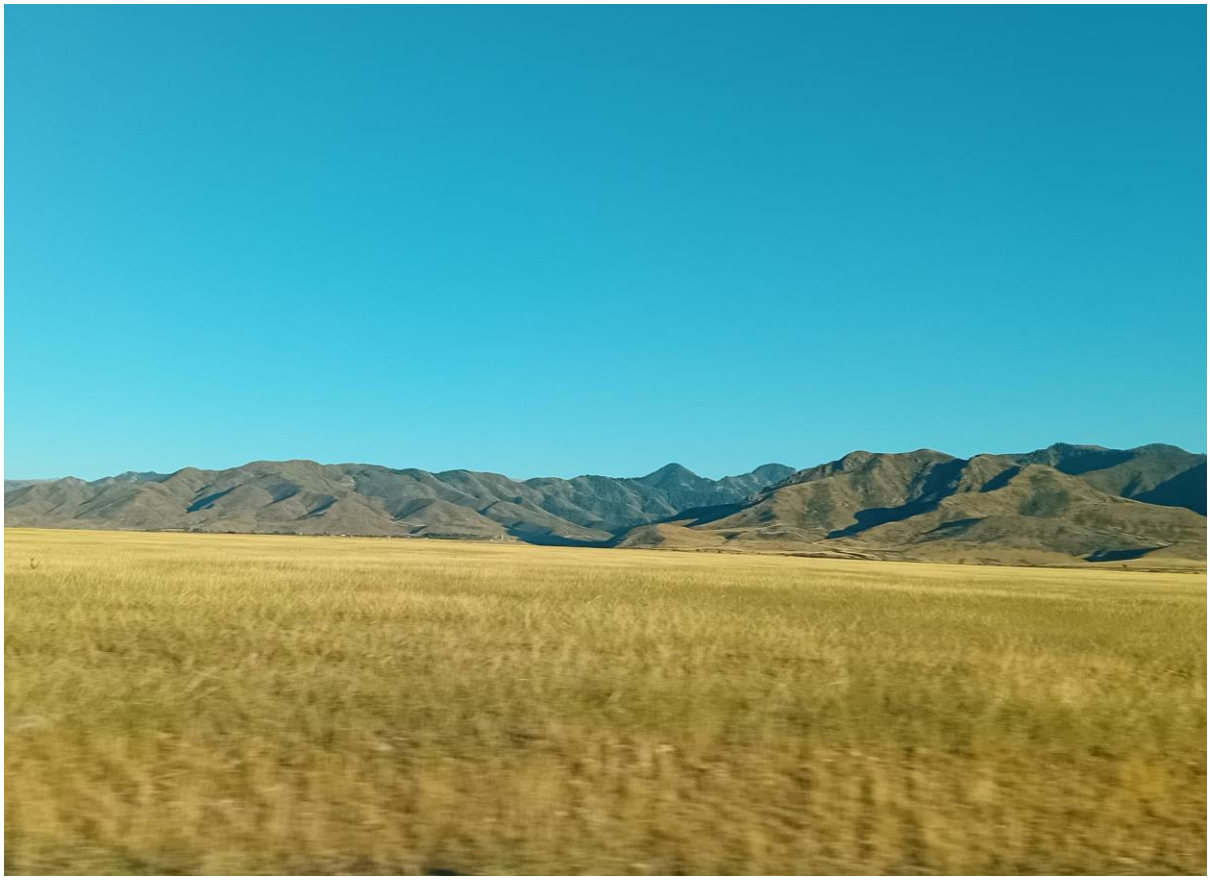
Terminal Evaluation Report

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

GEF Project ID: 9193 / UNDP Project ID: 5696



Country:	Kazakhstan
Region:	Europe and Central Asia
Focal Area:	Multi-focal area (GEF-6): Biodiversity, Land Degradation, Sustainable Forest Management
GEF Agency:	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Executing Agency:	Forestry and Wildlife Committee, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of RK

Opening Page

PROJECT DETAILS:

Project Name: Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits.
Project ID: UNDP PIMS: 5696 GEF Project ID: 9193

Country:	Kazakhstan
Region:	Europe and Central Asia
Focal Area:	Multi-focal area (GEF-6): Biodiversity, Land Degradation, Sustainable Forest Management
Focal Area Objectives:	**BD-1** Improving sustainability of protected area system. Program 2: Nature's Last Stand: Expanding the Reach of the Global Protected Area Estate (Outcome 2.1: Increase in area of terrestrial and marine ecosystems of global significance in new protected areas and increase in threatened species of global significance protected in new protected areas; Outcome 2.2: Improved management effectiveness of new protected areas). **LD-3** Reduce pressures on natural resources by managing competing land uses in broader landscapes. Program 4: Scaling-up sustainable land management through the Landscape Approach (Outcome 3.1: Support mechanisms for SLM in wider landscapes established. Outcome 3.2: Integrated landscape management practices adopted by local communities based on gender sensitive needs). **SFM-1**: Maintained Forest Resources: Reduce the pressures on high conservation value forests by addressing the drivers of deforestation. **Outcome 1:** Cross-sector policy and planning approaches at appropriate governance scales, avoid loss of high conservation value forests. **Outcome 2:** Innovative mechanisms avoid the loss of high conservation value forest. **SFM-2** Enhanced Forest Management: Maintain flows of forest ecosystem services and improve resilience to climate change through SFM **Outcome 3:** Increased application of good management practices in all forests by relevant government, local community (both women and men) and private sector actors. **Outcome 4:** Increased contribution of sustained forest ecosystem services to national economies and local livelihoods of both women and men.
Funding Source:	GEF Trust Fund (GEF 6)
Implementing Agency:	United Nations Development Programme
Implementation Modality:	National Implementation
Executing Agency:	Forestry and Wildlife Committee, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of RK

FINANCIALS:

Project Preparation Grant:	US$ 150,000
GEF Project Grant:	US$ 8,069,178
Co-financing Total:	US$ 86,795,676
GEF Agency Fees:	US$ 766,572
Total Cost:	US$ 94,864,854

PROJECT TIMELINE

Received by GEF:	April 2016
PPG Implementation:	June 2016 to December 2017
Project Approved for Implementation:	March 13, 2018
Start Date:	April 28, 2018
Closing Date (Planned):	April 28, 2023
Closing Date (Actual):	October 2024

MIDTERM REVIEW DETAILS:

Midterm Review Timeframe: July – November 2020

TERMINAL EVALUATION DETAILS:

Terminal Evaluation August-September 2024
TE Consultants: Mark Anstey and Sergey Pizikov

TE Reporting Language: English

Acknowledgements:

The Terminal Evaluation Team is grateful for the assistance and cooperation of the Project Management Unit Team in particular the current Project Coordinator Bibigul Izbair, and the core project technical team (Aray Belgubayeva, Akmaral Agazhayeva, Dinara Savazova, Aiman Omarbekova and Talgat Taukenov) in providing logistics and support during the field mission, as well as valuable insight to the project. Further, to acknowledge with thanks, the information and feedback provided by interviewed project stakeholders, including the Chairperson of the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife and the many staff of PA's, Forestry Enterprise's, academic institutions, local government and others who generously provided their time and opinions that contributed to the conclusions of this report.

The Terminal Evaluation Final Report is the final deliverable of the Terminal Evaluation.

The Terminal Evaluation Final Report is a Contractual deliverable of the Terminal Evaluation and once accepted becomes in integral part of the project management cycle and documentation.

The Terminal Evaluation is initiated by the UNDP commissioning unit and is independent of the Implementing and Executing Agencies .

The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view, which are not necessarily shared by the Implementing and Executing Agencies or by the project partners and beneficiaries.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..... *vi*
Project Information Table ..... **vi**
Project description ..... **vi**
Evaluation ratings table ..... **vii**
Summary of findings, conclusions and lessons learned ..... **vii**
Lessons learned ..... **viii**
Recommendations summary table ..... **ix**
List of acronyms and abbreviations ..... *xi*
1.0 Introduction *1*
1.1 Purpose and objective of the Terminal Evaluation **1**
1.2 Scope **1**
1.3 Methodology **2**
1.4 Data collection and analysis **3**
1.5 Ethics **3**
1.6 Audit trail **3**
1.7 Limitations to the evaluation **4**
1.8 Structure of the Terminal Evaluation report **4**
Table 1 Terminal Evaluation Ratings Scales 4
2.0 Project Description *4*
2.1 Project start and duration, including milestones **4**
Table 2 Project timeline and key dates 5
2.2 Development context **5**
2.3 Problems that the project sought to address **7**
2.4 Project description and strategy **9**
Table 3: GEF-6 Project Targets Contributions to Global Environmental Benefits 9
Table 4: The Project Target Contributions to Global Environmental Benefits 10
Table 5 Project components, outcomes, outputs and indicators 11
Table 7 Project financing 16
2.5 Project Theory of Change **16**
Figure 1 Project Theory of Change 17
3.0 Findings *18*
3.1 Project formulation and design **18**
3.2 Results framework and indicators **20**
3.2.1 Assumptions and risks 22
Table 9 Project risk assessment 23
3.2.2 Lessons from other projects 25
3.2.4 Linkages between other interventions in the sector 27
3.3 Project implementation **27**
3.3.1 Adaptive management 27

3.3.2 Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements 27
3.3.3 Project finance and co-finance 28
3.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation at entry 31
3.3.5 Monitoring and evaluation implementation and overall assessment 37
3.3.5 UNDP implementation/ oversight 38
Figure 3 Implementation arrangements 38
3.3.6 Implementing Partner execution 39

