow Leopard & Ecosystem Protection Program
HCVF	High Conservation Value Forest
IP	Implementation Progress
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LD	Land Degradation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NP	National Park
NPD	National Project Director
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PA	Protected Area
PB	Project Board
PFD	Partnership Framework for Development
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PM	Project Manager
PMAT	Portfolio Monitoring and Assessment Tool
PRF	Project Strategic Framework
RBM	Results Based Management
SBAA	Standard Basic Assistance Agreement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SESP	Social and Environmental Screening Protocol
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound (indicator)
SMART	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (Patrol)
TOR	Terms of Reference
TOC	Theory Of Change
TSA	Targeted Scenario Analysis
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
USD	United States Dollar
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the UNDP-supported-GEF-Financed-Government of Kazakhstan Project "*Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits*". This MTR was performed by an Independent Evaluation Team composed of Mr. Jean-Joseph Bellamy, Team Leader and Mr. Sergey Sklyarenko, National Evaluator on behalf of UNDP.

The forests of Kazakhstan cover an area of approximately 12.6 million hectares, which represent about 4.6% of the total area of the country. It is one of the most forest-rich countries in Eurasia. The majority of these forest are state owned. About 80% of the state forests are managed by regional governments (Akimats), and 20% by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee. Approximately 95% of Kazakhstan's forests are managed by 123 state forestry entities, which are overseen by regional (province) governments (Akimats).

The protected area system of Kazakhstan covers approximately 24 million hectares, representing 8.81% (as of 2015) of the total area of the country. However, only 5% of Kazakhstan's forests are included within the PA system. About 1/3 of the total area of PAs is managed by legal entities with their own administration such as reserves, national parks, etc. Importantly, some ecosystems with globally important species remain outside the PA system such as the riparian (tugai) forest and floodplain ecosystems, large areas of valuable mountain coniferous forests in Altai region, and saxaul forests. Additionally, the current PA system does not fully encompass the habitat of snow leopard population groups.

Through its "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030*", it is planned to increase the forest cover and also the total area of PAs in Kazakhstan. The targets are 5% (from 4.6%) of forest cover and 10% (from 8.81%) of PAs, both by 2030. It also includes the target of 50% of the total PAs area with a legal entity status. The increase of forest area is to be achieved through improved afforestation practices with a focus on supporting and stimulating the development of private forests.

Improving the effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of forest and land resources has been hampered by three main barriers: (i) Insufficient technical and financial capacity to manage the protected area system of Kazakhstan; (ii) A poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management; and (iii) Insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management.

The project was designed with the aim of contributing to the removal of these barriers, using long-standing foundational approaches to biodiversity conservation and natural resource management. The overall strategy of the project was underpinned by three main theories-of-change (TOC): 1) Strengthening and expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan to improve biodiversity conservation; 2) Providing buffer zones around PAs to allow a transition of land use management approaches and establishing corridors between protected areas to ensure that they do not exist as stand-alone islands in the landscape; and 3) Improving the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities.

The project strategy is to holistically address the conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems in Kazakhstan, through management approaches including both protected areas and sustainable use of associated HCVF landscapes. It focuses on 3 different ecosystems: alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems and intervenes in three administrative regions: East Kazakhstan Province; Almaty Province; and Turkestan (former South Kazakhstan) Province. Institutionally the project reach is to work with 11 newly planned PAs, 12 existing PAs, 10 forestry units, 12 rural districts, 4 villages, and 6 districts of Almaty region for landscape planning output. The project objective is to "*improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities*". It will be achieved through the delivery of three components, 6 outcomes and 21 outputs:

1) Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation-important forests;
2) Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems;
3) International cooperation and knowledge management;

This is a project supported by UNDP, the GEF, and the Government of Kazakhstan. It is funded by a grant from the GEF of USD 8,069,178 and a total co-financing of USD 86,795,676. The project started in April 2018 and the project duration is 5 years to be completed by March 2023. The implementing partner is the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources[1].

Table 1: Project Information Table

Project Title:	Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits.		
UNDP Project ID (PIMS #):	5696	**PIF Approval Date:**	June 9, 2016
GEF Project ID (PMIS #):	9193	**CEO Endorsement Date:**	May 13, 2018
Award ID:	00097224	**Project Document Signature Date (date project began):**	April 28, 2018
Country:	Kazakhstan	**Date project manager hired:**	September 2018
Region:	CIS	**Inception Workshop date:**	May 10, 2018
Focal Area:	Biodiversity & Land Degradation	**Midterm Review date:**	July – November 2020
GEF-6 Strategic Programs:	BD-1 – Program 2 LD-3 – Program 4 SFM-1 & SFM-2	**Planned closing date:**	April 28, 2023
Trust Fund:	GEF-6	**If revised, proposed closing date:**	n/a
Executing Agency:	Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources		
Project Financing	at CEO endorsement (USD)	at Midterm Review (USD)	
(1) GEF financing:	8,069,178	8,069,178	
(2) UNDP contribution:	200,000	200,000	
(3) Forest Wildlife Committee:	70,510,507	70,510,507	
(4) Others:	16,085,169	16,085,169	
(5) Total co-financing [2+3+4]:	86,795,676	86,795,676	
Project Total Cost [1+5]:	94,864,854	94,864,854	

This mid-term review report documents the achievements of the project and includes four chapters. Chapter 1 presents an overview of the project; chapter 2 briefly describes the objective, scope, methodology, evaluation users and limitations of the evaluation; chapter 3 presents the findings of the evaluation, chapter 4 presents the main conclusions and recommendations and lessons learned and relevant annexes are found at the back end of the report.

Key Findings

A summary of the main conclusions of this MTR is presented below. The full details of these findings are presented in Section 4.1 of this report.

Project Strategy

a) The project is fully relevant; it is well aligned with national priorities of the government of Kazakhstan, and it is part of the UNDP programme to support Kazakhstan in strengthening biodiversity conservation and the management of forests. The project is well aligned with the "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030"*. This biodiversity strategy is also aligned with the government Decree on Green Economy (2013) and also with the global biodiversity targets. This alignment was also confirmed recently with the recent address of the President who confirmed the priorities of the government to protect and conserve biodiversity as well as focusing on forests, eco-tourism and "green growth" in general. The project is also well aligned with the UNDP *Country Programme Document (CPD) for Kazakhstan (2016-2020)*.

1 At the beginning of the project the Forestry and Wildlife Committee was under the Ministry of Agriculture. It was transferred to this new Ministry during the summer of 2019.

b) The project strategy provides a good response to national needs/priorities; particularly to address three existing barriers hampering an effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of forests and pastures. It is a timely response to national priorities focusing on addressing three key barriers, which are hampering progress in improving the conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use in Kazakhstan. (i) insufficient technical and financial capacity to manage the protected area system of Kazakhstan; (ii) a poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management; and (iii) insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management.

c) The project is well designed. The "*logic model*", as a response to national needs/priorities, presents a clear strategy and a good and logical "*chain of results*" – ***Activities*** ➔ ***Outputs*** ➔ ***Outcomes*** ➔ ***Objective***. With 3 expected outcomes, 21 expected outputs and 124 planned activities, it is an ambitious project with a broad scope to reach the objective. It focuses on 3 different ecosystems: alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems and intervenes in three administrative regions: East Kazakhstan Province; Almaty Province; and Turkestan (former South Kazakhstan) Province. The strategy is underpinned by three main theories-of-change: strengthening and expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan to improve biodiversity conservation; providing buffer zones around PAs to allow a transition of land use management approaches and establishing corridors between protected areas to ensure that they do not exist as stand-alone islands in the landscape; and improving the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities.

Progress Towards Results

d) The project has, so far, made satisfactory progress. The project is progressing well toward its outcome targets and it has two and a half more years of implementation to go. It is on target to meet its expected results as anticipated in the project document. Up to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was certainly on track to be a satisfactory project by April 2023 and meet all its targets. As the pandemic is still on-going, it is difficult to assess its impact on the delivery of project results.

- ***Under Outcome 1*** the project has been focusing on expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan. The process to expand the PA system by 1,795,509 ha has started, technical justifications have been drafted, feasibility studies are underway, and equipment has been procured. Management plans for the period 2019-2024 for 23 pilot PAs were developed and approved; including holding workshops and training courses for PA staff to develop their capacities related to the implementation of this new management planning approach. This component 1 has been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project.
- ***Under Outcome 2*** the project has been focusing on improving the integration of forest PAs in the wider landscape where most forested areas are. The introduction of the HCVF concept has started with a preliminary ranking of forest according to HCVF criteria; work took place to develop a scientifically-based system to assess forest pest and disease and develop control and protection measures including the test of a new biological preparation; several forest nursery were created; current state and management of pastures were assessed; and the TSA methodology has been introduced with a national assessment of the effectiveness of the forestry management system underway. This component 2 has been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project, though the actual expenditures under this outcome are slightly behind the allocated budget for this outcome.
- ***Under Outcome 3*** the project has been focusing on increasing capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge. It also supports the government in implementing the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan through the development of Integrated Landscape Planning in National Priority Snow Leopard Landscapes. So far, an annual report reporting on the annual assessment of snow leopard (2019) was completed; the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan was updated; the SMART patrol system was introduced in the Sairam-Ugam National Park; support was provided to the Kazakh team to participate in the preparation of an intergovernmental memorandum on the conservation of snow leopard; and collaboration with GSLEP to develop a landscape management plan for 2 landscape area has started. This component 3 has also been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project.

e) The challenge for the remaining period of implementation will be to institutionalize the tested and piloted innovative measures. It is an ambitious project progressing well. However, its success will depend much on a challenging task during the remaining period of implementation that is to sustainably institutionalize

concepts, approaches and methods piloted/demonstrated. It includes the necessary capacities needed to be developed, and which, should be addressed before the end of the project.

Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

f) The management arrangements are conducive for a good implementation of the project; including an excellent implementation team. The management arrangements as planned at the outset of the project are good and conducive for the day-to-day implementation of project activities. The project is overseen by a PB, which is the same board for all UNDP-supported biodiversity projects in Kazakhstan. It provides a well-coordinated programme-based approach to strengthen biodiversity conservation in Kazakhstan. The project is implemented by an excellent technical team of professionals supported by national consultants/experts bringing together a broad range of skills and knowledge in protected area management, pasture and forestry management, biodiversity conservation, capacity development and local livelihood.

g) Stakeholders and beneficiaries are well engaged in the implementation of the project, particularly at the local level; a stronger link to share knowledge between policy makers, researchers, practitioners and beneficiaries is needed. The participative and collaborative approach used by the project implementation team is conducive for this good engagement. It has resulted in a good country ownership of the project. However, so far, the engagement of stakeholders is mostly happening at the local level in project targeted areas such as district level stakeholders but also staff in Leskhozes and in PA Administrations; local natural resource users are also being engaged. As innovative concepts, methods, approaches, etc. are being piloted/demonstrated, there is a need to establish a stronger link among local stakeholders (including beneficiaries), district level stakeholders, researchers and policy makers at national level. It is time to emphasize knowledge sharing among stakeholders and to learn from each other.

h) The disbursements of the GEF grant was well on track with the overall plan until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of August 2020, the remaining budget from the GEF grant is USD 5,574,570 (69%). Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project disbursements were well on track to expend the GEF grant by April 2023. However, the level of expenditures for this year has been greatly affected by the pandemic. Based on this year's numbers, it is now doubtful that the entire budget will be expended by April 2023. Monthly disbursements would need to increase by 83%, which would require a drastic change in managing and administering the project.

i) There is a good monitoring framework in place with a good set of indicators and targets to measure the performance of the project. The M&E framework includes a good mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The 16 indicators and their respective targets are SMART indicators with clear targets. There is also a good integration of tracking tool scores in the M&E framework, including the METT scores as indicator #6 and the PMAT score as indicator #10. This framework focuses clearly on measuring progress made toward expected results. It is a relatively cost-efficient, simple and effective monitoring framework.

j) One target (indicator #7) needs to be revised and adapted to the context in Kazakhstan. The target for the indicator #7 ("*At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment*") is not appropriate; it needs to be revised. At this stage it is not clear yet that the government of Kazakhstan made the decision to implement the "*green list*" standard within its PA system. Considering the high cost of implementing such standard, a clear strategy from the government to implement this standard is needed before any such investment is made. The target needs to be revised reflecting the collaboration with the government in reviewing the pros and cons of applying this standard to help the government to make a decision to proceed , or not.

Sustainability

k) Project achievements should be sustained over the long-term; however, the challenge is to institutionalize the tested and piloted innovative measures and ensure that full capacities are in place. As a direct response to the government agenda, the project has been strengthening the government's approach for biodiversity conservation, including expanding and strengthening its protected area network, and strengthening the management of its forests and pastures while bettering livelihoods of communities living in these areas. Through its activities the project has introduced new innovative concepts, methods, approaches, etc. Ultimately, the success of the project will reside in its ability to institutionalize – hence sustain – all these innovations and to ensure that capacities required by institutions involved in applying these innovations are developed. At this stage, a certain level of risk exists – including the still-not-fully-known impact of the

pandemic - that all these innovative measures are not fully institutionalized and capacities are not in place by the end of the project.

l) COVID-19 Pandemic: The project has been affected negatively by the pandemic with no end in sight and as a result a political risk emerged. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the implementation of project activities. As this pandemic is still on-going, it is difficult to assess the full impact on the delivery of project activities and, by extension, on achievements. Despite that the project management team is adapting well to the new reality, a certain political risk has emerged as critical from the impact of COVID-19. The government of Kazakhstan has already redirected initial financial commitments to counter the impact of COVID-19 and stabilize the epidemiological situation in Kazakhstan. According to the project team, the originally allocated budgets to PAs for 2020-2021 were reduced this year by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee by 50%. It is a large budget reduction for PAs management with an uncertain future for the coming years, including the timing for the adoption of the proposed new PAs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this mid-term review, the following recommendations are suggested. The full details for each recommendation is presented in Section 4.2 of this report.

Recommendation 1: Extend the project by one year minimum at no additional cost, due mostly to the impact of COVID-19.

Recommendation 2: Increase synergies and knowledge sharing among policy makers, researchers, practitioners and beneficiaries.

Recommendation 3: Emphasize institutionalization and capacity development of project partners for the remaining implementation period.

Recommendation 4: Undertake capacity assessments of partners to identify capacity gaps and capacity needs to sustain project achievements.

Recommendation 5: Undertake studies on the carrying capacity of PAs with high eco-tourism potential.

Recommendation 6: Prepare an exit strategy.

Recommendation 7: Make a few changes to the M&E framework: target for indicator #7 and #12, and means of verification for indicator #5.

Recommendation 8: Exchange with and access the body of knowledge of the UNDP-GEF-SLT "Transboundary Cooperation for Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Conservation" project.

Recommendation 9: The UNDP country office to look into faster processing of procurement requests for goods and services.

Recommendation 10: Calculate the CO2 benefits using the FAO Ex-ACT tool by the end of the project.

Recommendation 11: Verify that the project complies with UNDP and GEF communications and branding guidelines.

Lessons Learned

Several lessons learned are presented below:

- Implementing such a project as part of a programme as opposed to an isolated project is more effective.
- GEF projects have resources and flexibility to innovate, test and demonstrate new approaches. They play a pioneer role in improving the management of natural resources; they provide platforms offering "out of the box" thinking.

- A good skilled management/implementation project team is critical for a good implementation of such project.
- A project that is a response to clear national needs and priorities is often highly relevant for beneficiaries and its chance of being implemented effectively are maximized.
- A good design leads to a good implementation, which in turn leads to good project results.
- Sustainability of this type of projects, is much correlated with capacities being developed during the lifetime of these projects.

MTR Ratings and Achievement Summary Table[2]

Table 2: MTR Ratings and Achievement Summary Table

Measure	MTR Rating	Achievement Description
Progress Toward Results		
Objective Achievement:	**S**	The objective is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Outcome 1 Achievement:	**S**	The outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Outcome 2 Achievement:	**S**	The outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Outcome 3 Achievement:	S	The outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
Project Implementation & Adaptive Management	**S**	Implementation of most of the seven components: (i) management arrangements, (ii) work planning, (iii) finance and co-finance, (iv) project-level monitoring and evaluation systems, (v) stakeholder engagement, (vi) reporting, and (vii) communications are leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management except for only few that are subject to remedial actions.
Sustainability	**L**	Negligible risks to sustainability, with key outcomes on track to be achieved by the project's closure and expected to continue into the foreseeable future

2 **Note**: These ratings are based on the review of the implementation and progress made toward the expected results for the period 2018 to July 2020. They do not take into account the possible impact of the pandemic on the implementation and achievements of the project in the future.

1. CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT[3]

1. The area of Kazakhstan is 2.725 million km^2, making it the ninth largest country in the world by size. It includes approximately 12.6 million hectares of forest (4.6% of the total area). Despite this low percentage, it is one of the most forest-rich countries in Eurasia. The majority of these forest are state owned. About 80% of the state forests are managed by regional governments (Akimats), and 20% by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee. Approximately 95% of Kazakhstan's forests are managed by 120 state forestry entities, which are overseen by regional (province) governments (Akimats).

2. The protected area system of Kazakhstan covers approximately 24,018,800 ha, or 8.81% (as of 2015) of the total area of the country. However, only 5% of Kazakhstan's forests are included within the PA system. About 1/3 of the total area of PAs is managed by legal entities with their own administration such as reserves, national parks, etc. Importantly, some ecosystems with globally important species remain outside the PA system. Notably the riparian (tugai) forest and floodplain ecosystems, which support a number of endemic and threatened species; large areas of valuable mountain coniferous forests in Altai region, representing an important CO^2 pools; and saxaul forests (desert and semi-desert shrubs) playing a critical role in supporting local community livelihoods in drylands. Additionally, the current PA system does not fully encompass the habitat of the snow leopard population groups. Only 30-35% of its range in Kazakhstan is protected within the PA network. Large areas providing a natural bridge and genetic interactions between the Tien Shan, Zhungar and Altai population groups of snow leopard stay outside of the existing protected areas network.

3. Through its "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030*", which was elaborated in 2014, updated in 2018 and approved by the Scientific Technical Council of the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife in 2019, it is planned to increase the forest cover and also the total area of PAs in Kazakhstan. The targets are 5% (from 4.6%) of forest cover and 10% (from 8.81%) of PAs, both by 2030. It also includes the target of 50% of the total PAs area with a legal entity status. The increase of forest area is to be achieved through improved afforestation practices with a focus on supporting and stimulating the developing of private forests. However, under the existing forest governance system, forestry entities lack sufficient capacity to effectively manage high conservation value forests (HCVF), including those forests neighboring highly biodiverse specially PAs.

4. During the formulation of this project, it was found that improving the effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of forest and land resources were hampered by three main barriers:

- There was not sufficient technical or financial capacity available to support the necessary process for expanding the protected area system of Kazakhstan to be appropriately representative of Kazakhstan's forest ecosystems. In addition, there is insufficient capacity for an effective management of PAs in many forest PAs.
- There was a poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management combined with the lack of experience with modern and innovative forest and land management models and mechanisms.
- There was insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management amongst national stakeholders responsible for biological monitoring, and wildlife law enforcement. This situation is exacerbated with respect to certain mountain and forest species that are migratory and transboundary - such as the snow leopard, and its prey. There is currently no sharing of data or coordination between Kazakhstan and its neighboring countries with respect to snow leopard monitoring, despite the fact that all of the snow leopard landscapes in Kazakhstan are transboundary.

5. The project was designed with the aim of contributing to the removal of these barriers, using long-standing foundational approaches to biodiversity conservation and natural resource management. The overall strategy of the project was underpinned by three main theories-of-change (TOC).

1) Firstly, the formulation of the project relies on the concept of protected areas as core conservation zones for biodiversity, leading to conservation of rare species and valuable ecosystems. The project strategy is to contribute to establishing new protected areas and strengthening existing ones.
2) Secondly, it recognizes that as critical as protected areas are, they are not a complete solution for the

3 Information in this section has been summarized from the project document.

effective conservation of biodiversity. Biodiversity conservation must also take place beyond the boundaries of PAs, by providing buffer zones around them to allow a transition of land use management approaches, and establishing corridors between protected areas to ensure that they do not exist as stand-alone islands in the landscape. It also necessitates to support the development of land and resource management approaches that recognize the requirements for biodiversity conservation, but also balance these with short-term economic and livelihood needs and requirements. The project strategy is to support the development of sustainable forest and pasture management plans for HCVF and associated pastures in areas surrounding PAs. It is also to work with six districts that have forest PAs within their territories to develop land-use plans that recognize PA buffer zones and corridors between PAs. Finally, the project contributes to strengthening the national institutional and regulatory framework for forest management in Kazakhstan.

3) Thirdly, it relates to the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities. It was recognized that biodiversity outcomes are improved when stakeholders have quality scientific information to base management decisions on, and conservation efforts are coordinated among stakeholders. The project strategy in this area is to carry out activities to improve the quality of biodiversity monitoring information, in particular in relation to monitoring snow leopard populations, their prey, and their habitats. It also includes knowledge management activities to disseminate and share biodiversity monitoring information and to carry out education and awareness raising activities to further engage stakeholders in conservation activities, and improve coordination among stakeholders.

6. The project strategy is to holistically address the conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems in Kazakhstan, through management approaches including both protected areas and sustainable use of associated HCVF landscapes. It is also applying an integrated landscape management approach by targeting sustainable land management practices within forest landscapes. The project works in regions with key areas of Kazakhstan with alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems. These ecosystems (particularly alpine ecosystems, the main habitat of the snow leopard) are encompassed in the three administrative regions targeted by the project (*see maps in Annex 1*): East Kazakhstan Province (Altai and Saur-Tarbagatai mountain zones); Almaty Province (Zhongar Alatau, North and Central Tien Shan mountains, Charyn and Ile river and Ile-Balkhash delta floodplain forests, and associated saxaul ecosystems); and South Kazakhstan Province (West Tien Shan mountain ecosystems, and Syr Darya river floodplain forests, and associated saxaul ecosystems). Institutionally the project reach is to work with 11 newly planned PAs, 12 existing PAs, 8 forestry units, 12 rural districts, 4 villages, and 6 districts of Almaty region for landscape planning output.

7. The project objective is to "*improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities*". It will be achieved through the delivery of three components, 6 outcomes and 21 outputs (*see more detailed about the project strategy in Annex 2*):

4) Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation-important forests;
   - Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non- forest ecosystems and their biodiversity;
   - Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests;
5) Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems;
   - Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits;
   - Strengthened enabling environment to support SFM objectives through updated national policies, regulations, and knowledge management systems supporting improved management of 12,652,400 ha of national forest territory;
   - Integrated economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in decision making in natural resource management, through piloting of innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms;
6) International cooperation and knowledge management;
   - Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share

knowledge.

8. This is a project supported by UNDP, the GEF, and the Government of Kazakhstan. It is funded by a grant from the GEF of USD 8,069,178 and a total co-financing of USD 86,795,676; including a contribution from UNDP of USD 200,000, a contribution from national and provincial governments of USD 85,976,684 and a contribution from other organizations of USD 618,992. The total financing of the project is USD 94,864,854. The project was approved by GEF on Mars 12, 2018; it started in April 2018; the inception workshop was held on May 10, 2018 in Nur-Sultan; and the project duration is 5 years to be completed by March 2023. It is implemented under the "National Implementation Modality (NIM)" and the implementing partner is the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources[4].

2. REVIEW FRAMEWORK

9. This mid-term review (MTR) - a requirement of UNDP and GEF procedures - was initiated by UNDP Kazakhstan, the Commissioning Unit and the GEF Implementing Agency for this project. This review provides an in-depth assessment of project achievements and progress toward its objectives and outcomes.

10. This assignment was conducted during the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. Within this context, UNDP and the Government of Kazakhstan decided to proceed with the MTR, following local guidelines with regards to precautions against the spread of COVID19. The Evaluation Team composed of an International Evaluator (Team Leader) and a National Evaluator conducted the assignment in a way to minimize epidemiologic risks. The International Evaluator led the team remotely from his home in Ottawa, Canada using communication tools such as email, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and other convenient tools. The National Evaluator was responsible to conduct the interviews face-to-face or by using communication tools such as phone, Skype, Zoom or other means and also following the current government guidelines to minimize epidemiologic risks. Each interview was prepared by the Evaluation Team; using the Interview Protocol (*see Annex 8*) to collect evaluative evidence required by the assignment. As much as possible, the International Evaluator participated remotely to these interviews. In addition, the National Evaluator was involved into direct observations by visiting project sites as per his TORs. He provided all collected data (including photo/video) to the Team Leader and provided translation from/to English during all interviews and site visits as well as of documents as needed. Where relevant and where it was technically possible, the National Evaluator organized field video-calls from project site to help the Team Leader in observing directly relevant project outputs and activities. It was an opportunity to witness project impacts on beneficiaries. Observations made during these visits were documented in short (point form) reports accompanied by photos and short videos where possible (*see Annex 3 for additional remarks on remote evaluations under COVID-19*).

2.1. Objectives

11. The objective of the MTR was to assess progress toward the achievement of the project objective and outcomes as specified in the Project Document and Project Inception Report, and assess early signs of project success or failure with the goal of identifying possible changes to be made in order to keep/set the project on-track to achieve its intended results. The MTR also reviewed the project strategy and its risks to sustainability.

2.2. Scope

12. As indicated in the TORs for this MTR (*see Annex 4*), the scope of this review covered four categories of project progress, in accordance with the "*Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects*". A summary of the scope of this MTR is presented below:

A. <u>Project Strategy:</u>
- Review of the Project Design
- Review of the Results Framework/Log-frame

B. <u>Progress Toward Results</u>
- Reporting
- Communications
- Risk Management
- Safeguard and Gender Mainstreaming

4 At the beginning of the project the Forestry and Wildlife Committee was under the Ministry of Agriculture. It was transferred to this new Ministry during the summer of 2019.

- Progress Toward Outcomes Analysis

C. <u>Project Implementation and Adaptive Management</u>

- Management Arrangements
- Work Planning
- Finance and co-finance
- Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems
- Stakeholder Engagement

D. <u>Sustainability</u>

- Review risks and risk ratings
- Assess risks to sustainability in term of financial risks, socio-economic risks, institutional framework and governance risks, and environmental risks.

2.3. Methodology

13. The methodology that was used to conduct this MTR complies with international criteria and professional norms and standards; including the norms and standards adopted by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG).

2.3.1. Overall Approach

14. The review was conducted in accordance with the guidance, rules and procedures established by UNDP and GEF as reflected in the UNDP "*Guidance for Conducting Mid-Term Reviews of UNDP-supported, GEF-Financed Projects*[5]", and the UNEG Standards and Norms for Evaluation in the UN System. The review was undertaken in-line with GEF principles which are: *independence, impartiality, transparency, disclosure, ethical, partnership, competencies/capacities, credibility* and *utility*. The process promoted accountability for the achievement of project objective and outcomes and promoted learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned among the project's partners and beyond.

15. The evaluation adopted a *Utilization Focused Evaluation (UFE)* approach, which is predicated on maximizing the practical value of the evaluation to project stakeholders. The MTR was planned and conducted in ways that enhanced the likely utilization of both the findings and of the process itself to inform decisions and improve performance of the project. Using this approach, the Evaluation Team did not make decisions independently of the intended users, but they rather facilitated decision making amongst the people who will use the findings of this mid-term review.

16. The Evaluation Team developed gender sensitive review tools in accordance with UNDP and GEF policies and guidelines to ensure an effective project review. The review was conducted, and findings are structured around six major evaluation criteria; which are also the six recently revised internationally accepted evaluation criteria set out by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[6]. There are:

- *Relevance* is the extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries, global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change;
- *Coherence* is the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution;
- *Effectiveness* is the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups;
- *Efficiency is the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way;*
- *Impacts* is the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects;
- *Sustainability* is the extent to which net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.

17. In addition to the UNDP and GEF guidance for reviewing projects, the Evaluation Team applied to this mandate its knowledge of review methodologies and approaches and its expertise in biodiversity conservation,

5 UNDP Evaluation Office, 2012, *Project-Level Evaluation – Guidance for Conducting Mid-Term Review of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects.*

6 OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, *Better Criteria for Better Evaluation : Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use*

sustainable livelihood, land and forest management and more generally in environmental management issues. The Evaluation Team also applied several methodological principles such as (i) *Validity of information*: multiple measures and sources were sought out to ensure that the results are accurate and valid; (ii) *Integrity*: any issue with respect to conflict of interest, lack of professional conduct or misrepresentation were immediately referred to the client if needed; and (iii) *Respect and anonymity*: all participants had the right to provide information in confidence.

18. The evaluation was conducted following a set of steps presented in the table below:

Table 3: Steps Used to Conduct the Evaluation

I. Review Documents and Prepare Mission ▪ Start-up teleconference/finalize assignment work plan ▪ Collect and review project documents ▪ Draft and submit **Inception Report** ▪ Prepare Interviews and field visits	**III. Analyze Information** ▪ In-depth analysis and interpretation of data collected ▪ Follow-up interviews (where necessary) ▪ Draft and submit **draft review report**
II. Collect Information ▪ Interview key Stakeholders and conduct field visits ▪ Further collect project related documents ▪ Debriefings / **Presentation of key findings**	**IV. Finalize Review Report** ▪ Circulate draft report to UNDP-GEF and relevant stakeholders ▪ Integrate comments and submit **final Review Report**

19. Finally, the Evaluation Team signed and applied the "*Code of Conduct*" for Review Consultants (*see Annex 5*). The Evaluation Team conducted review activities, which were *independent*, *impartial* and *rigorous*. This MTR clearly contributed to learning and accountability and the Evaluation Team has personal and professional integrity and was guided by propriety in the conduct of its business.

2.3.2. Review Instruments

20. The review provides evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. Findings were triangulated through the concept of "*multiple lines of evidence*" using several review tools and gathering information from different types of stakeholders and different levels of management. To conduct the review the following review instruments were used:

Review Matrix: A review matrix was developed based on the review scope presented in the TOR, the project log-frame and the review of key project documents (*see Annex 6*). This matrix is structured along the six evaluation criteria and includes all review questions; including the scope presented in the guidance. The matrix provided overall directions for the review and was used as a basis for interviewing people and reviewing project documents.

Documentation Review: The Evaluation Team conducted a documentation review in Canada and in Kazakhstan (*see Annex 7*). In addition to be a main source of information, documents were also used to prepare the interviews with Stakeholders. A list of documents was identified during the start-up phase and further searches were done through the web and contacts. The list of documents was completed during the data collection phase.

Interview Guide: Based on the review matrix, an interview guide was developed (*see Annex 8*) to solicit information from stakeholders. As part of the participatory approach, the Evaluation Team ensured that all parties viewed this tool as balanced, unbiased, and structured.

List of Stakeholders to be Interviewed: A list of Stakeholders to be interviewed was constituted during the preparatory phase of this MTR with the support of the Project Team (*see Annex 9*). This list was reviewed to ensure that it represents all project Stakeholders. On this basis, dates and time slots for interviews were planned in advance with the objective of ensuring a broad scan of Stakeholders' views during the data collection phase of the MTR.

Interviews: Stakeholders were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the interview guide adapted for each interview. Interviews were conducted in person and/or remotely using phone, Skype or other communication platforms with some follow up using emails when needed. Confidentiality were guaranteed to the interviewees and the findings were incorporated in the final report.

Field Visits and Direct Observations: As per the TORs, visits to project sites were conducted by the National Evaluator where it was possible, given the COVID-19 quarantine limitations. It allowed the Evaluation Team to have direct primary sources of information from the field and project end-users (beneficiaries). It gave opportunities to the Evaluation Team to observe project achievements and obtain views from stakeholders and beneficiaries at the national but also local levels.

Achievement Rating: The Evaluation Team rated achievements according to the guidance provided in the TORs. It included a 6-point rating scale to measure progress toward results, project implementation and adaptive management and a four-point rating scale for sustainability (*see Annex 10*).

2.4. MTR Users

21. This MTR, initiated by UNDP Kazakhstan, provides Project Implementing Partner Managers at national, regional and local levels and UNDP-Kazakhstan with an in-depth review of how well the project is progressing and – as needed – recommendations to correct and adjust the overall project strategy, work plan and timetable for the purpose of enhancing the achievement of project objective and outcomes. It also provides the basis for learning and accountability for these managers.

2.5. Limitations and Constraints

22. The approach for this mid-term review was based on a planned level of effort of 80 working days for the Evaluation Team composed of an International and a National Evaluators. It comprises an effort to collect documents, interview stakeholders and, if permitted by the guidelines, collect evaluative evidence through field visits to project sites where the project support activities. Within the context of these resources, the Independent Evaluation Team was able to conduct a detailed assessment of actual results against expected results and successfully ascertains whether the project will meet its main objective - as laid down in the project document - and whether the project initiatives are, or are likely to be, sustainable after completion of the project. The Evaluation Team also made recommendations for any necessary corrections and adjustments to the overall project work plan and timetable and also for reinforcing the long-term sustainability of project achievements.

23. Due to COVID-19, this MTR was conducted remotely. Interviews were conducted online through videos when possible or audio when the internet bandwidth was limited. Despite that it is not as efficient as face-to-face interviews, the Evaluation Team was able to collect evaluative evidence and triangulate the collected information to ascertain how well the project will meet its expected targets.

3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

24. This section presents the findings of this MTR adhering to the basic structure proposed in the TOR and as reflected in the UNDP project review guidance.

3.1. Project Strategy

25. This section discusses the assessment of the project strategy – including its relevance - and its overall design in the context of Kazakhstan.

3.1.1. Project Design

26. According to the project document, Kazakhstan is a country with a low forest coverage estimated at about 4.6%. However, due to the overall size of the country, forests still represent a total area of about 12.6M ha making it one of the most forest-rich countries in Eurasia. These forests are mostly government owned; less than 400 ha are privately owned. 80% of the State forests are under the responsibility of local Akimats (regional governments) and 20% under the Forestry and Wildlife Committee. Finally, 5% of State forests are included in the Protected Area (PA) system and the rest (95%) is managed by 120 Leskhozes (state forest entities overseen by Akimats).

27. The protected area system of Kazakhstan covers approximately 24M ha or 8.81% (as of 2015) of the

total area of the country. As discussed above, it includes only 5% of the state forests. At the outset of this project, one critical issue from biodiversity conservation point of view was that some ecosystems with globally important species remained outside the PA system. It included the unique riparian (tugai) forest and floodplain ecosystems, which support a number of endemic and threatened species; large areas of valuable mountain coniferous forests in Altai region, representing an important CO^2 pools; and saxaul forests (desert and semi-desert shrubs) playing a critical role in supporting local communities' livelihoods in drylands. Additionally, the current PA system does not fully encompass the habitat of the snow leopard population groups. Large areas providing a natural bridge and genetic interactions between the Tien Shan, Zhungar and Altai population groups of snow leopard stay outside of the existing protected areas network.

28. In 2014, within this context, the government elaborated its comprehensive "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030*". This Concept was developed in line with the Decree on Green Economy endorsed by the government on May 30, 2013 (#577) and with the global biodiversity targets adopted by the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Its goal was twofold: (i) to ensure biodiversity conservation through prevention of wildlife species reduction, restoration of rare and endangered species population and conservation of species genetic diversity, communities and ecosystems; and (ii) to use biological resources sustainably to ensure long-term sustainable and inexhaustible biodiversity use and meet economic, aesthetic and other needs of the current and future generations.

29. This Concept stated a series of objectives; each one with its related target indicators (*see Annex 10*). It included several objectives, which the project has been well aligned with, including the establishment of optimal ecological network; the conservation of rare and endangered species; the genetic resources conservation, access to them and sharing of benefits; the development of environmental monitoring system for biodiversity based on ecosystem approach; the improvement of PA management system and mechanisms in accordance with biodiversity conservation goals; the securing forest ecosystems conservation through strengthening protection and conservation activities; the increasing forest restoration and reforestation to expand forest cover of the republic; the improvement of forest resources management effectiveness; and the conservation of agro-biodiversity in agriculture through the restoration and reduction of areas of deteriorated rangelands.