3.4 Project results 39
3.4.1 Progress towards objective and expected results 39

3.5 Relevance 53

3.6 Effectiveness 54

3.7 Efficiency 54

3.8 Overall outcome 54

3.9 Country ownership 54

3.10 Gender 55

3.11 Other cross-cutting issues 55

3.12 Social and Environmental Standards 55

3.13 Sustainability 56

3.14 GEF additionality 56
Table 11 GEF alternatives 57

3.15 Scaling up/ replication effect 58

3.16 Progress to impact 59

4.0 Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons 61

4.1 Project design and development conclusions 61

4.1 Project management conclusions 61

4.2 Project outcome and impact conclusions 62

4.4 Recommendations 64

4.5 Lessons learned 65

Annexes 66
Annex 1 Terminal Evaluation Terms of Reference 67
Annex 2 Agenda of the Field Trips with International Consultant for Project Terminal Evaluation 76
Annex 3: People interviewed by TE Team 82
Annex 4 Documents reviewed 87
Annex 5 Detailed methodology 88
Annex 6 Evaluation Question Matrix 89
Annex 7 Signed Evaluation Consultant Agreements Form 96
Annex 8 Ratings Tables 97
Annex 9 Project areas 98
..... 98
Annex 10 Signed UNEG Code of Conduct form 101
Annex 11 Signed TE Report Clearance form 102
Annexed in a separate file: TE Audit Trail 102

Executive Summary

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	**Originally Planned closing date:**	April 28, 2023
Trust Fund:	GEF-6	**If revised, proposed closing date:**	October 2024
		Terminal Evaluation completion date:	Sept. .2024
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)	At EoP (USD
(1) GEF financing:	8,069,178	8,069,178	8,069,178
(2) UNDP contribution:	200,000	200,000	132,135
(3) Forest Wildlife Committee:	70,510,507	70,510,507	95,640,815
(4) Others:	16,085,169	16,085,169	29,750,388
(5) Total co-financing [2+3+4]:	86,795,676	86,795,676	125,523.342
Project Total Cost [1+5]:	94,864,854	94,864,854	133,718,039

Project description

1. 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 forests 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).

2. Through its "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2035*", Kazakhstan plans to increase the forest cover and also the total area of PAs in Kazakhstan. The targets are 5.4% (from 5.06%) of forest cover and 12.5% (from 11.3%) of PAs, both by 2035. 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.

3. The Project Document sets out a clear rationale for the project i.e. the current forest governance system lacks sufficient capacity to effectively manage high conservation value forests (HCVF), and forest ecosystems are underrepresented in the national protected area systems. These issues therefore need to be addressed if the biodiversity targets contained in the above 2030 “Concept” are to be achieved and negative impacts to biodiversity (as well as related LD and CC impacts) are to be prevented/reversed.

4. The project strategy was 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.

5. It focused on 3 different ecosystems: alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems and intervenes in five administrative regions: East Kazakhstan Province; Almaty and Zhetisu Regions, Turkestan (former South Kazakhstan) and Zhambyl Province.

6. Institutionally the project reach is to work with 11 newly planned PAs, 12 existing PAs, 8 forestry units, 12 rural districts, 4 villages, and 7 districts of Almaty region for landscape planning output.

7. The project objective was 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*". This was to be achieved through the delivery of three components (see below), 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.

8. The project was 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 original duration was 5 years to be completed by March 2023. A project "no-cost" extension of 18 months was granted (i.e. Ending October 2024). The implementing partner is the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources.

Evaluation ratings table

1. Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating
M&E design at entry	MS
M&E Plan Implementation	S
Overall Quality of M&E	S
2. Implementing Agency (IA) Implementation & Executing Agency (EA) Execution	**Rating**
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	S
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	S
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	S
3. Assessment of Outcomes	**Rating**
Relevance	HS
Effectiveness	S
Efficiency	S
Overall Project Outcome Rating	S
4. Sustainability	**Rating**
Financial sustainability	L
Socio-political sustainability	ML
Institutional framework and governance sustainability	L
Environmental sustainability	L
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	L

Summary of findings, conclusions and lessons learned

9. The project was extremely relevant and pertinent to the needs of Kazakhstan and directly addressed priority national policy issues. The relevance and political recognition and commitment to the forestry sector significantly increased during the project development and implementation evidenced by attention given in high level political statements and increased financial support to the forestry sector.

10. The project overall design was logical and well-articulated but, based on hindsight, over ambitious. The project M&E was broadly well designed but contained weakness that limited its overall meaningfulness in terms of measuring progress to impact.

11. Management of the project has been, from the evidence seen, very capable and pragmatic with intelligent adaptions during implementation to reach achievable goals (such as the adjustments of unfeasible targets, adaption of activities related to non-state forestry models, etc.). These changes have been discussed and agreed with the SC, UNDP and with support from the RTA. A very experienced, effective and extremely dedicated project team of experts was quickly recruited by UNDP at the project start and have provided continuity throughout the project. It is largely due to this important capacity that the project has managed to achieve the level of results that it has.

12. The project has achieved an impressive set of results and the scope and extent of these are fully recognized by the TE Team. Undoubtably the project has had a very significant impact on the process to increase forest protected area estate in Kazakhstan and on ensuring a secure basis for snow leopard monitoring and conservation.

13. In terms of impact outside of protected areas it has made very significant contributions to the evolution of more effective approaches to state and non-state forest management and to district level methodologies/approaches to more integrated planning that better recognize forestry and natural resource use issues within the larger landscape context (and integrate their consideration with other socio-economic issues). The successful piloting in 7 districts of integrated land use planning approaches (zoning) is considered by the TE Team to be extremely important achievement by the project with very wide-ranging potential benefits in the future.

14. The project has contributed significantly to the conceptualization of “eco-tourism” in protected areas and the initial introduction of methods to manage and regulate such activities in a way that is compatible with the objectives of PAs. The project has replicated important natural resource management approaches in the “buffer areas” (such as the pilot pasture sites, Eco-DAMU loans, etc.) from which additional experience has been gained that can contribute to these initiatives being refined and strengthened in the future.

15. In short, the TE Team have been impressed by the scope of achievements, the dedication of the project team, and the level of commitment of all national stakeholders. However, though the project has (just) met most of the adjusted EoP targets, a closer analysis of the results indicates it has fallen short of the overall intended impact of the project document in some significant ways that do have implications for impact.

16. Part of the reason for this shortfall are possibly related to the disruption during early implementation by the COVID Pandemic. However, 3 additional reason are identified by the evaluation: firstly, the unrealistic overall ambition of the project (both geographically and in terms of the number of expected outputs), secondly, some loss of technical direction and prioritization during implementation (for example the over concentration of efforts and time to HCVF activities at the expense of more fundamental forestry management strengthening efforts that would address key threats to such areas), and thirdly, the less than optimal use of international technical expertise that could have helped address the technical direction issue (recruitment of consultants for specific tasks rather than overall technical guidance from the outset).

17. Based on the above points, the overall evaluation rating of the project is **Satisfactory** – although in the strictest sense the project fell short of the expected impact this rating is felt justified as the project document is considered over ambitious in the first place, and it is clear that the project has, despite this and other challenges achieved impressive and important results that are very well appreciated by all stakeholders.

Lessons learned

18. This evaluation draws 3 lessons from the project’s implementation:

19. Project Design and M&E needs to incorporate a realistic awareness of the time that legislative and institutional process occur: One major issue facing the project in terms of meeting the targets and expectations in the project document was the assumption that the project has the direct possibility to complete all many processes (such as PA legal establishment). Clearly this is not the case, and though projects can do much to ensure the conditions/ circumstances for such processes are in place, and provide follow up while project lasts, there will always be a risk that they will take longer to complete than expected or will fail for reasons beyond the project control. This reality needs to be better recognized in the design of Outputs and activities and in the formulation of M&E indicators and targets.

20. Make the most efficient use of international technical support: International technical support, particularly for initiatives new to the country, needs to be brought on board at the earliest stages possible to facilitate "getting off on the right foot" i.e, to ensure the wider experience can be applied at the start of implementation to plan in detail what are the priorities and approaches best suited to achieve the expected impact. A frequent problem the TE Team have observed is that projects often attempt to develop international consultant TORs based on an imperfect understanding of what needs to be done which then leads to inefficiency of practical implementation. Apart from helping to ensure planned implementation is strengthened and project team understanding is built, such early assistance then allows the project to identify more clearly and systematically what further support they will need during implementation and thus ensure TORs for international (and national) consultants are based on the real needs.

21. Ensure greater emphasis in future on supporting beneficiaries' financial sustainability post project: One major lesson learned from the interviews, particularly in Ridder, is the beneficiaries' lack of planning for sustainability. Most participants were heavily reliant on ongoing external support and had not considered how to fund their activities independently. This suggests a critical need for training on financial sustainability, resource mobilization, and long-term planning. Future projects should ensure that beneficiaries are equipped to maintain operations after the project concludes, reducing dependency on external actors (Quote -"We haven't really thought about how we'll manage without the support. Right now, we just depend on the equipment and assistance we've been given.")