30. The implementation of this Concept was planned in three phases: 2015-2020; 2021-2025; and 2026-2030. It also stated mechanisms for implementing this programme. It included economical mechanisms: Economic valuation of ecosystem services and payments for ecosystem services; subsidization; tax incentives; cadastral valuation of biological resources; trust funds; independent market certification, purchasing policy, biodiversity offsets and forest insurance against fires. It also included information, scientific and personal provisions.

31. The government has also been strengthening its legislation framework related to the environment, forests, pastures and eco-tourism. In addition to the existing legislative framework at the outset of this project, the government has, since, adopted the following related pieces of legislation:

- Forest Code (No. 477, July 8, 2003 - updated as of June 15, 2017)
- Law on Specially Protected Nature Areas (No. 175, July 7, 2006 - updated as of October 28, 2019)
- Law on Pastures (No. 47-VI, February 20, 2017)
- Law on Tourism Activities in the Republic of Kazakhstan (No. 211, June 13, 2001, updated as of July 2, 2020)
- Law on Protection, Reproduction and Use of Wildlife (No. 593, July 9, 2004, updated as of October 28, 2019)

32. More recently, as of September 1, 2020, the President of Kazakhstan addressed the Nation with a speech titled "*Kazakhstan in a New Reality: Time for Action*". As part of this address, a section was dedicated to "*Ecology and Biodiversity Protection*". It refers to the recently developed draft Environmental Code to address a number of systemic issues, which should be adopted by the government by the end of this year. It also sets the goal of planting over 2 billion trees in forests, 15 million trees in settlements and building a green belt around the capital. The President also requested the government in cooperation with the scientific community and the private sector to develop a package of proposals on "green growth". Finally, he requested the

government, together with the civil sector, to develop a draft law "*On Animals Protection*".

33. Nevertheless, as discussed in section 1 above, during the formulation of the project it was also found that improving the effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of forest and land resources were hampered by three main barriers:

- There was not sufficient technical or financial capacity available to support the necessary process for expanding the protected area system of Kazakhstan to be appropriately representative of Kazakhstan's forest ecosystems. In addition, there is insufficient capacity for an effective management of PAs in many forest PAs.
- There was a poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management combined with the lack of experience with modern and innovative forest and land management models and mechanisms.
- There was insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management amongst national stakeholders responsible for biological monitoring, and wildlife law enforcement.

34. Within this context, it is clear that the project has been addressing key priorities in Kazakhstan in the areas of forests, pastures and protected areas. It particularly addresses these three barriers, which are hampering progress in improving the conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use in Kazakhstan. It is a timely response to the "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030*" by directly responding to some objectives stated in this Concept. The recent address of the President has confirmed the priorities of the government to protect and conserve biodiversity as well as focusing on forests, eco-tourism and "green growth" in general. The project is well positioned to continue contributing to these priorities.

Gender Considerations

35. The Evaluation Team found that gender considerations were very well included in the design of the project. Using the UNDP Gender Marker, the project was assessed as GEN2, which is defined as "*Gender equality is not the main objective of the expected output, but the output promotes gender equality in a significant and consistent way*[7]." It is stated in the project document that the project will contribute to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5 that is Gender Equality. Furthermore, it states that the project will seek to promote gender equality and women's empowerment to the extend relevant and feasible within the scope of the project. The project team will ensure gender mainstreaming aspects to be addressed and integrated throughout all aspects of stakeholder engagement activities. As indicated in table 4 in the next section, gender mainstreaming was specifically stated as a cross-cutting component in the *Project Results Framework (PRF)* with its own indicator, baseline and targets to measure the performance of the project in mainstreaming gender.

36. An excellent section in the project document titled *IV.v - Mainstreaming Gender* provides detailed information on gender in Kazakhstan. It focuses on the analytical information on gender gaps based on the 2015 Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum and the UNDP Gender Development Index. It also refers to the *Strategy for Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2016* (adopted by Government Decree #1977 dated November 29, 2005) and the more recent *Family and Gender Equality Policy 2016-2030*, which has been developed and aligned with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Development Strategy of Kazakhstan until 2050, the National Action Plan on Advancement of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and other ratified international treaties and agreements.

37. A gender analysis was conducted during the formulation of the project to identify trends in gender policy and practices within the project areas and to develop recommendations for the project on mainstreaming gender issues into project activities and monitoring, and to define project specific gender indicators that will demonstrate how the project contributed to the implementation of the gender equity policy in Kazakhstan. This analysis was summarized and included as *Annex H Gender Analysis and Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan* in the project document. It is an exhaustive review of the gender context in Kazakhstan looking into the demographic and economic dimensions, and the legislation, policy and strategy dimensions. It also included a review of the gender situation in the project areas and sectors focusing on the representation of women at the

7 To reach a GEN2 gender marker rating, at least 50% of project outputs should be rated GEN2.

decision-making level, employment, access to resources and capital, and social role. On the basis of this analysis, recommendations were identified for mainstreaming gender in the design, implementation and monitoring of the project. These recommendations were taken into account in the design of the project.

38. Since the inception of the project, another gender analysis was conducted in 2018 focusing on the impact of ecosystem loss on the behavioral patterns of men and women; on the participation of men and women in decision-making on the use of biological resources and the distribution of socio-economic benefits; and on the financial opportunities already created or being created for ensuring equal access of men and women to natural resources (pastures, forest resources, fauna and flora on the example of the project area). This assignment was conducted by independent experts and was concluded with a set of recommendations for the project to improve the interaction of gender equality and biodiversity issues and to ensure that gender and social aspects are taken into account in all project activities to provide equal opportunities for men and women in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

UNDP Strategy in Kazakhstan

39. UNDP entered into an agreement with the Government of Kazakhstan on October 4, 1994 to provide assistance to the government for the benefit of the Kazakh people. This agreement defines the scope and conditions under which UNDP assist the government of Kazakhstan in carrying out its activities in response to requests submitted by the government.

40. In 2016, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) launched the *Partnership Framework for Development (PFD) 2016-2020* setting the strategic vision and direction for the UNCT in Kazakhstan for the period 2016-2020. This framework analyzes how the United Nations system can continue to most effectively coordinate its activities in response to national priorities, while serving as an easily accessible overview of United Nations goals and activities in Kazakhstan. The overall vision of the PFD is to develop a new pathway for strategic partnership with Kazakhstan, to achieve the '*Kazakhstan 2050*' vision, by building a prosperous, equitable and inclusive society, strengthening the accountability and effectiveness of public institutions, and facilitating the country's regional and international co-operation.

41. The PFD was developed as a follow up framework to the *United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2010-2015 (UNDAF)*. It builds on past achievements. It was recognized that, under the UNDAF 2010-2015, the UNCT provided assistance to national programmes on 'green' economy and environmental sustainability by helping the government to advance the country's policies and practices in conserving biodiversity, and combating land degradation, while introducing climate change adaptation within the agricultural sector. The main lesson learned during this period 2010-2015 was the necessity of transferring knowledge and capacities to national and local partners, both government and non-government, in order to achieve scaling up and sustainability.

42. This PFD 2016-2020 presents several pathways of cooperation and partnership with Kazakhstan and articulates its strategy through three pillars (*Reduced disparities and improved human development; Strengthened and innovative institution*s; and *Enhanced international and regional cooperation*). Under the first pillar, three expected outcomes were identified. Related to this project, it includes *outcome 1.3 - Ecosystems and natural resources are protected and sustainably used, and human settlements are resilient to natural and manmade disasters and climate change*. It stated that the UNCT will provide guidance on national alignment with international environmental obligations – including reporting - and Conventions. Under this outcome one indicator is to monitor the percentage of protected areas and adjacent territories and ecosystems managed sustainably with a baseline of 8% and a target of 20% by 2020.

43. Within the context of this PFD 2016-2020, UNDP developed its *Country Programme Document (CPD) for Kazakhstan (2016-2020)*. This programme is in line with national priorities as identified in the *Nurl Zhol* medium-term plan and the longer-term *Kazakhstan 2050* vision. Through this programme, UNDP seeks expand partnerships and strengthen its role of a convener and facilitator between the Government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and communities, as well as United Nations organizations and other international bodies. It states that the government cost-sharing mechanism will remain a strategic choice for UNDP in this CPD. By 2016, Kazakhstan, as a net contributing country, should cover at least 75 per cent of UNDP presence and core operations, with an increase to 100 per cent coverage during the period 2018-2020.

44. The CPD is made up of four priorities including *(b) sustainable human settlements, and natural resources management*. In this area, UNDP will continue expanding its work in ecosystems and natural resources management and protection by introducing new models of payments for eco-systems services and sustainable livelihoods options around protected territories, for both women and men. Under this priority, the project is in line with two expected outputs: (i) Natural resources are protected, accounted for and integrated in national and/or sub-national development planning; and (ii) National and sub-national institutions have strengthened capacities in environmental governance in protected territories and adjacent settlements.

GEF Focal Area Strategy

45. As described in the project document, the project was developed (and is funded) under the GEF-6 cycle. As mentioned in the project document, the project has been consistent with the objectives of, as well as contributing to several outcomes and outputs of the GEF's Biodiversity, Land Degradation and Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Focal Area Strategies set for the GEF-6 period. In particular, the project is well aligned with the biodiversity objective BD-1: Improve sustainability of protected area systems; particularly Program 2: Nature's Last Stand: Expanding the Reach of the Global Protected Area Estate. It is also well aligned with the land degradation objective LD-3: Reduce pressures on natural resources by managing competing land uses in broader landscapes; particularly Program 4: Scaling-up sustainable land management through the landscape approach. Finally, the project is also well aligned with two sustainable forest management objectives SFM-1: Maintained Forest Resources: Reduce the pressures on high conservation value forests by addressing the drivers of deforestation; and SFM-2: Enhanced Forest Management: Maintain flows of forest ecosystem services and improve resilience to climate change through SFM.

46. In conclusion, this project is well aligned with national priorities as well as with UNDP and GEF-6 focal areas strategies. It is a timely response to national priorities, particularly by directly responding to several objectives stated in the *Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030*. It particularly addresses the key barriers hampering progress in improving the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The project interventions focus on three strategic areas of intervention: (i) Improve the representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improve the management of protected conservation-important forests; (ii) Better integrate forest PAs in wider landscape, including an enabling environment for the sustainable management of conservation- important ecosystems; and (iii) Enhance international cooperation and knowledge management.

3.1.2. Results Framework / Log-frame

47. The *Project Results Framework (PRF)* formulated during the design phase of this project presents a well-articulated set of expected results. No changes were made during the inception phase to the project strategy (expected results) stated in the project document. The review of the objective and outcomes indicates a good and logical "*chain of results*" – ***Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Objective***. Project resources have been used to implement planned activities to reach a set of expected outputs (21), which would contribute in achieving a set of expected outcomes (3), which together should contribute to achieve the overall objective of the project that is to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities. The PRF also includes - for each outcome - a set of indicators and targets to be achieved at the end of the project and that are used to monitor the performance of the project.

48. The aim of the project is to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for the conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities. The project also seeks to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, to the extent relevant and feasible within the scope of the project. As discussed in the previous section, through its threefold strategy, the aim of the project is to address three key existing barriers: (i) insufficient technical and financial capacity to manage the protected area system of Kazakhstan; (ii) a poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management; and (iii) insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management.

49. The review of the *Project Results Framework* confirms that this project is well aligned with national priorities and its logic is appropriate to address clear national needs/priorities. The logic model of the project presented in the *Project Results Framework* is summarized in table 4 below. It includes one objective, three

components and 6 outcomes. For each expected outcome, indicators and targets to be achieved at the end of the project are also presented in table 4.

Table 4: Project Logic Model

Expected Results	Performance Indicators
Project Objective: Improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities.	1. Area of critical ecosystems with improved management, including tugai, saxaul, and mountain forests, and associated grasslands 2. Forest area in Kazakhstan under indirectly improved management 3. a. # direct project beneficiaries b. # of PA staff with enhanced individual capacity c. # of forestry staff with enhanced individual capacity d. # of local resource users with improved sustainability of livelihoods 4. Population trends for globally significant species, such as snow leopard, argali, goitered gazelle, and other threatened species within the expanded target PA estate: • Alpine forest and associated ecosystems, flora and fauna • Floodplain (tugai) forest and associated ecosystems, flora and fauna • Saxaul forest and associated ecosystems, flora and fauna: (species for each ecosystem is listed in project document)
Component 1 - Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation-important forests • ***Outcome 1.1:*** Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non-forest ecosystems and their biodiversity • ***Outcome 1.2:*** Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests	5. Incremental area under conservation management through establishment of new PAs 6. Forest PA management effectiveness 7. Level of achievement of Kazakhstan's forest PAs in securing their biodiversity and other associated values
Component 2 - Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation- important ecosystems • ***Outcome 2.1:*** Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits • ***Outcome 2.2:*** Strengthened enabling environment to support SFM objectives through updated national policies, regulations, and knowledge management systems supporting improved management of 12,652,400 ha of national forest territory • ***Outcome 2.3:*** Integrated economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in decision making in natural resource management, through piloting of innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms	8. Change in area of sustainably managed forest in forest ecosystems bordering protected areas 9. Reduction in degraded and deforested area in targeted forestry territories bordering protected areas 10. Change in area of degradation in pasture and forest pasture landscapes bordering protected areas 11. Area outside PAs with enhanced conservation management (PA corridors and buffer zones identified in district integrated management plans) 12. Number of good practice models for private afforestation established in Kazakhstan 13. Degree to which policy and regulatory context for managing natural resources incorporates ecosystem services
Component 3 - International cooperation and knowledge management • ***Outcome 3.1:*** Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge	14. Quality and coverage (over 50% of habitat) of snow leopard monitoring data in Kazakhstan as indicated by estimated accuracy and timeliness of national snow leopard population estimate 15. Level of international cooperation and coordination with Kazakhstan border countries regarding illegal wildlife trade, biodiversity management in borderland protected areas, and snow leopard monitoring
Cross-cutting: Gender mainstreaming during implementation	16. Consistency of project gender mainstreaming approach with project plans

Source: project document

50. The project strategy or "*logic model*" was confirmed during the inception phase of the project, including at the inception workshop held in Astana on May 10, 2018. No changes were made to the set of expected results presented in the *Project Results Framework* during the inception phase. During this phase, the project strategy was reviewed. It resulted in three minor changes in the targets set for this project and a set of six operational recommendations which were documented in an inception report and approved at the Project Board meeting of July 4, 2018.

51. The "*logic model*" presented above provides a good response to national needs/priorities. In the meantime, the detailed review of the project "*chain of results*" (*see Annex 2*) indicates that it is an ambitious project with a broad scope and many expected outputs (21) and planned distinct activities (124). In the meantime, this is a needed logic to reach the expected objective that is to improve the conservation status and the management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities. As it will further be discussed in section 3.4, the main challenge of the project for the remaining implementation period will be to ensure the long-term sustainability of the changes supported by the project.

52. When reviewing the scope of the project, the Evaluation Team noted that the project will focus on 3 different ecosystems: alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems; which are present in three administrative regions targeted by the project: East Kazakhstan Province; Almaty Province; and Turkestan (former South Kazakhstan) Province. Overall, the institutional reach of the project is to work with 11 newly planned PAs, 12 existing PAs, 8 forestry units, 12 rural districts, 4 villages, and 6 districts of Almaty region. This point – broad scope - was also questioned during the review of the project proposal by the GEF Council. The justification given to this comment was that the project objective is to focus on a systemic approach as opposed to a site-based approach to address critical forest ecosystems and to focus on Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) approach advocated by the GEF-6 biodiversity, land degradation and sustainable forest management focal areas strategies. It further stated that the project will concentrate on addressing the suite of key root-causes of degradation common to all important ecosystems. These causes include gaps in the representation of the protected area system with respect to coverage of habitat of globally important species; under-estimated valuation of ecosystem services which does not allow to make right decisions on sustainable resource use; and disengagement of local communities from ecosystem management and restoration.

53. Nevertheless, despite this ambitious strategy with numerous planned activities to be implemented, an implementation timeframe of 5 years and a GEF financing of about $8.1M, the project has been progressing well so far. The project document has been used as a "*blue-print"* by the project management team. As discussed in the previous section, gender considerations, including the empowerment of women is well included in the design of this project. As discussed in section 3.1.1, the project is addressing key barriers identified at the outset of the project: (i) the limited capacity for expanding the protected area system of Kazakhstan to include more of Kazakhstan's forest ecosystems; (ii) the poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management combined; and (iii) the insufficient amount of data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management amongst national stakeholders.

54. The project is part of a long-term partnership between GEF-UNDP funded projects and the government of Kazakhstan. It is not implemented as an isolated project but as part of the UNDP programme to support the strengthening of the management of PAs, forests and pastures in Kazakhstan; though it was noted that it is the first GEF-funded project in Kazakhstan focusing on forest ecosystems. The project strategy is to holistically address the conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems in Kazakhstan, through management approaches including both protected areas and sustainable use of associated HCVF landscapes. It also applies an integrated landscape management approach by targeting sustainable land management practices within forest landscapes.

55. The Evaluation Team noted in the project document that the overall strategy of the project was underpinned by three main theories-of-change to target the effective conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems and associated pastures in Kazakhstan. It includes strengthening and expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan to improve biodiversity conservation; providing buffer zones around PAs to allow a transition of land use management approaches and establishing corridors between protected areas to ensure that they do not

exist as stand-alone islands in the landscape; and improving the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities.

56. The performance of the project was to be measured by a set of 16 indicators and their respective targets: 4 indicators were identified to measure how well the project is progressing toward its objective; 3 indicators to monitor the progress under component 1; 6 indicators to monitor the progress under component 2; 2 indicators to measure the progress made under component 3; and one indicator to measure how well the project is mainstreaming gender. For a project of this size, it is a good number of indicators (*see also Section 3.3.5*).

57. In conclusion, the review of the project strategy and the national context for this project indicates that this strategy is a direct response to national needs and priorities. It is an ambitious project with many planned activities to be implemented over the lifetime of the project. The project strategy is based on a three-pronged theory-of-change: (i) strengthening and expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan to improve biodiversity conservation; (ii) providing buffer zones around PAs to allow a transition of land use management approaches and establishing corridors between protected areas to ensure that they do not exist as stand-alone islands in the landscape; and (iii) improving the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities. It is a complex project but well detailed/documented in the project document. As a result, the project document has provided a very useful "*blueprint*" for the project team to guide the implementation of the project and contributing to improving the conservation status and the management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities.

3.2. Progress Toward Results

58. This section discusses the assessment of project results; how effective the project is to deliver its expected results and what are the remaining barriers limiting the effectiveness of the project.

3.2.1. Progress Toward Outcomes Analysis

59. As presented in Sections 3.1, the project has been implemented through three (3) components. The implementation progress is measured though a set of 16 indicators with their respective targets. On the next page is a table listing key deliverables achieved by the project against each outcome (component) and their corresponding targets. A color "*traffic light system*" code was used to represent the level of progress achieved so far by the project. Finally, a discussion of results achieved so far is presented at the end of this section[8].

Target achieved On target to be achieved Not on target to be achieved

8 The analysis presented in this Section have been conducted with the assumption that the project will terminate in April 2023.

Table 5: List of Delivered Results

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
Project Objective: Improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities.	• 9,127,071 hectares of critical ecosystems with improved management, including tugai, saxaul, and mountain forests, and associated grasslands	• Management Plans for 2019-2024 for twenty- three (23) pilot PAs were developed and approved covering a total area of about 4.140M ha; • Data source: Management plans for 12 pilot protected areas (reserves, national parks, conservation areas), including management activities for 11 wildlife sanctuaries. The wildlife sanctuaries are under operational management of assigned protected areas and do not act as a legal entity. • 2 new PAs were established in July 2018 (Ile-Balkhash Reservat, Tarbagatai SNNP) with total area of 558,715 ha. • Completed the first stage of the expansion of the eco-network in the two project territories of "Western Tien Shan" and "Northern and Central Tien Shan" for a total area of about 271,000 ha. Documents submitted to the Scientific and Technical Council of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee for their review and approval • launched the process of creating five (5) new target protected areas in the two project territories "Altai and Saur-Tarbagatai" (East Kazakhstan region) and "Northern and Central Tien Shan and Zhetysu Alatau" (Almaty region) with an estimated coverage of 1.525M ha; • Started the development of zoning schemes and integrated plans for managing forest and land resources in seven (7) target districts, including recommendations on buffer zones and corridors covering 350,000 ha; • Started implementation of 4 pilot projects on sustainable pasture management with a target coverage of pasture lands on 3,000 ha in 2020; • Identification and zoning of HCVFs on an area of about 2.349M ha, covering eight (8) pilot forestries.	
	• Forests managed by 120 forestry entities = 12,652,400 ha of forest landscapes (within 29,318,750 total ha of national forest fund land); as indicated by status of HCVF management regulations (adopted at national level); • Status of national institutional framework for forest management (plan for restructuring Leskhozes under FWC instead of Akimats adopted at national level)	• Assessment of the national forest management system using the Target Scenario Analysis (TSA) Methodology is underway, within the context of the transfer of 120 forest enterprises managing 12.6 million hectares of forests to local administrations (regional Akimats). It will include two (2) development scenarios: current (BAU) and sustainable (SEM) development scenarios. • An assessment of the forest pathology state of saxaul, floodplain and mountain forests of the Northern and Central Tien Shan, and mountain forests of Altai was carried out on a total area of 2.269M ha (7 pilot forestry institutions of the Almaty and East Kazakhstan regions). It resulted in the development of recommendations and proposals to improve the applied system of forest pathology monitoring and protective measures against forest pests and diseases to preserve the sustainability of plantations. • Strengthened technical capacity of the Altai branch of the Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of Forestry and Agroforestry. Purchased an innovative monitoring equipment to detect rot diseases in valuable conifers and conduct dendro-climatic studies; resulting in improving the monitoring of all mountain forests of Altai and Saur-Tarbagatai covering a total area of 3.1M ha;	

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
		• Carried out an assessment and mapping of the ecological state of the floodplain forests of the Syrdarya, Sharyn, and Ile rivers on an area of 123,300 ha and saxaul forests in the Almaty region on an area of 1.455M ha. • Recommendations and action plans were prepared for the conservation and restoration of floodplain and saxaul forests, regulation of environmental water releases of the Moinak HPP.	
	• Total: ~41,000 direct project beneficiaries • >2,000 PA staff with enhanced capacity • 457 Leskhoze staff with enhanced capacity • 38,753 (19,382 men; 19,371 women) local resource users with improved sustainability of livelihoods	• 1,018 beneficiaries; 865 PA employees (568 men and 297 women); 138 employees of Leskhozes (forestries) (96 men and 42 women); 15 rural residents at the three (3) project territories (9 men and 5 women); and 15 artisans improved their skills in making local souvenirs • So far delivered 40 training courses to improve the management of PAs on subjects including sustainable forest management, development of management plans for PAs, monitoring forest fires, production of souvenirs, promotion of gender equity, and identification of HCVF. • Delivered 15 online webinars under COVID-19 with the participation of the staff of pilot protected areas, state forestry institutions, local Akimats and the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife;	
	• Flora: Non-deterioration of baseline status • Fauna: Increase relative to baseline	• Inventory and monitoring of key fauna species conducted in 14 pilot PAs by the external experts and PA staff with participation of regional divisions of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee. Results show no decline in most globally significant species when compared to baseline data in targeted ecosystems; and slight increases in specific wildlife species: European Brown Bear, Argali, Wolf, and Roe Deer in alpine forests and associated ecosystems; and Roe Deer, and Bukhara Deer in floodplain forest and associated ecosystems. • Systematized biodiversity monitoring, technical support, and comprehensive scientific research on the prey base of the snow leopard conducted by the project resulted in improving the quality of wildlife monitoring in the Tarbagatai National Park, Ile-Balkhash Reserve and adjacent wildlife sanctuaries.	

Component 1 - Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation-important forests
• ***Outcome 1.1:*** Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non-forest
	• 1,729,485 net new hectares under protection, which:
	(i) Increases the national PA coverage 0.67% from 8.81% to 9.49%;
	(ii) Secures protection of 761,693 ha of alpine forest ecosystems and 522,593 ha of tugai and saxaul forest ecosystems;
	(iii) Provides PA coverage for more than 1,000,000 ha of snow leopard range, which
		• In the process of expanding and creating new protected areas with an estimated coverage of 1,795,509 ha:
		  • 2 new PAs were established in July 2018 (Ile-Balkhash Reservat, Tarbagatai SNNP) with total area of 558,715 ha.
		  • Completed the first stage of work on the expansion of the eco-network in the two project territories "Western Tien Shan" and "Northern and Central Tien Shan" with an estimated coverage of 270,988 ha.
		  • Field ecosystem studies/assessments were carried out, key representative areas for inclusion in the protected areas were identified, and cartographic materials were developed.
		  • At the local level, public hearings were held with the participation of stakeholders to present the findings and receive their feedback and recommendations.	

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.

ecosystems and their biodiversity
• ***Outcome 1.2:*** Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests
	increases PA coverage of the two priority national snow leopard landscapes (Zhongar Alatau, and North/Central Tian Shan) from ~40% to ~90% (Zhongar Alatau = ~1,000,000 ha of snow leopard habitat, with current PA coverage of ~30%, which will increase by approximately 645,000 ha or 61% of snow leopard range; North/Central Tian Shan =~ 1,100,000 ha of snow leopard range, with current PA coverage of ~48%, which will increase by approximately 440,000 ha, or 40% of snow leopard range	• Developed draft scientific justification documents incorporating proposals/recommendations of local stakeholders. Submitted for consideration and approval to the Forestry and Wildlife Committee.
		• Details of the eco-network expansion:
		  • Expansion of existing protected areas (196,188 ha): National parks Kolsai Kolderi (by 110,000 ha) and Zhongar-Alatau (by 64,091.4 ha) in the Northern and Central Tien Shan; and Karatau Nature Reserve (by 22,096.6 ha) in the Western Tien Shan;
		  • Creation of new protected area: Regional park "Merke" (74,800.2 hectares) in the Zhambyl region (Western Tien Shan)
		• Feasibility studies for the 2nd stage of PA expansion/creation underway
		• Started the process of creating five (5) new target protected areas in the two project areas (Northern and Central Tien Shan and "Tereskey" Conservation Area) with an estimated coverage of 1,524,521 ha.
		  • In "Northern and Central Tien Shan": Ussek Wildlife Sanctuary – ≥197 684 ha; Koksu Wildlife Sanctuary – ≥586 796 ha; Ketmen Wildlife Sanctuary ≥ 218 474 ha; "Tereskey" Conservation Area ≥189 407 ha.
		  • In "Altai and Saur-Tarbagatai": Saur-Manrak Conservation Area ≥ 332,160 ha.	

	• 30% improvement in score gap ((1 – METT value)*0.3) over baseline Target METT Scores	• The midterm METT scores of target forest protected areas are presented below. A percentage increase over the baseline METT score is indicated in parentheses.
		  • Alpine forest ecosystems:
		  • Almaty Zapovednik: 68;
		  • Ile-Alatau NP: 67;
		  • Kolsay Kolderi NP: 82;
		  • Kolsay Kolderi NP Expansion (new): 24;
		  • Zhongar Alatau NP: 60;
		  • Zhongar Alatau NP Expansion (new): 27;
		  • SW Koksu Alatau ("Koksu Reserve) (new): 23;
		  • Sairam-Ugam NP: 73;
		  • Aksu-Zhabagly Zapovednik: 81;
		  • Karatau Reserve: 87;
		  • Karatau Reserve Expansion (new): 17;
		  • Katon Karagay NP: 63;
		  • Markakol Reserve: 48;
		  • Zapadno-Altay Reserve: 78;
		  • Ketmen Wildlife Sanctuary (new): 21;
		  • Terskey Conservation Area (new): 21;
		  • Merke Regional Nature Park (new): 18;	

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
		• Saur-Manrak Conservation Area (new): 17; • **Tarbagatay NP (new): 41 (130 %);** • Floodplain and saxaul forests: • Charyn Canyon NP: 69; • Syr Darya-Turkestan Regional Nature Park: 74; • **Ile-Balkhash State National Wildlife Sanctuary (new): 36 (140 %);** • Ussek Wildlife Sanctuary (new, instead of National Reserve "Ili River Delta"): 16 • The increase in METT was facilitated by the legal creation of these protected areas, the establishment of boundaries on the ground, funding from the national budget, the presence of permanent staff, protection of the territory, the initial work of these protected areas on environmental education and work with the local population. • METT scores for new/proposed PAs remain at the baseline level since the process of their creation has not yet been completed and studies are underway to determine the boundaries of new PAs. • The Project's systematic support to the target 14 pilot PAs since the beginning contributed to the overall increase in METT scores for the majority of PAs. The project's support included: development of management plans until 2023; strengthening their technical capacities by equipping target PAs with vehicles, walkie-talkie devices, uniforms, portable radios, and drones; increasing the PA staff capacities on monitoring, strategic and financial planning, SMART technologies, etc. • Overall, the following hardware support has been provided to target PAs: 16 high-mobility vehicles, 416 portable radios, 22 quadcopters, 284 camera traps, 2 motorboats, 10 smart phones, 3 thermal imagers, 21 set of field uniforms, and a wheeled tractor were purchased. • Important to note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Kazakhstan has redirected initial financial commitments to fight the coronavirus and stabilize the epidemiological situation in Kazakhstan. Therefore, the originally allocated PA budgets for 2020-2021 were reduced by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee by 50%.	
	• At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment	• The project established cooperation with the IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Active discussions were held with international IUCN experts on the implementation of the Green List standards in Kazakhstan. • In December 2019, with the participation of international experts from IUCN, pilot PAs and other national partners received a 2-day training on Green List standards. • A draft joint work plan and a strategy were prepared for improving the management of protected areas of Kazakhstan in line with the Green List certification standards. • Negotiations are underway to select a pilot protected area for its inclusion in the Green List.	

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
Component 2 - Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems • ***Outcome 2.1:*** Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits • ***Outcome 2.2:*** Strengthened enabling environment to support SFM objectives through updated national policies, regulations, and knowledge management systems supporting improved management of 12,652,400 ha of national forest territory • ***Outcome 2.3:*** Integrated economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in decision making in natural resource	• >1,000,000 ha, as indicated by adoption of improved HCVF management practices in 6 targeted Leskhozes	• A national Concept for identification of high conservation value forests (HCVF) was developed. A preliminary ranking of forests according to HCVF qualifications, identified barriers and opportunities for implementation of this approach was conducted. • For better understanding of HCVF approaches, a group of Kazakhstani experts, within the framework of a study tour, got acquainted with the leading experience of European countries in implementing, managing and monitoring HCVF, including the monetization of ecosystem services and the FSC certification. • The Project actively interacts on the matter with experts of a similar GEF Forest Project in Kyrgyzstan. This collaboration resulted in the project launching its work on the HCVF identification and zoning of an area of 2,348,590 ha covering eight (8) pilot Leskhozes or forestries.	
	• >5% improvement over baseline in degraded and deforested area in targeted forestry territories bordering protected areas	• No net degradation of forest areas observed beyond baseline; • Assessed the forest pathology status of saxaul, floodplain and mountain/alpine forests in five (5) pilot forestries in the Northern and Central Tien Shan covering an area of 15,000 hectares. This resulted in the development of a scientifically based system of forest pest and disease control & protection measures; • In collaboration with the Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of Plant Protection and Quarantine, completed the introduction of biological products in the fight against forest pests; • For the first time, in May-June 2020, the biological preparation Aktarofit was tested on 14 ha of pest-inhabited apple plantations of the Uyghur forestry. As a result, foci of pests were eliminated, the biological preparation showed a high efficiency of 92-100%, not inferior to the chemical ones that had been used by the forestry earlier. The preparation will be recommended for use and included in the list of approved pest control preparations in forestry. • Work is underway to create a sustainable basis for forest breeding and cultivation of mountain, desert and floodplain forests. • Together with the Forestry and Wildlife Committee, work created the Mezhdurechensk forest nursery (Northern Tien Shan and Zhetysu Alatau) on an area of 16 ha. Project procured a tractor, a wagon, and a drip irrigation system. Conditions were created for the production of seedlings of black saxaul and turangas (Populus pruinosa and Populus diversifolia Schrenk). It resulted in 14 forestry institutions of the Almaty region (Northern and Central Tien Shan) to have access to improved seedling material; • Provided support to forest nurseries of the Narynkol and Zhongar forests of the Almaty region with a total area of 7 ha, specializing in the cultivation of conifers (Schrenk's spruce, pine); • Installed solar stations in nurseries to improve the irrigation of seedling production.	
	• Total: 73,000 ha with reduced degradation in pasture and	• Assessed the current state and management of pastures in ten (10) pilot sites in three (3) regions (Almaty, Turkestan, and East Kazakhstan). Jointly with local partners, priority pasture improvement &	

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
management, through piloting of innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms	forest pasture landscapes bordering protected areas	management activities were identified at selected four (4) pasture plots totaling 43,000 ha in the three regions (East Kazakhstan, Almaty and Turkestan): • Sumbe pilot plot - 15,000 ha of distant forest pastures and 2,000 ha of pastures near settlement (ecosystems of the tugai forests of the Charyn River); • Belkaragai pilot plot – 10,000 ha of distant forest pastures and 6,000 ha of pastures near settlement (ecosystem of Altai forests); • Kaskasu pilot plot – 6,000 ha of distant forest pastures and 4,000 ha of pastures near settlement (mountain ecosystems of the Western Tien Shan); • Koksaray pilot plot - 13,000 ha (ecosystems of the tugai forests of the Syr Darya River); • The scope of works as well as financial and in-kind contributions of local project partners have been identified, and joint action plans for each site agreed.	
	• 350,000 ha outside PAs with enhanced conservation management	• Held a series of consultations with international and national experts on landscape planning and biodiversity assessment. • Identified the approach and stages of functional zoning including identification of key biodiversity species and areas, corridors and buffer zones; • Plan to apply a landscape planning approach on an area of 8.6 million ha and cover the territory of seven (7) pilot districts of the Almaty region. Functional zoning and landscape maps will include recommendations for the location of PA corridors and buffer areas. Measures for sustainable maintenance of forests, biodiversity and productive landscapes with their integration into the territorial planning system will also be developed.	
	• Two functional and replicable models demonstrated as feasible to meet key gaps in private afforestation regulatory framework: One private-sector based, and one community-based	• Afforestation was initiated in four pilot models with key partners identified. • The Project held a series of working meetings and consultations with national experts, the Forestry and Wildlife Committee and GIZ; • With the GIZ support, 6 pilot projects were implemented in three regions of Kazakhstan (Almaty, Zhambyl and Akmola regions) in order to collect technical data on plantations and create an information base for further development of mechanisms for state support for private forest breeding; • Defined a step-by-step plan for the creation of pilot models for private forest breeding in 3 pilot regions.	
	• At least one regulation adopted at provincial or national level that recognizes and incorporates TSA methodology	• Launched one (1) pilot project using the Target Scenario Analysis (TSA) methodology; • Assessment of the effectiveness of the forestry management system at national level underway. Then two environmental and economic models for the forestry system in Kazakhstan in accordance with the TSA methodology will be developed; • A group of experts was formed at national level to oversee the TSA process;	

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
		• Thirty-four (34) evaluation indicators were identified and all the needed data collected to perform the economic assessment of forest ecosystem services.	
Component 3 - International cooperation and knowledge management • ***Outcome 3.1:*** Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge	• Publishing of annual population estimates with a 95% or greater confidence level	• Prepared a national annual report (2019) reporting on the annual assessment of snow leopard population with a credibility level of 95%. Facilitated the reliable data collection with the installation of 294 camera traps in key habitats of the snow leopard (13 pilot protected areas and the Merke forestry); • A large-scale study is underway to estimate the Kazakhstan snow leopard population in mountain ecosystems at three (3) pilot regions (Altai, Western Tien Shan, Northern and Central Tien Shan); • Updated the National Snow Leopard Conservation Action Plan following discussions with academia and other relevant stakeholders. The draft updated Action Plan was submitted to the Forestry and Wildlife Committee for approval and adoption; • The SMART patrol system was introduced in the Sairam-Ugam National Park to increase the effectiveness of the fight against poaching and to conduct quality monitoring of biodiversity.	
	• International agreement between Kazakhstan and at least one bordering country under implementation regarding at least one of the below issues: - Cooperation on law enforcement at border points regarding illegal wildlife trade - Illegal hunting by border guards - Data sharing on snow leopard monitoring	• Carried out a regional meeting in Nur Sultan on cooperation and coordination for snow leopard conservation with the participation of the snow leopard habitat countries; • Supported, together with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan snow leopard projects, the participation of representatives of state bodies in the preparation of an intergovernmental memorandum on the conservation of snow leopard (2018, Tashkent, Uzbekistan; May 2019, Khujand, Tajikistan, July 2019, Nur-Sultan (Kazakhstan). Currently, Parties have reached an agreement on the final version of the Memorandum. The Minister of Environment of Kazakhstan approved the draft agreement for signing. • On-going collaboration with the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) to develop a landscape management plan for 2 project areas (Altai and Western Tien Shan). Under the GSLEP, snow leopard habitat countries are required to develop landscape management plans, which define the necessary policies and activities for improving and integrating the conservation and sustainable development of the snow leopard habitat. These landscapes include protected areas (PAs) as well as large snow leopard and prey habitats; • UNDP signed a cooperation agreement (July 2019) with the Snow Leopard Foundation to jointly create a research laboratory for snow leopard genetic data, strengthen the monitoring of snow leopard population groups and create a unified database on snow leopard; • Within the framework of the intergovernmental agreement "*Greater Altai*", a data exchange was carried out on the state of the snow leopard population and related experience between the two bordering protected areas: Katon-Karagai National Park (Kazakhstan) and Katunsky Biosphere Reserve (Russia).	
Cross-cutting: Gender mainstreaming during implementation	• Gender mainstreaming carried out during project	• Completed project gender mainstreaming action plan;	

Expected Results	Project Targets	Results (Deliverables)	MTR Assess.
	implementation, as indicated by: a) Project Board and local stakeholder working groups have gender balance and/or include a gender expert; b) Policies, laws, and regulations developed with project support include gender perspectives, as relevant c) Project events and activities (e.g. trainings) promote gender balance among invited participants, as feasible d) Project education and awareness activities are developed and carried out incorporating gender perspectives, as relevant	• Gender approaches mainstreamed in planning and implementation of project activities. Annual work plans are drawn up with mandatory inclusion and consideration of gender aspects; • Recommendations, strategic plans, documents developed within the support of the project are drawn up taking into account gender issues; • Conducted a gender analysis of the 3 target project areas and developed recommendations on including gender issues and approaches in relevant project activities; • The Project Board membership includes 30% of women; • To enhance women's participation in decision-making on sustainable bioresource management, a large-scale information campaign has been held at the time of creation of PA Public Councils at target pilot PAs regarding equal participation of both men and women in PA related decision-making process. With the support of the project, the composition of Public Councils was revised and updated in 12 out of 14 pilot protected areas with women's membership ranging from 30% to 50% (representing NGOs, initiative groups and local residents); • Conducted a series of training sessions to identify gender-related needs of target groups in the three (3) regions of the country: 159 people were trained - 65 were men (40%), and 94 women (60%). • Supported a business training for ten (10) women from the target protected areas and forestries in cooperation with the Ernst & Young Academy of Business to improve their business skills and knowledge; • Held on November 22-23, 2019 - for the first time in Kazakhstan - an international conference on "*Gender and Biodiversity*". It was attended by leading conservation and genders experts from Kazakhstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Finland. Participating experts shared their experiences of how to consider and incorporate gender equality issues in biodiversity conservation and including gender aspects in economic models with an emphasis on women leadership and participation.	