Recommendations summary table

Rec #	TE Recommendation	Entity Responsible	Time frame
A	Category 1: Project closure		
A.1	Develop a more holistic Exit strategy that adds clarification on how project achievements, experience and lessons learned will be captured and passed on within the future UNDP programme	PMU and UNDP CO	October 2024
A.2	Complete all required GEF tracking tools, specifically SFM and FAO EX-ACT by project closure.	PMU	October 2024
A.3	Undertake an in-depth evaluation and analysis of the new and innovative approaches and mechanisms introduced by the project to ensure their real-world application and usefulness is clearly identified, lessons learned are captured, and future replication (if justified) is supported (specifically: Forestry management plans, district ILMP approach/zoning, private forestry models, TSA). *NB – given the limited remaining time UNDP CO may have to identify other means to achieve these evaluations (see recommendation B.1)*	PMU	December 2025

A4	Ensure follow-up and support to the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife regarding the various legal adjustments, PA establishment processes, Forest Management plan pilots, etc. in order to minimize the sustainability risk in this regard (during remaining project duration) *NB – given the limited remaining time UNDP CO may have to identify other means to ensure this follow up.*	PMU	December 2025
B	Category 2: Follow-up		
B.1	During future project development (or the initial implementation of new projects), ensure the critical review and analysis of past initiatives that are planned to be replicated or upscaled in order to ensure their maximum utility and impact is fully understood. Two specific examples would be the TSA approach and the Eco-Damu Loan mechanism.	UNDP CO, UNDP RTA	Ongoing
B.2	Ensure that key experience, initiatives, and lessons learned are integrated into the new national "Biodiversity Concept" currently under development (alignment with GBF 2030)- In particular: GBF targets 1: Plan and Manage all Areas to Reduce Biodiversity Loss (integrated planning at local level – district zoning experience from 7 districts), GBF Target 2 (Restore 30% of all Degraded Ecosystems) and GBF Target 3 (Conserve 30% of Land, Waters and Seas).	FWC, UNDP CO	During next 12 m.
B.3	Ensure that in future projects greater emphasis and attention is paid to the inception phase to ensure that adjustments that are needed are made and an in-depth practical plan for implementation of all components is fully elaborated in consultation with all stakeholders. Ideally international technical support should be available at this stage to support this process.	UNDP CO	Ongoing
B.4	Initiate a process to establish a roster system and data base of national experts and consultants in order to facilitate the future retention and timely recruitment of important national capacity and expertise that is available in the country in regard to biodiversity, sustainable rural development, etc	UNDP CO	Ongoing
B.5	Ensure that when projects undertake to test or demonstrate new approaches or management systems the appropriate international technical assistance is employed at the *planning stage* so their expertise can help guide the overall technical direction of such initiatives. Ideally such inputs should take place at the inception phase (see above).	UNDP CO, RTA	Ongoing
B.6	That UNDP (CO and RTA) undertake consultation with the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife, and other relevant key partners, in order to develop a longer-term cooperation framework to guide future systematic project development that maximizes continuity and synergy towards global / national targets.	UNDP CO, RTA, FWC, Others	In next 12 m
B.7	Prioritize in future relevant projects and initiatives on strengthening and capacity support of the hunting farm system in Kazakhstan as a potentially key component of socio-economically sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity in productive landscapes.	UNDP CO, RTA, FWC	Oingoing
B.8	Support in future projects the opportunity for female staff and representatives in PAs, Forestry structures, local councils, etc. to network, share experience / act as mentors and advisers to each other.	UNDP CO	Ongoing

List of acronyms and abbreviations

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 Results 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

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and objective of the Terminal Evaluation

22. The UNDP and GEF monitoring, and evaluation (M&E) policies and procedures require all UNDP-implemented and GEF-funded projects to undergo a terminal evaluation (TE) upon completion of implementation. Therefore, UNDP has commissioned the terminal evaluation by contracting an independent evaluation team consisting of a National Consultant (NC) and an International Consultant (IC). The TE was conducted following the UNDP-GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and facilitated by the UNDP Country Office, Kazakhstan.

23. The purpose of the "Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits[1]" Project terminal evaluation as per TORs (Annex 1), is to assess the achievement of project results and to draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of the benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP and Government programming.

1.2 Scope

24. The evaluation focuses primarily on assessing the performance of the project in light of the accomplished outcomes, objectives and effects using the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, as defined and explained in the UNDP Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-supported and GEF-financed Projects[2]. These are:

    Relevance: assesses how the project relates to the development priorities at the local, regional and national levels for climate change and is coherent with the main objectives of GEF focal areas. It also assesses whether the project addressed the needs of targeted beneficiaries at the local, regional and national levels.
    Effectiveness: measures the extent to which the project achieved the expected outcomes and objectives, how risks and risk mitigation were being managed, and what lessons can be drawn for other similar projects in the future.
    Efficiency: the measure of how economically resources (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results. It also examines how efficient were partnership arrangements (linkages between institutions / organizations) for the project.
    Impact: examines the positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by the development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. It looks at whether the project has achieved the intended changes or improvements (technical, economic, social, cultural, political, and ecological). In GEF terms, impact / results include direct project outputs, short to medium-term outcomes, and longer-term impact including global environmental benefits, replication effects and other local effects including on communities.
    Sustainability: is the ability of the project interventions to continue delivering benefits for an extended time after completion; it examines the project's sustainability in financial, socio-political, institutional framework and governance, environmental terms.

25. Using these evaluation criteria, the terminal evaluation covers all activities supported by UNDP-GEF and completed by the project management unit (PMU) and Government agencies as well as activities that other collaborating partners including beneficiaries participated in.

26. The temporal scope of the TE covers all activities of the project beginning with the Project Identification Form (PIF) through to the current final period of implementation evaluation in late 2024 (approximately one month before project closure).

27. The evaluation has been conducted in an ethical and participatory manner and to provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful.

[1] Henceforth referred to as the "Sustainable Forest Management project" or "the project".

[2] http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/GEF/TE_GuidanceforUNDP-supportedGEF-financedProjects.pdf

1.3 Methodology

28. As stated above, the Evaluation adopted a participatory and consultative approach ensuring close engagement with government counterparts, UNDP Office, the PMU, and key stakeholders based at the local level (state, local communities, NGOs, private sector).
29. Key aspects of the evaluation approach included:

    Defining the scope of the Evaluation's focus: through discussions with the PMU and UNDP and partner agencies, the areas and extent of inquiry to be defined.

    Emphasis on constructive analytical dialogue: with the project partners; providing the project participants with an opportunity to explain the strategies applied to date, the challenges that have been faced and the inevitable nuances that affect a project. In this way the Evaluation is able to deepen the partner's conceptual understanding of the key issues underlying the project and the driving forces that have shaped, and continue, shaping events.

    Critical analysis of the project design: the original design and strategic approach was challenged against best practices and in light of the project's experience to consider whether there were flaws in its logic and approach or whether there were assumptions, known or unknown, that have not proven correct.

    Critical reflection on the measures of project success: measuring progress and performance against the indicators provided in the project's SRF with the participation of the project partners and reflecting on their relevance and adequacy.

    Assessment of the project's performance and impact to date: analysing the performance and progress against the indicators and reasonably expected impacts of the project's implementation.

    An examination of process: critically examining the project's actions and activities to ensure that there was sufficient effort in ensuring that elements of capacity building and participation, establishing processes and mechanisms, that would enable the targets to be achieved in the longer term rather than being *expedient*.

    Synthesizing plausible future impacts: using analytical methods to identify plausible future outcomes resulting from the impact of the project in the future and how these might affect the project's Theory of Change[3] (ToC)[4].

    Jointly defining the conclusions and recommendations with the PMU and UNDP: ensuring that there is a common understanding of any weaknesses or shortcomings in the project's implementation and an understanding of the reasons for, and the appropriate detail of, any recommended actions that might be necessary.
30. The methodology used is detailed in Annex 8.
31. Gender was considered through participation and inclusion by incorporating gender and women's rights dimensions into the evaluation approach, method and analysis to determine how the project affected men and women differently.
32. As directed in the 2020 GEF Terminal Evaluation guidelines, specific Evaluation Rating Criteria were used for the following aspects of the project's implementation and results:

Project Implementation:

Monitoring and Evaluation: design at entry, implementation, and overall assessment of M&E.
Implementing Agency (UNDP) and Executing Agency, overall project oversight / implementation and execution.

Project Results (outcomes):

Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and overall project outcome.
Sustainability: financial, socio-political, institutional framework and governance, environmental, overall likelihood of sustainability.

33. Project performance was evaluated and rated using the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact using the standard rating scales (Table 1). The primary reference points for assessing the performance were the indicators and targets set out in the Strategic Results Framework (SRF), with consideration given to contextual factors.

[3] Theory of Change Primer A STAP document, December 2019

[4] At the time of the project's formulation it was not a requirement to include a ToC in the Project Document. However, a ToC was developed during the Midterm Review (MTR).

34. The MTR (2020) reached eleven key findings and made eleven recommendations to address weaknesses in the project identified during the MTR. In addition, 6 lessons learned were highlighted. The TE will examine validity of the MTR findings (with the benefit of hindsight) and the management response to these recommendations, assess any changes made, and their overall effect on the project's performance, impact and achievements.

1.4 Data collection and analysis

35. An initial document review was carried out to define the scope and focus of the TE[5]. This was followed by a country mission with visits to field sites and interviews with the PMU, UNDP, key stakeholders and beneficiaries.

36. The data collection tools included a structured questionnaire for key farmers and interview guides for discussions with beneficiaries based on the evaluation questions matrix (Annex 8). These were structured according to different stakeholder groups. The tools were developed by the evaluators focusing on the evaluation criteria and major outcomes planned and adjusted after a scoping exercise carried out during the inception phase.

37. Generally, information obtained from interviews was cross-checked against more than one source and field observations[6] and project documents where possible[7]. A detailed account of the data collection and analysis is provided in Annex 7.

1.5 Ethics

38. The evaluation was conducted following the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluators (Evaluation Consultant Code of Conduct Agreement - attached Annex 9 and 18).

39. The rights and dignity of all stakeholders were respected, including interviewees, project participants (project, UNDP, Government staff), beneficiaries (beneficiary institutions and communities) and other evaluation stakeholders including co-financing partners. The evaluators explained and preserved the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants so that those who participate in the evaluation are free from external pressure and that their involvement in no way disadvantages them.

40. The final report of the evaluation does not indicate a specific source of citations or qualitative data to preserve this confidentiality. The confidentiality of stakeholders was ensured throughout, and consultation processes were appropriately contextualised and culturally sensitive, with attention given to issues such as gender empowerment and fair representation for vulnerable groups, wherever possible.

41. Whilst every effort was made to reflect the inputs of stakeholders fairly and accurately in the report, the evaluation ratings, conclusions and key recommendations are those of the evaluators, they do not necessarily reflect the opinions and views of the Implementing and Executing Agencies or other project partners. As such they are not binding on any individual or institutional stakeholder.