Source: Adapted from project progress reports, mostly from PIR 2020.

GEF-6 Tracking Tools

60. The Evaluation Team also reviewed the GEF tracking tools for this project, which include the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) for all PAs targeted by the project, the Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Tracking Tool, the Land Degradation Portfolio Monitoring and Assessment Tool (PMAT), and the Greenhouse Gas Calculations (Ex-ACT Tool). Tracking tools are instruments developed by the GEF Secretariat to measure progress in achieving the impacts and outcomes established at the portfolio (global) level under GEF-6 cycle. The information contained in these tracking tools is collated together at the global level to provide a global summary on the progress made in each GEF focal area.

61. Regarding the METT, the main output of this tool is the METT score that is also a performance indicator (*see Table 11 – indicator #6*) used to measure the performance of the first component of the project. The table below shows the scores for each protected area at the time of the inception phase, at the MTR time (actual), and at project end (target).

Table 6: METT Scores

Protected Area	METT Scores		
	at Inception	at MTR	Target at end of project
Alpine Forest Ecosystems			
Almaty Reserve	67	68	77
Ile-Alatau NP	66	67	76
Kolsay Kolderi NP	80	82	86
Kolsay Kolderi NP Expansion	24	24	47
Zhongar Alatau NP	59	60	71
Zhongar Alatau NP Expansion	27	27	49
SW Zhongar Alatau ("Koksu") (proposed)	23	23	46
Sairam-Ugam NP	71	73	80
Aksu-Jabagly Reserve	81	81	87
Karatau Reserve	81	87	87
Karatau Reserve Expansion	17	17	42
Katon Karagay NP	20	63 (+215%)	44
Markakol Reserve	48	48	64
Zapadno-Altay Reserve	77	78	84
Ketmen Reservat (proposed)	21	21	45
Terskey Reservat (proposed)	21	21	45
Merke NP (proposed)	18	18	43
Saur-Manrak Reservat (proposed)	17	17	42
Tarbagatai NP (proposed)	18	41 (+128%)	43
Floodplain (tugai) and Saxaul Ecosystems			
Charyn NP	68	69	78
Syr Darya-Turkestan Regional Nature Park	73	74	81
Ile-Balkhash Reserve (proposed)	15	36 (+140%)	41
Ussek Wildlife Sanctuary (proposed - new)	n/a	36	41

Sources: Project document, PIR 2020 and information collected from the Project Team.

62. The review of these scores indicates that few minor improvements in the management effectiveness of protected areas can be observed. As explained in the recent PIR2020, most METT scores for new/proposed

PAs remain at the baseline level; this is mostly due to the fact that the process of their creation has not yet been completed and studies are underway to determine the boundaries of these new PAs. Regarding the existing 14 pilot PAs targeted by the project, the project supported activities such as development of management plans until 2023; provision of equipment; increasing the PA staff capacities on monitoring, strategic and financial planning, SMART technologies, etc. The Evaluation Team noted that the project has provided 16 high-mobility vehicles, 416 portable radios, 22 quadcopters, 284 camera traps, 2 motorboats, 10 smart phones, 3 thermal imagers, 21 set of field uniforms, and a wheeled tractor to these 14 PAs. The result of these activities has not been reflected yet in an increase of the management effectiveness of PAs.

63. The Evaluation Team also noted that the METT score for two proposed PAs increased a lot during this first part of the project: the Ile-Balkhash Reserve (from a METT score of 15 to 36; an increase of 140%) and the Tarbagatai SNNP (from 18 to 41; an increase of 128%). As discussed in the PIR2020, these increases are mostly due to the completed legal creation of these two protected areas, the establishment of boundaries on the ground, the allocation of a government budget, the presence of permanent staff, the protection of the territory, the initial work of these protected areas on environmental education and work with the local population. It was also noted the high increase in METT score (from 20 to 63; an increase of 215%) for the Katon Karagay NP PA.

64. Overall, it is anticipated that METT scores for these 23 PAs will improve dramatically over the second period of implementation of the project. However, it is also important to note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Kazakhstan has redirected some financial commitments to fight the coronavirus and stabilize the epidemiological situation in Kazakhstan. It resulted in the reduction of the allocation to PAs management for 2020-2021 of about 50% and may affect the progress in increasing the management effectiveness of PAs over the next few years.

65. The SFM Tracking Tool provides a number of simple indicators which are being tracked for all GEF SFM projects. This tracking tools was completed during the formulation of the project. It includes 2 key datasets, which were incorporated into the M&E framework as part of the indicators/targets to measure the progress of the project. It included the number of ha (1,174,500 ha) of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs) which are under the management of Leskhozes and which are bordering key forests in PAs. The indicator (#8) is "*Change in area of sustainably managed forest in forest ecosystems bordering PAs*" with the target of >1,000,000 ha, as indicated by the adoption of improved HCVF management practices in 6 targeted Leskhozes. The second dataset is the indicator #3 as "*Number of PA staff with individual capacity*" with the target of >2,000 PA staff with enhanced capacity; considering that there were 2,215 staff employed in targeted PAs at the time of the formulation of this project. As of the time of the MTR, the review of these indicators as reported in the PIR-2020 indicates that the project has been actively engage in the identification of HCVF, including the zoning of an area of 2,348,590 ha covering eight (8) pilot Leskhozes or forestries. Regarding the capacity development of staff, so far, the project supported the delivery of 40 training courses and 15 online webinars reaching out 1,018 beneficiaries: 865 PA employees (568 men and 297 women); 138 employees of Leskhozes (forestries) (96 men and 42 women); 15 rural residents at the three (3) project territories (9 men and 5 women).

66. The PMAT is a tool to capture important data on land degradation in areas targeted by GEF-funded projects. It was used by the formulation team to collect key datasets on land degradation in areas planned to be covered by this project. The completion of this tool during the formulation of the project revealed a key dataset of 73,000 ha as being the "*extend of land degradation within the project boundaries*". This dataset was incorporated in the M&E framework of the project as the target (reduce land degradation by 73,000 ha) for the indicator #10 (*see Section 3.3.5*). As of the time of the MTR, the review of this indicator (#10) as reported in the PIR-2020 indicates that the project has, jointly with local partners, been working on the identification of priority pasture improvement & management activities in four (4) pasture plots totaling 43,000 ha in the three regions (East Kazakhstan, Almaty and Turkestan).

67. Regarding the Greenhouse Gas Calculations (Ex-ACT Tool), the formulation team, using the FAO Ex-ACT tool and the GEF guidance calculated that once the project would be completed and be successful in meeting all its targets, it would generate a total of 5,838,328 tCO2eq as CO_2 benefits. At the time of the MTR, this area was reviewed including the calculations made at the formulation stage using the Ex-ACT tool. The Evaluation Team noted that this CO_2 benefits were not part of the M&E framework to measure the performance

of the project; there is no indicator nor target related to the CO_2 benefits of this project. Nevertheless, as discussed in the project document (Annex D and S), the CO_2 benefits calculation was made to measure the climate change benefits through SFM using the FAO-Ex-ACT tool in line with GEF guidance. This tools requests inputs on hectares of forest and land area affected by the project, as well as the level of with-project and with-out project degradation or deforestation. No update of these calculations at the time of the MTR was found by the Evaluation Team during the MTR. It is recommended that this tool be used to calculate the CO_2 benefits by the end of the project.

68. Overall, the project is progressing well toward its outcome targets and it has two and a half more years of implementation to go. This is an ambitious project focusing on three different ecosystems and targeting three regions of Kazakhstan; which is reflected in the rather long list of achievements presented in table 5 above. Nevertheless, the review of targets and results achieved so far indicates that the project is on target to meet its expected results as anticipated in the project document. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was certainly on track to be a satisfactory project by April 2023 and meet all its targets. Currently, as this pandemic is still on-going, it is difficult to assess its impact on the delivery of project activities and on achievements. However, the project management team is adapting well to the new reality and without any resurgence of this pandemic, project activities will carry on and the project should meet its expected results and *improve the conservation and the management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities*.

69. Under ***Component 1*** (*GEF budget USD 2,547,067 – Used USD 953,961 or 38%*), the project has been focusing on expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan, in order to increase the representation of important forests and biodiversity in protected areas with the plan to create 11 new PAs equipped with effective management plans. It also includes strengthening the management plans of 14 existing PAs to include the concept of High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF). So far, the process to expand the PA system by 1,795,509 ha has started, technical justifications have been drafted, feasibility studies are underway, and equipment has been procured. Management plans for the period 2019-2024 for 23 pilot PAs were developed and approved; including holding workshops and training courses for PA staff to develop their capacities related to the implementation of this new management planning approach. However, this improved management planning approach has not yet been translated into an overall increase of the management effectiveness of these PAs.

70. This component 1 has been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project. As a result of activities under this component, Kazakhstan should end up with an expanded PA system with the inclusion of important forests and biodiversity. It should also be better equipped with management skills and tools to better manage its protected area system, including the introduction of the HCVF concept as a method to identify forests with critical significance. It is expected that, by the end of the project, the management effectiveness of the PA system will increase significantly, which is one critical indicator to measure the performance under this component.

71. Under ***Component 2*** (*GEF budget USD 4,017,000 – Used USD 957,722 or 24%*), the project has been focusing on improving the integration of forest PAs in the wider landscape where most forested areas are (only 5% of forests are included in the PA system in Kazakhstan). It seeks to test/pilot new approaches in district land use planning for areas with important natural landscapes and with the goal of providing direct community benefits. It includes the introduction and application of the HCVF concept and methods within Leskhozes but also integrated into national forest management guidelines, the development of forest pasture management plans with the participation of local communities, testing of afforestation investments models, development of district-based land and forest management plans where new PAs were established, development of tourism management strategies, development of hunting regulations incorporating biodiversity considerations, and introduction of the TSA methods as a tool to assess economic viability of change in forest resource use. So far, the introduction of the HCVF concept has started with a preliminary ranking of forest according to HCVF criteria; work took place to develop a scientifically-based system to assess forest pest and disease and develop control and protection measures including the test of a new biological preparation; several forest nursery were created; current state and management of pastures were assessed; and the TSA methodology has been introduced with a national assessment of the effectiveness of the forestry management system underway.

72. This component 2 has been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project. From

a budget point of view, it is the largest component with about 50% of the GEF grant allocated to this component[9]; though, it was noted that only 24% of this budget has been expended so far as opposed to an elapsed time of the project of 45%. Nevertheless, as a result of activities under this component, Kazakhstan should be better equipped with the HCVF to identify and protect important forests and with the TSA methodology to assess the economic viability of change in forest resource use, while these new approaches should provide benefits and improve the livelihoods of local communities.

73. Under ***Component 3*** (*GEF budget USD 1,120,865 – Used USD 427,985 or 38%*), the project has been focusing on increasing capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge. It also supports the government in implementing the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan through the development of Integrated Landscape Planning in National Priority Snow Leopard Landscapes; and to update the monitoring of snow leopard applying internationally certified quality standards, including monitoring arrangements with key neighboring countries. Finally, the project focuses also on disseminating knowledge products and support awareness and education activities targeting natural resource managers and communities to enhance their understanding of SMF, SLM and biodiversity conservation. So far, an annual report reporting on the annual assessment of snow leopard (2019) was completed; the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan was updated; the SMART patrol system was introduced in the Sairam-Ugam National Park; support was provided to the Kazakh team to participate in the preparation of an intergovernmental memorandum on the conservation of snow leopard; and collaboration with GSLEP to develop a landscape management plan for 2 landscape areas has started.

74. This component 3 has also been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project. As a result of activities under this component, Kazakhstan should be better equipped to monitor its wildlife and particularly its population of snow leopard. It should also have a greater capacity to enforce laws and regulations related to wildlife; a greater capacity for an integrated snow leopard landscape planning approach; and, with more knowledge being disseminated, a greater awareness on SFM, SLM and biodiversity conservation for natural resource managers and local communities.

75. So far, the project has been successful in delivering its planned activities. The implementation of the project is adhering to its strategy designed at the outset. As summarized above, this is a project with a broad scope, providing resources (services and goods) in three main areas. It is anticipated that all these deliverables will contribute to reaching the objective of the project that is the "*improve the conservation status and the management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities"*. Based on this first implementation period, the success of the project resides in its ability to institutionalize – hence sustain – its innovations such as the introduction of the HCVF concept, the TSA methodology, the integrated landscape management planning approach, etc. Stakeholders interviewed for this MTR, mentioned the pioneer aspect of the project, bringing key innovation approaches to address the issues at hand; the next step is to ensure that these innovations be institutionalized and sustained over the long-term.

76. In conclusion, the project has made some good progress and it has about 31 more months of implementation. The implementation adheres to the project strategy detailed in the project document that is used as a "*blue-print*" by the project implementation team. The Evaluation Team also found that the project is implemented with a good participative approach to engage stakeholders in project activities. This participation will certainly contribute to a good national ownership of project achievements and to the sustainability of these achievements over the long-term. The project is barely at its mid-point, it is expected that the project will continue to deliver successful activities; however, the challenge for this second period will be on ensuring the institutionalization – hence its long-term sustainability - of innovations tested and piloted by the project.

9 The Evaluation Team noticed that in the project document under Output 2.1.1 (Component 2) one planned activity was to update Leskhoze forest inventories for 6 targeted forestry units with a total budget of USD 450,000. However, this activity cannot be done nor funded by the project due to the fact that by legislation, forest inventories are conducted by the State Forest Agency every 10 years and the last inventory was done during the period 2016-2019. It is proposed to use this budget for the implementation of forest protection measures, fire protection and forest restoration activities.

3.2.2. Remaining Barriers to Achieve the Project Objective

77. The project started in April 2018 and will end in April 2023. At the time of this review (end of September 2020), the project has completed 29 months (48%) of implementation and has 31 more months to go before it ends. At this point, there is no critical barriers limiting its implementation over the remaining implementation period. As discussed in the previous section, the project overall effectiveness will depend much on the institutionalization of key concepts and approaches piloted/demonstrated by the project. So far, good progress has been made in most planned intervention areas; however, as discussed in Section 3.1.2, this is an ambitious project with a broad scope. When considering the three-pronged theory-of-change, the question remains as to will activities supported by the project be enough to sustain the desired changes over the long term?

78. The rationale of the project for improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for the conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities was to remove three critical barriers, which were identified at the outset of the project as: (i) the limited capacity for expanding the protected area system of Kazakhstan to include more of Kazakhstan's forest ecosystems; (ii) the poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management combined; and (iii) the insufficient amount of data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management amongst national stakeholders.

79. The project – through its activities - has been focusing and addressing these three barriers. Their removal will, ultimately, gauge the overall effectiveness of the project at the end. Using a landscape conservation approach through integrated resource management and planning at the Akimat (district) level, the aim of the project is to improve the management of forests, pastures and protected areas. Strategically, the project seeks to contribute to: (i) improve the representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improve the management of protected conservation-important forests; (ii) better integrate forest PAs in the wider landscape, including an enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems; and (iii) international cooperation and knowledge management.

80. As discussed in previous sections, this project is timely and responds to national priorities and needs. It is making good progress in strengthening the management of forests, pastures and protected areas, contributing to improving the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in targeted PAs but also in the wider landscape around these PAs. The project also started to focus on integrating economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services through piloting innovative sustainable economic development mechanisms such as ecotourism, private forest breeding, and other sustainable business activities to improve the livelihoods of local communities. The review of the progress made indicates that the project will contribute to the removal of the three barriers identified during the formulation of the project. However, this is an ambitious project with a challenging task, which is to sustainably institutionalize concepts, approaches and methods piloted/demonstrated with the support of the project. Considering the time left to implement the second part of this project, it is recommended to focus on the institutionalization of key processes supported by the project; including where needed addressing capacity gaps, which could/should be addressed before the end of the project.

3.3. Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

81. This section discusses the assessment of how the project has been implemented. It assessed how efficient the management of the project has been and how the use of project resources is conducive to a successful project implementation.

3.3.1. Management Arrangements

82. The management arrangements of this project are as follows:

- The *GEF Agency* for this project is UNDP. Under an agreement with the government of Kazakhstan, the UNDP Country Office provides *Direct Project Services (DPS)* to the project, including procurement of goods and services, contracting, human resources management, and financial services (*This function is funded by the GEF grant*).
- The *Implementing Partner* of the project is the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It is responsible and

accountable for managing this project, including the monitoring and evaluation of project interventions, achieving project outcomes, and for the effective use of UNDP resources (*This function is funded by the government*).

- The project is guided by a *Project Board (PB)* as the executive decision-making body of the project. It is composed of the main government entities related to biodiversity conservation and pasture and forest management as well as few NGOs and local administrations. The PB includes the following role:
  - *Executive* represented by the Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan represents the ownership of the project and chair the Project Board;
  - *Senior Supplier* represented by the Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in Kazakhstan, provides guidance regarding the technical feasibility of the project and has the authority to commit or acquire supplier resources required by the project;
  - *Senior Beneficiary,* representing the Forestry and Wildlife Committee, is responsible for validating the needs and for monitoring that the solution will meet those needs within the constraints of the project. It monitors progress against targets and quality criteria.

  The PB provides strategic oversight and guidance based upon project progress assessments and related recommendations from the Project Manager (PM). The PB ensures that the project remains on course to deliver the desired outcomes of the required quality. The PB met three times since the inception of the project: July 4, 2018; February 22, 2019; and on February 25, 2020.
- A *National Project Director (NPD)* - a senior representative of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee - was named as the National Project Director on behalf of the Implementing Partner. The NPD provides the strategic oversight and guidance to project implementation and chairs the meetings of the PB (*This function is funded by the government*).
- A full time *Project Manager (PM)* was hired by UNDP and approved by the PB. The PM is tasked with the day-to-day management of project activities, as well as with financial and administrative reporting on behalf of the Implementing Partner. He is guided by Annual Work Plans, following UNDP Results Based Management (RBM) standards. The PM prepares Annual Work Plans (AWPs) in advance of each year and submit them to the PB for approval (*This function is funded by the GEF grant*).
- Three *Implementation Teams* operate full time and are supervised by the PM: (i) a team based in Astana responsible for implementation, coordination and monitoring of activities within the three project components and which includes appropriate Experts; (ii) a team based in Almaty responsible for coordination, monitoring, and support of field activities in the Almaty, South Kazakhstan, and Zhambyl regions; and (iii) a team based in Oskemen responsible for coordination, monitoring, and support of field activities in the East-Kazakhstan region. Overall, the project implementation team is composed of the following 13 staff:
  i. Project Manager (PM) – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  ii. Administrative &Finance Assistant (UNDP Biodiversity Projects) – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  iii. Project Logistics Assistant (UNDP Biodiversity Projects) – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  iv. Procurement Specialist – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  v. Expert on protected areas and biodiversity – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  vi. Expert on landscape planning – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  vii. Expert on sustainable forest management – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  viii. Expert on wildlife – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  ix. Expert on environmental monitoring – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  x. Expert on sustainable ecosystem management and socio-economic development of the Almaty region – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  xi. Expert on sustainable ecosystem management and socio-economic development in the East Kazakhstan region – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  xii. Expert on sustainable ecosystem management and work with local communities in the Turkestan and Zhambyl regions – *Full time funded by GEF grant*
  xiii. Specialist in ecotourism and work with local communities in the East Kazakhstan region – *Full time funded by GEF grant*

- The implementation teams are technically supported by contracting national experts, international consultants and companies. The procurement of services (recruitment of specialists/experts) and of any equipment and materials for the project is done by the implementation teams in accordance with relevant recruitment and procurement rules and procedures of UNDP and of the government of Kazakhstan.

83. The project is implemented in line with the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement (SBAA) between the Government of Kazakhstan and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), signed by the parties on October 4, 1994. The implementation modality of the project to allocate, administer and report on project resources is the *UNDP Support Services to National Implementation Modality (NIM)*. The provision of support services was the object of a Letter of Agreement between the government of Kazakhstan represented by the Vice Minister of Agriculture and UNDP, represented by the UNDP Resident Representative in Kazakhstan. Based on this agreement, UNDP may provide services for assistance with reporting requirements and direct payments; ensuring at the same time that the capacity of the designated institution of the ministry of agriculture is strengthened to enable it to carry out such activities directly. This agreement also refers to the SBAA signed on October 4, 1994. An attachment to this agreement lists the type of support services with the cost for each of these services. This agreement was signed by both Parties and incorporated in the project document as Annex Y.

84. The review indicates that the management arrangements as planned at the outset of the project are good and conducive for the day-to-day implementation of project activities. The Evaluation Team noted that the project is overseen by a PB, which is the same board for all UNDP-supported biodiversity projects in Kazakhstan. It is a good incentive for a more coordinated programme-based approach to strengthen biodiversity conservation in Kazakhstan as opposed to a project-based approach to implement this project with limited considerations for other similar opportunities. The project is implemented by an excellent technical team of professionals supported by national consultants/experts bringing together a broad range of skills and knowledge in protected area management, pasture and forestry management, biodiversity conservation, capacity development and local livelihood. Finally, the management arrangements detailed above were conducive in developing good partnerships with key stakeholders such as the Forestry and Wildlife Committee but also the Akimats where project activities are implemented and other non-governmental organizations involved in natural resource management. The result of these collaborations is a project enjoying a good ownership by national Partners, which should contribute to the long-term sustainability of its achievements.

3.3.2. Stakeholder Engagement

85. As per the project document, the project formulation team conducted a stakeholder analysis to identify key stakeholders, assess their respective roles and responsibilities and propose their role in implementing the project. It resulted in a *Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan*, which was incorporated in the project document as Annex G. The initial list of identified stakeholders includes the following:

- Forestry and Wildlife Committee (FWC) of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources (formerly of the Ministry of Agriculture)
- Committee of Water Resources
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Ministry of Energy
- Ministry of National Economy, Ministry on Investments and Development, Ministry of Finance
- JSC “Samrul Energo”
- Land Management Committee (Oblast and Rayon level branches)
- Administrative Units of 12 existing PAs and new PAs
- Forestry Administrations of targeted areas
- Oblast Akimats
- Rayon Akimats
- Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK)
- WWF
- Other NGOs
- Institute of Zoology
- Institute of Geography

- Institute of Botany
- Forestry Institute and Kazlesproekt (State Project Design Institute under CFH)
- State Enterprise "Science & Production Center on Land Resources Management »
- Kazakh Research Institute of Livestock Breeding and Fodder Production
- Local Industries and Entrepreneurs
- Hunting and Fishery Managers
- Rural Consumer Cooperatives and Communities

86. Based on what is in the project document, the review conducted for this MTR indicates that a good framework had been designed for engaging stakeholders in the implementation of the project. Since the outset of the project, most activities are implemented with and for key stakeholders/beneficiaries. In addition to the stakeholder assessment conducted during the formulation of the project, the design team also estimated the potential reach of the project. They estimated that about 41,000 people would benefit directly from the project, including 2,000 staff of PAs, over 450 staff of Leskhozes and about 38,500 local natural resource users. They also estimated that about 397,000 people – which is the population of the districts where project activities are taking place - would benefit indirectly from the project.

87. Key stakeholders are well engaged in implementing activities supported by the project. This engagement consists mostly of staff from PA Administrations and from Leskhozes. However, so far, activities targeting local resource users – particularly enhancing their livelihoods - have been limited. Nevertheless, this group of users started to be engaged through training activities and through the establishment of Public Councils for targeted protected areas; a participatory process of local communities in managing PAs which is also actively promoted by the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources (MEGNR). The plan is also to increase the focus on these users during the second part of this project; once updated management plans will be in place as well the new PAs being created.

88. In conclusion, the assessment conducted for this MTR reveals that key stakeholders are well engaged in implementing the project. The participative and collaborative approach used by the project implementation team is conducive for this good engagement and will certainly be contributing to the sustainability of project achievements over the long term. So far, the engagement of stakeholders is mostly happening at the local level in project targeted areas such as district level stakeholders but also staff in Leskhozes and in PA Administrations; local natural resource users are also being engaged. However, as the innovations are being tested and piloted, there is a need to establish a stronger link between these activities, the local stakeholders and the national level, mostly represented by the staff of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee. As the project started to have "tangible" results, it is recommended to increase the engagement of national level staff in reviewing the progress made by the project, including staff from the Forestry and Wildlife Committee but also other related government entities, which would benefit from the knowledge accumulated by the project.

3.3.3. Work Planning

89. Project Annual Work Plans (AWPs) were produced every year since 2018. These AWPs were developed following UNDP project management guidelines, including the calendar year cycle (January to December for each year). Once finalized, these AWPs were reviewed and endorsed by the PB. These AWPs details the list of main activities to be conducted during the coming year following the structure of the log frame (components, outcomes and outputs) of the project. For each activity, they include a tentative schedule (per quarter) when each activity will be implemented and a corresponding budget from the GEF grant.

90. Based on the information collected, the Evaluation Team compared the budgeted annual work plans with the actual annual disbursements (GEF grant only), the results are presented in the table below:

Table 7: Annual Work Plans versus Actual Expenditures (GEF grant)

Years	AWP Budgets	Actual Expenditures	% Spent
2018	450,000	321,668	71%
2019	1,660,000	1,685,891	102%

Years	AWP Budgets	Actual Expenditures	% Spent
2020	2,285,898	487,049	n/a

Sources: Project AWPs and UNDP-Atlas CDR Reports

91. Numbers presented in the table above reveal that work planning has been efficient since the start of the project in 2018 and in line with the disbursement profile detailed in the project document. However, the arrival of the pandemic in early 2020 has greatly affected project disbursements. After the first year, which ended with actual expenditures being only 71% of the approved budget, disbursements in 2019 were on target with the approved AWP budget. The review of the 2020 AWP indicates that, in continuation with 2019, the disbursements would have met the approved AWP budget and overall was on track to use the GEF grant as planned over 5 years of implementation.

92. However, as of end of July 2020, the actual disbursements represent only 21% of the approved AWP budget for this year; due to activities being postponed until the pandemic is receding. As of the time of this MTR, it is still difficult to assess the full impact of this pandemic on the delivery of project activities. The good news is that the project still has over 2.5 years to go, which hopefully will allow the project team to use adaptive management and deliver anticipated activities within the timeframe of the project.

93. Nevertheless, some quick calculations on the disbursements and the remaining amount to be disbursed indicate that it will be challenging to expend the GEF grant within the given timeframe (5 years to April 2023). When comparing the monthly expenditures of the period May 2018 to July 2020 with the period August 2020 to April 2023, it shows that project expenditures will need to significantly increase for the entire GEF grant to be expended by April 2023. The monthly disbursement for the first period is USD 92,393 and the expected monthly disbursement for the second period of implementation (August 2020 to April 2023) is USD 168,926; an 83% increase. Without knowing exactly when the negative impact of the pandemic will recede, it is unlikely that the remaining budget will be expended by April 2023. When considering the project performance so far, a time extension is recommended. The duration of this extension should be assessed once the pandemic is finally under control and that the project implementation team can plan ahead.

3.3.4. Finance and Co-finance

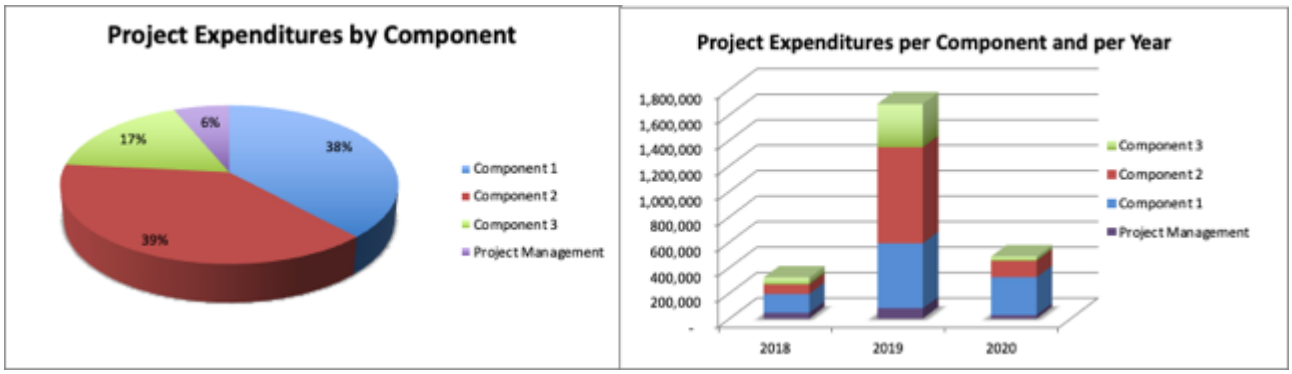
94. The project is implemented in line with the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement (SBAA) between the Government of Kazakhstan and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), signed by the parties on October 4, 1994. As discussed in Section 3.3.1, the implementation modality of the project to allocate, administer and report on project resources is the *UNDP Support Services to National Implementation Modality (NIM)*. The provision of support services was the object of a Letter of Agreement between the government of Kazakhstan represented by the Vice Minister of Agriculture and UNDP, represented by the UNDP Resident Representative in Kazakhstan. Based on this agreement, UNDP may provide services for assistance with reporting requirements and direct payments; ensuring at the same time that the capacity of the designated institution of the ministry of agriculture is strengthened to enable it to carry out such activities directly. This agreement also refers to the SBAA signed on October 4, 1994. An attachment to this agreement lists the type of support services with the cost for each of these services. This agreement was signed by both Parties and incorporated in the project document as Annex Y.

95. At the time of this evaluation, the review of financial records as recorded in the UNDP Atlas system indicates that the actual expenditures allocated against the GEF project grant for the years 2018 to July 2020 (27 months) represent about 31% (USD 2,494,608) of the total approved GEF grant of USD 8,069,178 versus an elapsed time of 45% (27 months out of 60). The breakdown of project expenditures by component and by year is presented in the table below.

Table 8: UNDP-GEF Project Funds Disbursement Status (GEF Grant in USD)

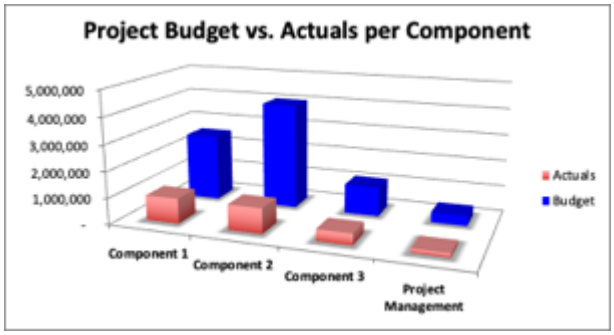
Component	Budget (USD)	2018	2019	2020[10]	Total (USD)	Total/ Budget
Component 1	**2,547,067**	147,238	509,932	296,791	**953,961**	**37.5%**
Component 2	**4,017,000**	74,836	754,308	128,578	**957,722**	**23.8%**
Component 3	**1,120,865**	54,079	340,242	33,665	**427,985**	**38.2%**
Project Management	**384,246**	45,515	81,410	28,015	**154,940**	**40.3%**
TOTAL	**8,069,178**	321,668	1,685,891	487,049	**2,494,608**	**30.9%**

Sources: UNDP Atlas Financial Reports (CDRs) and information collected from the Project Team.



96. As of August 2020, the remaining budget from the GEF grant is USD 5,574,570 (69%). As discussed in section 3.3.3 above, the project disbursements were on track to expend the GEF grant by April 2023. However, so far, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the expenditures for this year; as of end of July 2020, project expenditures for this year represents only 21% of the approved AWP 2020. The current reality is that when comparing the average monthly disbursements for the period to July 2020 (USD 92,393) with the following period to April 2023 (USD 168,926), it is now doubtful that the entire budget will be expended by April 2023; monthly disbursements would need to increase by 83%. It is not impossible to achieve but it would require a drastic change in managing and administering the project with a significant increase of project activities and disbursements to reach this average. Additionally, the full impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the project is still unknown. It is only when this pandemic will recede that the project implementation team will be in a position to fully assess the impact on the implementation of project activities and on the chances to achieve its expected results.

97. Nevertheless, the project is moving ahead with its implementation plan; adapting along the way to the new reality under COVID-19. Within this context, the Evaluation Team recommends a no-cost time extension to complete the implementation of the project. The duration of this extension should be assessed once the pandemic is finally under control and that the project implementation team can securely plan ahead.



98. The review of project expenditures against budgets per component indicates an unequal level of disbursements. The table above and the diagram indicate that almost 38% of the budget for component 1 (Improve management and expand PAs) has been expended to July 2020. About the same percentage of disbursements was noted for component 3 (International cooperation and knowledge management) with just over 38%, and a lower percentage of disbursements for component 2 (Improve forest and pasture management bordering PAs) with only 24%. This disbursement profile is in line with the analysis on progress of the project conducted in section 3.2.1.