1.6 Audit trail

42. The final draft of the TE report is accompanied by an "audit trail" of the evaluation process, the review comments to the draft report compiled along with responses from the TE team and documented in an annex separate from the main report.

---

[5] Over 60 project related documents and reports as well as Excel tables, minutes, peripheral documents, etc.

[6] 64 stakeholders were interviewed and 9 site visits.

[7] Additional documents were provided by some stakeholder after the first draft was reviewed and were subsequently included in the final draft.

1.7 Limitations to the evaluation

43. The reported active cases of Covid-19 were very low during the evaluation mission and interviews with stakeholders were possible with minimal restrictions (e.g. social distancing, etc.) therefore, there were no specific limitations to the evaluation. An independent interpreter accompanied the International Consultant during the country mission and field visits and the most of the project's documentation is written in English. In the case of documents in Russian or Kazakh auto-translation was adequate to evaluate content. Despite the very large geographical scope of the project a reasonable sample of the project sites were possible to visit (by dividing the TE team into two sets of field visits). As such there were no significant limitations to the evaluation process. However, it should be noted that the large geographical scope did challenge the TE process given a relatively short period for its completion.

1.8 Structure of the Terminal Evaluation report

44. This report is structured in line with the guidance given on conducting TEs of UNDP-GEF projects and in accordance with the TE Terms of Reference (ToR) provided in Annex 1:

Section 1 provides an executive summary which gives basic information on the project, a brief description of the project and its progress to date, the TE ratings and achievement table, summary of conclusions and recommendations.

Section 2 provides a description of the review process and methodology.

Section 3 describes the background and context of the "Sustainable Forest Management" project, including the problems that the project sought to address, the objectives, outcomes and means of monitoring and evaluation, the implementation arrangements, a timeline and key milestones as well as a summary of project stakeholders.

Section 4 presents the main findings of the TE on all aspects including the project's strategy, its progress towards results, the performance of its implementation and efficiency of adaptive management as well as assessing the sustainability of the project outcomes and the TE conclusions, recommendations and main lessons.

Table 1 Terminal Evaluation Ratings Scales

Ratings for Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation/Oversight, Execution, Relevance	Sustainability ratings:
6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS): exceeds expectations and/or no shortcomings 5 = Satisfactory (S): meets expectations and/or no or minor shortcomings 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS): more or less meets expectations and/or some shortcomings 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): somewhat below expectations and/or significant shortcomings 2 = Unsatisfactory (U): substantially below expectations and/or major shortcomings 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe shortcomings Unable to Assess (U/A): available information does not allow an assessment	4 = Likely (L): negligible risks to sustainability 3 = Moderately Likely (ML): moderate risks to sustainability 2 = Moderately Unlikely (MU): significant risks to sustainability 1 = Unlikely (U): severe risks to sustainability Unable to Assess (U/A): Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability

2.0 Project Description

2.1 Project start and duration, including milestones

45. The Project Identification Form (PIF) was approved on March 2016 for incorporation into the GEF Council Work Programme for the GEF-6 replenishment cycle. The Project's preparatory grant (PPG) was approved by the GEF on 11 March 2016 with the concept being approved on 09 June 2016. The project development phase lasted for 18 months - from June 2016 to December 2017. The full project proposal

was submitted to GEF for review and approval on 19 January 2018 and resubmitted again on February 22, 2018, following comment and revision. The project was cleared by the Local Project Approval Committee (LPAC) on March 12, 2018, followed by the GEF's final approval on March 13, 2018.

46. The project document was signed by UNDP Deputy Resident Representative on 26 April 2018 and officially counter-signed by Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture (on behalf of the Government of Kazakhstan) on 28 April 2018, marking the official start date of the project. The five-year project was originally planned to terminate in April 2023.

47. The Inception workshop took place on the 10th of May 2018 and the inception report was finalized in July 2018. It should be noted that the inception workshop took place only 13 days after project signature, but the inception report was only prepared 2.5 months after project start.

48. Following the MTR, which had to be undertaken remotely due to COVID (July to November 2020) a request was made and granted for a 18 month extension giving a revised closing date of the October 2024.

Table 2 Project timeline and key dates

Preparation	
PIF approved	March 2016
STAP review	March 2016
PPG approved	March 2016
CEO approval of Project Document	March 2018
Implementation	
Project Document signature & official start-up	April 2018
Appointment of Project Manager	April 2018
Inception workshop	May 2018
Inception Report	July 2018
COVID pandemic lockdown	March -August 2020
Midterm Review	July to November 2020
18 months no-cost extension approval	Not clear – no date on clearance letter.
Originally planned project end date	April 2023
Revised Planned project end	October 2024
Terminal Evaluation	August-Sept. 2024

2.2 Development context

49. The Project Document has a well-articulated description of the development context. In summary it states:

50. 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).

51. The **Forest Governance** system in Kazakhstan has some controversial attributes that hamper the sound management of the forests in a broad landscape. The central forest governing body (Forestry and wildlife Committee) controls only 20 % of the forested area with the fixed annual budget and relevant competences. These are mainly the forests within the protected areas.

52. **The remaining 80% of forests** are managed by the regional governments that are usually have less resources and competences, while the management objectives of both types of managed forests is to maintain of ecological and socio-economic functions of the forest ecosystems.

53. The forests outside the protected areas, having the same protection functions, sometimes are more vulnerable both in terms of natural and human caused threats. Reassessment and restructuring of the forest governance system could significantly increase the potential benefits of healthy forests ecosystems.
54. The state forest management planning is focused on the instructed processes and production of the formal reports rather than adaptive management with clearly sets science-based targets both for individual forest characteristics, and effectiveness of ecosystem functions in a landscape.
55. As a result of such governance, the defined afforestation targets are not realistic and achievable in the existing silvicultural systems, the data on ecological characteristics of the state forests is not available, the existing data is not properly analysed to recommend feasible measures, the management targets are not specific and accurately monitored, the intersectoral coordination is poor and inefficient to maintain important ecological functions of the forests, the threats monitoring is poorly structured and documented.

56. 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.

57. 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 pool; and saxaul forests (desert and semi-desert shrubs) playing a critical role in supporting local community livelihoods in drylands.

58. 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.

59. The overall natural resources management system in Kazakhstan tend to ignore the potential and benefits of integrated **threats assessment** approach as a basis for management planning and monitoring of ecosystems, species and habitats. F orest ecosystems are heavily impacted by human caused threats, including inappropriate regulation of the water use and releases, overgrazing due to poor pasture management practices and regulatory framework, illegal cutting, overharvesting of forest sub-products, linear infrastructure, unregulated tourism, and fires.
60. There are no formal mechanisms and sufficient capacities on the ground to properly record, document, and analyse these threats and integrate the reduction measures into the regional and rural development programs. There is also no capacities for identifying the best practices for addressing the threats and successful examples.
61. Considering the climate zoning of Kazakhstan, the forested areas are the most populated areas with dynamically developing agriculture. The existing forest management model is based on “cutting off” and protecting the forests from the human interventions and existing and potential threats, which is sometimes just impossible to complete due to limited agricultural resources, and sometimes hampers the socio-economic development of the region.
62. The project needs to change such paradigm of perceiving the forest resources by capturing the effects of multiple ecosystem services (like pollination, pest control, nutrient cycling, water regulation etc.) on the agricultural indicators (crop yield, soil fertility, pastures’ quality, income) and translate those into comprehensive **landscape plans and regional development programs.**
63. There are at least three major sectors with relevant state institutions that are engaged in sustainable forest management – nature resources, agriculture, and water resources. Even though all three are roofed under the same Ministry of agriculture, the practice proved that there is no any long-term or operational inter-sectoral coordination between these sectors; each of them is regulated by a separate program, and there is no any officially approved effective tool for planning and monitoring of crosscutting issues. This is also true for the regional level, where 80% of managed forests belong.

Regional government has more authority and wiliness to interact, but they have poor capacity in landscape planning and developing integrated action plans.

64. The government of Kazakhstan declares 10% forest cover level as a target until 2030. This is intended to be achieved through improved afforestation practices with a focus on supporting and stimulating the developing of **private forests**. However, currently there is little experience of private / community / joint forest management approaches and a lack of policy, legislative or administrative mechanisms to support it. Some important limitations include: 1) Ineffective policies, incentives and legal context, 2. Lack of practical experience and examples/models, 3). Remaining disincentives (short lease terms, etc), 4). High competition from outside (cheap imports).
65. As a result, the problems and threats to forest ecological functions are mounting up, agricultural resources are affected by land degradation, local communities become deprived of opportunities to increase their income. The changing water regime caused by uncoordinated regulation of water use and water releases at the power station dumps is a good example of how one sector practically destroys the ecosystems and agricultural lands.