99. In the meantime, about 40% of the project management budget has been spent, which represents a ratio

10 Figures for 2020 are from January to July 2020 included.

of just over 6% of the total expenditures to July 2020. It is higher than the planned ratio of 4.8% allocated to project management at the formulation stage; and it is mostly due to the impact of the pandemic on the disbursement this year. However, based on the review of management of the project conducted for this MTR, it is expected that the final percentage will be in line with the budgeted ratio of 4.8% of total expenditures.

100. Finally, the Evaluation Team noted that this project was selected as part of a group of projects to be audited by the UNDP - Office of Audit and Investigations. A forensic review of its financial transactions covering the period January 1, 2018 through 30 June 2020 is underway. This forensic review is conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

Co-financing

101. Co-financing (including parallel co-financing) commitments at the outset of the project totaled the amount of USD 86,795,676 (*see table below*), which represented about 91% of the total amount of the financial resources required in the project document of USD 94,864,854 (GEF grant + co-financing) for the implementation of the project. All pledged amounts listed in the table below were supported by co-financing letters and are part of the project document.

Table 9: Co-financing and Parallel Co-financing Status

Partner	Type	Commitments (USD)	Actuals ('000s tenge)	Actuals (USD[11])
Forest and Wildlife Committee (PAs)	In-kind	70,510,507	11,567,453	31,011,939
Institute of Zoology	In-kind	59,249	68,581	183,863
Almaty Province	In-kind	8,229,217	1,979,424	5,306,767
East Kazakhstan Province	In-kind	7,177,711	1,186,945	3,182,158
CSO – WWF	In-kind	318,992	606,000	1,624,665
CSO - ACBK	In-kind	300,000	1,806	4,300
Others (Snow leopard Foundation)	In-kind	0	29,465	128,866
UNDP	Cash	200,000		
Total (USD)		**86,795,676**	**15,439,674**	**47,360,960**

Source: Project Document and data collected from the Project Team

102. The table indicates that 81% of this co-financing was pledged by the Forest and Wildlife Committee through the budgets allocated to the 14 targeted PAs. A further 17% was from the Almaty and East Kazakhstan provinces. The rest (2%) was pledged by UNDP (cash) and NGOs. Actual figures reported at the time of this MTR totaled USD 47,360,960 or 48% of the total committed co-financing. The review of these figures indicates that the project Partners are contributing to the implementation of the project as pledged at the formulation stage of the project. The Evaluation Team noted the much higher co-financing from WWF and also the additional co-financing from another NGO: Snow Leopard Foundation. Regarding the co-financing contribution from ACBK, it is currently low but the organization has two large grants pending for 2021-2022, which, once approved and implementation will have started will contribute to meeting the pledged co-financing amount. Finally, regarding the co-financing amount from UNDP, despite their clear contribution to the project, no actual data was made available to the Evaluation Team during the MTR.

103. Additionally, the Evaluation Team noted that the project is negotiating with the *Snow Leopard Foundation* to collaborate on a snow leopard study focusing in the Western Tian-Shan and Altay areas, as well as in the Northern Tian-Shan area. A MOU has already been signed and this initiative will also be co-finance by the project and the foundation.

11 Actual figures obtained in Kazakhstani tenge (KZT) were converted at an average rate of 373 KZT per USD, which is the average exchange rate between the 2017 average rate of 326 and the 2020 average rate of 420 KZT/USD.

104. Based on this review, the Evaluation Team confirmed that these Partners have contributed critical resources to the implementation of project activities, particularly local governments (Akimats), Leskhozes and PA Administrations, as well as the Forestry and Wildlife Committee, the Implementing Partner of the project. As discussed in previous sections, project activities are being implemented with and for the relevant stakeholders, including regional and local institutions.

3.3.5. Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

105. A good M&E plan was developed during the formulation of the project – including one gender indicator to track progress in gender mainstreaming - in accordance with standard UNDP and GEF procedures. A budget of USD 135,000 was allocated to M&E, representing about 1.7% of the GEF grant. This plan also details the M&E oversight and monitoring responsibilities of the PM, the PB, the Implementing Partner as the *Senior Beneficiary* (Forestry and Wildlife Committee) and of UNDP as the *Senior Supplier*.

106. The Evaluation Team noted that, during the inception phase, minor changes were made to the set of indicators and targets to be used to measure the performance of the project. The M&E budget was also slightly revised from USD 102,000 to USD 96,000 due to a lower cost of the inception workshop. These changes were documented in the inception report.

107. A summary of the M&E plan operating modalities are as follows:

- *Performance indicators:* A set of 16 indicators with their respective baselines and targets at the end of the project were identified and documented in the *Project Results Framework*.
- *Inception workshop*: It was conducted on May 10, 2018 in Astana. The project design was explained in detail, including the *Project Results Framework* and the available resources for implementing the project. Discussions were facilitated on roles and responsibilities of the *GEF Implementing Agency*, the *Implementing Partner*, other partners/stakeholders and the *Project Implementation Team*. The 2018 annual work plan and budget was reviewed and endorsed. Finally, few minor changes to indicators and targets as well as several operational recommendations were proposed and endorsed by the PB. The inception phase was concluded by this workshop and documented in the inception report.
- *Quarterly Progress Reports*: Quarterly progress reports are produced quarterly documenting the activities implemented and results achieved during the period reported on. These reports are recorded in the UNDP Enhanced Results Based Management Platform.
- *Annual Project Review/Project Implementation Review (APR/PIR)*: These annual progress reports, UNDP and GEF annual reporting requirements, are submitted by the Project Manager to the PB, using a UNDP/GEF template for project progress reporting. These APRs/PIRs includes a summary of results achieved against the overall targets identified in the project document (Development Objective (DO)); and a summary of deliverables implemented during the reporting period (Implementation Progress (IP)). They follow the GEF annual cycle of July 1st to June 30th for each year.
- *External mid-term and final evaluations*: The mid-term evaluation (MTR) is underway (this report); a final evaluation will take place three months prior to the final PSC meeting and will follow UNDP and GEF evaluation guidelines. The GEF's tracking tools were completed for the MTR and will be updated before the final evaluation.
- *Project Final Report*: This comprehensive report will summarize the results achieved (objectives, outcomes, outputs), lessons learned, problems met and areas where results may not have been achieved. It will also lay out recommendations for any further steps that may need to be taken to ensure sustainability and replicability of project's results.
- *Learning and Knowledge Sharing*: Results from the project are to be disseminated within and beyond the project intervention zone through existing information sharing networks and forums. The project is due to identify and participate, as relevant and appropriate, in scientific, policy-based and/or any other networks, which may be of benefit to project implementation though lessons learned. The project is to identify, analyze, and share lessons learned that might be beneficial in the design and implementation of similar future projects. A two-way flow of information between this project and other projects with a similar focus is also encouraged.
- *Audit*: As discussed in section 3.3.4, the project has been selected as part of a group of projects to

be audited by the UNDP - Office of Audit and Investigations. A forensic review of its financial transactions covering the period January 1, 2018 through 30 June 2020 is underway.

108. The slightly revised set of indicators presented in the *Project Results Framework* and documented in the inception report was reviewed during this review. It includes a set of 16 indicators – each one with a baseline and a target by the end of the project - to monitor the performance of the project at the objective and component /outcome levels. The list of indicators and targets is presented in the table below. Text highlighted in green are the changes made during the inception phase.

Table 10: List of Performance Indicators

Objective & Outcomes	Indicators	Targets
Project Objective: Improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities.	1. Area of critical ecosystems with improved management, including tugai, saxaul, and mountain forests, and associated grasslands	• 9,127,071 hectares
	2. Forest area in Kazakhstan under indirectly improved management	• Forests managed by 120 forestry entities = 12,652,400 ha of forest landscapes (within 29,318,750 total ha of national forest fund land); as indicated by status of HCVF management regulations (adopted at national level); • Status of national institutional framework for forest management (plan for restructuring Leskhozes under FWC instead of Akimats adopted at national level)
	3. a. # direct project beneficiaries b. # of PA staff with enhanced individual capacity c. # of forestry staff with enhanced individual capacity d. # of local resource users with improved sustainability of livelihoods	• a. Total: ~41,000 • b. PA staff: >2,000 PA staff with enhanced capacity • c. Forestry staff: 457 Leskhoze staff • d. Local resource users: • Total: 38,753 (19,382 men; 19,371 women) (figures official from 2009 census)
	4. Population trends for globally significant species, such as snow leopard, argali, goitered gazelle, and other threatened species within the expanded target PA estate: Alpine forest and associated ecosystems, flora and fauna Floodplain (tugai) forest and associated ecosystems, flora and fauna Saxaul forest and associated ecosystems, flora and fauna: (species for each ecosystem is listed in project document)	• Flora: No-deterioration of baseline status • Fauna: Increase relative to baseline
Component 1 - Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation-important forests • ***Outcome 1.1:*** Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non-forest ecosystems and their biodiversity	5. Incremental area under conservation management through establishment of new PAs	• 1,729,485 net new hectares under protection, which: (i) Increases the national PA coverage 0.67% from 8.81% to 9.49%, (ii) Secures protection of 761,693 ha of alpine forest ecosystems and 522,593 ha of tugai and saxaul forest ecosystems; (iii) Provides PA coverage for more than 1,000,000 ha of snow leopard range, which increases PA coverage of the two priority national snow leopard landscapes (Zhongar Alatau, and North/Central Tian Shan) from ~40% to ~90% (Zhongar Alatau = ~1,000,000 ha of snow leopard habitat, with current PA

Objective & Outcomes	Indicators	Targets
• ***Outcome 1.2:*** Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests		coverage of ~30%, which will increase by approximately 645,000 ha or 61% of snow leopard range; North/Central Tian Shan =~1,100,000 ha of snow leopard range, with current PA coverage of ~48%, which will increase by approximately 440,000 ha, or 40% of snow leopard range)
	6. Forest PA management effectiveness	• 30% improvement in score gap ((1 – METT value)*0.3) over baseline Target METT Scores: <u>*Alpine forest ecosystems*</u>: - Almaty Reserve: 77 - Ile-Alatau NP: 76 - Kolsay Kolderi NP: 86 - Kolsay Kolderi NP Expansion: 47 - Zhongar Alatau NP: 71 - Zhongar Alatau NP Expansion: 49 - SW Zhongar Alatau (“Koksu”) (proposed): 46 - Sairam-Ugam NP: 80 - Aksu-Jabagly Reserve: 87 - Karatau Reserve: 87 - Karatau Reserve Expansion: 42 - Katon Karagay NP: 44 - Markakol Reserve: 64 - Zapadno-Altay Reserve: 84 - Ketmen Reservat (proposed): 45 - Terskey Reservat (proposed): 45 - Merke NP (proposed): 43 - Saur-Manrak Reservat (proposed): 42 - Tarbagatai NP: 43 <u>*Floodplain (tugai) and saxaul forest*</u>: - Charyn NP: 78 - Syr Darya-Turkestan Regional Nature Park: 81 - Ile-Balkhash Reservat (proposed): 41 - Ile Floodplain Reservat (proposed): 41
	7. Level of achievement of Kazakhstan's forest PAs in securing their biodiversity and other associated values	• At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment
Component 2 - Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation- important ecosystems • ***Outcome 2.1:*** Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits • ***Outcome 2.2:*** Strengthened enabling	8. Change in area of sustainably managed forest in forest ecosystems bordering protected areas	• >1,000,000 ha, as indicated by adoption of improved HCVF management practices in 6 targeted Leskhozes
	9. Reduction in degraded and deforested area in targeted forestry territories bordering protected areas	• >5% improvement over baseline
	10. Change in area of degradation in pasture and forest pasture landscapes bordering protected areas	• Total: 73,000 ha with reduced degradation
	11. Area outside PAs with enhanced conservation management (PA corridors and buffer zones	• 350,000 ha

Objective & Outcomes	Indicators	Targets
environment to support SFM objectives through updated national policies, regulations, and knowledge management systems supporting improved management of 12,652,400 ha of national forest territory • ***Outcome 2.3:*** Integrated economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in decision making in natural resource management, through piloting of innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms	identified in district integrated management plans)	
	12. Number of good practice models for private afforestation established in Kazakhstan	• Two functional and replicable models demonstrated as feasible to meet key gaps in private afforestation regulatory framework: One private-sector based, and one community-based
	13. Degree to which policy and regulatory context for managing natural resources incorporates ecosystem services	• At least one regulation adopted at provincial or national level that recognizes and incorporates TSA methodology
Component 3 - International cooperation and knowledge management • ***Outcome 3.1:*** Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge	14. Quality and coverage (over 50% of habitat) of snow leopard monitoring data in Kazakhstan as indicated by estimated accuracy and timeliness of national snow leopard population estimate	• Publishing of annual population estimates with a 95% or greater confidence level
	15. Level of international cooperation and coordination with Kazakhstan border countries regarding illegal wildlife trade, biodiversity management in borderland protected areas, and snow leopard monitoring	• International agreement between Kazakhstan and at least one bordering country under implementation regarding at least one of the below issues: - Cooperation on law enforcement at border points regarding illegal wildlife trade - Illegal hunting by border guards - Data sharing on snow leopard monitoring
Cross-cutting: Gender mainstreaming during implementation	16. Consistency of project gender mainstreaming approach with project plans	• Gender mainstreaming carried out during project implementation, as indicated by: e) Project Board and local stakeholder working groups have gender balance and/or include a gender expert; f) Policies, laws, and regulations developed with project support include gender perspectives, as relevant g) Project events and activities (e.g. trainings) promote gender balance among invited participants, as feasible h) Project education and awareness activities are developed and carried out incorporating gender perspectives, as relevant

Source: Project Document and PIRs

109. These 16 indicators and their respective targets were identified to measure the progress of the project toward its outcomes and objective. They have been used to report progress made in the APR/PIR reports. The review of these indicators and their respective targets reveals that they are SMART[12] indicators with clear targets. It is a good set of indicators that is used to measure how well the project is progressing toward its

12 SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound.

expected results. With clear targets, it makes them unambiguous indicators that are Specific, Measurable, Available and Relevant for the project in a Timely manner.

110. The M&E plan is a good monitoring framework to measure the performance of the project with a good mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitative indicators – such as number of ha outside PAs with enhance conservation management - give a clear measure of things and are numerically comparable. They also provide an easy comparison of a project progress over time and are easy to monitor and do not require too much resources to collect data. Qualitative indicators measure the degree of capacity developed such as skills developed for relevant stakeholders, procedures and mechanisms developed within relevant institutions and measure the relevance of the enabling environment in place (laws, policies and programmes). They depict the status of a situation in more qualitative terms.

111. The Evaluation Team noted the good integration of the tracking tool scores in this M&E framework. It includes the METT scores as indicator/target #6 and the PMAT score as indicator/target #10. Overall, this is a good monitoring framework, focusing clearly on measuring progress made toward expected results. With 16 indicators and targets, it is also a relatively simple tool and the collection of monitoring information is kind of a continuum of project activities. For instance, the project supports the extension of the PA system with the addition/creation of 11 PAs. Once these PA will be created, the additional total area protected will be the "*incremental areas under conservation management through establishment of new PAs*" (indicator #5 with a target value of 1,729,485 ha). The same logic exists for the number of ha of "*critical ecosystems with improved management, including tugai, saxaul, and mountain forests, and associated grasslands*". The project has been supporting the development of capacities to strengthen management plans of existing and new PAs; as progress is being made, the number of ha of critical ecosystems will progress against the target of 9,127,071ha.

112. However, three indicators and their related targets were particularly reviewed: *"#7 Level of achievement of Kazakhstan's forest PAs in securing their biodiversity and other associated values*" with the target "*At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment*." So far, the project collaborated with IUCN to explore how to implement the "*green listing*" standard in Kazakhstan and a work plan was drafted. However, it is not clear yet that the government of Kazakhstan made the decision to implement the "*green listing*" standard for its PA system. It is recommended that instead of the target to have one PA "*green listed*", to rather focus on collaborating with the government and review the pros and cons of applying this standard. The target should be changed to finalizing a feasibility study and the Kazakh government to reach the decision to proceed or not with this standard.

113. Another indicator reviewed include *Indicator #12* with the target "*Two functional and replicable models demonstrated as feasible to meet key gaps in private afforestation regulatory framework: One private-sector based, and one community-based."* There are no community-based forests in Kazakhstan, all forests are state-owned and a small area of less than 400 ha are privately-owned forests. The national legislation provides for the creation of private forests outside the lands of the forest fund but not for community-based forests. Within the forestry legislative context and the lessons learned from past experiences, the project is focusing on the development of model private forest plantation projects. It is recommended to change the target to "*Model projects of private forest plantations are developed taking into account natural and climatic conditions and results/lessons learned from implemented pilots*".

114. Finally, the *Indicator #5* was to be verified through *"Area of newly established PAs, according to government approval decree documents, as reported in annual PIR, and verified by MTR and TE."* The target for this indicator was revised to 1,729,485 ha during the inception phase; it stays the same. However, the "means of verification" of this target was through government approval decree(s) of newly created PAs; which is outside of the project control. The project has been supporting the creation of new PAs through scientific analyses and feasibility studies. It is recommended to change the means of verification for this target to "*Documents (scientific background reports and feasibility studies) on the expansion/creation of new PAs were developed and approved by the authorized body*."

115. Overall, the review of indicators and targets conducted for this MTR indicates that the project is on its way to meet the established targets; though the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the implementation of project activities and at the time of this MTR it is still difficult to assess the full impact of these delays on the project to achieve its expected results.

3.3.6. Reporting

116. Management reports have been produced according to UNDP project management guidelines. They include AWPs that when finalized have been endorsed by the PB and annual APRs/PIRs (Annual Progress Reports/Project Implementation Reviews). The Evaluation Team was able to collect the 2018, 2019, and 2020 AWPs, and the APR/PIRs for 2019 and 2020. Overall, progress made by the project is being satisfactorily reported, following UNDP project progress reporting guidelines. The APRs/PIRs document the progress made against the project objective and outcomes on a yearly basis using indicators and targets set at the outset of the project (*see Section 3.3.5*). These annual reports include also a review and update of risks identified at the outset of the project and the steps taken to mitigate these risks when rated as critical; no risks were reported as critical in the PIR-2019, an operational risk focusing on delays due to COVID-19 was reported in the PIR-2020. It discusses the impacts of the pandemic on the implementation of project activities. Using adaptive management measures, the project management team has been migrating some activities online – including capacity development to use online platforms - as a mitigation measure.

117. Ratings given in PIRs 2019 and 2020 were also reviewed. The progress made against the overall progress toward the Development Objective (DO) has been rated as *Satisfactory (S)* in both the 2019 and 2020 PIRs and the Implementation Progress (IP) was rated as *Moderately Satisfactory (MS)* for both years. The Evaluation Team noted that ratings given in these PIRs are well justified and are consistent (same) among Raters in their respective "*role*". Based on the review conducted for this MTR, the project has certainly the potential to be overall *Satisfactory* or better by its end.

3.3.7. Communications / Knowledge Management

118. From the outset of the project, knowledge management and communication have been part of the implementation of this project. Knowledge management is part of the *Project Results Framework* as "*Component #3 - International cooperation and knowledge management*". It is implemented through one "*Outcome 3.1: Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge*". At the formulation stage, the development of the theory-of-change for this project identified that coordination and knowledge management of biodiversity conservation activities needed to be improved. It was recognized that to secure this change, improving the quality of biodiversity monitoring information, in particular in relation to monitoring snow leopard populations, their prey, and their habitats was necessary and that sharing quality scientific information was needed to improve management decisions.

119. As presented in section 3.2.1, under this outcome 3.1 the project has been focusing on improving the monitoring of the snow leopard population and sharing this information through the 2019 national annual report. The project has also contributed to the regional coordination and collaboration to share knowledge on snow leopard habitats (landscapes). It has supported the Kazakh team of representatives of state bodies in the preparation of an intergovernmental memorandum to collaborate on the conservation of snow leopard – including the organization of a regional workshop in Nur-Sultan in July 2019. Currently, Parties (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) have reached an agreement on the final version of the Memorandum and the Minister of Environment of Kazakhstan approved the draft agreement for signing.

120. Regarding communications, the Evaluation Team noted that communications and visibility guidelines to comply with UNDP's Branding Guidelines and the GEF's Communication and Visibility Guidelines, including the use of the UNDP and GEF logos are not mentioned in the project document as requirements. However, it noted that the project implementation team has been excellent in communicating information on topics related to the project and in producing/disseminating information products to raise awareness of stakeholders and beneficiaries and overall to emphasize the visibility of the project and its objectives. Communication activities are reported in progress reports. Both PIR 2019 and 2020 include stories extracted from the project, which may be used by UNDP Corporate Communications to communicate on how the project has helped to improve community livelihoods in Kazakhstan. These reports also include a long list of communications published in local media and also in social media.

121. As a result of these communication activities and products, the Evaluation Team confirms the good visibility of the project at national but also at regional and local levels where the demonstration sites are

located. Through various communication channels, knowledge on biodiversity conservation, including Snow Leopard conservation, is being disseminated throughout Kazakhstan. However, it is also recommended that the project implementation team ensures that the project complies with UNDP and GEF communication and branding guidelines as well as those from project Partners such as the Forestry and Wildlife Committee.

3.4. Sustainability

122. This section discusses how sustainable project achievements should be over the long-term. It includes a review of the management of risks and a discussion on specific risk factors such as financial risk, socio-economic risks, institutional framework and governance risks, and environmental risks.

123. Project risks were identified at the formulation stage and documented in the project document; including the type of risk, their impact and probability and mitigation measures for each identified risk. It included a list of 4 risks plus an additional 6 risks identified through the assessment conducted using the *UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Protocol (SESP)*. These risks were reviewed during the inception phase but no changes were made. There are presented in the table below.

Table 11: List of Risks Identified at the outset of the project

Project Risks	Type	Impact and Probability
Non-SESP Risks		
1. Changes in government policy priorities related to sustainable forestry development	Political	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)
2. Biodiversity science and conservation community continue to ignore/underestimate the participatory approaches in planning the landscapes and continue to use formal social surveys as a key tool for community engagement.	Political	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)
3. Data deficiencies to complete the ecosystem services quantification and economic valuation research may undermine the quality of the final products related to species and habitats modeling.	Operational	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)
4. Mountain ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts, and data and analysis on climate change impacts for the mountain forest ecosystems of Kazakhstan is still not well developed. Therefore, climate change could lead to ecosystem impacts that negatively influence the status of biodiversity and the sustainability of forest ecosystems, despite project efforts. The question will be in what timeframe such effects may happen, whether it would be within the lifetime (or shortly thereafter) of the project, or whether such effects, if they occur, would be on much longer timescales.	Environmental	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)
Risks Identified through SESP		
5. Principle 1.1 "*Could the Project lead to adverse impacts on enjoyment of the human rights (civil, political, economic, social or cultural) of the affected population and particularly of marginalized groups?* – YES" Principle 1.2 "*Is there a likelihood that the Project would have inequitable or discriminatory adverse impacts on affected populations, particularly people living in poverty or marginalized or excluded individuals or groups? – YES"* *Principle 1.3 "Could the Project potentially restrict availability, quality of and access to resources or basic services, in particular to marginalized individuals or groups?* – YES" Principle 2.4 "*Would the Project potentially limit women's ability to use, develop and protect natural resources, taking into account different roles and positions of women and men in accessing environmental goods and services?* – YES"	Political	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)
6. Principle 1.5. "*Is there a risk that duty bearers do not have the capacity to meet their obligations in the Project?* – YES" Principle 1.6 "*Is there a risk that rightsholders do not have the capacity to claim their rights?* – YES"	Organizational	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)

Project Risks	Type	Impact and Probability
7. Standard 1.2 "*Are any Project activities proposed within or adjacent to critical habitats and/or environmentally sensitive areas, including legally protected areas (e.g. nature reserve, national park), areas proposed for protection, or recognized as such by authoritative sources and/or indigenous peoples or local communities?* – YES" Standard 1.3 "*Does the Project involve changes to the use of lands and resources that may have adverse impacts on habitats, ecosystems, and/or livelihoods?* – YES"	Environmental	I = 1 (negligible) P = 5 (expected)
8. Standard 1.6 "Does the Project involve harvesting of natural forests, plantation development, or reforestation? – YES"	Environmental	I = 1 (negligible) P = 5 (expected)
9. "Standard 2.2 Would the potential outcomes of the Project be sensitive or vulnerable to potential impacts of climate change? - YES"	Environmental	I = 1 (negligible) P = 3 (moderately likely)
10. Standard 5.2 "*Would the Project possibly result in economic displacement?* – YES" Standard 5.4 "*Would the proposed Project possibly affect land tenure arrangements and/or community-based property rights/customary rights to land, territories and/or resources?* – YES"	Political	I = 2 (minor) P = 1 (moderately likely)

Source: Project Document, Inception Report and UNDP-Atlas Risk Log.

124. Since the outset of the project, the project implementation team has been monitoring and reporting these risks, particularly those risks which would have their impact and/or probability increasing. Project risks are logged and monitored/updated regularly in the UNDP-Atlas system. However, the Evaluation Team noted that only the 4 initial risks (non-SESP) were logged in the Atlas system. As per the reporting guidelines for annual progress reports (APRs/PIRs), risks are to be reported as critical when the impact and probability are high under section *E - Critical Risk Management*. No critical risks were reported in the 2019 PIR, however, one operational risk related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was reported as critical in the 2020 PIR. It discussed how the pandemic and the related state of emergency declared in Kazakhstan has affected the delivery of project activities and, for the time being, presented the need to focus on online activities as a mitigation measure to pursue some activities; including the development of capacities of Partners to use various online platforms for meetings and training activities.

125. The review of these risks and their respective risk assessments reveal that there are covering key aspects of the project where issues can arise, and the level of risk significance is appropriate. It includes the risk related to the limited take-up of tested and piloted innovative measures by the state institutions directly responsible for the administration of protected areas, pastures and forests to ensure the sustainability of project achievements. As of the time of this MTR, the Evaluation Team concurs with the overall risk assessment documented in the project document.

126. However, one risk that was not anticipated, was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impact on the delivery of project activities. The project has been progressing well since its outset until early 2020 when the pandemic outbreak started in Kazakhstan. A state of emergency was declared by an Emergency Decree (#285) on March 15, 2020. The Decree was mostly to control/suspend air links to and from countries outside of Kazakhstan. However, it also put restrictions on gatherings such as workshops and seminars; notified that organizations should limit their activities in order to stop the spread of COVID-19; and encourage alternative working arrangements such as remote work (online) while wages are to be paid. Nevertheless, using adaptive management measures, the project management team has been migrating some activities online – including developing the capacities of Partners to use online platforms - as a mitigation measure. It goes without saying that this risk is constantly monitored, hoping that this pandemic will recede in a not-too-far future.

3.4.1. Financial risk to Sustainability

127. When reviewing the sustainability of project achievements, financial risk is an area where some

questions related to the long-term sustainability of project achievements need some attention. Through the implementation of innovative measures, the project has been financing the procurement of equipment as part of testing and piloting these new measures. It includes the procurement of tractors, vehicles, boats, mobile trailer, camera traps, thermal cameras, portable radio units, solar station, IT equipment, winter clothing for Rangers, etc. These items are now used when testing and piloting these new innovative measures. This support has been much appreciated and it has allowed project activities to be carried out with the required resources. However, once the project will end, financial resources will still be needed to run and maintain this equipment (recurrent costs) and over the medium to long term to replace it. Additional financial resources will be needed after the end of the project. The same is true for the new created 11 PAs. Those with staff to manage these new PAs will need a budget to operate.

128. A financial risk exists of a lack of financial resources to support the new tested/piloted measures for improving the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, forests and pastures after the project end. However, so far, the project enjoyed a good national ownership and the government has already demonstrated its strong interest in integrating these tested innovative measures and it is much committed to integrate more of those as the project progresses toward its end. Overall, it is expected that the government will continue to support the achievements of the project with the necessary financial resources from the national budget and possibly from other funding sources. In the meantime, considering the expected outcomes of the project, the Evaluation Team recommends that the project implementation team prepare a project exit strategy, identifying what, when, where and how much it will cost to ensure continuity of the project achievements.

3.4.2. Socio-economic risk to Sustainability

129. The review indicates that there is no socio-economic risk to sustainability. In the worst-case scenario, if the project has very limited impact, it should not affect negatively the project beneficiaries and the "*business as usual*" scenario would continue. Nevertheless, the project is progressing well and the integration of economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services through piloting innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms should impact positively communities living in the areas surrounding the targeted PAs. It should have a positive socio-economic impact on the livelihood of local communities in the project areas.

3.4.3. Institutional framework and governance risk to Sustainability

130. The institutional framework and governance are areas where a certain risk to sustainability of project achievements exist. As discussed previously in this report, the project is a direct response to the government agenda. It strengthens the government's approach for biodiversity conservation, including expanding and strengthening its protected area network, and strengthening the management of its forests and pastures while bettering livelihoods of communities living in these areas. The project is "rooted" in national priorities and needs, including its "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030*". The project seeks to enhance biodiversity conservation, and sustainable use, of natural resources in three ecosystems: alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems. It has been supporting the development of management planning capacity of PA Administrations and Leskhozes to improve the management of PAs and forests, which the latter are mostly situated outside the PA network. It also supports the expansion of the PA network through the creation of 11 new PAs, which will, then, encompass a greater area of forests in the PA system. This support is done through testing and piloting new innovative concepts, methods, approaches, etc. such as the introduction of the HCVF, TSA methodology, Green Listing standard, SMART patrol system, a more comprehensive approach to prepare management plans for PAs and forests, and a more integrated landscape management planning approach applied to district level areas. It also includes the preparatory work to create new PAs.

131. As discussed in section 3.2.1, the success of the project resides in its ability to institutionalize – hence sustain – all these innovations and to ensure that capacities required by institutions involved in applying these innovations are developed. A certain level of risk exists – including the still-not-fully-known impact of the pandemic - that all these innovative measures and capacities are not in place by the end of the project. It is recommended that the project implementation team focuses on these 2 aspects: institutionalization and capacity development of project partners for the remaining implementation period to ensure that by project end, achievements will be sustained over the long term. In the meantime, the Evaluation Team noted that this

recommendation is much aligned with the coming activities supported by the project and also the anticipation that the government is fully committed to incorporate these innovative measures within its institutional and governance frameworks.

3.4.4. Environmental risk to Sustainability

132. The review did not find any environmental risks to the sustainability of project outcomes. The project supports the implementation of measures to improve biodiversity conservation, including the development of capacities of national, sub-national and local stakeholders to implement these measures. Ultimately, the achievements of the project that is to " *improve the conservation status and the management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities",* should have a medium and long-term positive environmental impact over the natural resources in the project areas. The implementation of new biodiversity conservation measures as well as protection measures for forests and pastures, should render the management of these ecosystems more sustainable over the long-term.

4. Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

4.1. Conclusions

Project Strategy

a) The project is fully relevant; it is well aligned with national priorities of the government of Kazakhstan, and it is part of the UNDP programme to support Kazakhstan in strengthening biodiversity conservation and the management of forests.

133. The project is well aligned with the "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030"* which was updated in 2018 and approved by the Scientific Technical Council of the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife in 2019. This biodiversity strategy is also aligned with the government Decree on Green Economy (2013) and also with the global biodiversity targets. This alignment was also confirmed recently with the recent address of the President who confirmed the priorities of the government to protect and conserve biodiversity as well as focusing on forests, eco-tourism and "green growth" in general. Regarding UNDP programme in Kazakhstan, its *Country Programme Document (CPD) for Kazakhstan (2016-2020),* which is aligned with national priorities, has four priorities. The project is particularly well aligned with two expected outputs: (i) Natural resources are protected, accounted for and integrated in national and/or sub-national development planning; and (ii) National and sub-national institutions have strengthened capacities in environmental governance in protected territories and adjacent settlements.

b) The project strategy provides a good response to national needs/priorities; particularly to address three existing barriers hampering an effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of forests and pastures.

134. The aim of the project is to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for the conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities. The project also seeks to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, to the extent relevant and feasible within the scope of the project. It is a timely response to national priorities focusing on addressing three key barriers, which are hampering progress in improving the conservation of biodiversity and its sustainable use in Kazakhstan. (i) insufficient technical and financial capacity to manage the protected area system of Kazakhstan; (ii) a poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management; and (iii) insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management.

c) The project is well designed.

135. The "*logic model*", as a response to national needs/priorities, presents a clear strategy and a good and logical "*chain of results*" – ***Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Objective***. With 3 expected outcomes, 21 expected outputs and 124 planned activities, it is an ambitious project with a broad scope to reach the

objective that is "*to improve the conservation status and the management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities*." It focuses on 3 different ecosystems: alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems and intervenes in three administrative regions: East Kazakhstan Province; Almaty Province; and Turkestan (former South Kazakhstan) Province. The strategy is underpinned by three main theories-of-change: strengthening and expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan to improve biodiversity conservation; providing buffer zones around PAs to allow a transition of land use management approaches and establishing corridors between PAs to ensure that they do not exist as stand-alone islands in the landscape; and improving the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities.

Progress Toward Results

d) The project has, so far, made satisfactory progress.

136. The project is progressing well toward its outcome targets and it has two and a half more years of implementation to go. It is on target to meet its expected results as anticipated in the project document. Up to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was certainly on track to be a satisfactory project by April 2023 and meet all its targets. As the pandemic is still on-going, it is difficult to assess its impact on the delivery of project results. In the meantime, the project management team is adapting well to the new reality and without any resurgence of this pandemic, the implementation of the project will carry on and it should meet its expected results.

- ***Under Outcome 1*** the project has been focusing on expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan, with the creation of 9 new PAs equipped with effective management plans and strengthening the management plans of 14 existing PAs to include the concept of High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF). So far, the process to expand the PA system by 1,795,509 ha has started, technical justifications have been drafted, feasibility studies are underway, and equipment has been procured. Management plans for the period 2019-2024 for 23 pilot PAs were developed and approved; including holding workshops and training courses for PA staff to develop their capacities related to the implementation of this new management planning approach. This component 1 has been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project.
- ***Under Outcome 2*** the project has been focusing on improving the integration of forest PAs in the wider landscape where most forested areas are. It seeks to test/pilot new approaches in district land use planning for areas with important natural landscapes and with the goal of providing direct community benefits. So far, the introduction of the HCVF concept has started with a preliminary ranking of forest according to HCVF criteria; work took place to develop a scientifically-based system to assess forest pest and disease and develop control and protection measures including the test of a new biological preparation; several forest nursery were created; current state and management of pastures were assessed; and the TSA methodology has been introduced with a national assessment of the effectiveness of the forestry management system underway. This component 2 has been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project, though the actual expenditures under this outcome are slightly behind the allocated budget for this outcome.
- ***Under Outcome 3*** the project has been focusing on increasing capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge. It also supports the government in implementing the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan through the development of Integrated Landscape Planning in National Priority Snow Leopard Landscapes. So far, an annual report reporting on the annual assessment of snow leopard (2019) was completed; the National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan was updated; the SMART patrol system was introduced in the Sairam-Ugam National Park; support was provided to the Kazakh team to participate in the preparation of an intergovernmental memorandum on the conservation of snow leopard; and collaboration with GSLEP to develop a landscape management plan for 2 landscape area has started. This component 3 has also been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project.

e) The challenge for the remaining period of implementation will be to institutionalize the tested and piloted innovative measures.

137. This project is timely and responds to national priorities and needs. It is making good progress in strengthening the management of forests, pastures and protected areas, contributing to improving the

conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in targeted PAs but also in the wider landscape around these PAs. The project also started to focus on integrating economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services through piloting innovative sustainable economic development mechanisms such as ecotourism, private forest breeding, and other sustainable business activities to improve the livelihoods of local communities. It is an ambitious project progressing well. However, its success will depend much on a challenging task during the remaining period of implementation that is to sustainably institutionalize concepts, approaches and methods piloted/demonstrated. It includes the necessary capacities needed to be developed, and which, should be addressed before the end of the project.

Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

f) The management arrangements are conducive for a good implementation of the project; including an excellent implementation team.

138. The management arrangements as planned at the outset of the project are good and conducive for the day-to-day implementation of project activities. The project is overseen by a PB, which is the same board for all UNDP-supported biodiversity projects in Kazakhstan. It provides a well-coordinated programme-based approach to strengthen biodiversity conservation in Kazakhstan. The project is implemented by an excellent technical team of professionals supported by national consultants/experts bringing together a broad range of skills and knowledge in protected area management, pasture and forestry management, biodiversity conservation, capacity development and local livelihood. Since the outset of the project, the team developed good partnerships with key stakeholders such as the Forestry and Wildlife Committee but also the Akimats where project activities are implemented and other non-governmental organizations involved in natural resource management. The result of these collaborations is a project enjoying a good ownership by national Partners, which should contribute to the long-term sustainability of its achievements.

g) Stakeholders and beneficiaries are well engaged in the implementation of the project, particularly at the local level; a stronger link to share knowledge between policy makers, researchers, practitioners and beneficiaries is needed.

139. Key stakeholders are well engaged in implementing the project. The participative and collaborative approach used by the project implementation team is conducive for this good engagement and will certainly be contributing to the sustainability of project achievements over the long term. This good engagement has resulted in a good country ownership of the project. However, so far, the engagement of stakeholders is mostly happening at the local level in project targeted areas such as district level stakeholders but also staff in Leskhozes and in PA Administrations; local natural resource users are also being engaged. As innovative concepts, methods, approaches, etc. are being piloted/demonstrated, there is a need to establish a stronger link among local stakeholders (including beneficiaries), district level stakeholders, researchers and policy makers at national level. The project started to have "tangible" results; it is time to emphasize knowledge sharing among stakeholders and to learn from each other.

h) The disbursements of the GEF grant was well on track with the overall plan until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

140. As of August 2020, the remaining budget from the GEF grant is USD 5,574,570 (69%). Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project disbursements were well on track to expend the GEF grant by April 2023. However, the measures taken to control the pandemic have greatly affected the expenditures for this year; as of end of July 2020, project expenditures for this year represents only 21% of the approved AWP 2020. A brief analysis of average monthly disbursements indicates that these averages are USD 92,393 of project expenditures per month from the beginning of the project to July 2020 and, when considering the budget left, USD 168,926 per month for the period to April 2023. It is now doubtful that the entire budget will be expended by April 2023. Monthly disbursements would need to increase by 83%, which would require a drastic change in managing and administering the project. Additionally, the full impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the project is still unknown.

i) There is a good monitoring framework in place with a good set of indicators and targets to measure the performance of the project.

141. The M&E plan is a good monitoring framework to measure the performance of the project with a good mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The 16 indicators and their respective targets are SMART indicators with clear targets. There is also a good integration of tracking tool scores in the M&E framework, including the METT scores as indicator #6 and the PMAT score as indicator #10. This framework focuses clearly on measuring progress made toward expected results. It is a relatively simple and effective monitoring framework. It is also cost-efficient; the collection of monitoring information is closely related to project activities and do not require extra surveys, studies, etc.

j) One target (indicator #7) needs to be revised and adapted to the context in Kazakhstan.

142. Despite a good M&E framework, the target for the indicator #7 ("*At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment*") is not appropriate; it needs to be revised. Related to this target, so far, the project collaborated with IUCN to explore how to implement the "*Green List*" standard in Kazakhstan. Following a workshop on "*Green List*" standard in Almaty, a proposal was sent from IUCN to the project detailing the tasks and cost to implement this standard in Kazakhstan. In the meantime, it is not clear yet that the government of Kazakhstan made the decision to implement the "*green list*" standard within its PA system. Considering the cost (almost USD 500k without the in-country workshop costs), which the project cannot cover as it stands now, a clear strategy from the government to implement this standard is needed before any such investment is made. The target needs to be revised reflecting the collaboration with the government in reviewing the pros and cons of applying this standard and a final government decision to proceed , or not, with this standard in the future.

Sustainability

k) Project achievements should be sustained over the long-term; however, the challenge is to institutionalize the tested and piloted innovative measures and ensure that full capacities are in place.

143. So far, the implementation of the project has been successful; it is progressing well toward its expected results. As a direct response to the government agenda, the project has been strengthening the government's approach for biodiversity conservation, including expanding and strengthening its protected area network, and strengthening the management of its forests and pastures while bettering livelihoods of communities living in these areas. Through its activities the project has introduced new innovative concepts, methods, approaches, etc. such as the introduction of the HCVF concept, TSA methodology, Green Listing standard, SMART patrol system, a more comprehensive approach to develop management plans for PAs and forests, and a more integrated landscape management planning approach applied to district level areas. Ultimately, the success of the project will reside in its ability to institutionalize – hence sustain – all these innovations and to ensure that capacities required by institutions involved in applying these innovations are developed. At this stage, a certain level of risk exists – including the still-not-fully-known impact of the pandemic - that all these innovative measures are not institutionalized and capacities are not in place by the end of the project.

l) COVID-19 Pandemic: The project has been affected negatively by the pandemic with no end in sight and as a result a political risk emerged.

144. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the implementation of project activities. The slow-down in activities have been translated into lower expenditures for this year. Project expenditures from January to July 2020 represents only 21% of the approved AWP-2020. As this pandemic is still on-going, it is difficult to assess the full impact on the delivery of project activities and, by extension, on achievements. In the meantime, the project management team is adapting well to the new reality and as the pandemic subside, project activities will carry on.

145. Nevertheless, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a certain political risk has emerged as critical. The government of Kazakhstan has already redirected initial financial commitments to counter the impact of COVID-19 and stabilize the epidemiological situation in Kazakhstan. According to the project team, the originally allocated budgets to PAs for 2020-2021 were reduced this year by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee by 50%. It is a large budget reduction for PAs management with an uncertain future for the coming years. As the project is in the process to introduce documentation for the creation of new PAs (component 1),

the review and adoption of these proposed new PAs may take much longer to be completed. On this basis, there is a risk that the project may not meet some of its targets; in particular the target of "*1,729,485 net new hectares under protection*" (indicator #5) which implies the creation of new PAs. As a result, a greater commitment – including financial commitments - from the government to the PA system would be needed in the long term. However, in the short term, these financial obligations would be mitigated by the fact that five new PAs would be transferred under the operational management of existing PAs/forestry farms, which will reduce costs.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this mid-term review, the following recommendations are suggested.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended a one year no-cost time extension.

Issue to Address

146. The project has been progressing well since its outset until early 2020 when the pandemic outbreak started in Kazakhstan, which impacted negatively the delivery of project activities. A state of emergency was declared on March 15, 2020 putting restrictions on gatherings such as workshops and seminars and also on local travel. Since then, the project implementation team has migrated some activities online but not all; particularly field activities which were suspended. The reduction of project activities was translated in a much lower disbursement of the GEF grant; only 21% of the AWP for 2020 was expanded as of the end of July 2020. The review of the project finances indicates that based on the status as of end of July 2020, the monthly disbursement for the period August 2020 to April 2023 should be USD 168,926 per month to expend the GEF grant by end of April 2023; an 83% increase of monthly disbursements when compared to the period May 2018 to July 2020. Without knowing exactly when the negative impact of the pandemic will recede, it is unlikely that the remaining budget will be expended by April 2023. When considering the good project performance so far, a no-cost time extension is recommended. Despite the fact that the final duration of this extension should be assessed once the pandemic is finally under control and that the project implementation team would have more clarity to plan ahead, it is recommended a no-cost time extension of a minimum of 12 months (one year).

Recommendation 2: It is recommended to increase synergies and knowledge sharing among policy makers, researchers, practitioners and beneficiaries.

Issue to Address

147. Stakeholders are well engaged in implementing the project. However, so far, the engagement of stakeholders is mostly happening at the local level in project targeted areas such as district level stakeholders but also staff in Leskhozes and in PA Administrations; local natural resource users are also being engaged. After almost 2.5 years, the implementation of innovative approaches and techniques started to produce "*tangible*" results and it is time to focus more on knowledge sharing, seeking synergies among all stakeholders and to learn from each other. It is recommended to increase knowledge sharing and establish a stronger link between local stakeholders (including beneficiaries), district level stakeholders, researchers and policy makers at national level. It is suggested to increase meetings and workshops with the participation of all stakeholders to communicate the progress made and exchange views among participants. Another suggestion would be to organize "*field days*" with the participation of government representatives from national, district and local levels, Leskhoze and PA staff, researchers, farmers/communities and private sector to review ongoing demonstrations and seek a greater involvement of local communities and private sector in the management of these ecosystems.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended to emphasize institutionalization and capacity development of project partners for the remaining implementation period.

Issue to Address

148. The project has been successfully introducing innovative approaches to improve biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. It includes the introduction of the HCVF concept to protect valuable forests, the TSA methodology to assess the effectiveness of the forestry management system

as well as estimate the value of ecosystem services, and the integrated landscape management planning approach to improve the management of PAs and of forests managed by Leskhozes. However, the ultimate success of the project resides in its ability to institutionalize – hence sustain – these innovative approaches and to ensure that capacities required by institutions involved in applying these innovations are developed before the end of the project. It is recommended that the project implementation team focuses on these 2 aspects: institutionalization and capacity development of project partners for the remaining implementation period to ensure that, by the end of the project, achievements will be sustained over the long term. It is noted that this recommendation is much aligned with the coming activities supported by the project and also the anticipation that the government is fully committed to incorporate these innovative measures within its institutional and governance framework.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended to undertake capacity assessments of partners to identify capacity gaps and capacity needs to sustain project achievements.

Issue to Address

149. As per the above recommendation, it is critical that the project contribute to the development of capacities needed to sustain the project achievements. It is an ambitious project with a broad scope. To succeed, the strategy is underpinned with three key necessary changes: strengthening and expanding the PA system; providing buffer zones around PAs; and improving the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities. It goes without saying that for this strategy to succeed, capacities of key stakeholders need to be in place before the end of the project to ensure the sustainability of results. It is recommended to undertake capacity assessments of partners to identify capacity gaps and capacity needs (skills, knowledge, procedures, human and financial resources, etc.). Once these gaps and needs are identified, to pursue with the appropriate capacity development exercise to address these gaps.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended to undertake studies on the carrying capacity of PAs with high eco-tourism potential.

Issue to Address

150. Eco-tourism is an economic sector, which was recently put on the priority agenda of the government following the recent President's address to the Nation (September 1, 2020). As part of "*Time for Action*" of this address, development of ecotourism was an area promoted by the President. In the meantime, the project has supported the development of guidelines for ecotourism in PAs. These guidelines are currently under review by the government. As much as ecotourism is good for the local population and tourists to enjoy the natural environment, there is also the risk of damaging and disturbing this environment, including disturbing natural habitats. To provide tools and information on the capacity of some natural environments, it is recommended to support carrying capacity studies of PAs with high ecotourism potential, including paying special attention for regulations of recreational tourism, which is expected to be high in some areas in the coming years.

Recommendation 6: It is recommended to prepare an exit strategy.

Issue to Address

151. So far, the project enjoyed a good national ownership and the government has already demonstrated its strong interest in integrating these tested innovative measures and more is coming as the project progresses toward its end. Overall, it is expected that the government will continue to support the achievements of the project with the necessary financial resources from the national budget and possibly from other funding sources. In order to facilitate the "transfer" of project achievements from with-the-project to without-the-project, it is recommended to develop a project exit strategy (or roadmap?), identifying what, when, where and how much priorities to sustain project achievements will cost to ensure continuity of project achievements.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended to make a few changes to the M&E framework: target for indicator #7 and #12, and means of verification for indicator #5.

Issue to Address

Indicator #7 – target: At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment

152. The project has collaborated with IUCN to explore how to implement the "*green list*" standards in Kazakhstan. Following some initial exchanges, including a workshop in Almaty in December 2019, IUCN sent to the project (May 2020) a proposal to establish the "*Green List*" process in Kazakhstan. However, the cost of this proposal is almost USD 500k and it does not include the cost of some activities such as workshops. The project in its current set up does not have the budget to fund this proposal. Furthermore, it is not clear yet that the government of Kazakhstan made the decision to implement the "*Green List*" standards in its PA system. It is recommended to change the target from "*at least one PA has had a preliminary "green list" assessment*" to "*Submit a feasibility study to the government and support the government to review and decide to proceed or not with the "Green List" standard*."

Indicator #12 – target: Two functional and replicable models demonstrated as feasible to meet key gaps in private afforestation regulatory framework: One private-sector based, and one community-based

153. There are no community-based forests in Kazakhstan, all forests are state-owned and a small area of less than 400 ha are privately-owned forests. The national legislation provides for the creation of private forests outside the lands of the forest fund but not for community-based forests. The project has been implementing pilots to test private forest breeding in three regions. It also integrated best practices and lessons learned from GIZ supported pilot plantation projects. Within the forestry legislative context and the lessons learned from past experiences, the project is focusing on the development of model private forest plantation projects. It is recommended to change the target to "*Model projects of private forest plantations are developed taking into account natural and climatic conditions and results/lessons learned from implemented pilots*".

Indicator #5 – means of verification: Area of newly established PAs, according to government approval decree documents, as reported in annual PIR, and verified by MTR and TE

154. The target for this indicator was revised to 1,729,485 ha during the inception phase; it stays the same. However, the "means of verification" of this target was planned through government approval decree(s) of newly created PAs; which is outside of the project control. The project has been supporting the creation of new PAs through scientific analyses and feasibility studies. It is recommended to change the means of verification for this target to "*Documents (scientific background reports and feasibility studies) on the expansion/creation of new PAs were developed and approved by the authorized body*."

Recommendation 8: It is recommended to exchange with and access the body of knowledge of the UNDP-GEF-SLT "*Transboundary Cooperation for Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Conservation*" project.

Issue to Address

155. This project, based at GSLEP Secretariat in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is ending in December 2020. The objective of the project was "*to strengthen transboundary conservation of snow leopard ecosystems and landscapes that ensure stability of global snow leopard population by addressing drivers of existing and emerging threats with special focus in Central Asia*." The project delivered high quality outputs, consisting of methodologies, manuals, guidelines, training courses, recommendations, strategies, etc. integrating leading-edge knowledge on snow leopard conservation to be used by key organizations responsible for the conservation of snow leopards in Central Asian countries and other country members of GSLEP. Most of these tools and instruments exist in both languages - English and Russian. Worth exploring are (i) the Snow Leopard Genome sub-project, a high-quality reference genome (open-source) for snow leopard; and (ii) the Population Assessment of the World's Snow Leopards (PAWS), a methodology to estimate snow leopard abundance and distribution using a combination of spatial capture-recapture and occupancy models. It is recommended to establish a link with the partners of this project: Snow Leopard Trust (SLT) and GSLEP Secretariat, both based in Bishkek in order to access their skills and body of knowledge.

Recommendation 9: It is recommended for UNDP country office to look into faster processing of procurement requests for goods and services.

Issue to Address

156. Slow procurement processing, including services such as hiring experts and consultants was one of the rare weaknesses mentioned by stakeholders interviewed for this MTR. It seems that sometimes it takes months between the time of an initial request for a service and the time to have a contract in place; sometimes resulting in long delays in implementing activities. It is recommended for the UNDP country office to look into the processing of this type of transactions and explore ways to speed up the process of procuring a requested good

or hiring an expert/consultant for a particular assignment.

Recommendation 10: It is recommended to calculate the CO_2 benefits using the FAO Ex-ACT tool by the end of the project.

Issue to Address

157. The formulation team, using the FAO Ex-ACT tool and the GEF guidance calculated that once the project would be completed and be successful in meeting all its targets, it would generate a total of 5,838,328 tCO2eq as CO_2 benefits. In the meantime, CO_2 benefits were not part of the M&E framework to measure the performance of the project. Nevertheless, the CO_2 benefits calculation was made to measure the climate change benefits through SFM using the FAO-Ex-ACT tool in line with GEF guidance. This tools requests inputs on hectares of forest and land area affected by the project, as well as the level of with-project and without project degradation or deforestation. It is recommended that this tool be used to calculate the CO_2 benefits by the end of the project.

Recommendation 11: It is recommended to verify that the project complies with UNDP and GEF communications and branding guidelines.

Issue to Address

158. The communications and visibility guidelines to comply with UNDP's Branding Guidelines and the GEF's Communication and Visibility Guidelines, including the use of the UNDP and GEF logos are not mentioned in the project document. It is recommended that the project implementation team ensures that the project complies with these guidelines as well as those from the project partners such as the Forestry and Wildlife Committee.

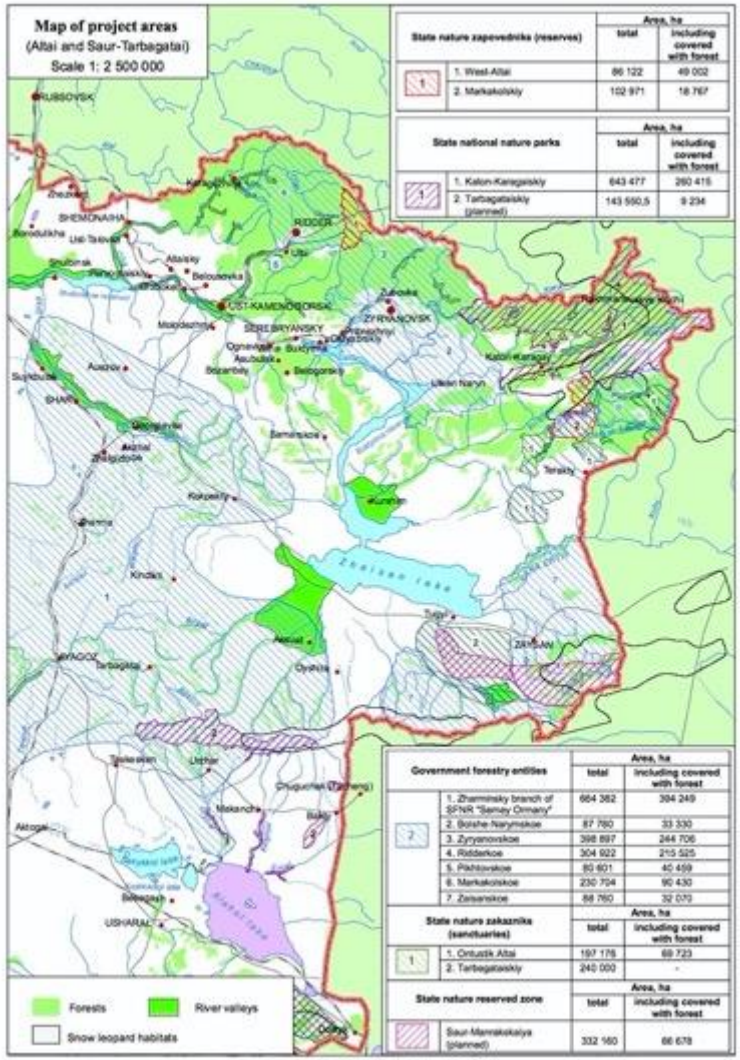
4.3. Lessons Learnt

159. Several lessons learned are presented below. There are based on the review of project documents, interviews with key informants and analysis of the information collected for this evaluation:

- Implementing such a project as part of a programme as opposed to an isolated project is more effective. It is part of a programmatic approach as opposed to a project-based approach which the latter tend to be more "*piecemeal*."
- GEF projects have resources and flexibility to innovate, test and demonstrate new approaches. They play a pioneer role in improving the management of natural resources; they provide platforms offering "*out of the box*" thinking.
- A good skilled management/implementation project team is critical for a good implementation of such project.
- A project that is a response to clear national needs and priorities is often highly relevant for beneficiaries and its chance of being implemented effectively are maximized.
- A good design leads to a good implementation, which in turn leads to good project results. Every steps of the way count for the success of a project; it is a lot easier to succeed when all these steps are relevant and clear to be implemented.
- Sustainability of this type of projects, is much correlated with capacities being developed during the lifetime of these projects. The more capacities are developed the more sustainable project achievements will be.

Annex 1: Map of Targeted Project Regions

East Kazakhstan Province



State nature zapovednika (reserves)		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
1	1. West-Altai	86 122	49 002
	2. Markakolskiy	102 971	18 767

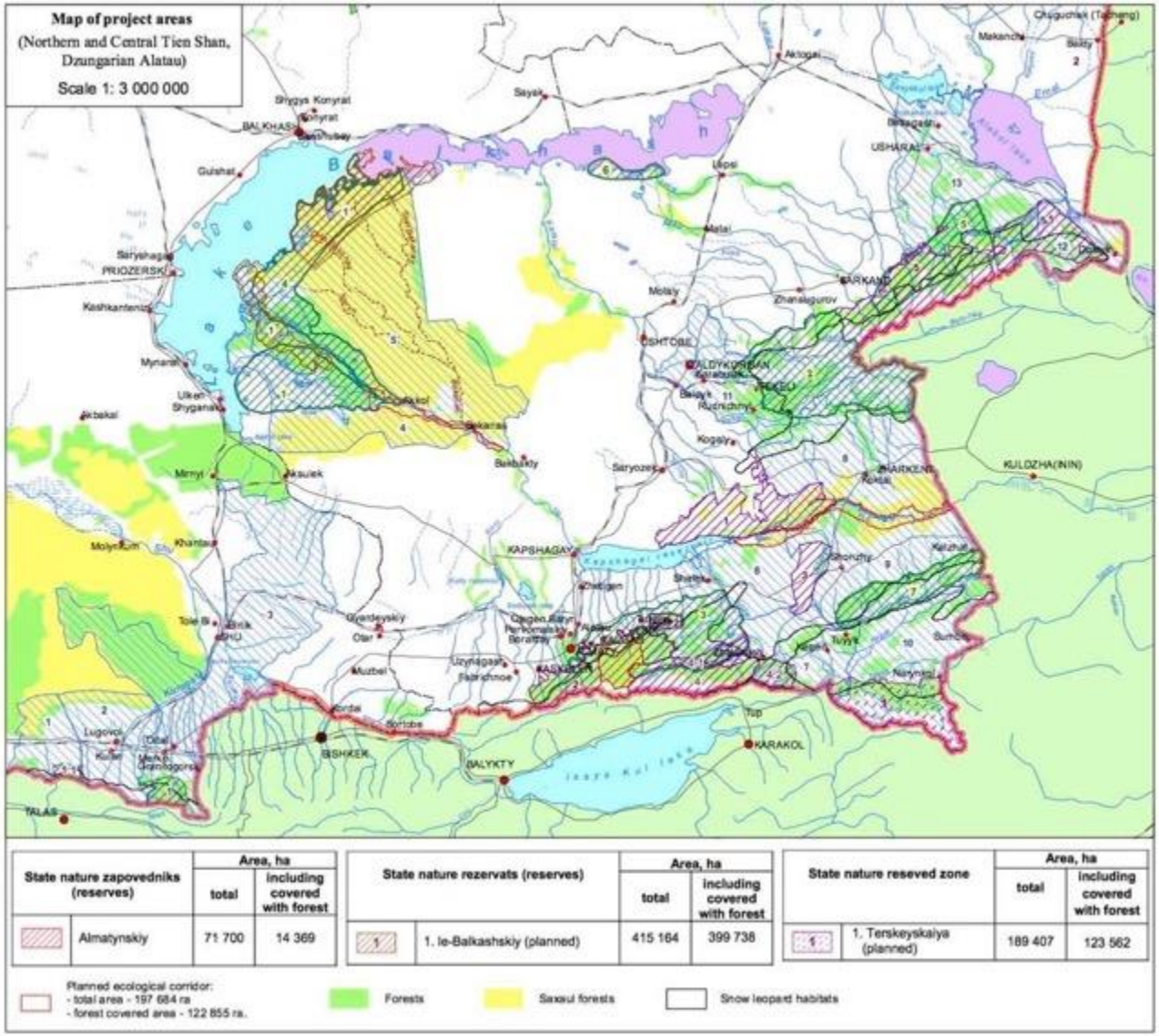
State national nature parks		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
1	1. Katon-Karagaiskiy	643 477	260 415
	2. Tarbagataiskiy (planned)	143 550,5	9 234

Government forestry entities		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
2	1. Zharminskiy branch of SPNR "Semey Ormany"	664 382	394 249
	2. Borshe-Narymskoe	87 760	33 330
	3. Zyryanovskoe	398 897	244 706
	4. Ridderkoe	304 922	215 525
	5. Pikhtovskoe	80 601	40 459
	6. Markakolskoe	230 704	90 430
	7. Zaisanskoe	88 760	32 070

State nature zakaznika (sanctuaries)		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
1	1. Ontustik Altai	197 176	69 723
	2. Tarbagataiskiy	240 000	-

State nature reserved zone		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
	Saur-Mamrakskaiya (planned)	332 160	66 678

Almaty Province



State nature zapovedniks (reserves)		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
	Almatynskiy	71 700	14 369

State nature rezervats (reserves)		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
1	1. Ile-Balkashskiy (planned)	415 164	399 738

State nature reseved zone		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
1	1. Terskeyskaiya (planned)	189 407	123 562

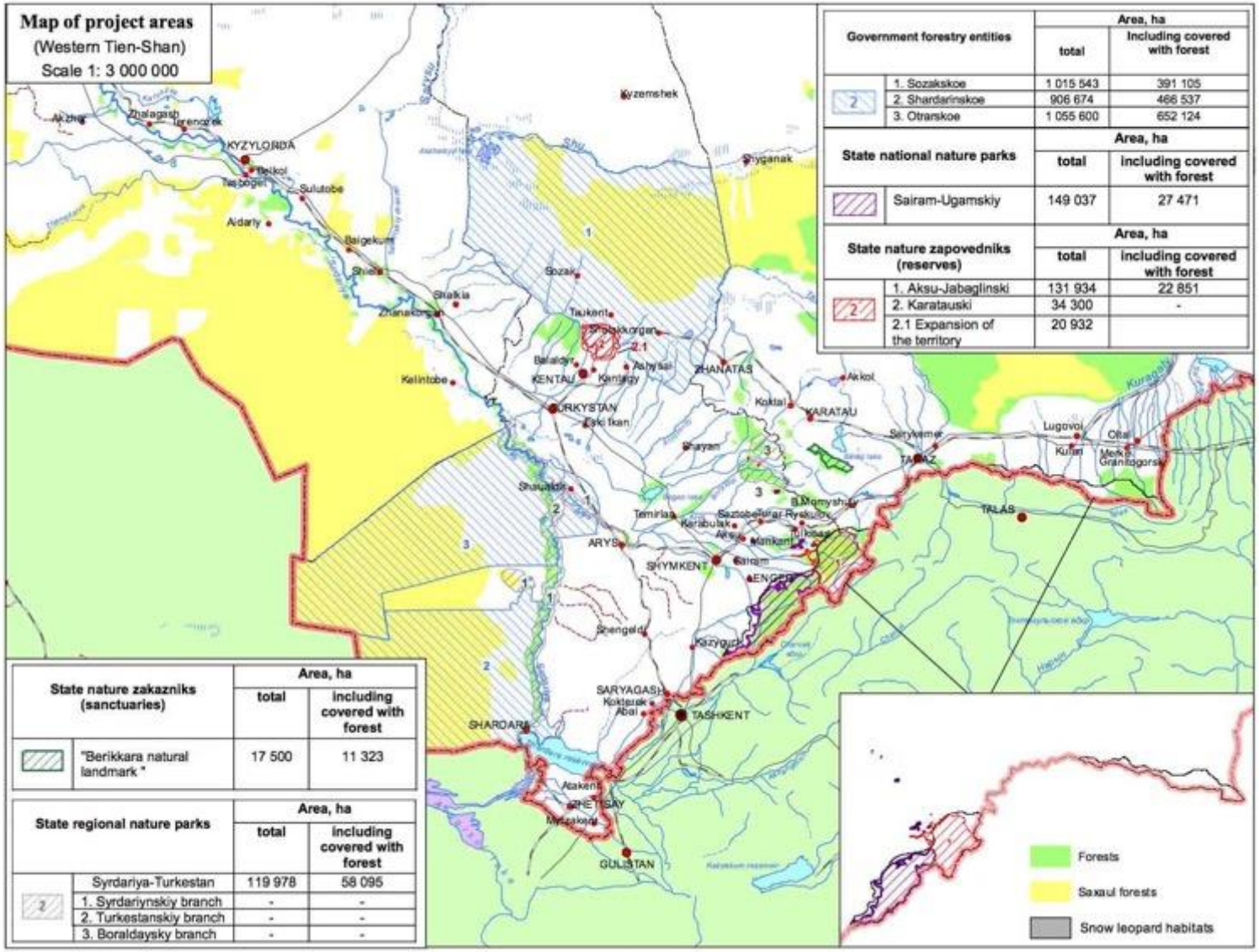
State national nature parks		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
3	1. Altyn-Emel	161 153	11 113
	2. Ile-Alatau	186 450	69 906
	3. Charynski	127 050	22 50
	4. "Kolsai kolderi"	161 045	74 521
	4.1 Expansion of the territory	65 208	34 819
	4.2 Expansion of the territory	56 107	38 256
	5. Zhongar-Alatau	356 022	63 687
	5.1 Expansion of the territory	218 278	102 248

Government forestry entities		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
4	1. Aktobinskoe	16 627	51 03
	2. Lugovskoe	45 388	1 043
	3. Merkenskoe	440 699	194 758
	4. Kurtinskoe	367 567	189 703
	5. Bakanasskoe	1 558 997	911 172
	6. Shelekskoe	104 516	23 426
	7. Kegenskoe	84 790	24 434
	8. Zharkentskoe	215 864	63 821
	9. Uighurskoe	259 715	103 515
	10. Narynkolskoe	193 912	52 533
	11. Taldykorganskoe	185 792	51 166
	12. Uigentasskoe	76 402	17 679
	13. Alakolskoe	168 116	52 852

State nature zakazniks (sanctuaries)		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
4	1. Pribalkhashskiy	503 000	116 512
	2. Koksuiskiy 3. (planned)	586 796	240 951
	4. Almatynskiy	542 400	138 336
	5. Karoyskiy	509 000	419 016
	6. Lepsinskiy	258 000	144 400
	7. Kukanskiy	49 100	2 178
	8. Ketmenskiy (planned)	68 910	48 692

State regional nature parks		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
1	1. Merkenskiy zakaznik (planned SRNP)	68 910	48 713
1	1. 1 Expansion of Merkenskiy zakaznik (Shalsu cluster)	19 644	-

South Kazakhstan Province



Government forestry entities		Area, ha	
		total	Including covered with forest
2	1. Sozakskoe	1 015 543	391 105
	2. Shardarinskoe	906 674	466 537
	3. Otranskoe	1 055 600	652 124

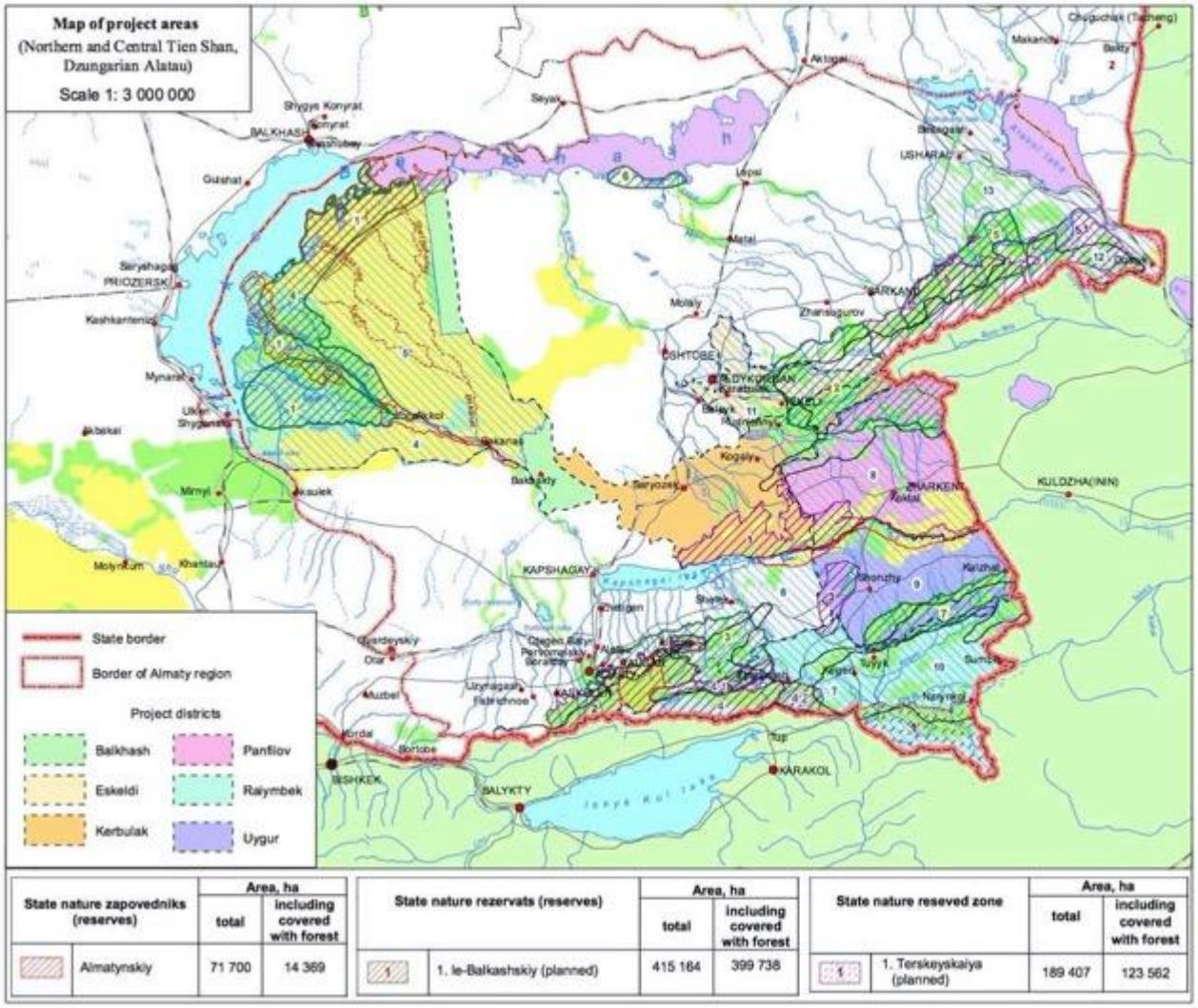
State national nature parks		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
	Sairam-Ugamskiy	149 037	27 471

State nature zapovedniks (reserves)		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
2	1. Aksu-Jabaglinski	131 934	22 851
	2. Karatauski	34 300	-
	2.1 Expansion of the territory	20 932	

State nature zakazniks (sanctuaries)		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
	"Berikkara natural landmark "	17 500	11 323

State regional nature parks		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
2	Syrdariya-Turkestan	119 978	58 095
	1. Syrdariynskiy branch	-	-
	2. Turkestanskiy branch	-	-
	3. Boraldaysky branch	-	-

Establishment of Wildlife Corridors and PA Buffer Zones in Six Districts of Almaty Province



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	7. Kukanskiy	49 100	2 178
	8. Ketmenskiy (planned)	68 910	48 692

Planned ecological corridor:
- total area - 197 684 ra
- forest covered area - 122 855 ra.

Forests

Saxaul forests

Snow leopard habitats

State nature zapovedniks (reserves)		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
	Almatynskiy	71 700	14 369

State nature rezervats (reserves)		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
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State nature reseved zone		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
1	1. Terskeyskaiya (planned)	189 407	123 562

Annex 2: Project Expected Results and Planned Activities

The table below was compiled from the list of expected results and planned activities as anticipated in the project document and project inception report. It was used during the assignment by the Evaluation Team as a succinct summary of what is expected from this project. Progress made against these expected results and expected targets were assessed during this review and reported in the MTR report.

***Project Objective*: Improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities.**

Intended Component	Expected Outcome	Budget per Component	Expected Outputs and Indicative Activities
Component 1 – Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation important forests	***Outcome 1.1:*** Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non-forest ecosystems and their biodiversity	**GEF: $2,547,067**	***(i)*** **Output 1.1.1 Protection regimes approved for globally important forest ecosystems (saxaul, floodplain forest, and mountain forest), and their associated SLM and biodiversity ecosystem services, in cooperation with local communities.** a. Completion of technical justification documents b. Local stakeholder consultations c. National stakeholder consultations d. National approval of protected areas ***(ii)*** **Output 1.1.2 Newly established forest PAs are operationalized with improved management effectiveness, including community management mechanisms.** a. Drafting management plan, including zoning, staffing plans, and business plan-based budget b. Specific planning for management of forest resources within PA management plan c. Comprehensive field assessment of biodiversity values followed by monitoring d. Field validation of boundary demarcation e. Establishment of community management board f. Initial investment in critical infrastructure and technical capacity to operationalize new PAs g. Forest ecosystem restoration in Ile-Balkhash tugai forest for ecosystem functioning and biodiversity conservation
	Outcome 1.2: Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests		***(i)*** **Output 1.2.1. Development and implementation of forest-specific management measures in PA management plans for PAs.** a. Revision of PA management plans to appropriately reflect needs of managing HCVF b. Conservation and SFM measures in PAs for high priority forest management issues c. Investment in PA technical capacity strengthening for forest and biodiversity management d. At national level - amendment to PA legislation to allow ecosystem restoration of native species within specially protected zones e. Management plans for globally endangered species and habitats f. Management plan for globally important genetic resources of forest ecosystems g. Training PA staff on HCVF management principles and practices, including special training on local stakeholder and community engagement and participation h. Introduction and piloting of Assessment for Protected Areas IUCN Green List Standard in at least 1 forest PA

Intended Component	Expected Outcome	Budget per Component	Expected Outputs and Indicative Activities
Component 2 – Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation important ecosystems	***Outcome 2.1:*** Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits	**GEF: $4,017,000**	***(i)*** **Output 2.1.1. Revision and implementation of forest management and monitoring standards and processes and for 8 forestry units bordering forest PAs, including community input mechanisms.** a. Updated Leskhoze forest inventories b. Identification of an agreement on key biodiversity areas - corridors and buffer zones surrounding PAs c. Updating Leskhoze Forest Management Plans based on inventory and biodiversity data d. Training on HCFV principles and practices for Leskhoze staff, including special training on stakeholder participation and community engagement e. Saxaul protection and restoration - Research and training on improved saxaul reforestation techniques; improved reforestation techniques; include in development of SLM measures through improved forest pasture management; extend the cutting ban; feasibility assessment of alternative fuel sources; community awareness raising relating to saxaul protection f. Development of Leskhoze grazing plans for sustainable use of forest pastures in agreement with local communities g. Establishment of genetic bank and nurseries for wild relatives of fruit and nut plants (North Tian Shan, West Tian Shan) h. Fire protection strengthening measures i. Feasibility assessment of major infrastructure wildlife crossing points j. Strategy for removal of non-native invasive tree/bush species in HCVF zone k. Revision and improvement of silvicultural standards, targets and practices l. Development of methodology for monitoring system of climate change effects on woody species ***(ii)*** **Output 2.1.2. Forest pasture management plans developed and implemented with local community engagement.** a. Pasture inventory - condition and degradation assessment, definition of carrying capacity - in community forest-pasture lands surrounding Leskhozes and PAs. b. Stakeholder consultations with Pasture Management Committees c. Development of sustainable pasture management plan, including grazing plan d. Implementation of SLM via pasture management plan - mechanism for monitoring and enforcement to be defined e. Four community driven SLM pilot projects: demonstrating seasonal rotational grazing practices for SLM, and improvement of pastures by complementary seeding of forage herbs f. Pilot program of installing water points in areas near key tugai forest ecosystems used by livestock. ***(iii)*** **Output 2.1.3. Incentive-based Forest Ecosystem Management Partnership: Four models of afforestation investments are designed and tested within different ownership patterns, including local community engagement.** a. Roundtable forum on models, approaches, financial incentives mechanism, potential sites, and identification of partners. b. Agreement with four partners on the afforestation models to be implemented. c. Completion of afforestation studies and activities. d. Documentation of results, identification of good practices, scaling up and development of information management tools. e. Draft regulations to implementation experience and amendments to the appropriate legislation.

Intended Component	Expected Outcome	Budget per Component	Expected Outputs and Indicative Activities
			(iv) **Output 2.1.4. Integrated land and forest management plans developed and implemented in six administrative districts through community consultation, surrounding newly established PAs, including designation of buffer zones and corridors.** a. Series of stakeholder consultations within the target districts and at the regional level. b. Aggregation of relevant data on the current land use practices, condition of the forest ecosystems, threats and causes, infrastructure and on the planned development targets of six districts of Almaty region. c. Digitization of relevant data into geo-referenced database. d. Stakeholder consultations to identify key biodiversity areas, corridors, and buffer zones, and corresponding management requirements. e. Production of final integrated land and forest management plans, with associated management planning guidelines, and public dissemination. f. Training of local government staff in use of geo-referenced database. ***(v)*** **Output 2.1.5 Tourism management strategies developed for forest PAs in cooperation with local communities, strategies integrated in PA management plans under implementation.** a. Completion of detailed analysis of tourism loads and impacts on forest ecosystems in each of the listed PAs, including future projections in visitors' number and infrastructure development. b. Analysis of revenue options from tourism considering the carrying capacity of forest ecosystems. c. Development of tourism management plan, and integration with existing PA management plan. d. Construction of basic tourism infrastructure according to management plan. ***(vi)*** **Output 2.1.6. Hunting regulations developed to fully incorporate biodiversity considerations and economic benefits to local communities, and implemented with strengthened monitoring and enforcement capacity.** a. Inventory of operational hunting areas and biodiversity inventory analysis in forest hunting areas in three regions (Almaty region, South Kazakhstan region, East Kazakhstan region) b. Research and analysis on effectiveness of current regulations on hunting areas within forestry units, and coherence with biodiversity needs and priorities. c. Proposal developed and adopted for revised regulations and management approaches in hunting areas operational within the forestry units borders. d. Strengthened enforcement of hunting regulations - training, equipment for wildlife inspectors. e. Education and awareness of stakeholders about regulations - local communities near hunting areas, hunting service providers, etc.
	Outcome 2.2: Strengthened enabling environment to support SFM objectives through updated national policies, regulations, and knowledge		***(i)*** **Output 2.2.1. Review of and modifications to existing forest governance system to ensure that the HCVF managed by 123 forestry entities (12,452,000 ha) are covered by policy objectives to be managed as an integral component of the national ecological network (IUCN VI PA category managed resource protected area).** a. Development and endorsement of the HCVF conservation and sustainable management strategy and national plan supported with adequate budget. b. Assessment of the existing HCVF governance system as to ensure coordinated and effective implementation of the HCVFs Strategy and Action Plan within the available capacities and policy mechanisms between central and local governments.

Intended Component	Expected Outcome	Budget per Component	Expected Outputs and Indicative Activities
	management systems supporting improved management of 12,652,400 ha of national forest territory		c. Review the existing technical, ecological and policy regulations on principal, sanitation and other felling in HCVFs based on inventories and threats analysis. d. Improvement of data management flows and storage with implementation of standardized reporting and database system. e. Revision and improvement of the existing regulations and tools of HCVF inventories and systemic monitoring. f. Improve financial and technical regulations for incentive-based private-state partnerships in forest sector g. Policy and mechanisms for SFM certification are developed and endorsed ***(ii)*** **Output 2.2.2. HCVF standards, tools, and practices are integrated into national forest management guidelines and regulations to improve the management effectiveness of HCVF** a. Assessment of the operational policy and guidelines for HCVFs management as to compliance with internationally set standards, tools and practices b. Develop comprehensive guidelines for HCVFs management planning based on threats assessments, identification and measuring of ecological and socio-economic characteristics and functions of the forests with appropriate inter-sectoral coordination and community engagement mechanisms in place c. Development of the general scheme of fire early detection, prevention and extinguishing within the forest fund lands. d. Revision of infrastructure and machinery standards for fires management and integration updated standards into management planning processes. e. Revision of forest health monitoring system and supported with relevant capacity and policy framework. f. Research on climate change adaptation measures and setting up a national system of monitoring climate change indicators in forest ecosystems. ***(iii)*** **Output 2.2.3. Training program and improved forest research and data analysis capacities to support implementation and uptake of HCVF management approaches.** a. 15 Training models are developed: forest management planning, Forest inventory, Forest management monitoring, Forest restoration and rehabilitation, silviculture in natural and planted forest, fire management, forest and water, non-timber products management, forest pests, forest genetic resources, CC adaptation and mitigation, forest tourism and recreation, forest certification, wildlife management, land use planning. b. 15 training programs are organized for the target organizations – PAs and forestry units. c. Design plans for forest research and monitoring center. d. Forest research and monitoring center is set up and equipped with relevant equipment and software. e. Training for the staff of the forest research and monitoring center on application of new remote sensing technologies for forest monitoring and inventory. ***(iv)*** **Output 2.2.4. Based on afforestation pilot activities, relevant by-laws and amendments to the existing legislation are developed and approved.** a. Regulations on state co-financing in infrastructure investments for afforestation projects b. Regulations on subsidized maintenance of forests and SFM practices c. Regulations on tax reduction d. Regulations on land provision e. Regulations on wood and processing sector incentives f. Regulations on development of carbon credit market and access to international markets

Intended Component	Expected Outcome	Budget per Component	Expected Outputs and Indicative Activities
			(v) **Output 2.2.5. Technical knowledge bank for the private afforestation is set up and maintained by FWC, and accessible by potential interested groups and individuals** a. Definition of the suitable lands for afforestation b. Cost-benefit analysis for different business cases c. Setting up a database on afforestation regulations, technical information, and silvicultural systems d. Marketing of the afforestation business cases and opportunities among potential investor groups.
	Outcome 2.3: Integrated economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in decision making in natural resource management, through piloting of innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms		***(i)*** **Output 2.3.1. Integrated economic and environmental resource management optimization assessments (Targeted Scenario Analysis (TSA)) demonstrated in three resource-management scenarios for improved conditions of mountain forests and grasslands, tugai and saxaul forest ecosystems.** a. TSA process completion in three selected demonstration projects. b. Study tour for hydropower TSA for sharing practical experience. c. Integration of the results of the TSAs exercises in resource management planning for conservation of three types of forest (mountain forests and grasslands, tugai, and saxaul). ***(ii)*** **Output 2.3.2. Methodology and guidance for TSAs related to mountain forests and grasslands, tugai and saxaul forest ecosystems, are integrated in Kazakh legal context.** a. Identify and revise sectoral policies relevant for TSA approach and relevant stakeholders. b. Identify existing mechanisms and gaps for including ecosystem services as inputs into sectoral outputs c. Improve the guidance for regional planning by proposing TSA tools. d. Revise the regulations for EIA for the infrastructure development projects within the regions containing HCVFs e. Consider the TSA application for development of financial incentives for afforestation projects and agroforestry projects (subsidies, tax exemptions, certifications). ***(iii)*** **Output 2.3.3. TSA is integrated into capacity development and professional training courses.** a. Agreements with training partners on mechanism, curriculum, and process for training on TSA b. Development of TSA training materials and courses c. Adoption and integration by training partners of TSA training materials and courses d. Piloting "test class" first round of TSA national training
Component 3 – International cooperation and knowledge management.	***Outcome 3.1:*** Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge.	**GEF: $1,120,865**	***(i)*** **Output 3.1.1. Enhanced enforcement capacities of wildlife protection agencies** a. Provide support to ensure suitable and sufficient equipment and supplies, appropriate terms and conditions of service, and supported and incentivized patrol staff in order to optimize the effectiveness of law enforcement patrols to ensure skilled and knowledgeable rangers, experienced and competent patrol leader by assessing the current systems, gap analysis, and capacity building measures. b. Development of proactive and dynamic patrol strategies, collection and use of patrol data, effective management systems and infrastructure, and clear and consistent standards and procedures to maximize effectiveness of management. c. Improvement of investigation collaboration mechanisms with other law enforcement agencies and with prosecutors, ensuring the investigative process leading to prosecution in court. d. Training of the senior rangers and patrol rangers in operational planning and deployments, patrol management, care and maintenance of equipment, information and data handling, standard operating procedures, crime

Intended Component	Expected Outcome	Budget per Component	Expected Outputs and Indicative Activities
			scene training, fitness training. ***(ii)*** **Output 3.1.2 Implementation of Kazakhstan's National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan Through Development of Integrated Landscape Planning in National Priority Snow Leopard Landscapes** a. Research and mapping of landscape-wide occupancy surveys to determine snow leopard and prey occurrence b. Snow leopard and prey population assessments in at least 50% of the landscape area c. Threats reduction analysis and mapping in two priority landscapes, including short action research projects to understand threats d. Landscape management plan developed and under implementation for each priority landscape e. Information and awareness activities (conferences, international meetings, publications), including capacity development activities to strengthen national ownership by local government and community members ***(iii)*** **Output 3.1.3. System for long-term regular monitoring of snow leopard in Kazakhstan put in place applying internationally certified quality standards (GIS-based), including transboundary monitoring arrangements with key neighboring countries.** a. Monitoring methodology update considering the methods and techniques recommended by global monitoring framework guidance. b. Monitoring equipment investments. c. Establishment of a "virtual" snow leopard research and monitoring center d. Demonstration of satellite collaring of snow leopards in Almaty zapovednik e. GIS training for PA and monitoring center collaborators. f. Training for PA staff and other stakeholders on RTA, snow leopard, prey and habitat monitoring techniques, community engagement. g. Training of 1 laboratory in sampling, analysis, interpretation and storing of DNA materials for 1 laboratory in Almaty. h. DNA analysis in Almaty laboratory with international expert to mentor the process. i. MoU on monitoring data sharing with the bordering snow leopard range countries. ***(iv)*** **Output 3.1.4 Knowledge products disseminated and education and awareness activities completed to enhance understanding of natural resource managers and communities about SFM, SLM, and biodiversity conservation** a. National annual State of the Snow Leopard report b. Education and awareness raising activities on fire prevention in targeted high priority sites (e.g. public awareness signs in key sites, radio advertisements, brochures disseminated at key locations such as local government offices, tourism facilities, schools, and at public meetings) c. Education and awareness raising activities (e.g. publication of regulations in easily readable formats, on enforcement of forest sustainable use regulations (i.e. grazing regimes, medicinal plant and other NTFP collection) d. Education and awareness raising activities on implementation and enforcement of hunting regulations (e.g. publication and dissemination of hunting regulations in easily understandable formats to hunting associations and to registered hunters, posting of signs in key locations, training of local law enforcement, rangers, and environmental inspectors about hunting regulations, etc.) e. Development and publication of good practice knowledge products targeted at various stakeholder groups (i.e.

Intended Component	Expected Outcome	Budget per Component	Expected Outputs and Indicative Activities
			HCVF good practices for forest managers, grazing good practices for pasture management committees, wildlife management good practices for resource users and wildlife managers)
Cross-cutting: Gender mainstreaming during implementation			*(i)* Project gender mainstreaming action plan *(ii)* Gender mainstreaming carried out during project implementation, as indicated by: a. Project Board and local stakeholder working groups have gender balance and/or include a gender expert; b. Policies, laws, and regulations developed with project support include gender perspectives, as relevant c. Project events and activities (e.g. trainings) promote gender balance among invited participants, as feasible d. Project education and awareness activities are developed and carried out incorporating gender perspectives, as relevant
Project Management		**GEF: $384,246**	
Total Financing		**GEF: $8,069,178 + Co-financing: $86,795,676 = Total: $94,864,854**	

Source: Project Document

Annex 3: Remarks about conducting evaluations online under COVID-19

This assignment was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic; the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War Two. The virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica and all countries are racing to slow the spread of the virus by testing and treating patients, carrying out contact tracing, limiting travel, quarantining citizens, and cancelling large gatherings such as sporting events, concerts, and schools. We are in uncharted territory. Across the world, businesses are closing, and people are losing jobs and income, with no way of knowing when normality will return. Within this context, UNDP has already been hard at work, focusing on three immediate priorities: supporting the health response including the procurement and supply of essential health products under WHO's leadership; strengthening crisis management and response; and addressing critical social and economic impacts. In the meantime, the GEF and its Partners have continued the implementation of their work programme using more online and remote communication means to conduct their business.

Below are some notes based on recent experiences of conducting evaluations remotely.

Data Collection Process

- Need to pair the international Evaluator with a national Evaluator, both with a good command of English to be able to provide online translation of interviews.
- Spent more time in preparing the data collection phase (interviews and documents gathering), particularly key questions to use for interviews, which, as much as possible, should overlay the outline of the report. The better the clarity of questions, the better collected data is, resulting in a better evaluation report.
- Plan interviews ahead as if it was a mission agenda, taking into account time differences and allowing a good hour for each interview plus possibly travel time between interviews for the National Evaluator.
- In addition to the International Evaluator taking notes during online interviews, the National Evaluator should summarize in point-form his/her notes from conducting these interviews. It provides additional evaluative evidence (including comments on observations and discussion points) collected during the interviews but also possibly before and after interviews and during field visits.
- Where relevant and where it will be technically possible, the National Evaluator should do his best in organizing in field video-calls from project sites to help the International Evaluator observe directly relevant project outputs and activities. It will be an opportunity to witness project impacts on beneficiaries. Observations made during these visits will be documented in short (point form) reports accompanied by photos and short videos where possible.

Technologies

- Use video link as much as possible to conduct interviews (as opposed to voice only). Content of these interviews through video link is richer, allowing the Evaluators to better deepen the understanding of particular areas.
- Use WIFI instead of phone network (generally faster bandwidth).
- Try to set up a 2-point web connection (instead of 3 or more) if travel is authorized in-country; i.e. the National Evaluator to go and meet the Interviewees on site; particularly important in places where the internet bandwidth is limited.
- Chose a video platform that is used comfortably by all such as Skype, Zoom or others. Note that WhatsApp video is only working on smartphones; not the best set up for interviews. Based on my experience, Zoom would be the preferred choice; a stable video platform offering interpretation feature if available/needed.
- Use smartphones to record short videos with comments to provide visuals on the project such as surrounding areas of a project area, activities implemented with the support of the project, and "close up" of goods and services procured by the project.
- If possible, record videos/pictures of field activities from drone if available.
- Set up a dropbox folder (or any other cloud-based system) to upload data.

Annex 4: MTR Terms of Reference

International Consultant for Mid-Term Review of UNDP GEF
Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits project
UNDP-GEF Midterm Review - Terms of Reference

BASIC CONTRACT INFORMATION

Location: home-based with 1 mission to Kazakhstan (or online support in case of COVID-19 security restrictions).
Category: Energy and Environment
Type of Contract: Individual Contract
Assignment Type: International Consultant
Languages Required: English
Starting Date: 1 July 2020
End Date: 30 October 2020
Duration of Initial Contract: app. 40 working days over a period of 4 months
Expected Duration of Assignment: 25 effective person-days home based and 15 effective person-days on fields mission to Kazakhstan (approximately 2 days in Nur-Sultan and rest 13 days in Almaty region, Turkestan and East Kazakhstan regions \or online support in case of COVID-19 security restrictions).

BACKGROUND

A. Project Title: 00101043 UNDP-GEF "Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits"

B. Introduction

This is the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the UNDP-GEF Midterm Review (MTR) of the full -sized project titled "Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits" (PIMS #5696), implemented through the *UNDP Kazakhstan,* which is to be undertaken in 2020. The project started on *16 April 2018* and is in its third year of implementation. In line with the UNDP-GEF Guidance on MTRs, this MTR process was initiated before the submission of the second Project Implementation Report (PIR). This ToR sets out the expectations for this MTR. The MTR process must follow the guidance outlined in the document "*Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects"*.

C. Project Background Information

Kazakhstan has approximately 12.6 million hectares of forest, which makes it one of the most forest- rich countries in Eurasia, despite the fact that its forests amount to only 4.6% of the national territory. Approximately 95% of Kazakhstan's forests are managed by 123 state forestry entities, which are overseen by regional governments (Akimats). Under the current forest governance system, forestry entities lack sufficient capacity to effectively manage HCVF, including those forests neighboring highly biodiverse protected areas.

Kazakhstan's protected area system covers approximately 24,018,800 ha, or 8.81% (as of 2015) of the total country, although only 5% of Kazakhstan's forests are included within protected areas.

Therefore, forest ecosystems are underrepresented in the national protected area systems. Kazakhstan has three main forest ecosystem types: alpine forests, tugai (riparian) forests, and saxaul landscapes (desert and semi-desert shrubs).

The project strategy is to holistically address the conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems in Kazakhstan, through management approaches including both protected areas and sustainable use of associated HCVF landscapes. Many forest ecosystems in Kazakhstan have mixed landcover (forest and pasture) and mixed-use (i.e. pastoralism in forest pastures) characteristics. Therefore, the project is also applying an integrated landscape management approach by targeting sustainable land management practices within forest landscapes.

The project is structured in three components:

- *Component 1.* Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation-important forests;
- *Component 2.* Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems;
- *Component 3.* International cooperation and knowledge management.

The UNDP-GEF Project team is located in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. The primary beneficiaries are the Forest and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Institute of Zoology, Almaty Akimat, East Kazakhstan Akimat, CSO – WWF, CSO – ACBK. The GEF Grant for the Project budget is $8,069,178, UNDP Cash Co-financing is $200,000, with over $86,795,676 in co-financing from national partners.

D. Objectives of the MTR

The MTR consultant will assess progress towards the achievement of the project objectives and outcomes as specified in the Project Document, and assess early signs of project success or failure with the goal of identifying the necessary changes to be made in order to set the project on-track to achieve its intended results. The MTR consultant will also review the project's strategy, its risks to sustainability.

E. MTR Approach &Methodology

The MTR consultant must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The MTR team will review all relevant sources of information including documents prepared during the preparation phase (i.e. PIF, UNDP Initiation Plan, UNDP Environmental & Social Safeguard Policy, the Project Document, project reports including Annual Project Review/PIRs, project budget revisions, lesson learned reports, national strategic and legal documents, and any other materials that the project team considers useful for this evidence-based review). The MTR team will review the baseline GEF focal area Tracking Tool submitted to the GEF at CEO endorsement, and the midterm GEF focal area Tracking Tool that must be completed before the MTR field mission or online support (in case of COVID-19 security restrictions) begins.

The MTR team is expected to follow a collaborative and participatory approach13 ensuring close engagement with the Project Team, government counterparts (the GEF Operational Focal Point), the UNDP Country Office(s), UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Advisers, and other key stakeholders.

Engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful MTR14 Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities, including but not limited to: the Forest and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Institute of Zoology, Almaty Akimat, East Kazakhstan Akimat, CSO – WWF, CSO – ACBK, senior officials and task team/ component leaders, key experts and consultants in the subject area and the Project Board.

The final MTR report should describe the full MTR approach taken and the rationale for the approach making explicit the underlying assumptions, challenges, strengths and weaknesses about the methods and approach of the review.

F. Detailed Scope of the MTR

The MTR team will assess the following four categories of project progress. See the Guidance For Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects for extended descriptions.

i. Project Strategy

13 For ideas on innovative and participatory Monitoring and Evaluation strategies and techniques, see UNDP Discussion Paper: Innovations in Monitoring & Evaluating Results, 05 Nov 2013.

14 For more stakeholder engagement in the M&E process, see the UNDP Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results http://web.undp.org/evaluation/handbook/get_handbook.html, Chapter 3, pg. 93.

Project design:

- Review the problem addressed by the project and the underlying assumptions. Review the effect of any incorrect assumptions or changes to the context to achieving the project results as outlined in the Project Document.
- Review the relevance of the project strategy and assess whether it provides the most effective route towards expected/intended results. Were lessons from other relevant projects properly incorporated into the project design?
- Review how the project addresses country priorities. Review country ownership. Was the project concept in line with the national sector development priorities and plans of the country (or of participating countries in the case of multi-country projects)?
- Review decision-making processes: were perspectives of those who would be affected by project decisions, those who could affect the outcomes, and those who could contribute information or other resources to the process, taken into account during project design processes?
- Review the extent to which relevant gender issues were raised in the project design. See Annex 9 of Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects for further guidelines.
- If there are major areas of concern, recommend areas for improvement. Results

Framework/Logframe:

- Undertake a critical analysis of the project's logframe indicators and targets, assess how "SMART" the midterm and end-of-project targets are (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound), and suggest specific amendments/revisions to the targets and indicators as necessary.
- Are the project's objectives and outcomes or components clear, practical, and feasible within its time frame?
- Examine if progress so far has led to or could in the future catalyze beneficial development effects (i.e. income generation, gender equality and women's empowerment, improved governance etc.) that should be included in the project results framework and monitored on an annual basis.
- Ensure broader development and gender aspects of the project are being monitored effectively. Develop and recommend SMART 'development' indicators, including sex- disaggregated indicators and indicators that capture development benefits.

ii. Progress Towards Results

Progress Towards Outcomes Analysis:

- Review the log frame indicators against progress made towards the end-of-project targets using the Progress Towards Results Matrix and following the Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects; color code progress in a "traffic light system" based on the level of progress achieved; assign a rating on progress for each outcome; make recommendations from the areas marked as "Not on target to be achieved" (red).

Table. Progress Towards Results Matrix (Achievement of outcomes against End-of-project Targets)

Project Strategy	Indicator[3]	Baseline Level[4]	Level in 1st PIR (self-reported)	Midterm Target[5]	End-of-project Target	Midterm Level & Assessment[6]	Achievement Rating[7]	Justification for Rating
Objective:	Indicator (if applicable):							
Outcome 1:	Indicator 1:							
	Indicator 2:							
Outcome 2:	Indicator 3:							
	Indicator 4:							

	Etc.							
Etc.								

Indicator Assessment Key

Green= Achieved	Yellow=On target to be achieved	Red= Not on target to be achieved

3 Populate with data from the Logframe and scorecards
4 Populate with data from the Project Document
5 If available
6 Color code this column only
7 Use the 6-point Progress Towards Results Rating Scale: HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU

In addition to the progress towards outcomes analysis:
- Compare and analyze the GEF Tracking Tool at the Baseline with the one completed right before the Midterm Review.
- Identify remaining barriers to achieving the project objective in the remainder of the project.
- By reviewing the aspects of the project that have already been successful, identify ways in which the project can further expand these benefits.

iii. Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

Management Arrangements:

- Review overall effectiveness of project management as outlined in the Project Document. Have changes been made and are they effective? Are responsibilities and reporting lines clear? Is decision-making transparent and undertaken in a timely manner? Recommend areas for improvement.
- Review the quality of execution of the Executing Agency/Implementing Partner(s) and recommend areas for improvement.
- Review the quality of support provided by the GEF Partner Agency (UNDP) and recommend areas for improvement.

Work Planning:
- Review any delays in project start-up and implementation, identify the causes and examine if they have been resolved.
- Review the extent to which adaptive management has been undertaken effectively on the project?
- Are work-planning processes results-based? If not, suggest ways to re-orientate work planning to focus on results?
- Examine the use of the project's results framework/ log frame as a management tool and review any changes made to it since project start.

Finance and co-finance:
- Consider the financial management of the project, with specific reference to the cost- effectiveness of interventions.
- Review the changes to fund allocations as a result of budget revisions and assess the appropriateness and relevance of such revisions.
- Does the project have the appropriate financial controls, including reporting and planning, that allow management to make informed decisions regarding the budget and allow for timely flow of funds?
- Informed by the co-financing monitoring table to be filled out, provide commentary on co- financing: is co-financing being used strategically to help the objectives of the project? Is the Project Team meeting with all co-financing partners regularly in order to align financing priorities and annual workplans?

Project-level Monitoring and Evaluation Systems:
- Review the monitoring tools currently being used: Do they provide the necessary information? Do they involve key partners? Are they aligned or mainstreamed with national systems? Do they use existing

information? Are they efficient? Are they cost-effective? Are additional tools required? How could they be made more participatory and inclusive?
- Examine the financial management of the project monitoring and evaluation budget. Are sufficient resources being allocated to monitoring and evaluation? Are these resources being allocated effectively?

Stakeholder Engagement:
- Project management: Has the project developed and leveraged the necessary and appropriate partnerships with direct and tangential stakeholders?
- Participation and country-driven processes: Do local and national government stakeholders support the objectives of the project? Do they continue to have an active role in project decision- making that supports efficient and effective project implementation?
- Participation and public awareness: To what extent has stakeholder involvement and public awareness contributed to the progress towards achievement of project objectives?

Reporting:
- Assess how adaptive management changes have been reported by the project management and shared with the Project Board.
- Assess how well the Project Team and partners undertake and fulfil GEF reporting requirements (i.e. how have they addressed poorly rated PIRs, if applicable?)
- Assess how lessons derived from the adaptive management process have been documented, shared with key partners and internalized by partners.

Communications:
- Review internal project communication with stakeholders: Is communication regular and effective? Are there key stakeholders left out of communication? Are there feedback mechanisms when communication is received? Does this communication with stakeholders contribute to their awareness of project outcomes and activities and investment in the sustainability of project results?
- Review external project communication: Are proper means of communication established or being established to express the project progress and intended impact to the public (is there a web presence, for example? Or did the project implement appropriate outreach and public awareness campaigns?)
- For reporting purposes, write one half-page paragraph that summarizes the project's progress towards results in terms of contribution to sustainable development benefits, as well as global environmental benefits.

iv. Sustainability

- Validate whether the risks identified in the Project Document, Annual Project Review/PIRs and the ATLAS Risk Management Module are the most important and whether the risk ratings applied are appropriate and up to date. If not, explain why.
- In addition, assess the following risks to sustainability:

Financial risks to sustainability:
- What is the likelihood of financial and economic resources not being available once the GEF assistance ends (consider potential resources can be from multiple sources, such as the public and private sectors, income generating activities, and other funding that will be adequate financial resources for sustaining project's outcomes)?

Socio-economic risks to sustainability:

- Are there any social or political risks that may jeopardize sustainability of project outcomes? What is the risk that the level of stakeholder ownership (including ownership by governments and other key stakeholders) will be insufficient to allow for the project outcomes/benefits to be sustained? Do the various key stakeholders see that it is in their interest that the project benefits continue to flow? Is there sufficient public / stakeholder awareness in support of the long-term objectives of the project? Are lessons learned being documented by the Project Team on a continual basis and shared/ transferred to appropriate parties who could learn from the project and potentially replicate and/or scale it in the future?

Institutional Framework and Governance risks to sustainability:

- Do the legal frameworks, policies, governance structures and processes pose risks that may jeopardize sustenance of project benefits? While assessing this parameter, also consider if the required systems/ mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and technical knowledge transfer are in place.

Environmental risks to sustainability:

- Are there any environmental risks that may jeopardize sustenance of project outcomes?

Conclusions & Recommendations

The MTR team will include a section of the report setting out the MTR's evidence-based conclusions, in light of the findings.15

Recommendations should be succinct suggestions for critical intervention that are specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant. A recommendation table should be put in the report's executive summary. See the *Guidance for Conducting Midterm Reviews of UNDP-Supported, GEF- Financed Projects* for guidance on a recommendation table.

The MTR team should make no more than 15 recommendations total.

Ratings

The MTR team will include its ratings of the project's results and brief descriptions of the associated achievements in an *MTR Ratings & Achievement Summary Table* in the Executive Summary of the MTR report. See Annex E for ratings scales. No rating on Project Strategy and no overall project rating is required.

Table. MTR Ratings & Achievement Summary Table for UNDP-GEF project "*Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits*"

Measure	MTR Rating	Achievement Description
Project Strategy	N/A	
Progress Towards Results	Objective Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 1 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 2 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Outcome 3 Achievement Rating: (rate 6 pt. scale)	
	Etc.	
Project Implementation & Adaptive Management	(rate 6 pt. scale)	
Sustainability	(rate 4 pt. scale)	

G. Timeframe

The total duration of the MTR will be approximately *40 days* over a time period of 4 months starting in July 2020 and it includes a 15 days mission to Kazakhstan (online support in case of COVID-19 security restrictions). The time elapsed shall not exceed 4 months from when the consultant(s) are hired. The tentative MTR timeframe is as follows:

15 Alternatively, MTR conclusions may be integrated into the body of the report.

TIMEFRAME	ACTIVITY
May 2020	Application closes
June 2020	Select MTR Team
1st July 2020	Start date of the Contract/Desk review
Early July 2020	Prep the MTR Team (handover of Project Documents)
30 July 2020	Document reviewed and preparing MTR Inception Report Finalization and Validation of MTR Inception Report
10 August 2020	MTR mission: stakeholder meetings, interviews, field visits (online support in case of COVID-19 security restrictions)
September 2020 (not later than 2 weeks after mission completion)	Preparing draft MTR report
Early October 2020	Incorporating audit trail from feedback on draft report/Finalization of MTR report
Mid of October 2020	Expected date of full MTR completion

Options for site visits should be provided in the Inception Report.

H. Midterm Review Deliverables

#	Deliverable	Description	Timing	Responsibilities
1	**MTR Inception Report**	MTR team clarifies objectives and methods of Midterm Review Initial Findings	July 2020	MTR team submits and presents to the Commissioning Unit and project management
2	**Draft Final Report**	Full report (using guidelines on content outlined in Annex B) with annexes	September 2020 (not later than 2 weeks after mission completion)	Sent to the Commissioning Unit, reviewed by RTA, Project Coordinating Unit, GEF OFP
3	**Final Report***	Revised report with audit trail detailing how all received comments have (and have not) been addressed in the final MTR report	Mid of October 2020	Sent to the Commissioning Unit

*The final MTR report must be in English. If applicable, the Commissioning Unit may choose to arrange for a translation of the report into a language more widely shared by national stakeholders.

I. MTR Arrangements

The principal responsibility for managing this MTR resides with the Commissioning Unit. The Commissioning Unit for this project's MTR is *SDU Unit of the UNDP CO Kazakhstan.*

The commissioning unit will contract the consultants and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the country for the MTR team. The Project Team will be responsible for liaising with the MTR team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews, and arrange field visits.

J. Team Composition

A team of two independent consultants will conduct the MTR - one international team leader (with experience and exposure to projects and evaluations in other regions globally) and one team expert, from the country of the project. The consultants cannot have participated in the project preparation, formulation, and/or

implementation (including the writing of the Project Document) and should not have a conflict of interest with project's related activities.

K. Payment Modalities and Specifications

20% - at submission and approval of the Inception Report, prior to the mission to Kazakhstan (end of July 2020)
50% - following submission and approval of the 1ST draft terminal evaluation report, following the mission to Kazakhstan (September 2020, not later than 2 weeks after mission completion)
30% - following submission and approval (UNDP-CO and UNDP RTA) of the final terminal evaluation report (October 2020)

L. Duty Station

Home based with one mission to Kazakhstan (25 effective person-days home based and 15 effective person-days on fields mission to Kazakhstan (approximately 2 days in Nur-Sultan and rest 13 days in Almaty region, Turkestan and East Kazakhstan regions \or online support in case of COVID-19 security restrictions).

Travel:

- BSAFE security course must be successfully completed prior to commencement of travel;
- Individual Consultants are responsible for ensuring they have vaccinations/inoculations when travelling to certain countries, as designated by the UN Medical Director.
- Consultants are required to comply with the UN security directives set forth under https://dss.un.org/dssweb/

Consultant Independence:

- The consultants cannot be involved in the project preparation, formulation, and/or implementation (including the writing of the Project Document) and should not have a conflict of interest with project's related activities.

M. Required Skills and Experience

a) Competencies: Corporate competencies:

- Promotes the vision, mission, and strategic goals of UNDP;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability;
- Treats all people fairly without favoritism;
- Fulfills all obligations to gender sensitivity and zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

Functional competencies:

- Excellent communication skills
- Demonstrable analytical skills

b) Qualifications of the Successful Applicants

The selection of consultants will be aimed at maximizing the overall qualities in the following areas:

Education:

- Master's degree in natural resources management, economics, environmental research or other closely related fields.