2.3 Problems that the project sought to address

66. In relation to the above context and root causes, the project document identified three main barriers to the effective conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of forest and land resources.
67. **Barrier 1:** First barrier described in the project document was - that there is not currently 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. There is government and political will to expand the protected area system, and Kazakhstan is committed to meeting the international target of 10% national protected area coverage, but to develop proposals for establishing scientifically and socio- economically rationalized protected areas at a large scale (the project aimed to establish new protected areas covering over 1.8 million hectares) requires significant inputs.
68. In addition, there is insufficient capacity for effective management of PAs in many forest PAs, as demonstrated by the average METT score of 45 among PAs with baseline METTs completed for this project. Therefore, the first part of the project's strategy, as described in the next section, is to make a significant contribution to the establishment of new forest PAs and to the strengthening of the management of new and existing forest PAs.
69. **Barrier 2:** The second major barrier described in the project document 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.
70. The current institutional framework of forest management units managed by regional governments is inefficient and does not allow necessary strengthening of capacity for forest management. Ensuring sustainable forest and land management requires creative approaches based on the most scientifically and technically current knowledge about how ecosystems function, and about how people interact with ecosystems. While Kazakhstan, like many former Soviet states, has a long history of forest management, the existing forest management regimes are by and large based on outdated concepts and approaches, from Soviet times.
71. Sustainable forest management requires a diverse array of management approaches, based on the current technology and research. The project will introduce a number of innovative approaches, models, and techniques, including the introduction of HCVF management practices, forest inventory and management planning that incorporates remote sensing data, the use of information technology for effective pasture management, public-private partnerships, economic valuation of ecological resources, and sustainable forest management incorporating climate change.
72. **Barrier 3:** The third major barrier described in the project document was - insufficient data and lack of coordination for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest and land management. There is currently poor coordination amongst national stakeholders responsible for biological monitoring, and wildlife law enforcement. In addition, data and information on biodiversity monitoring is not aggregated, or analysed in a comprehensive way. Different bodies are responsible for monitoring biodiversity in different areas depending on the management mandate that each area is under (i.e.

state forest fund land, protected areas, hunting concessions, community forest and pastureland, etc.). 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 neighbouring countries with respect to snow leopard monitoring, despite the fact that all of the snow leopard landscapes in Kazakhstan are transboundary. Therefore, the project will undertake multiple measures to improve coordination amongst stakeholders with respect to biodiversity monitoring and wildlife law enforcement and improve data management and knowledge dissemination.

73. *Project alignment with national priorities:* In 2014, 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.

74. 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.

75. 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.

76. 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)
77. 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*".

78. Thus, within this context, 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 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 in numerous statements. A practical demonstration of this increased national commitment has been the significant increase in PA and forestry sector salaries (approx. doubling) and greater investments in infrastructure and equipment (mainly related to fire fighting equipment). The project was well positioned to contribute to these priorities.

2.4 Project description and strategy

79. The project strategy was 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.

80. It focused on 3 different ecosystems: alpine forest, tugai forest, and saxaul forest ecosystems and intervenes in five administrative regions: East Kazakhstan Province; Almaty and Zhetisu Province; Turkestan (former South Kazakhstan) and Zhambyl Province.

81. Institutionally the project reach is to work with 11 newly planned PAs, 12 existing PAs, 8 forestry units, 12 rural districts, 4 villages, and 7 districts of Almaty region for landscape planning output.

82. 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 (see below), 6 outcomes and 21 outputs:

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

83. The project was 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 original duration was 5 years to be completed by March 2023. A project "no-cost" extension of 18 months was granted (i.e. Ending October 2024). The implementing partner is the Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources.

84. The GEF Focal Areas, programs and Outcomes that the project was designed to contribute to were:

Table 3: GEF-6 Project Targets Contributions to Global Environmental Benefits

Focal Area	*FA Objective*	*Program*	*Outcome*
BD-1	Improving sustainability of protected area system.	Program 2: Nature's Last Stand: Expanding the Reach of the Global Protected Area Estate	**Outcome 2.1**: Increase in area of terrestrial and marine ecosystems of global significance in new protected areas and increase in threatened species of global significance protected in new protected areas; **Outcome 2.2**: Improved management effectiveness of new protected areas).
LD-3	Reduce pressures on natural resources by	Program 4: Scaling-up	**Outcome 3.1:** Support mechanisms for SLM in wider landscapes established.

	managing competing land uses in broader landscapes.	sustainable land management through the Landscape Approach	**Outcome 3.2**: Integrated landscape management practices adopted by local communities based on gender sensitive needs
SFM-1	Maintained Forest Resources: Reduce the pressures on high conservation value forests by addressing the drivers of deforestation.		**Outcome 1:** Cross-sector policy and planning approaches at appropriate governance scales, avoid loss of high conservation value forests. **Outcome 2:** Innovative mechanisms avoid the loss of high conservation value forest.
SFM-2	Enhanced Forest Management: Maintain flows of forest ecosystem services and improve resilience to climate change through SFM		**Outcome 3:** Increased application of good management practices in all forests by relevant government, local community (both women and men) and private sector actors. **Outcome 4:** Increased contribution of sustained forest ecosystem services to national economies and local livelihoods of both women and men.

85. The expected project contribution to Global Environmental Benefits were described in the GEF CEO Endorsement document as in the table below.

Table 4: The Project Target Contributions to Global Environmental Benefits[8]

Corporate Results	**Replenishment Targets**	**Project Targets**
1. Maintain globally significant biodiversity and the ecosystem goods and services that it provides to society	Improved management of landscapes and seascapes covering 300 million hectares	*4,720,000* hectares*
2. Sustainable land management in production systems (agriculture, rangelands, and forest landscapes)	120 million hectares under sustainable land management	*4,407,829** hectares*
4. Support to transformational shifts towards a low- emission and resilient development path	750 million tons of CO_{2e} mitigated (include both direct and indirect)	*5,838,328**** metric tons

86. These Project Targets were elaborated in the notes to the above table (in the CEO Endorsement document) as follows:

a). The project will improve the management of approximately 4.72 million ha of PAs (2.19 million ha of existing PAs (results from Output 1.2.1), and planned approximately 2.53 million ha of new PAs (results from Outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.2); the project will implement 350,000 ha of biodiversity buffer zones and corridors as part of integrated natural resource management plans in six districts (Output 2.1.4), but this is likely to include significant portions of the HCVF and pastureland indicated under indicator 2 below, and so is not added in order to avoid double-counting,

b). The project will ensure adoption of SLM and SFM practices in forest management plans of six forest units with forest pasture area of 1,175,700 ha (results from Output 2.1.1), in 720,000 ha of forest-pasture lands in rural districts (results from Output 2.1.2), and in 2,512,129 ha through six district integrated natural resource management plans (results from Output 2.1.4),

c). As per FAO EX-ACT tool for the 5-year project duration plus 15-year post-project "lifetime" benefits, including both biomass and soil carbon for avoided forest degradation and afforestation (partner co-financed), and soil carbon for reduced degradation in grasslands.

87. The expected results and means of measurement (indicators) are set out in Table 6 below. It will be achieved through the delivery of three components (see below), 6 outcomes and 21 outputs.

[8] See CEO Endorsement document

Table 5 Project components, outcomes, outputs and indicators

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.	
Objective indicators: 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)	
Expected Results	**Outcome Indicators**
Component 1: - Improved representation of globally important forest biodiversity and improved management of protected conservation-important forests (2 Outcomes and 3 Outputs) **Outcome 1.1:** Prevention of loss of conservation important forest and associated non-forest ecosystems and their biodiversity *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. *Output 1.1.2 :* Newly established forest PAs are operationalized with improved management effectiveness, including community management mechanisms **Outcome 1.2:** Improved management of protected conservation important forests, through HCVF-specific management measures in PA forests *Output 1.2.1.* Development and implementation of forest-specific management measures in PA management plans for PAs, covering 839 567 ha of HCVF	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 (3 Outcomes, 12 Outputs) **Outcome 2.1:** Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits (6 Outputs) *Output 2.1.1*: Revision and implementation of Forest Management Plans for 10 forestry units bordering forest PAs covering [5 365 100] hectares (with [2 783 000] forested area), including community input mechanisms *Output 2.1.2*. Forest pasture management plans (including grazing plans) developed and implemented with local community engagement in X pilot sites bordering PAs covering XXX,XXX ha of forest pastures *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 *Output 2.1.4* Integrated land and forest management plans developed and implemented in six administrative districts through community consultation covering XXX,XXX ha surrounding newly established PAs, including designation of buffer zones and corridors	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

Output 2.1.5 Tourism management strategies developed for forest PAs in cooperation with local communities, strategies integrated in PA management plans and under implementation *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 **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 (3 Outputs) *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). *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 *Output 2.2.3*. Training program and improved forest research and data analysis capacities to support implementation and uptake of HCVF management approaches **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 (3 Outputs). *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 *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. *Output 2.3.3.* TSA is integrated into capacity development and professional training courses.	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 (1 Outcome and 3 Outputs) ***Outcome 3.1:*** Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge (3 Outputs). *Output 3.1.1.* Enhanced enforcement capacities of wildlife protection agencies through: (i) improved effectiveness of monitoring, apprehending, and prosecution of illegal activities; (ii) training materials developed and rolled out for wildlife protection agencies. *Output 3.1.2* Targeted additional implementation of Kazakhstan's National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan and international engagement in GSLEP *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.	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

Table 6 Summary List of Main Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Role
Government agencies	
Forestry and Wildlife Committee (FWC) of the Ministry of Agriculture	Implementing Partner for the project. It is the key government institution responsible for SFM, regulating biodiversity, including the establishment and management of protected areas, hunting areas and forests. It oversees and seeks state funding for the establishment/ expansion of PAs, including negotiations with local authorities and stakeholders, through its regional offices, preparation and justification of the relevant budgets. FWC ensures conservation and recovery of the threatened and endangered species and that efficient information management system is in place. FWC will initiate and lobby all policy amendments within the ministries and the Parliament.
Committee of Water Resources	This Committee and its regional branches are responsible for management of water resources to meet the needs of water users of different sectors of the economy in a sustainable way. The Committee and its branches will contribute to development of landscape-level planning frameworks and development and implementation of the sustainable water use models at the regional and district level.
Ministry of Agriculture	Develops and implements state policy and programs in agriculture sector. The Ministry will contribute to development of landscape-level management plans and implementation of sustainable use alternatives in rangeland and agricultural productive landscapes.
Ministry of Energy	**Inherited the mandate of the Ministry of Environment** after it was abolished. Current role of the Ministry of Energy is to develop state policies and programs on environmental conservation and sustainable development, and coordinate with the Secretariat of the CBD. One of the key players in development of planning frameworks that focus on the economic potentials (rather than the constraints) of safeguarding and maintaining ecosystem services in the districts. Ensure that its monitoring and data collection systems under its Environmental Information Center are harmonized with the decision support systems developed by the project. MEP and its Oblast branches are responsible for Environmental
Stakeholder	**Role**
	impact assessments, which are needed for any of the planned activities related to conservation or use of nature resources.
Ministry of National Economy, Ministry on Investments and Development, Ministry of Finance	These three ministries will be engaged in economic valuation of the ecosystem services, development of the PES schemes, demonstration of TSA project, and drafting and lobbying the relevant policies and regulations.