Experience:

- Recent work experience (over the past 5 years) on the methodology for evaluating project implementation is required;
- Experience in evaluating the implementation of GEF-5 and GEF-6 phase projects is required (at least 2 projects);
- Experience in Kazakhstan or the CIS region over the past 10 years in the preparation / evaluation /

implementation of international projects is required;
- At least 5 years of experience in sustainable biodiversity / ecosystems / natural resources management and landscape planning is required;
- Demonstration of understanding issues related to the promotion of gender equality;
- Experience in evaluating and preparing project reviews within the United Nations system will be considered an advantage.

Language skills:

English is the working language of the UNDP-GEF Project and required. The ability to communicate in Russian is an asset.

N. Scope of price proposal

This is a lump sum contract for the completed result. The interested candidate must submit his/her financial proposal in **USD** in a separate file (from other required documents to be submitted). The financial proposal should include all the expert's expenses, including his fees, travel expenses* and etc. necessary for obtaining the above results within the Terms of Reference. Payment will be made in tranche after the approval of the report, based on the above results and the signing of the Certificate of payment for the result by the Commissioning Unit.

**Please be noted that in financial proposal the living allowances should be lower or equal to UN daily subsistence allowances, but under no circumstance should they be higher. UN Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) rate in Nur - Sultan 173 USD, DSA rate elsewhere – 112 USD. Domestic transport costs will be paid by project.*

O. APPLICATION PROCESS

The following documents only in PDF should be attached to the application (proposal) and sent by e- mail to the following address: procurement.kz@undp.org **indicating Ref.2020-052** in the e-mail subject no later than ***15.00 (Nur-Sultan time zone) 26 May, 2020:***

- Duly accomplished Letter of Confirmation of Interest and Availability and Financial Proposal that indicates the all-inclusive fixed total contract price, supported by a breakdown of costs, as per UNDP template provided;
- Detailed personal CV, indicating all past experience from similar projects, as well as the contact details (email and telephone number) and other supporting information confirming that the Candidate meets the qualification requirements;
- Brief Description of Approach to Work.
- Copies of higher education diplomas and other relevant documents.

Due to the technical features of e-mail, the size of the file/s should not exceed 19 Mb per e-message.

Please make sure you have provided all requested materials. ONLY fully submitted applications would be considered!!!

The type of Contract to be signed and the applicable UNDP Contract General Terms and Conditions, as specified in TOR, can be accessed at http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/procurement/business/how-we-buy.html

Due to large number of applications we receive, we are able to inform only the successful candidates about the outcome or status of the selection process.

P. Criteria for Evaluation of Proposal:

Individual contractor will be evaluated based on a Combined Scoring Method taking into

consideration the combination of the applicant's qualifications and financial proposal.

The award of the contract should be made to the individual contractor whose offer has been evaluated and determined as:

- Responsive/ compliant/ acceptable; and
- Having received the highest score out of a pre-determined set of weighted technical and financial criteria specific to the solicitation,
- Technical criteria weight (70%);
- Financial Criteria weight (30%).
- Only the highest ranked candidates who received a score of at least 350 points (70%) upon the result of the technical evaluation will be admitted to the financial assessment.

Criteria	**Weight %**	**Min. passing points**	**Max. points**
Academic background and skills			
Master's degree in natural resources management, economics, environmental research or other closely related fields	20%	70	100
Full proficiency of English language. The ability to communicate in Russian is an asset.	10%	35	50
Experience:			
Recent work experience (over the past 5 years) on the methodology for evaluating project implementation	20%	70	100
Experience in evaluating the implementation of GEF-5 and GEF-6 phase projects (at least 2 projects)	15%	52.5	75
Experience in Kazakhstan or the CIS region over the past 10 years in the preparation /evaluation / implementation of international projects	15%	52.5	75
At least 5 years of experience in sustainable biodiversity / ecosystems / natural resources management and landscape planning	10%	35	50
Demonstration of understanding issues related to the promotion of gender equality	10%	35	50
TOTAL	**100%**	**350**	**500**

Approved:

_____

Arman Kashkinbekov Head of SD/U Unit Date:

_____

Talgat Kerteshev Project Manager Date:

ToR ANNEX A: List of Documents to be reviewed by the MTR Team
ToR ANNEX B: Guidelines on Contents for the Midterm Review Report
ToR ANNEX C: Midterm Review Evaluative Matrix Template
ToR ANNEX D: UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluators/Midterm Review Consultants
ToR ANNEX E: MTR Ratings
ToR ANNEX F: MTR Report Clearance Form

Annex 5: UNEG Code of Conduct for Reviewers and Agreement Form

Reviewers / Consultants:

1. Must present information that is complete and fair in its assessment of strengths and weaknesses so that decisions or actions taken are well founded.
2. Must disclose the full set of evaluation findings along with information on their limitations and have this accessible to all affected by the evaluation with expressed legal rights to receive results.
3. Should protect the anonymity and confidentiality of individual informants. They should provide maximum notice, minimize demands on time, and respect people's right not to engage. Evaluators must respect people's right to provide information in confidence, and must ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source. Evaluators are not expected to evaluate individuals, and must balance an evaluation of management functions with this general principle.
4. Sometimes uncover evidence of wrongdoing while conducting evaluations. Such cases must be reported discreetly to the appropriate investigative body. Evaluators should consult with other relevant oversight entities when there is any doubt about if and how issues should be reported.
5. Should be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs and act with integrity and honesty in their relations with all stakeholders. In line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender equality. They should avoid offending the dignity and self-respect of those persons with whom they come in contact in the course of the evaluation. Knowing that evaluation might negatively affect the interests of some stakeholders, evaluators should conduct the evaluation and communicate its purpose and results in a way that clearly respects the stakeholders‟ dignity and self-worth.
6. Are responsible for their performance and their product(s). They are responsible for the clear, accurate and fair written and/or oral presentation of study imitations, findings and recommendations.
7. Should reflect sound accounting procedures and be prudent in using the resources of the evaluation.

<u>Mid-Term Review Consultant Agreement Form</u>

Agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System

We confirm that we have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

Signed in Ottawa on July 24, 2020

Signature: _____

Names: ***Jean-Joseph Bellamy***

Signed in Almaty on July 27, 2020

Signature: _____

Sergey Sklyarenko

Annex 6: Mid-Term Review Matrix

The evaluation matrix below served as a general guide for the mdi-term review. It provided directions for the review; particularly for the collection of relevant data. It was used as a basis for interviewing people and reviewing project documents. It also provided a basis for structuring the review report as a whole.

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Review criteria: Relevance *- How does the project relate to the main objectives of the GEF, UNDP and of Kazakhstan to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems?*				
How is the Project relevant to the GEF objectives?	▪ How does the Project support the related strategic priorities of the GEF? ▪ What regional & international commitments/agreements did the project contribute to?	▪ Level of coherence between project objectives and those of the GEF	▪ Project documents ▪ GEF policies and strategies ▪ GEF web site	▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with GEF officials and other partners
How is the Project relevant to UNDP objectives?	▪ How does the project support the objectives of UNDP in this sector?	▪ Existence of a clear relationship between project objectives and country programme objectives of UNDP	▪ Project documents ▪ UNDP strategies and programme	▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with UNDP officials and other partners
How is the Project relevant to Kazakhstan in improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems?	▪ Does the project follow the government's stated priorities? ▪ How does the Project improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan? ▪ Does the project address the identified problem? ▪ How country-driven is the Project? ▪ Does the Project adequately take into account national realities, both in terms of institutional framework and programming, in its design and its implementation? ▪ To what extent were national partners involved in the design of the Project?	▪ Degree to which the project improves the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan ▪ Degree of coherence between the project and national priorities, policies and strategies; particularly related to improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems ▪ Appreciation from national stakeholders with respect to adequacy of project design and implementation to national realities and existing capacities? ▪ Level of involvement of Government officials and other partners into the project ▪ Coherence between needs expressed by national stakeholders and UNDP criteria	▪ Project documents ▪ National policies, strategies and programmes ▪ Key government officials and other partners	▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with government officials and other partners
Does the Project address the needs of target beneficiaries?	▪ How does the project support the needs of target beneficiaries? ▪ Is the implementation of the project being inclusive of all relevant Stakeholders? ▪ Are local beneficiaries and stakeholders adequately involved in project formulation and implementation? ▪ Were gender issues incorporated in the project design?	▪ Strength of the link between project expected results and the needs of target beneficiaries ▪ Degree of involvement and inclusiveness of beneficiaries and stakeholders in project design and implementation	▪ Beneficiaries and stakeholders ▪ Needs assessment studies ▪ Project documents	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Future directions for similar Projects	▪ What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment between the project and Partners' priorities and areas of focus? ▪ How could the project better target and address priorities and development challenges of targeted beneficiaries?		▪ Data collected throughout evaluation	▪ Data analysis
Review criteria: Coherence *– How well does the project fit with other interventions to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan?*				
How is the coherence between the project and other interventions carried out by the same project's Partners?	▪ Are there contradictions between the different projects' objectives of Partners? ▪ Are there duplications between their activities? ▪ Are there any interlinkages and synergies between the project and other projects implemented by the Partners? ▪ To what extent is the project coherent with international norms and standards as well as international obligations that Kazakhstan signed up to? ▪ Is there convergence between the objective of the project and those of the project's Partners?	▪ Level of coherence between the project objective and those of the project's Partners ▪ Level of coherence between the project and international norms and standards as well as international obligations committed by Kazakhstan	▪ Project documents ▪ Partners policies and strategies ▪ Partners' web sites ▪ Documents from other projects	▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with government officials and other Partners/projects ▪ Field visits
Is the Project internally coherent in its design?	▪ Were GEF criteria for project identification adequate in view of actual needs? ▪ Was the project sourced through a demand-driven approach? ▪ Is there a direct and strong link between project expected results (*Project Results Framework*) and the project design (in terms of project components, choice of partners, structure, delivery mechanism, scope, budget, use of resources etc.)? ▪ Are the assumptions made at the outset still valid? ▪ Is the length of the project conducive to achieve project outcomes?	▪ Level of coherence between project expected results and internal project design logic ▪ Level of coherence between project design and project implementation approach	▪ Program and project documents ▪ Key project stakeholders	▪ Document analysis ▪ Key Interviews
How is the coherence between the project and other relevant interventions?	▪ Is the project coherent in terms of areas of focus and targeting of key activities within the context of other donors' strategies? ▪ How does GEF help to fill gaps (or give additional stimulus) that are crucial but are not covered by other donors? ▪ To what extent interventions undertaken by different donor's support (or undermine) the objective of the project? ▪ Is there any overlap (or not) between the project and other similar interventions in Kazakhstan which are implemented by other donors? If any, to what extent efforts are being made to minimize/eliminate them? ▪ Are the design and implementation of similar interventions implemented by other donors harmonized and coordinated to avoid duplication of effort? In what ways?	▪ Degree to which the project was coherent and complementary to other donors programming ▪ List of programs and funds in which future developments, ideas and partnerships of the project are eligible?	▪ Other Donors' policies and programming documents ▪ Other Donor representatives ▪ Project documents	▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with other Donors

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Future directions for similar Projects	▪ What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment, its coherence and complementarity between the project and other relevant interventions?		▪ Data collected throughout evaluation	▪ Data analysis
Review criteria: Effectiveness *– To what extent have the components and objective of the project been achieved?*				
How is the Project effective in achieving its expected outcomes?	▪ How is the project being effective in achieving its expected outcomes? o 1.1 Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non- forest ecosystems and their biodiversity o 1.2 Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests o 2.1 Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits o 2.2 Strengthened enabling environment to support SFM objectives through updated national policies, regulations, and knowledge management systems supporting improved management of 12,652,400 ha of national forest territory o 2.3 Integrated economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in decision making in natural resource management, through piloting of innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms o 3.1 Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge ▪ Is the project strategy feasible within the timeframe of the project? ▪ Does the project mainstream gender considerations into its implementation? ▪ Does (or will) the project catalyzes unintended beneficial development effects? ▪ Are environmental and social safeguards appropriately addressed in the project implementation?	▪ New methodologies, skills and knowledge ▪ Change in capacity for improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan ▪ Change in capacity for awareness raising o Stakeholder involvement and government awareness o Change in local stakeholder behavior ▪ Change in capacity in policy making and planning for improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan: o Policy reform o Legislation/regulation change o Development of national and local strategies and plans ▪ Change in capacity in implementation and enforcement o Design and implementation of risk assessments o Implementation of national and local strategies and action plans through adequate institutional frameworks and their maintenance o Monitoring, evaluation and promotion of pilots ▪ Change in capacity in mobilizing resources o Leverage of resources o Human resources o Appropriate practices o Mobilization of advisory services ▪ Gender disaggregated data in project documents	▪ Project documents ▪ Key stakeholders including UNDP, Project Team, Representatives of Gov. and other Partners ▪ Research findings	▪ Documents analysis ▪ Meetings with main Project Partners ▪ Interviews with project beneficiaries
How is risk and risk mitigation being managed?	▪ How well are risks and assumptions being managed? ▪ What is the quality of risk mitigation strategies developed? Are they sufficient? ▪ Are there clear strategies for risk mitigation related with long-term sustainability of the project?	▪ Completeness of risk identification and assumptions during project planning ▪ Quality of existing information systems in place to identify emerging risks and other issues? ▪ Quality of risk mitigations strategies developed and followed	▪ Atlas risk log ▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, Project Staff and Project Partners	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Future directions for similar Projects	▪ What lessons have been learnt for the project to achieve its outcomes? ▪ What changes could have been made (if any) to the formulation of the project in order to improve the achievement of project's expected results? ▪ How could the project be more effective in achieving its results?		▪ Data collected throughout evaluation	▪ Data analysis

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
***Review criteria: Efficiency** – Has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively and in-line with international and national norms and standards?*				
Is Project support channeled in an efficient way?	▪ Is adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use? ▪ Is the implementation in line with the timeline of the project? ▪ Does the *Project Results Framework* and work plans and any changes made to them used as management tools during implementation? ▪ Are the accounting and financial systems in place adequate for project management and producing accurate and timely financial information? ▪ How adequate is the M&E framework? Does it measure well the performance of the project? ▪ How SMART are indicators & targets? ▪ Are progress reports produced accurately, timely and responded to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes? ▪ Is project implementation as cost effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual) ▪ Are financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources have been used more efficiently? ▪ Is the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happened as planned? ▪ How is RBM used during project implementation? ▪ Is the project decision-making effective? ▪ Does the government provide continuous strategic directions to the project's formulation and implementation? ▪ Have these directions provided by the government guided activities and outcomes of the project? ▪ Are there an institutionalized or informal feedback or dissemination mechanisms to ensure that findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertaining to project formulation and implementation effectiveness were shared among project stakeholders, UNDP staff and other relevant organizations for ongoing project adjustment and improvement?	▪ Availability and quality of financial and progress reports ▪ Timeliness and adequacy of reporting provided ▪ Level of discrepancy between planned and utilized financial expenditures ▪ Planned vs. actual funds leveraged ▪ Cost in view of results achieved compared to costs of similar projects from other organizations ▪ Adequacy of project choices in view of existing context, infrastructure and cost ▪ Quality of RBM reporting (progress reporting, monitoring and evaluation) ▪ Occurrence of change in project formulation/ implementation approach (i.e. restructuring) when needed to improve project efficiency ▪ Existence, quality and use of M&E, feedback and dissemination mechanism to share findings, lessons learned and recommendation on effectiveness of project design. ▪ Cost associated with delivery mechanism and management structure compare to alternatives	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, Representatives of Gov. and Project Staff ▪ Beneficiaries and Project partners	▪ Document analysis ▪ Key Interviews
How efficient are partnership arrangements for the Project?	▪ Is the government engaged? ▪ How does the government demonstrate its ownership of the project? ▪ Did the government provide a counterpart to the project? ▪ To what extent partnerships/linkages between institutions/ organizations are encouraged and supported? ▪ Which partnerships/linkages are facilitated? Which one can be considered sustainable? ▪ What is the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? (between local actors, UNDP and relevant government entities) ▪ Which methods were successful or not and why?	▪ Specific activities conducted to support the development of cooperative arrangements between partners, ▪ Examples of supported partnerships ▪ Evidence that particular partnerships/linkages will be sustained ▪ Types/quality of partnership cooperation methods utilized	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ Project Partners ▪ UNDP, Representatives of Gov. and Project Staff ▪ Beneficiaries	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Does the Project efficiently utilize local capacity in implementation?	▪ Was an appropriate balance struck between utilization of international expertise as well as local capacity? ▪ Does the project support mutual benefits through sharing of knowledge and experiences, training, technology transfer among developing countries? ▪ Did the Project take into account local capacity in formulation and implementation of the project? ▪ Was there an effective collaboration with scientific institutions with competence in conservation and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan?	▪ Proportion of total expertise utilized taken from Kazakhstan ▪ Number/quality of analyses done to assess local capacity potential and absorptive capacity	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, Project Team and Project partners ▪ Beneficiaries	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Future directions for similar Projects	▪ What lessons can be learnt from the project on efficiency? ▪ How could the project have more efficiently addressed its key priorities (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements etc.)? ▪ What changes could have been made (if any) to the project in order to improve its efficiency?		▪ Data collected throughout evaluation	▪ Data analysis
Review criteria: Impacts - *Are there indications that the project has contributed to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems, which are important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities?*				
How is the Project effective in achieving its long-term objective?	▪ Will the project achieve its objective that is to "*Improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities"*? ▪ Are there any qualitative and quantitative evidence on environmental stress reduction and environmental status change	▪ Changes in capacity: o To pool/mobilize resources o To provide an enabling environment, o For implementation of related strategies and programmes through adequate institutional frameworks and their maintenance, ▪ Changes in use and implementation of improved conservation and management approaches of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems ▪ Changes to the quantity and strength of barriers including changes in: o Not sufficient technical or financial capacity available to support the necessary process for expanding the protected area system of Kazakhstan o A poorly functioning institutional framework for forest management combined with the lack of experience with modern and innovative forest and land management models and mechanisms o Insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management	▪ Project documents ▪ Key Stakeholders ▪ Research findings	▪ Documents analysis ▪ Meetings with UNDP, Project Team and project Partners ▪ Interviews with project beneficiaries and other stakeholders
How is the Project impacting the	▪ What are the impacts or likely impacts of the project on? o Local environment; o Poverty; and, o Other socio-economic issues.	▪ Provide specific examples of impacts at those three levels, as relevant	▪ Project documents ▪ Key Stakeholders ▪ Research findings	▪ Data analysis ▪ Interviews with key stakeholders

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
local environment?				
Future directions for the Project	▪ How could the project build on its successes and learn from its weaknesses in order to enhance the potential for impact of ongoing and future initiatives?		▪ Data collected throughout evaluation	▪ Data analysis
Review criteria: Sustainability *- To what extent are there financial, institutional, social-economic, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?*				
Are sustainability issues adequately integrated in Project design?	▪ Were sustainability issues integrated into the formulation and implementation of the project? ▪ Does the project employ government implementing and/or monitoring systems? ▪ Is the government involved in the sustainability strategy for project components?	▪ Evidence/Quality of sustainability strategy ▪ Evidence/Quality of steps taken to address sustainability	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, project staff and project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Did the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues?	▪ Did the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues? ▪ Are the recurrent costs (if any) after project completion sustainable?	▪ Level and source of future financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities after project end? ▪ Evidence of commitments from international partners, governments or other stakeholders to financially support relevant sectors of activities after project end ▪ Level of recurrent costs after completion of project and funding sources for those recurrent costs	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, project staff and project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Organizations arrangements and continuation of activities	▪ Are results of efforts made during the project implementation period well assimilated by organizations and their internal systems and procedures? ▪ Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support? ▪ Has there been a buy-in process, or was there no need to sell the project and buy support? ▪ What degree is there of local ownership of initiatives and results? ▪ Are appropriate 'champions' being identified and/or supported?	▪ Degree to which project activities and results have been taken over by local counterparts or institutions/ organizations ▪ Level of financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities by in-country actors after project end ▪ Number/quality of champions identified	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, project staff and project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Enabling Environment	▪ Are laws, policies and frameworks addressed through the project, in order to address sustainability of key initiatives and reforms? ▪ Are the necessary related capacities for lawmaking and enforcement built? ▪ What is the level of political commitment to build on results of the project?	▪ Efforts to support the development of relevant laws and policies ▪ State of enforcement and law-making capacity ▪ Evidence of commitment by the political class through speeches, enactment of laws and resource allocation to priorities	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, project staff and project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Institutional and individual	▪ Is the capacity in place at the national and sub-national levels adequate to ensure sustainability of results achieved to date?	▪ Elements in place in those different management functions, at appropriate levels (national and sub-national levels) in terms of adequate structures, strategies, systems,	▪ Project documents and evaluations	▪ Interviews ▪ Documentation review

Reviewed Component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
capacity development		skills, incentives and interrelationships with other key actors	▪ UNDP, Project staff and project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries ▪ Capacity assessments available, if any	
Social and political sustainability	▪ Did the project contribute to key building blocks for social and political sustainability? ▪ Did the project contribute to local Stakeholders' acceptance of new practices?	▪ Example of contributions to sustainable political and social change with regard to improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ UNDP, project staff and project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries	▪ Interviews ▪ Documentation review
Replication	▪ Were project activities and results replicated elsewhere or scaled up? ▪ What was the project contribution to replication or scaling up of innovative practices or mechanisms for improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan? ▪ Does the project have a catalytic role?	▪ Number/quality of replicated initiatives ▪ Number/quality of replicated innovative initiatives ▪ Volume of additional investment leveraged	▪ Other donor programming documents ▪ Beneficiaries ▪ UNDP, project staff and project Partners	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Challenges to sustainability of the Project	▪ What are the main challenges that may hinder sustainability of efforts? ▪ Have any of these been addressed through project management? ▪ What could be the possible measures to further contribute to the sustainability of efforts achieved with the project?	▪ Challenges in view of building blocks of sustainability as presented above ▪ Recent changes which may present new challenges to the project	▪ Project documents and evaluations ▪ Beneficiaries ▪ UNDP, project staff and project Partners	▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Future directions for the Project	▪ Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results? ▪ What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed? ▪ Are national decision-making institutions (Parliament, Government etc.) ready to improve their measures to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan?		▪ Data collected throughout evaluation	▪ Data analysis

Annex 7: List of Documents Reviewed

GEF, April 26, 2011, *Proposal for Enhancing the Visibility of the GEF*

GEF, *Brand Guidelines & Graphic Standards*

GEF, *CEO Endorsement Letter PIMS 5696*

GEF, *GEF-6 GEF Secretariat Review for FS/MSP - "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits"*

GEF, *GEF-6 Programming Directions*

GEF, *GEF-6 Request for Project Endorsement / Approval*

GEF, *Government of Kazakhstan, UNDP, Project Document for National Implemented Projects Financed by GEF Trust Funds "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits"*

GEF, *Project Identification Form (PIF) - "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits" Project*

GEF, UNDP, *2019 Project Implementation Review (PIR) – Forest Ecosystems*

GEF, UNDP, *2020 Project Implementation Review (PIR) – Forest Ecosystems*

GEF, UNDP, *Government of Kazakhstan, Inception Report of the UNDP/GEF Project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits"*

GEF, UNDP, *Project Level Monitoring – Guidance for Conducting MTR of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects*

IUCN, May 12, 2020, *Letter to Mr. Talgat Seitovich, SFM Project PM*

IUCN, May 2020, *Enhancing Conservation of Biodiversity in High Conservation-Value Forest Sites in Kazakhstan through the IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas – Project Proposal*

Ministry of Agriculture and Wildlife, *Letter to Germany Council Member in GEF – Response to Germany Council Member Comments*

Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, *The Fifth National Report on Progress in Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity*

Oleg Loginov, *Snow Leopard Conservation Grants, Snow Leopard Network – Final Report for 2011 Project – Development of the Action Plan of Snow Leopard Conservation in Kazakhstan*

President of Kazakhstan, September 1, 2020, *Address by President Tokaev – Kazakhstan in a New Reality: Time for Action*

Profor, June 2018, *Kazakhstan Community-Private Plantations: Analysis to Better Understand the Potential for Developing Forest Plantations*

SFM Project, *AWP 2018, 2019 and 2020*

SFM Project, *CDR 2019 and 2020*

SFM Project, *List of Equipment Purchased by the Project*

SFM Project, *List of Staff and Stakeholders*

SFM Project, *Presentations on Components (3)*

SFM Project, *Project Board Meeting Minutes 2018, 2019 and 2020*

SFM Project, *Photos, Videos and Maps*

STAP, March 17, 2016, *STAP Scientific and Technical Screening of the Project Identification Form (PIF)*

UN, *Partnership Framework for Development, Kazakhstan, 2016-2020*

UNDP, *Annual Project Progress Report 2018, 2019 and 2020*

UNDP, *Atlas Risk Log*

UNDP, *Country Programme Action Plan Between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the UNDP 2016-2020*

UNDP, *Country Programme Document for Kazakhstan (2016-2020)*

UNDP, Government of Kazakhstan, *Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the UNDP*

UNDP, International Charity Foundation "Snow Leopard Foundation", *Memorandum of Understanding between the UNDP in Kazakhstan and the SLF*

UNDP, *Minutes of Local Project Appraisal Committee (LPAC) Meeting of the "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits" Project*

UNDP, *National Implementation by the Government of UNDP Supported Projects: Guidelines and Procedures*

UNDP, *Quarterly Project Progress Report Q4 2018, Q1, Q2, Q3 2019 and Q1 2020*

UNDP, *Standard Operating Procedures*

UNDP, *Targeted Scenario Analysis – A New Approach to Capturing and Presenting Ecosystem Service Values for Decision Making*

UNDP, *The UNDP Evaluation Policy*

UNDP, _____, *Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan Until 2030*

UNECE, FAO, *Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration in the Caucasus and Central Asia, June 21-22, 2018, Astana, Kazakhstan*

UNEP, CMS, Fauna & Flora International, *Aspects of Trans-Boundary Snow Leopard Conservation in Central Asia – Report of the FFI/CMS Workshop Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, December 1-2, 2014*

Valentina Bodrug-Lungu, 2018, *Report 1 – Gender Analysis within the UNDP Project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits"*

Valentina Bodrug-Lungu, 2018, *Report 2 - Gender Analysis within the UNDP Project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits"*

Wolds Company, September 2019, *Targeted Scenario Analysis of the Forest Sector in Kazakhstan – Work Progress Report Step 1 – Research Scope*

Wolds Company, December 2019, *Targeted Scenario Analysis of the Forest Sector in Kazakhstan – Work Progress Report Step 2 – Draft BAU and SEM Scenarios*

Wolds Company, May 2020, *Targeted Scenario Analysis of the Forest Sector in Kazakhstan – Work Progress Report Step 3 – Results of Field Mission and the Construction of the BAU and SEM Scenarios*

Wolds Company, October 2020, *Targeted Scenario Analysis of the Forest Sector in Kazakhstan – Work Progress Report Step 3 – Assessment of Forest Management Indicators under the BAU Scenarios*

_____, *Amendment to the Forest Code, June 15, 2017*

_____, *Co-financing Pledge Letters*

_____, *Co-financing Report Letters*

_____, *GEF Project 9193: "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits" – Response to Comments from GEF Council (Germany)*

_____, *January 2015, Land Degradation Focal Area – Portfolio Monitoring and Assessment Tool – Revised Guidelines*

_____, *Law on Pastures (No. 47-VI, February 20, 2017)*

_____, *Law on Protection, Reproduction and Use of Wildlife (No. 593, updated as of October 28, 2019)*

_____, *Law on Specially Protected Nature Areas (updated as of October 28, 2019)*

_____, *Law on Tourism Activities in the Republic of Kazakhstan (No. 211, updated as of July 2, 2020)*

_____, *National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Priority in Kazakhstan (NSLEP)*

_____, *Tracking Tool for GEF-6 Biodiversity Projects*

_____, *Tracking Tool for SFM/REDD-Plus Projects – Guidance Note v0.2*

Website Consulted

http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/U1600000384

https://nbsapforum.net/knowledge-base/peer-review/concept-conservation-and-sustainable-use-biological-diversity-republic

https://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/about-us.html

https://open.undp.org/projects/00097224

http://snowleopardfoundation.kz/eng.htm

www.thegef.org

https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/our-work/iucn-green-list-protected-and-conserved-areas

https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/our-work/iucn-green-list-protected-and-conserved-areas/global-standard

https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/environment-energy/environmental_finance/targeted-scenario-analysis.html

http://www.unece.org/info/media/news/forestry/2017/kazakhstan-is-making-considerable-steps-towards-sustainable-forest-management/doc.html

Annex 8: Interview Protocol

Note: This is a guide for the Review Team (a simplified version of the review matrix). Not all questions were asked to each interviewee; it was a reminder for the interviewers about the type of information required to complete the review exercise and a guide to prepare the semi-structured interviews. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the interviewees and the findings once "triangulated" were incorporated in the report.

I. RELEVANCE - *How does the project relate to the main objectives of the GEF, UNDP and of Kazakhstan to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems?*

I.1. How is the Project relevant to the GEF objectives?
I.2. How is the Project relevant to UNDP objectives?
I.3. How is the Project relevant to Kazakhstan in improving the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems?
I.4. Does the Project address the needs of target beneficiaries?

Future directions for similar projects

I.5. What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment between the project and the Partners' priorities and areas of focus?
I.6. How could the project better target and address priorities of targeted beneficiaries?

II. COHERENCE - *How well does the project fit with other interventions to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems in Kazakhstan?*

II.1. How is the coherence between the project and other interventions carried out by same project's Partners?
II.2. Is the Project internally coherent in its design?
II.3. How is the coherence between the project and other relevant interventions?

Future directions for similar projects

II.4. What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment, and coherence between the project and other relevant interventions?

III. EFFECTIVENESS – *To what extent have the components and objective of the project been achieved?*

II.1. How is the Project effective in achieving its expected outcomes?
- Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non- forest ecosystems and their biodiversity
- Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests
- Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits
- Strengthened enabling environment to support SFM objectives through updated national policies, regulations, and knowledge management systems supporting improved management of 12,652,400 ha of national forest territory
- Integrated economic and environmental valuation of ecosystem services and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in decision making in natural resource management, through piloting of innovative sustainable economic development planning mechanisms
- Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge

II.2. Does the project mainstream gender considerations into its implementation?
II.3. How is risk and risk mitigation being managed?

Future directions for similar projects

II.4. What changes could have been made (if any) to the formulation of the project in order to improve the achievement of project's expected results?
II.5. How could the project be more effective in achieving its results?

IV. EFFICIENCY - *Has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively and in-line with international and national norms and standards?*

IV.1. Is adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use?
IV.2. Do the *Project Results Framework* and work plans and any changes made to them used as management tools during implementation?

IV.3. Are accounting and financial systems in place adequate for project management and producing accurate and timely financial information?
IV.4. How adequate is the M&E framework (indicators & targets)?
IV.5. Are progress reports produced accurately, timely and respond to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes?
IV.6. Is project implementation as cost effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual)
IV.7. Is the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happening as planned?
IV.8. Are financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources have been used more efficiently?
IV.9. How is RBM used during project implementation?
IV.10. Are there an institutionalized or informal feedback to ensure that findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertaining to project formulation and implementation effectiveness were shared among project stakeholders, UNDP Staff and other relevant organizations for ongoing project adjustment?
IV.11. Is the government engaged?
IV.12. To what extent are partnerships/ linkages between institutions/ organizations encouraged and supported?
IV.13. Which partnerships/linkages are facilitated? Which one can be considered sustainable?
IV.14. What is the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? (between local actors, UNDP, and relevant government entities)
IV.15. Is an appropriate balance struck between utilization of international expertise as well as local capacity?
IV.16. Did the project take into account local capacity in design and implementation of the project?

Future directions for the project

IV.17. What lessons can be learnt from the project on efficiency?
IV.18. How could the project have more efficiently addressed its key priorities (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements, etc.)?

V. IMPACTS - *Are there indications that the project has contributed to improve the conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems, which are important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities?*

IV.1. Will the project achieve its objective that is to *"improve conservation status and management of key forest and associated grassland, riparian and arid ecosystems important for conservation of biodiversity, land resources and provision of livelihoods for local communities"*?
IV.2. What are the impacts of the project on the local environment; poverty; and, other socio-economic issues?

Future directions for the project

IV.3. How could the project build on its successes and learn from its weaknesses in order to enhance the potential for impact of ongoing and future initiatives?

VI. SUSTAINABILITY - *To what extent are there financial, institutional, social-economic, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?*

V.1. Were sustainability issues adequately integrated in project formulation?
V.2. Does the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues?
V.3. Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support?
V.4. Are laws, policies and frameworks being addressed through the project?
V.5. Is the capacity in place adequate to ensure sustainability of results achieved to date?
V.6. Are there any environmental risks linked to the implementation of the project?
V.7. Does the project contribute to key building blocks for social and political sustainability?
V.8. Are project activities and results being replicated elsewhere and/or scaled up?
V.9. What are the main challenges that may hinder sustainability of efforts?

Future directions for the project

V.10. Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results? What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed?