JSC "Samrul Energo"	Is a 100% shareholder of the Hydro Power Stations that impact the floodplain forests of Ili and Syrdarya Rivers by regulating their hydrological regime. The project will engage the company for implementation of the threats analysis for floodplain forests and development of recommendations on integrated water use planning with the relevant PAs and forestries through the TSA tools.
Local communities and local administrations	
Land Management Committee (oblast and rayon-level branches)	At a national is responsible for development and implementation of state policy and programs on land use planning and land management, geodesies and cartography. Oblast branches are responsible for key decisions related to zoning and allocation of land use permits for agriculture, mining, etc at oblast level. One of the key players in development of planning frameworks that focus on the economic potentials (rather than the constraints) of safeguarding and maintaining ecosystem services in the districts.
Administrative Units of 12 existing PAs and new PAs	These are the key beneficiaries of activities on protected area expansion and strengthening management effectiveness. Coordinate negotiations with oblast/ rayon administrations and other relevant government agencies regarding zoning arrangements and the creation of buffer zones and corridors, as well as adaptive landscape management to ensure that the PA is managed in tandem with the management of production activities occurring in the larger landscape.
Forestry Administrations of the target areas	Forest units are state funded legal entities operating under the regional administrations aimed at management of the forest fund lands outside the protected areas system comprising about 80 % of forested area in Kazakhstan. The project will focus on improving capacity of the the forestries within the boundaries of the project sites.
Oblast Akimats	Grant official endorsement of land use projects for PAs of local importance. Allocate land for planned PAs. Disseminate the project's lessons learned related to landscape-level planning and management and advocate for replication of this ecosystem approach throughout Oblast. Assist in community mobilization and awareness activities.
Rayon akimats	Lead the development and implementation of the landscape-level management plans by providing coordinating inputs of all stakeholders
Non-government organizations	
There is a number of NGOs that are already engaged in conservation actions in the selected regions. The tentative list may include: Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan, Eco-Altay, Biosphere, Eco-Museum, Green Salvation, Snow Leopard Fund, Avalon. All these NGOs will be engaged in variety of activities relevant for their field of expertise.	
Research institutions	
Institute of Zoology	Is already implementing a camera trapping project, but still no data and publications are available. The institute will not only provide expertise related to biodiversity in Kazakhstan, but will also be a beneficiary of the project through improved capacity in using new tools of data processing like biostatistics and population/habitat modelling.
Institute of Geography	Has vast experience in producing data maps for landscape planning and management. So considering the vast and complicated areas of four landscapes of the project, this institute will contribute to this work.

Institute of Botany	Will be engaged in surveys and research on habitat status to be integrated into the SL habitat management plans and establishment of new PAs. Will also be involved in the landscape planning activities.
Forestry Institute and Kazlesproekt (State project design institute under CFH)	Will contribute their research, experience and expertise for training and site visits related to monitoring of the habitat and introduction of new information management systems.
State enterprise "Science & Production Center on Land Resources Management"	Will support project activities related to implementation of demonstration projects on sustainable land and pasture management, and monitoring land degradation
Stakeholder	**Role**
Kazakh Research Institute of Livestock Breeding and Fodder Production	Will support project activities related to implementation of demonstration projects on sustainable land and pasture management, and monitoring land degradation
Private sector	
Local industries and entrepreneurs	Will participate in consultations and provide inputs to the development of the landscape- level management plans for further implementation.
Hunting and Fishery Managers	Will contribute to the development and implementation of the landscape-level management plans as being key repositories of ecological information on biodiversity, land resources, wildlife, and habitats. Will ensure that monitoring and data collection and processing systems are harmonized with the decision support system. Will engage patrolling rangers of existing hunting areas for introduction of the new spatial monitoring and reporting tool.
Rural consumer cooperatives and communities	Will be actively engaged in the development of income-generation activities (through Public Councils) at the PAs and corridors that are a focus of the project, as well as in sustainable use demonstrations at project territories.

Table 7 Project financing

PDF/PPG	at approval (US$M)	at PDF/PPG completion (US$M)
GEF PDF/PPG grants for project preparation	Not known	Not known
Co-financing for project preparation		
Project	**at CEO Endorsement (US$M)**	**at TE (US$M)**
[1] UNDP contribution:	200,000	132,136
[2] Government:	85,976,684	122,742,932
[3] Other multi-/bi-laterals:		
[4] Private Sector:		
[5] NGOs:	618,992	2,638,275
[6] Total co-financing [1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5]:	86,795,676	125,523,342
[7] Total GEF funding:	8,069,178	8,069,178
[8] Total Project Funding [6 + 7]	**94,864,854**	**133,592,520**

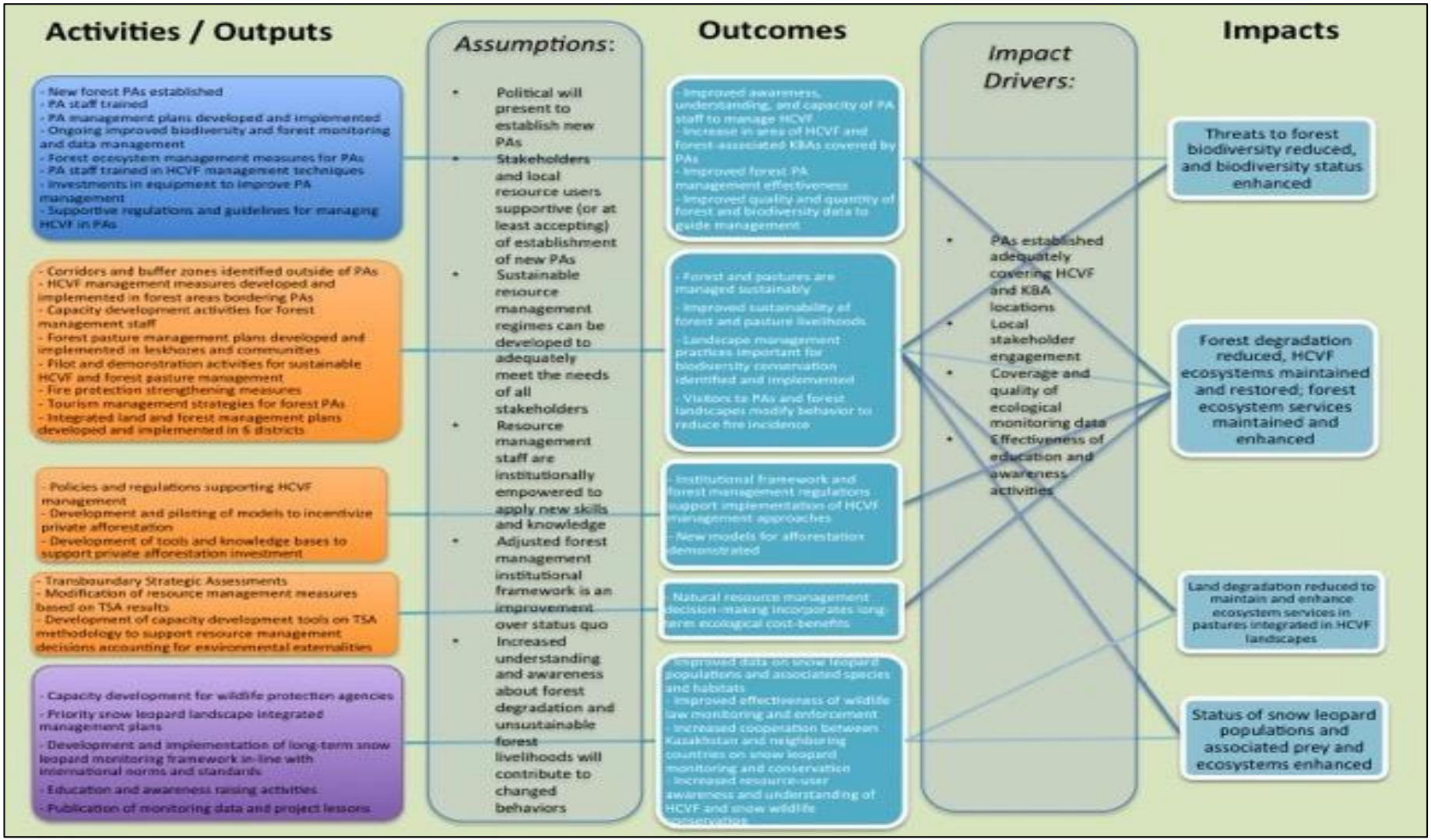
2.5 Project Theory of Change

88. The project's overall strategy is somewhat unusual in that instead of being derived from a single "theory of change" it is described as being "underpinned by three main theories-of-change, which have been combined to target the effective conservation and sustainable use of forest ecosystems and associated pastures in Kazakhstan".

89. The first main theory-of-change relies on the idea of protected areas as core conservation zones for biodiversity, including rare species and valuable ecosystems (the first component of the project employs this theory of change). The second theory-of-change applied by the project is based on the recognition that as critical as protected areas are, they are not a complete solution for the effective conservation of biodiversity (the 2nd component derives from this TOC). The third theory-of-change approach relates to coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities and 3rd component from this TOC).

90. These 3 combined "theories of change" do add up to a logical whole that theoretically leads towards the impacts that would achieve the 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)*. However, the TE team would note that the subsequent TOC diagram does not seem to clearly follow the same logic of 3 TOC's combined and there is some question as to what added clarity the TOC diagram brings to the design process (see project TOC diagram below).