Annex 9: List of People Interviewed

List of partners and beneficiaries interviewed for the MTR

101043 – Project «*Conservation and Sustainable Management of Key Globally Important Ecosystems for Multiple Benefits*»

№	Organization	Name/Surname	Direction of the project	Contacts	Interview Date/Time
Authorized state bodies and public organizations					
1	Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan	Maxat Yelemessov, National Project Director, Head of Forestry and PA Department	General questions on the project, forestry, and PA	elemesov.m@ecogeo.gov.kz +7 701 524 2983 +7 777 115 3802	Interview conducted on Wednesday Sept. 16th
2	Republican association of public unions of hunters and hunting entities "Kansonar"	Bakytbek Duisekeev	Hunting management system of Kazakhstan, cooperation issues	+7 701 820 2460, qansonar2018@gmail.com	Interview conducted on Monday Sept. 7th
3	Republic State Enterprise «Republican forest selective and seed production center»»	Sanat Baimukanbetov, Deputy General Director	Ok, confirmed (*Will speak Kazakh*)	sanat.s.08.12@gmail.com +7 708 427 70 55	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 24th
4	International Consultant	Josh Brann	Design/formulation	brann.evaluation@gmail.com	Interview conducted on Tuesday Sept. 29th
5	UNDP	Vitalie Vremis	Deputy Resident Representative		Debriefing conducted on October 26th
6	UNDP	Maxim Vergeichik	RTA - Istanbul	maxim.vergeichik@undp.org	Interview conducted on Wednesday Oct. 7th
Component 1: Increasing the representativeness of globally important forest ecosystem biodiversity in the network of protected areas					
7	State National Nature Park «Kolsay Koldery»	Daniyar Turgambayev, Director Madina Salmenova, Specialist of the Tourism and Eco-education Department	Pilot PA Project Territory "Northern and Central Tien Shan"	kolsai-2016@mail.ru +7 701 387 8787 (Daniyar Turgambayev) kolsai_tourism@mail.ru +7 707 750 6624 (Madina Salmenova)	Interview conducted on Monday Sept. 21st

№	Organization	Name/Surname	Direction of the project	Contacts	Interview Date/Time
8	State Nature Reserve «Ile-Balkhash»	Djubaniyazov Zhanibek, Director	Pilot PA Project Territory "Northern and Central Tien Shan"	ile-balkhash@mail.ru +7 777 008 2545	Interview conducted on Monday Sept. 21st
9	Zapadno-Altay State Nature Reserve	Lyudmilla Vinokurova, Acting Director	Pilot PA Project Territory «Altay and Saur-Tarbagatay»	zagpz@mail.ru zagpzekotur@mail.ru +7 705 502 9969	Interview conducted on Tuesday Sept. 22nd
10	Independent expert	Viktoriya Kovshar, independent expert	Biodiversity monitoring programme in 3 project territories	victoria_kovshar@mail.ru +7 777 224 5279	Interview conducted on Tuesday Sept. 15th
Component 2. Promoting the integration of forest protected areas in the landscape context					
11	Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Management of Almaty region	Timur Tazhibekov, Head of Forestry and PAs Department	Questions on the overall forest management system of Almaty region Project Territory "Northern and Central Tien Shan"	+7 775 697 71 41 uprlestk3@mail.ru	Interview conducted on Wednesday Sept. 23rd
12	Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Management of East-Kazakhstan region	Dauren Asylkhanov, Head of Forestry and PAs Department	Questions on the overall forest management system of East-Kazakhstan region Project Territory «Altay and Saur-Tarbagatay»	+7 771 540 58 73 d.asylkhanov@akimvko.gov.kz	Interview conducted on Wednesday Sept. 23rd
13	Republic State Enterprise «Kazakh Forest Management Enterprise»	Nurlan Suleimenov, Deputy General Director	Question on Forest management, inventories, high conservation value forests	n.suleimenov@mail.ru +7 701 776 35 68	Interview conducted on Wednesday Sept. 16th
14	Institute of Botany and Phytointroduction	Gulnara Sitpayeva, General Director	Creation of a seed gene bank of valuable tree species	+7 701 209 9997 sitpaeva@mail.ru botanyphyto@mail.ru	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 24th
15	"Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of protection and	Nurzhan Mukhamadiyev, Head of the «Forest and	Forest protection and forest health monitoring in Almaty	nurzhan-80@mail.ru +7 777 357 25 53	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 17th

№	Organization	Name/Surname	Direction of the project	Contacts	Interview Date/Time
	quarantine of plants named after Zhazken Zhiembayev" LLP	Greenery Protection», Independent Expert	region Project Territory "Northern and Central Tien Shan"		
16	Independent consultant	Kairat Ustemirov,	Independent expert, issues general questions on forestry , TSA	ustemirov64@mail.ru +7 701 730 59 55 +7 775 193 20 32 +7 702 433 92 64	Interview conducted on Wednesday Sept. 9th
17	Expert on agriculture	Bakhtiyar Sadyk,	Sustainable pasture management in 3 project pilot territories	b.sadyk@mail.ru +7 701 221 80 11	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 17th
18	Ecotourism and eco-education expert	Irina Kovhsar,	Development of ecotourism and ecotourism management plans, additional eco-education programmes	ikovshar2014@gmail.com +7 705 261 64 60 +7 701 211 22 77	Interview conducted on Friday Sept. 25th
19	Kazakh National University name after Al-Farabi	Alexander Artemyev, Head of the Department of Tourism and Recreational Geography	Development of ecotourism and development of recreational load's norms	alexandr.artemyev@kaznu.kz amartemyev@yandex.ru +7 701 657 5900 +7 777 249 0272	Interview conducted on Friday Sept. 25th
20	Belkaragai Rural District (Katon-Karagai, East Kazakhstan Region)	Kairat Nurkanov, Mayor of Belkaragai Rural District	Implementation of pilot project on Sustainable pasture management «Altay and Saur-Tarbagatay»	+7 775 164 0760 +7 777 411 9649 8 (72342) 2-43-24 office belkaragai@mail.ru	Interview conducted on Friday Sept. 18th
Component 3. International cooperation and knowledge management					
21	Institute of Zoology	Alexey Grachev, Head of the Theriology Laboratory, Project Manager	Complex of works on studying the Kazakhstani population of snow leopard	+7 702 485 68 82 aleksey.al.grachev@gmail.com	Interview conducted on Friday Sept. 18th
22	Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan	Oleg Lukanovskyi, Head of SMART Implementation Unit	Implementation of SMART toward nature conservation in Sayram-Ugam SNNP	+7 707 808 71 20 oleg.lukanovsky@acbk.kz	Interview conducted on Monday Sept. 7th

№	Organization	Name/Surname	Direction of the project	Contacts	Interview Date/Time
23	Public Utility Insitution «Merken Forestry»	**Azat Yerensiz**, Deputy Director, (*Will speak Kazakh*)	Confirmed by the deputy director. Director in Almaty for operations	lesxoz_merke@mail.ru +7 776 670 20 08	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 17th

Schedule of interviews with Project team within the MTE framework

No.	Project Team	Expertise	Contacts	Interviews
24	Aray Belgubayeva	Expert on PAs and biodiversity, coordination of events' implementation on Component 1	aray.belgubayeva@undp.org	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 28th
25	Akmaral Agazhayeva	Expert on landscape planning, coordination of events on landscape planning, sustainable pasture management, ecotourism development under Component 2	akmaral.agazhayeva@undp.org	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 29th
	Dinara Savazova	Expert on SFM, coordination of events on sustainable development of forest ecosystems under Component 2	dinara.savazova@undp.org	Interview conducted on Thursday Sept. 29th
26	Aiman Omarbekova	Expert on wildlife, coordination of events' implementation on Component 3	aiman.omarbekova@undp.org	Interview conducted on Wednesday Sept. 30th
	Aizhan Baimukanova Dinara Shamenova	Administrative and finance assistant Procurement specialist;	aizhan.baimukanova@undp.org dinara.shamenova@undp.org	Interview conducted on Wednesday Sept. 30th
27	Talgat Kerteshev	Project Manager of UNDP Biodiversity conservation projects	talgat.kerteshev@undp.org	Interview conducted on Friday Oct. 2nd

Annex 10: Concept for Biodiversity to 2030: Objectives and Indicators

Objectives	Indicators
Biodiversity Conservation Objectives:	
• Establishment of optimal ecological network	• By 2030, the optimal ecological network, including sustainably managed PAs, forest conservation institutions, wildlife corridors, etc., will have been established • By 2030, total PAs coverage is 10% out of the total country area, while the PAs coverage with legal entity status is 5%
• Conservation of rare and endangered species	• By 2020, conditions for safety migration of ungulates are created by making 3 safe crossings through existing roads, by 2030, there are 10 crossings due to mandatory establishment of crossings through all constructing roads starting from 2017 in accordance with recommendations provided by ecological expertise; • By 2020, the list of rare and endangered wildlife species updated and specified with rare status of each species in accordance with IUCN categories. • By 2020, developed action plans on conservation and restoration of 10 rare and endangered flora and fauna species. • By 2020, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Flora" is enacted. • By 2020, developed the effective economic activity planning mechanisms of rare and endangered species conservation • By 2017, the Environmental Code includes environmental requirements regulations on equipping black spots of power lines, transport infrastructure objects with safe technologies and establishing above- and underground crossings to ensure free migration and security to wild animals. • By 2020, to publish the Green Data Book of the Republic of Kazakhstan on plant associations
• Genetic resources conservation, access to them and sharing of benefits	• By 2015, the Republic of Kazakhstan has joined the Nagoya Protocol on access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity, by 2020, the mediation mechanism established under the Nagoya Protocol. • By 2020, the national forest selective centers network is established. • By 2020, selective genetic objects of 10 species are created, and 20 species by 2030. • By 2030, established genetic bank of main plant species
• Development of environmental monitoring system for biodiversity based on ecosystem approach	• By 2020, established the National forest and biological resource informational center; • By 2020, established environmental monitoring system for PA biodiversity, by 2030, the system will cover entire ecological network of the Republic of Kazakhstan; • By 2020, established computer-based biodiversity monitoring informational system covering all PAs
• Improvement of PA management system and mechanisms in accordance with biodiversity conservation goals	• By 2020, established PA Public councils • By 2020, included PA Management plan targets in state planning system • By 2020, approved the standards for PA budget financing, recreational loads on PA ecosystems, sustainable PA species, communities, ecosystems conservation • By 2030, there are informational visitor centers in 15 national PAs
Biodiversity Sustainable Use Objectives:	
Forest Resources	• By 2020, large forest fires decreased by 50 %, by 2030-70%.

• Securing forest ecosystems conservation through strengthening protection and conservation activities	• By 2030, average coverage of one fire decreased by 50% or up to 10 ha. • By 2030, forest pest and disease focus coverage decreased by 40%
• Increasing forest restoration and reforestation to expand forest cover of the republic	• By 2020 the forest coverage of the republic increased by 4.7%, by 2030- by 5%. • By 2020, planted forest plantations covered an area of 216 thousand hectares, and by 2030 –of 576 thousand hectares through the planting. • By 2020, developed projects on establishment of green belt around the settlements covered an area of 30 thousand hectares. • By 2020, completed inventory of current shelterbelt system, by 2030 transferred these areas of the coverage of 350 thousand hectares to private forest fund. • By 2020, planted shelterbelts covered an area of 6 thousand hectares, by 2030- of 10 thousand hectares
• Improvement of forest resources management effectiveness	• By 2020, developed and approved state forest policy focused on improvement of management effectiveness under the climate change. • By 2030, completed transition to the sustainable forest management. • By 2020, computer-based monitoring system of forest resources to be established. • By 2020, the final cutting reached 30%, by 2030 -100% for following advanced processing of forest material. • By 2020, established forest certification system, by 2030 ensured certification of forest resources users
• Climate adaptation activities	• By 2030, established monitoring and forecast system with complete coverage of the republic area. • By 2020, developed projects on watershed areas afforestation of main country's rivers (Irtysh, Ural, Ili, Syrdarya) and other water bodies. • By 2020, developed recommendations on variety of tree species and planting technologies for different climatic zones of the republic
Fauna Resources • Legal framework of fauna resources protection, reproduction and sustainable use	• By 2020, made amendments to current regulatory and legal acts
• Ensuring fauna protection, reproduction and sustainable use	• By 2025, identified species and conducted assessment of ecosystem services, which are used in hunting process • By 2020, established integrated center performing monitoring and inventory of wild animal species and providing data collection and processing. • By 2020, established Center on migration of wild animals. • By 2020, created conditions for private fund raising. • By 2020, identified targets of hunting effectiveness and assessed hunting management effectiveness
Fish Resources • Considering biodiversity conservation in legal framework of fishery	• By 2020, made amendments to current regulatory and legal acts, international Treaties and Agreements in accordance with standards of the Convention for Biological Diversity. • By 2020, adopted the Program on sustainable fishery development until 2020. • By 2020, developed and introduced standards on fishing effort for fishery water bodies. • By 2020, developed and introduced standards on fishery resources research. • By 2020, developed and introduced Plan for response to critical changes

	of status of fish resources and their habitats. • By 2020, made amendments to qualifying requirements for individuals and legal entities to participate in biddings on assignment of water body (section) concerning the availability of expert in fishing and/or fish breeding
• Protection of biodiversity and habitats of fish and other amphibians	• By 2020, made amendments to the relevant regulatory and legal acts limiting negative impact on habitats of fish and other amphibians. • By 2020, adopted action plan on protection of migration paths and concentration grounds of fish and other amphibians as well as mechanism of its implementation. • By 2020, identified the most valuable areas of the habitats of fish and other amphibians • By 2020, established controlling regime of fishing that enables to conserve biological diversity
• Reproduction of fish population inclining to population reduction, restoration of migration paths and concentration grounds (wintering and breeding grounds) of fish and other amphibians	• By 2020, developed action plan on reproduction of fish population inclined to reduction in number in natural habitat. • By 2020, developed the biological technology of rare and endangered fish species breeding under aquaculture conditions. • By 2030, produced population of rare and endangered fish species under aquaculture conditions. • By 2030 developed action plan on reintroduction of fish species inclined to reduction in number into natural habitat or water bodies. • By 2020 developed list of rare and endangered fish species to be reproduced. • By 2020 developed recommendations on genetic diversity of rare and endangered fish species population, produced under aquaculture conditions for their further reintroduction. • By 2020, developed requirements (origin, population belonging) to breeding stock of rare and endangered fish species produced under aquaculture conditions for further reintroduction. • By 2020, developed scientific background and feasibility study reports, work programs of the Breeding and Genetics Center based on Kazakh production and acclimatization station
• Conservation of the Caspian Sea ecosystem	• By 2020, conducted land-use planning of the Caspian Sea waters, assessed potential extent of recreational and industrial pressure that in its turn reduces risk of biodiversity loss, and identified areas of sea reserve zones with different resistance and vulnerability as well as wildlife corridors to ensure migration paths of sturgeon fish species and Caspian Sea. • By 2020, developed and introduced integrated system of monitoring for population status of sturgeon fish species in Kazakhstan part of the Caspian Sea. • By 2020, developed and introduced system of monitoring for population status and evaluation of potential removal of sea fish species in Kazakhstan part of the Caspian Sea. • By 2020, developed and introduced integrated system of monitoring for population status and evaluation of potential removal of semi-migrating fish species in Ural-Caspian basin. • By 2020, developed, agreed and introduced the Integrated Caspian Seal Monitoring Program
Agro-biodiversity Resources • Conservation of agro-biodiversity in agriculture through the restoration	• By 2030, conducted 100% inventory of degraded (in the distance of 3-5 km from settlements) and deteriorate (in the distance of 6-12 km from settlements) areas of pastures. • By 2030, decreased by 10% the coverage of degraded pastures and deteriorate pasture ecosystems

and reduction of areas of deteriorated rangelands	
• Agro-biodiversity conservation and restoration in fallow lands removed from agriculture	• By 2025, conducted 100% inventory of virgin lands' status removed of agricultural cycle. • By 2030, transformed virgin lands of area of 40% to highly productive forage land
• Production of ecologically clean products based on organic farming	• By 2020, developed regulatory and legal acts designating legal, economic and institutional frameworks of organic food production and realization. • By 2030, technology of organic farming to produce green farm products is developed and introduced into farm production by 10%
• Agricultural industry adaptation to climate	• By 2020, specified agricultural and agro-hydrological indices of soil in main grain sowing regions. • By 2020, bred new stress-resistant species and hybrids of main agricultural crops. • By 2025, diversified plant breeding including remunerative and stress-adaptive crops. • By 2030, conducted agro-climatic zoning of agricultural crops (by types, species) with regard to climate change. • By 2020, changed the structure of plough land use by including crops able to occlude carbon dioxide from atmosphere. • By 2030, introduced water saving technologies for agricultural crop cultivation based on modeling of precipitation distribution shift over the area of more than 50%

Annex 11: MTR Rating Scales

As per UNDP-GEF guidance, the MTR Reviewing Team used the following scales to rate the project:

- A 6-point scale to rate the project's progress toward the objective and each project outcome as well as the Project Implementation and Adaptive Management: Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), or Highly Unsatisfactory (HU).
- A 4-point scale to rate the sustainability of project achievements: Likely (L), Moderately Likely (ML), Moderately Unlikely (MU), and Unlikely (U).

Ratings for Progress Toward Results: (one rating for each outcome and for the objective)		
6	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve or exceed all its end-of-project targets, without major shortcomings. The progress toward the objective/outcome can be presented as "good practice".
5	Satisfactory (S)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets, with only minor shortcomings.
4	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve most of its end-of-project targets but with significant shortcomings.
3	Moderately Unsatisfactory (HU)	The objective/outcome is expected to achieve its end-of-project targets with major shortcomings.
2	Unsatisfactory (U)	The objective/outcome is expected not to achieve most of its end-of-project targets.
1	Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	The objective/outcome has failed to achieve its midterm targets, and is not expected to achieve any of its end-of-project targets.

Ratings for Project Implementation & Adaptive Management: (one overall rating)		
6	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Implementation of all seven components – management arrangements, work planning, finance and co-finance, project-level monitoring and evaluation systems, stakeholder engagement, reporting, and communications – is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management. The project can be presented as "good practice".
5	Satisfactory (S)	Implementation of most of the seven components is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management except for only few that are subject to remedial action.
4	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	Implementation of some of the seven components is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management, with some components requiring remedial action.
3	Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	Implementation of some of the seven components is not leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive, with most components requiring remedial action.
2	Unsatisfactory (U)	Implementation of most of the seven components is not leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management.
1	Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	Implementation of none of the seven components is leading to efficient and effective project implementation and adaptive management.

Ratings for Sustainability: (one overall rating)		
4	Likely (L)	Negligible risks to sustainability, with key outcomes on track to be achieved by the project's closure and expected to continue into the foreseeable future
3	Moderately Likely (ML)	Moderate risks, but expectations that at least some outcomes will be sustained due to the progress toward results on outcomes at the Midterm Review
2	Moderately Unlikely (MU)	Significant risk that key outcomes will not carry on after project closure, although some outputs and activities should carry on
1	Unlikely (U)	Severe risks that project outcomes as well as key outputs will not be sustained

Annex 12: Audit Trail

Annex 12 : Audit Trail

Author	#	Para No./ comment location	Comment/Feedback on the draft report	Evaluation team response and actions taken on comments
Throughout		Edits / Updates		Done
	134	***Under Outcome 1*** the project has been focusing on expanding the PA system in Kazakhstan, with the creation of 11 new PAs equipped with effective management plans and strengthening the management plans of 14 existing PAs to include the concept of High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF). So far, the process to expand the PA system by 1,795,509 ha has started, technical justifications have been drafted, feasibility studies are underway, and equipment has been procured. Management plans for the period 2019-2024 for 23 pilot PAs were developed and approved; including holding workshops and training courses for PA staff to develop their capacities related to the implementation of this new management planning approach. This component 1 has been progressing well and it should be completed by the end of the project.	The project would like to make a little clarification: in July 2018, 2 new Protected Areas were created (Ile-Balkhash Reserve and Tarbagatai National Park) with the total area of 558.715 hectares. Now the Project is working on creation/expansion of 9 protected areas with the total area of 1,444,248 hectares.	Addition accepted and this achievement added in table 5 in section 3.2.1
	143	Nevertheless, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a certain political risk has emerged as critical. The government of Kazakhstan has already redirected initial financial commitments to counter the impact of COVID-19 and stabilize the epidemiological situation in Kazakhstan. According to the project team, the originally allocated budgets to PAs for 2020-2021 were reduced this year by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee by 50%. It is a large budget reduction for PAs management with an uncertain future for the coming years. As the project is in the process to introduce documentation for the creation of new PAs (component 1), the review and adoption of these proposed new PAs may take much longer to be completed. On this basis, there is a risk that the project may not meet some of its targets; in particular the target of "*1,729,485 net new hectares under protection*" (indicator #5) which implies the creation of new PAs; hence a greater commitment – including financial commitments - from the government to the PA system.	Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a partial decrease in funding for PAs. It affected considerably some planned activities to strengthen the material and technical capacity of protected areas, the construction of infrastructure facilities in protected areas. At the same time, the existing protected areas will be provided with guaranteed funding for the main costs for all subsequent years. The project agrees with the comments of the evaluation on probable postponement of expansion/creation of new PAs due to adjustment of plans of the executive agency caused by COVID-19 pandemic, as financing of newly created and expanded PAs will also be provided by financing from the national budget and regional budget. However, the risk of financial obligations of the government may be mitigated by the fact that the planned 5 new PAs, after their establishment, will be	Indeed, a new risk. Noted the mitigation measure described in the last sentence of the comment and added reference to this mitigation measure at the end of paragraph #143.

Author	#	Para No./ comment location	Comment/Feedback on the draft report	Evaluation team response and actions taken on comments
			transferred under the operational management of existing PAs/forestry farms, which will reduce costs.	
	144	**Recommendation 1: It is recommended a no-cost time extension.** ***Issue to Address*** The project has been progressing well since its outset until early 2020 when the pandemic outbreak started in Kazakhstan, which impacted negatively the delivery of project activities. A state of emergency was declared on March 15, 2020 putting restrictions on gatherings such as workshops and seminars and also on local travel. Since then, the project implementation team has migrated some activities online but not all; particularly field activities which were suspended. The reduction of project activities was translated in a much lower disbursement of the GEF grant; only 21% of the AWP for 2020 was expanded as of the end of July 2020. The review of the project finances indicates that based on the status as of end of July 2020, the monthly disbursement for the period August 2020 to April 2023 should be USD 168,926 per month to expend the GEF grant by end of April 2023; an 83% increase of monthly disbursements when compared to the period May 2018 to July 2020. Without knowing exactly when the negative impact of the pandemic will recede, it is unlikely that the remaining budget will be expended by April 2023. When considering the good project performance so far, a no-cost time extension is recommended. The final duration of this extension should be assessed once the pandemic is finally under control and that the project implementation team would have more clarity to plan ahead.	The project thanks for this recommendation. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, fieldwork in 2020 in the framework of activities to create new PAs, functional zoning, HCVF were postponed to the next year. According to our estimates, the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures related to it will last till spring 2021 (April), which already implies a year of delay in the implementation of project activities, respectively, in order to achieve the final results and indicators of the Project, additional time will be required. Therefore, the Project Team asks for a recommendation to extend the Project for a period of 12 months.	Comment accepted and recommendation #1 made for one year no-cost time extension at a minimum.
	145	**Recommendation 2: It is recommended to increase synergies and knowledge sharing among policy makers, researchers, practitioners and beneficiaries.** ***Issue to Address*** Stakeholders are well engaged in implementing the project. However, so far, the engagement of stakeholders is mostly happening at the local level in project targeted areas such as district level stakeholders but also staff in Leskhozes and in PA Administrations; local natural resource users are also being engaged. After almost 2.5 years, the implementation of innovative approaches	The project team takes this recommendation into account. Enhanced knowledge sharing and interaction between local stakeholders will be taken into consideration when planning project activities. To ensure sustainability of knowledge sharing, the Project is developing a training program and 15 thematic training modules to enhance capacity of forest protection workers. This program and modules will be transferred to the Forestry and Wildlife Committee for implementation of the Professional Development Program for forest personnel at the	No changes made. Excellent comment detailing how the project will increase knowledge sharing and capacity development.

Author	#	Para No./ comment location	Comment/Feedback on the draft report	Evaluation team response and actions taken on comments
		and techniques started to produce "*tangible*" results and it is time to focus more on knowledge sharing, seeking synergies among all stakeholders and to learn from each other. It is recommended to increase knowledge sharing and establish a stronger link between local stakeholders (including beneficiaries), district level stakeholders, researchers and policy makers at national level. It is suggested to increase meetings and workshops with the participation of all stakeholders to communicate the progress made and exchange views among participants. Another suggestion would be to organize "*field days*" with the participation of government representatives from national, district and local levels, Leskhoze and PA staff, researchers, farmers/communities and private sector to review ongoing demonstrations and seek a greater involvement of local communities and private sector in the management of these ecosystems.	national level. The Project also proposes to create a budget line for capacity building of forest personnel.	
	146	**Recommendation 3: It is recommended to emphasize institutionalization and capacity development of project partners for the remaining implementation period.** ***Issue to Address*** The project has been successfully introducing innovative approaches to improve biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. It includes the introduction of the HCVF concept to protect valuable forests, the TSA methodology to assess the effectiveness of the forestry management system as well as estimate the value of ecosystem services, and the integrated landscape management planning approach to improve the management of PAs and of forests managed by Leskhozes. However, the ultimate success of the project resides in its ability to institutionalize – hence sustain – these innovative approaches and to ensure that capacities required by institutions involved in applying these innovations are developed before the end of the project. It is recommended that the project implementation team focuses on these 2 aspects: institutionalization and capacity development of project partners for the remaining implementation period to ensure that, by the end of the project, achievements will be sustained over the long term. It is noted that this recommendation is much aligned with the coming activities	This recommendation will be taken into account when preparing work plans for the next years. The project will contribute to strengthening national capacity, replication and widespread use of the methodology for analyzing the target scenario and the concept of HCVF in institutional and management activities. Training materials and courses in these areas will be developed and conducted within the framework of the project.	No changes made. Excellent to learn the plan to address the issue!

Author	#	Para No./ comment location	Comment/Feedback on the draft report	Evaluation team response and actions taken on comments
		supported by the project and also the anticipation that the government is fully committed to incorporate these innovative measures within its institutional and governance framework.		
	147	**Recommendation 4: It is recommended to undertake capacity assessments of partners to identify capacity gaps and capacity needs to sustain project achievements.** ***Issue to Address*** As per the above recommendation, it is critical that the project contribute to the development of capacities needed to sustain the project achievements. It is an ambitious project with a broad scope. To succeed, the strategy is underpinned with three key necessary changes: strengthening and expanding the PA system; providing buffer zones around PAs; and improving the coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities. It goes without saying that for this strategy to succeed, capacities of key stakeholders need to be in place before the end of the project to ensure the sustainability of results. It is recommended to undertake capacity assessments of partners to identify capacity gaps and capacity needs (skills, knowledge, procedures, human and financial resources, etc.). Once these gaps and needs are identified, to pursue with the appropriate capacity development exercise to address these gaps.	This recommendation has been taken into account. The following activities are carried out by the Project within 2 directions: 1) The training program for protected area staff is being updated. 2) Training program and 15 standard modules for staff of forest protection institutions are being prepared. Within the confines of this work, a comprehensive assessment and analysis of the current level of skills and potential of the staff of 120 forest protection institutions, implemented and operating training programs/courses to improve the skills of employees over the past 15 years, identification of training needs at different levels (taking into account gender composition) will also be conducted.	No changes made. Excellent to learn the plan to address the issue!
	148	**Recommendation 5: It is recommended to undertake studies on carrying capacity of PAs with high eco-tourism potential.** ***Issue to Address*** Eco-tourism is an economic sector, which was recently put on the priority agenda of the government following the recent President's address to the Nation (September 1, 2020). As part of "*Time for Action*" of this address, development of ecotourism was an area promoted by the President. In the meantime, the project has supported the development of guidelines for ecotourism in PAs. These guidelines are currently under review by the government. As much as ecotourism is good for the local population and tourists to enjoy the natural environment, there is also the risk of damaging and disturbing this environment, including disturbing natural	This recommendation has been taken into account. The Covid-19 World Pandemic has made its adjustments, currently there is an increase (expected in the future as well) in the development of domestic tourism and as a consequence, an increase in the flow of visitors to the national parks of Kazakhstan. Today, some national parks (especially those located in the vicinity of large metropolitan areas) are experiencing high visitor growth (tens of times higher than the established norms of recreational loads); accordingly, unregulated flow exerts a significant load on ecosystems and biodiversity. This situation requires an urgent response, the development of strategic management measures, setting a threshold for the number of visitors and subsequent monitoring. The	No changes made. Good to see that this recommendation is already under way.

Author	#	Para No./ comment location	Comment/Feedback on the draft report	Evaluation team response and actions taken on comments
		habitats. To provide tools and information on the capacity of some natural environments, it is recommended to support carrying capacity studies of PAs with high ecotourism potential, including paying special attention for regulations of recreational tourism, which is expected to be high in some areas in the coming years.	Project has already conducted research in 5 pilot national parks (Charyn, Sairam-Ugam, Katon-Karagai, Kolsai Kolderi, Syrdarya-Turkestan) and calculated norms of recreational loads for 27 tourist routes and trails. Tested methodology for calculating recreational loads in protected areas was approved by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of RoK for subsequent application at the national level.	
	149	**Recommendation 6: It is recommended to prepare an exit strategy.** ***Issue to Address*** So far, the project enjoyed a good national ownership and the government has already demonstrated its strong interest in integrating these tested innovative measures and more is coming as the project progresses toward its end. Overall, it is expected that the government will continue to support the achievements of the project with the necessary financial resources from the national budget and possibly from other funding sources. In order to facilitate the "transfer" of project achievements from with-the-project to without-the-project, it is recommended to develop a project exit strategy (or roadmap?), identifying what, when, where and how much priorities to sustain project achievements will cost to ensure continuity of project achievements.	The Project fully acknowledges the relevance of this recommendation. The Project will provide for development of the Project Exit Strategy next year (in the first half of 2021), which will contain descriptions of the cost of ensuring continuity of the achieved results of the Project, with subsequent updating until the closure of the Project.	No changes made. Excellent!
	150	**Recommendation 7: It is recommended to change the target on "*Green List*" for indicator #7.** ***Issue to Address*** The project has collaborated with IUCN to explore how to implement the "*green list*" standards in Kazakhstan. Following some initial exchanges, including a workshop in Almaty in December 2019, IUCN sent to the project (May 2020) a proposal to establish the "*Green List*" process in Kazakhstan. However, the cost of this proposal is almost USD 500k and it does not include the cost of some activities such as workshops. The project in its current set up does not have the budget to fund this proposal. Furthermore, it is not clear yet that the government of Kazakhstan made the	The project fully agrees with this recommendation to change the target. Due to absence of the procedure for including PAs into the Green List, the Project will prepare an overview with criteria adapted for Kazakhstan for including PAs into the "Green List" and submit it to the Forestry and Wildlife Committee.	No changes made. Good approach.

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		decision to implement the "*Green List*" standards in its PA system. It is recommended to change the target from "*to have one PA with a preliminary "green list" assessment*" to "*Submit a feasibility study to the government and support the government to review and decide to proceed or not with the "Green List" standard*."		
		Recommendation: Indicator # 5 "Incremental area under conservation management through establishment of new PAs" (Annex J. Results Framework Indicator Data Disaggregation). The Project requests to amend means of verification of the indicator #5	Within the framework of creation of new PAs, the tasks of the Project include the work on preparation of the institutional framework - this is the development of the scientific background report and feasibility study and their approval at the level of the authorized body. However, direct decision on creation of new protected areas belongs exclusively to the government of the country. In this regard, the Project proposes to change the means of verification of the indicator from "The area of new PAs, confirmed by the government decree or other relevant documents" to "The documents (scientific background report and feasibility study) on the expansion / creation of new PAs were developed and approved by the authorized body". Additional justification can be provided by the continuing restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite all possible measures taken by the project to expand the protected area network, the PAs can be created/expanded already after the project completion.	Recommendation #7 was updated to reflect the changes to the means of verification for indicator /target #5 and also to the target for indicator #12. Accordingly, changes were also made in Section 3.3.5 paragraph #114.
		Recommendation. Indicator # 12 "Number of good practice models for private afforestation established in Kazakhstan" (Annex J. Results Framework Indicator Data Disaggregation). It is suggested to revise End of project target " Two functional and replicable models demonstrated as feasible to meet key gaps in private afforestation regulatory framework: One private-sector based, and one community-based " and consider to read " Model projects of private afforestation have been developed, taking into account the peculiarities of natural and climatic conditions"	The project team proposes to reconsider the 12th target indicator: "2 functional and replicable models have been demonstrated, which help to overcome the main legislative gaps for the development of non-state forestry: one model is based on private investments, the second on public forests" and to describe in the next edition: "Model projects of private forest plantations are developed taking into account the peculiarities of natural and climatic conditions and implemented pilots". This is due to the fact that there are no public forests in Kazakhstan, all forests in Kazakhstan are state-owned. The national legislation provides for the creation of private forests outside the lands of the forest fund. In this regard, the implementation	Recommendation #7 was updated to reflect the changes to the means of verification for indicator /target #5 and also to the target for indicator #12. Accordingly, changes were also made in Section 3.3.5 paragraph #113.

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			of model 1 of public forests is not possible. At the same time, the pilots of the German Society for International Cooperation in Private Forestry were taken into account (within the framework of the Flermonica initiative in Kazakhstan, 6 pilots were implemented). Based on the results of the implementation of pilot projects in the project areas, the project will focus on the development of Model Projects of Private Forest Plantations based on additional pilots within the Project.	
	151	**Recommendation 8: It is recommended to exchange with and access the body of knowledge of the UNDP-GEF-SLT "*Transboundary Cooperation for Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Conservation*" project.** ***Issue to Address*** This project, based at GSLEP Secretariat in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is ending in December 2020. The objective of the project was to "*to strengthen transboundary conservation of snow leopard ecosystems and landscapes that ensure stability of global snow leopard population by addressing drivers of existing and emerging threats with special focus in Central Asia*." The project delivered high quality outputs, consisting of methodologies, manuals, guidelines, training courses, recommendations, strategies, etc. integrating leading-edge knowledge on snow leopard conservation to be used by key organizations responsible for the conservation of snow leopards in Central Asian countries and other country members of GSLEP. Most of these tools and instruments exist in both languages - English and Russian. Worth exploring are (i) the Snow Leopard Genome sub-project, a high-quality reference genome (open-source) for snow leopard; and (ii) the Population Assessment of the World's Snow Leopards (PAWS), a methodology to estimate snow leopard abundance and distribution using a combination of spatial capture-recapture and occupancy models. It is recommended to establish a link with the partners of this project: Snow Leopard Trust (SLT) and GSLEP Secretariat, both based in Bishkek in order to access their skills and body of knowledge.	The project thanks for the recommendation and partially accepts it. The monitoring system is implemented by Zoology Institute, according to the unified methodology developed by GSLEP. Within the framework of the regional project "Transboundary aspects of snow leopard ecosystem conservation" on the Kazakhstan part, project activities were not implemented. Our project was not involved in project implementation and, as a result, we were not able to get the results of our work. At the same time, we would like to note that the project took a part at the online meeting on closing the project "Transboundary aspects of snow leopard ecosystem conservation" (20.11.2020) and uses all opportunities to study the materials developed.	No changes made. Indeed, good approach to review the knowledge of this project and what could be useful for Kazakhstan to adopt and implement.
	152	**Recommendation 9: It is recommended for UNDP country office**	Evaluators are requested to clarify how the conclusion on	Reviewed the wording of this

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		to look into faster processing of procurement requests for goods and services. ***Issue to Address*** Slow procurement processing, including services such as hiring experts and consultants was one of the rare weaknesses mentioned by stakeholders interviewed for this MTR. It seems that it takes months between the time of an initial request for a service and the time to have a contract in place; often resulting in "severe" delays in implementing activities. It is recommended for the UNDP country office to look into the processing of this type of transactions and explore ways to speed up the process of procuring a requested good or hiring an expert/consultant for a particular assignment.	"severe" delays was made. References could be provided in the evaluation report on delays referenced in this recommendation. Following the business processes review exercise conducted in the beginning of 2020 the country office has started consolidating procurement capacities from different projects into a centralized Procurement Unit, this should help to improve standardization & efficiency of the procurement function and reduce the procurement functional cost at the project level by achieving economy of scale.	recommendation; wrong choice of words to justify the recommendation. Changed "*often resulting in severe delays*" to "*sometimes resulting in long delays*" which is reflecting some comments we heard during the interviews. It is in no way, an issue for all procurement of goods and services processes. Glad to see that effort is made to review these procurement processes and hopefully to improve them over time.
	153	**Recommendation 10: It is recommended to calculate the CO_2 benefits using the FAO Ex-ACT tool by the end of the project.** ***Issue to Address*** The formulation team, using the FAO Ex-ACT tool and the GEF guidance calculated that once the project would be completed and be successful in meeting all its targets, it would generate a total of 5,838,328 tCO2eq as CO_2 benefits. In the meantime, CO_2 benefits were not part of the M&E framework to measure the performance of the project. Nevertheless, the CO_2 benefits calculation was made to measure the climate change benefits through SFM using the FAO-Ex-ACT tool in line with GEF guidance. This tools requests inputs on hectares of forest and land area affected by the project, as well as the level of with-project and without project degradation or deforestation. It is recommended that this tool be used to calculate the CO_2 benefits by the end of the project.	Thank you for your recommendation. Starting from 2022, the Project will plan the works on calculation of benefits of CO^2 from the achieved results of the Project using Ex-ACT Carbon Balance Tool. As of 2021, the Project will conduct an analysis of existing methodologies for calculating CO^2 emissions.	No changes made. Indeed, good approach to calculate CO_2 benefits due to project interventions.

	154	**Recommendation 11: It is recommended to verify that the project complies with UNDP and GEF communications and branding guidelines.** ***Issue to Address*** The communications and visibility guidelines to comply with UNDP's Branding Guidelines and the GEF's Communication and Visibility Guidelines, including the use of the UNDP and GEF logos are not mentioned in the project document. It is recommended that the project implementation team ensures that the project complies with these guidelines as well as those from the project partners such as the Forestry and Wildlife Committee.	The project fully accepts the proposed recommendations. The Project will monitor the implementation of Branding Guidelines of UNDP GEF and project partners.	No changes made. Good.
		General comment on the recommendations from the expert group on the mid-term assessment from the Project's Implementing Agency (Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the MEGPR RK)	The Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the MEGPR of the Republic of Kazakhstan considered the draft report on the results of the mid-term assessment of the Project and agrees with its conclusions. There are no comments at this stage.	Thank you and good luck in implementing the second phase of this project.

Annex 13: Evaluation Report Clearance Form

Evaluation Report Clearance Form

for the Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the UNDP-GEF-Government of Kazakhstan Project:
"*Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits*"
Kazakhstan
(PIMS 5696)

Midterm Review Report Reviewed and Cleared by

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