Figure 1 Project Theory of Change



3.0 Findings

3.1 Project formulation and design

Project Relevance:

91. The project has been addressing key priorities in Kazakhstan in the areas of forest sustainable management, in particular high conservation forests, through strengthening of forestry management (via protected area and forestry fund territory expansion and improved management), plus the effectiveness and sustainability of land use within and around PAs and forestry areas by local communities and private entities.

92. These priorities were highly relevant to the country at the time of the project formulation (as described in the project document and the MTR) and became even more so during the period of project implementation. Project implementation has been enhanced and benefited from increased national commitment and political profile (particularly following the disastrous forest fires in northeast Kazakhstan in June 2023), evidenced by increased forestry and PA sector salaries and state infrastructure / equipment support.

93. The reaction to those fires has perhaps initially been a "*knee-jerk*" one that tends to focus on addressing the symptoms rather than root causes (i.e. strengthening firefighting capacity rather than forest management weaknesses in past decades that helped create the conditions for fires). However, despite this, the increased focus / support to forestry sector has helped provide a positive environment for the project to start introducing approaches that will hopefully strengthen the capacity to address root cause issues in the future.

94. There is also the opportunity to embed and upscale the project achievements in this regard within the current "National Biodiversity concept" process (part of UNDP supported Early Action Support for national application of the 2022 Global Biodiversity Framework) and within new joint UNDP and government initiatives in final development at present (*Promotion of sustainable food systems and improved ecosystems services in Northern Kazakhstan Landscape* Project, etc.).

UNDP Kazakhstan

95. UNDP in Kazakhstan has, since its establishment in the country in the 1990s, (UNDP entered into an agreement with the Government of Kazakhstan on October 4, 1994), played a significant role in supporting the development and implementation of GEF financed technical assistance projects in Biodiversity Focal area (as well as others).

96. These projects have played a significant role in the expansion and increased management effectiveness of the Protected Areas system in the country and sustainable use of biodiversity and have allowed the establishment of UNDP as a respected partner for the government in this respect. Through intelligent and synergistic linkages between past projects, plus the nurturing and retention of national technical capacity to implement such projects, a good degree of continuity has been maintained allowing step by step support to the building of the national PA system. In short UNDP Kazakhstan (and national partners) have largely ensured that individual GEF biodiversity projects have <u>not</u> (as in many countries) been isolated interventions but have formed a continuum of progress and experience that systematically build and deepen national capacity to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity (albeit up to now mostly in a protected area context).

97. 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 analyses 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.

98. 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 aided 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.

99. The 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.

100. Within the context of this PFD 2016-2020, UNDP developed its *Country Programme Document (CPD) for Kazakhstan (2016-2020)*. This programme was in line with national priorities as identified in the *Nurly Zhol* medium-term plan and the longer-term *Kazakhstan 2050* vision. Through this programme, UNDP seeks to 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.

101. The CPD 2016-20 was 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.

102. Under this priority, the project was 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.

103. Since 2021 UNDP has developed and agreed with government a subsequent CPD 2021 to 2025[9]. One of the 4 programmes identified under the CDP is "Supporting climate and disaster resilience and nature-based, low-carbon growth". Under this programme it is stated "In continuing its work on biodiversity, pastoralism and irrigated agriculture, UNDP will introduce and scale up new solutions and more efficient farming techniques, including for saving and harvesting water". The relevant CPD Output is - Output 4.1: Solutions developed, and resources mobilized for more sustainable use of ecosystems for the improvement of the well-being of local communities and nature.

GEF Focal Areas

104. 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

[9] https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3874133?ln=en&v=pdf

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.

105. 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.

106. In the above context this project has remain relevant and directly contributing to the national priorities and the framework for UNDP assistance to the county in this regard. In its focus on moving beyond the protected areas system and addressing biodiversity and ecosystem service conservation in forestry and productive landscapes, it is aligned with and has helped to provide an improved basis for Kazakhstan to respond to the new Global Biodiversity Framework (particularly in regard to GBF Target 2 related to restoration of degraded landscapes and GBF 3 related to PA and OECM[10]).

3.2 Results framework and indicators

107. 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".

108. It aims to do this through 3 main pathways (derived from the 3 TOCs identified in project strategy section) which are represented in the Project Results Framework (PRF) by the 3 components (see table 5 above for summary of Components, Outputs, and related indicators).

Table 8: Summary of Outcomes, Outputs, Activities and Indicators per Component

Component	*Outcomes*	*Outputs*	*Activities indicated in Multi-year workplan.*	*No indicators*
Component 1	2	3	17	3
Component 2	3	12	62	6
Component 3	1	3	15	2
Totals	*6*	*18*	*94*	*11*

109. The 1st component basically aims to build on the existing national (and UNDP) experience regarding PA establishment and management effectiveness strengthening (derived from a serious of past projects going back to the 1990s) in order to significantly expand the forest PA coverage (new PAs created on the basis of existing forestry fund territories and extension of existing PAs) plus the strengthening of management effectiveness (via training and equipment support).

110. The only significant "new" aspect of this component (relative to past projects) from a technical point of view is the introduction of a modified PA management plan approach based on best practice but combined with the realistic understanding of evolving capacity and institutional realities at this point in time. Though the value of this

[10] OECM - Other area based Effective Conservation measures - https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/oecms?tab=OECMs

new MP approach shouldn't be underestimated, the majority of this component is an "upscaling" of past experience and innovation rather than being particularly innovative in itself.

111. The 2nd component however represents a marked departure from the historically mainly PA focused approach in that it is principally aimed at improving effectiveness and sustainability of forest and productive landscapes management outside of PAs in order to reach the mutually supportive objectives of biodiversity and ecosystem services conservation, and the improvement in the sustainability and resilience of productive natural resources use by populations in rural areas. In many ways this is the real step change in terms of Kazakhstan's approach to biodiversity / ecosystem services conservation and this is the most innovative and "incremental" aspect of the project design.

112. As highlighted in the project document, as important as the PA system will be to conserving biodiversity and ecosystem services in future, it will only ever be able to do this in a relatively small percent of the country – on their own PAs will not be able to preserve landscape scale biodiversity and functional and stable ecosystems in the majority of the country (which will be needed to ensure the long term productivity and resilience necessary to provide security of livelihoods to rural populations and preserve ecosystem services critical to future national sustainable development).

113. Furthermore, past projects have already substantially addressed the PA development in the country and thus this component of the project is the one that is moving the development process forward by extending the experience and lessons learned to address the wider productive landscapes around protected area. In this context this component was the most critical of the project both to Kazakhstan's development and meeting the GEF global benefits. This is reflected in both the larger proportion of the budget and the most Outcomes and Outputs - 50% of the projects Outcomes (3 out of 6), and 67% of outputs (12 out of 18), and 50% of budget the overall budget).

114. The 3rd component of the project is stated to be aimed at coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities in Kazakhstan. The single Outcome is in line to these i.e. Outcome 3.1 Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge. However, the Component title is "International cooperation and knowledge management". Of the 3 outputs under this Component two are entirely devoted to Snow Leopard research and transboundary cooperation in that context (only one output is aimed at overall biodiversity monitoring, ensure law enforcement and knowledge management. This feels somewhat unbalanced in terms of emphasis (however deserving the snow leopard research is).

115. *Project scope and ambition:* 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. The project aims to overcome significant and entrenched barriers to more effective forest management and to address root causes of unsustainable management in the wider productive landscape around PAs.

116. In short, the project is extremely ambitious in scope (bio-geographically and technically). This ambition and scope were questioned during the review of the project proposal by the GEF Council. The response provided 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. The validity of the original GEF Council concern and the response will be examined in more detail in the progress towards results section and conclusions to the report.

117. *Project indicators*: The performance of the project was 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. A more in depth review of the effectiveness of these indicators in terms of measuring the progress towards project outcomes and Objective is included in *Section 3.3.5*.

3.2.1 Assumptions and risks

118. The Project Document made a number of explicit assumptions contained in the PRF.

119. Assumptions regarding the objective:

- Project does not encounter critical risks that derail Implementation
- New threats do not emerge
- Stakeholders remain interested in large-scale forest sector reform
- Large scale sector reform can be achieved in the timeframe available for the project
- Changing the institutional framework of the forest sector is not too complex for the scale and scope of the project
- All staff in targeted PAs and leskhozes will benefit from project investments in capacity strengthening
- No large-scale staff turnover in targeted PAs and leskhozes
- All community members in targeted districts depend at least partially on pastoralism for livelihoods, and therefore will benefit from project activities on sustainable land management
- Project lifetime is sufficient to allow impacts to be generated and monitored

120. Assumptions regarding outcome 1:

- National political commitment to expanding the PA system remains firm
- Project does not encounter critical risks related to stakeholders in establishment of new PAs
- Various forms of PAs provide for improved conservation of biodiversity
- Project activities are sufficiently targeted to increase PA METT score
- Project results, in terms of increase METT score, can be documented within the timeframe of the project
- Proposed PAs are established in time to begin implementation of PA including strengthening of management
- Criteria of Green List standard are suitable for Kazakhstan context

121. Assumptions regarding outcome 2:

- Forest managers are open and willing to implement HCVF management measures
- Institutional framework re-alignment in the forest sector does not interfere with forest management planning at the site level
- Forest degradation is not significantly worse than currently known
- Forest degradation can be changed and documented within project lifetime
- New threats do not emerge (or rate of impact of threats does not significantly change).
- Implementation of improved pasture management planning leads to reduced degradation
- District authorities are able and willing to apply and implement integrated management plans in other district land use planning policies and procedures.
- Potential private afforestation partners remain willing and interested based on terms to be defined for afforestation pilot models.
- Piloting of TSA in Kazakhstan context is successful, and deemed valuable by stakeholders

122. Assumptions regarding outcome 3:

- Accurately estimating snow leopard population can be done within a 12-month period
- It is in the national interest to report an accurate level of snow leopard population on an annual basis
- The project, along with other partner initiatives, can provide full national coverage for snow leopard monitoring

123. The accuracy and feasibility of these assumptions is examined and commented on during review of project implementation progress. However, the TE Team would like to highlight two of the Objective level assumptions that are particularly pertinent in the context of the previously touched on issue of project scope (i.e., large scale sector reform can be achieved in the timeframe available for the project, changing the institutional framework of the forest sector is not too complex for the scale and scope of the project). These assumptions were in practice over optimistic (reforms achieve) – as discussed previously, these projects represent a part of a continuum of change and though it can contribute to the process of reform it could never "achieve" such reform completely. The TE team note that this is a frequent issue in similar projects based on a somewhat unrealistic "project based" approach rather than more realistic programmatic approach in project design. Adjustments in indicator targets related to this were made to better reflect these realities (see below) i.e. instead of expecting new PAs legal establishment or new legislation to be passed by project completion the expectation was shifted to ensuring the conditions for these final steps were in place.

124. *Project Risk:* 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)*.

Table 9 Project risk assessment

Project Risks	Type	Impact and Probability	TE Comment
Non-SESP Risks			
1. Changes in government policy priorities related to sustainable forestry development	Political	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)	Did not emerge as a risk – on contrary government priority for forestry sector strengthened.
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)	Project efforts to ensure participatory approaches in PA, Forest and other initiatives (pasture, district planning, etc.). ensured risk not experienced significantly
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)	This risk was not the main issue facing TSA. The more pertinent risk was actually more related to the acceptance of ecosystem service valuation as a basis for making decisions (which was not included in risk log).
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,	Environmental	I = 2 (minor) P = 2 (not likely)	This risk was beyond the project to mitigate. Significantly drier years were experienced during early project implementation that probably impacted the effectiveness of some aspects (pasture rehabilitation for example).

or whether such effects, if they occur, would be on much longer timescales.			
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)	The TE team observed no evidence of these risks occurring in practice.
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)	The TE team observed no evidence of these risks occurring in practice
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)	There was no evidence that efforts by the project to introduce new approaches to land or natural resource use had a negative environmental impact. Potential impact on livelihoods from PA expansion etc. were not clearly evident and efforts to provide alternative livelihood options implemented.
8. Standard 1.6 "Does the Project involve harvesting of natural forests, plantation development, or reforestation? – YES"	Environmental	I = 1 (negligible) P = 5 (expected)	No negative impact noted
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)	It is noted that the country experiences a number of unusually dry years during implementation with impact on forest fires and condition of pasture.

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)	Though this was a risk from the PA area expansion it was not noted by the TE Team to be a critical issue (though confusions / limited initial clarity within local authorities and communities on the actual impact of PAs on their opportunities was noted).

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 (and subsequently the new Quantum system).

125. 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.

126. Subsequent APRs / PIRs have not identified any critical risks, but a reoccurring operational risk seems to be delays in completion of recruitments and procurements – however, mitigation steps seem to have been implemented. There does remain the question as to how significant an impact such delays have had on project implementation.

127. One risk that could not be anticipated was the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impact on the delivery of project activities. The project was 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 migrated the situation via some activities online – including developing the capacities of Partners to use online platforms.

128. Post the Covid pandemic, and in line with the MTR recommendation, the project requested and had approved an 18 month no-cost extension that was mainly justified based on the impact of this unforeseeable risk.

3.2.2 Lessons from other projects

129. The Project Document listed several past projects or initiatives (both GoK/UNDP and others) which might provide lessons or supporting activities. The most important of these are listed below.

130. The TE team note and would like to highlight that this past experience, the strong collaborative relationship that has resulted between UNDP/GoK, and the in-country capacity built by it, has been absolutely critical in allowing the SFM project to reach the significant achievements that it has, despite the enormously challenging original scope of the project.

UNDP /GoK

131. UNDP in Kazakhstan has a long history of supporting the government to implement related GEF projects, and this is of vital importance to the successful implementation of this project.

132. Specifically, the project leveraged the experience created during the implementation of multiple previous GEF projects, including:

- "Steppe Conservation and Management" (GEF ID# 3293) - In particular, the experiences, infrastructures and systems created for biodiversity monitoring data and site-specific knowledge of the projects was applied.

- UNDP-GEF project "Improving Sustainability of PA System in Desert Ecosystems through Promotion of Biodiversity-compatible Livelihoods in and around PAs". This project period ended in 2018. The SFM project built on and addressed a number of crosscutting issues that were covered within the desert project, such as PA management and conservation planning, wildlife management, threats and risks mitigation. The project will build on the following achieved results:

- UNDP project "Building financial frameworks to increase investments in biodiversity management". The project has studied opportunities for mainstreaming biodiversity into national development and sectoral planning to reduce negative impacts resulting in biodiversity loss and to achieve economic efficiency.

- UNDP-GoK "Improvement of wildlife management planning and monitoring system**".** The project was focused on policy and institutional capacity of the hunting concessions to ensure that they are economically viable and are managed in an ecosystem friendly way.

- Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture (FFSA)/DAMU Program was defined as a most appropriate fund for the project's activities under the Outcome 2 targeted at demonstration of resource use and management practices that would minimize the impact on the valuable forest ecosystems caused by local communities, agricultural businesses, tourism, hunting, non-timber forest products, and water use. FFSA has been operational in Kazakhstan since 1994 and is one of a few organizations that render credit services to residents of rural areas. The project will work with "Eco-Damu" Program of the FFSA offering the lowest interest rate 4% with the average in Kazakhstan – 14-20%. The program goal is to fund the alternative types of activities and implementation of sustainable methods of agriculture, forestry, fishery and hunting within the area of 50 km around the protected areas. The program will last until 2024 under the Agreement between UNDP-GEF portfolio and the Ministry of Agriculture (*TE note – programme has been extended)*

133. Non-UNDP projects of importance to this project were:

- **Forest and Biodiversity Governance Including Environmental Monitoring (FLERMONECA)** was being implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the German forestry agency Hessen-Forst, the Austrian Environment Agency (UBA) and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) in all five Central Asian countries. The project was finished in 2015 and has produced a number of valuable recommendations that can be implemented with a new project. In Kazakhstan the main focus was forest and biodiversity governance, including environmental monitoring. Responding to the Government's request the main outcome of the project was assessment of the potential for the private forests development in Kazakhstan.

- **WWF active initiatives in Kazakhstan: Caspian Tiger Re-establishment.** The second region outlined as a potential site for the restoration programme is the southern shore of Lake Balkhash in Kazakhstan, around and to the east of the Ili River delta – this an area the project also focused on.

3.2.4 Linkages between other interventions in the sector

134. The project works closely with a number of regional and international organisations such as WWF Russia and International Union for Nature IUCN (on Green Listing), and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) alliance.

3.3 Project implementation

3.3.1 Adaptive management

135. The project has had to be very adaptive in its implementation. Once the project had a PMU in place then there is considerable evidence that the PMU's expertise and willingness to challenge and address issues and make changes where necessary has been adaptive. A number of changes were made during the inception phase to address weaknesses in the design or changes in circumstances. There appears to have been good communications between the PMU, UNDP Country Office and the RTA.

136. The Covid-19 pandemic and the international security issue were significant challenges which the project appears to have responded well to putting online those parts of the project that lend themselves to remote or virtual working.

137. The project provided a robust management response to the MTR and has sought to address most of the issues raised in the subsequent PIRs. Following the MTR the CO and project have addressed the issues raised by the review, including the strengthening of support to procurement and adjustment of some of the indicators/targets (see Management response).

138. Therefore, the project has been adaptive, as opposed to expedient, in the changes made to the project's strategy and activities.

3.3.2 Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements

139. The country ownership is very high and there is considerable appreciation of the project's support in a sector that has had a significant increase in attention and political focus during the project implementation period.

140. There was a very high sense of ownership exhibited by the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife, protected areas staff and Forestry Enterprise staff, as well as other beneficiaries such as District authorities were zonation planning and other activities took place.

141. Key contractors and partners such as the Association of Biodiversity, the Institute of Zoology and Institute of Livestock Husbandry and Fodder production were very clearly highly committed and dedicated to the activities and achievement the project was supporting.

142. A great deal of effort was devoted by the project to ensure wide stakeholder participation through organization of stakeholder councils (in PAs, Forestry Enterprises where management plans were being developed, etc) and discussion forums to allow experience exchanges (as well as the many and varied training events).

143. The only stakeholder groups that expressed to the TE Team less clear sense of ownership or connection to the project were those related to the hunting sector and the recipients of Eco-DAMU loans. In former case the TE Team identified some perception that their role and interests were not fully embraced by the project or other stakeholders (the issue of hunting farms is discussed further in later sections of the report). In the latter case (Eco-DAMU loans) there appeared to be little or no perception as to the wider project objectives, although they were very grateful for the support received via the project support.

144. Project has clearly made extensive efforts in all relevant circumstance to ensure stakeholder participation, particularly in the context of PA and Forestry management planning process and the 7 district "pilot" zonation planning process where stakeholder consultation meetings have been supported and the establishment of local "councils" has been supported to increase opportunity for

local participation / problem solving during management plan implementation and normal PA/forestry operational activities.

145. Evidence during the visit to Syrdarya Turkestan Regional Park office suggests that clear instructions and guidance is required for the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife in order to ensure such best practices are replicated in an effective / timely manner during future PA establishment or area adjustment process in order to avoid the problems and delays experienced there (see further details in later discussion).

3.3.3 Project finance and co-finance

146. 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.

147. The project original timeframe was 60 months (5years) between April 2018 and April 2023. However, due to delays caused mainly by the COVID pandemic in 2019/20 (plus some additional political issues impacting the transboundary Snow Leopard activities and procurement challenges) an 18 month no cost project extension was recommended by the MTR and was approved in 2020. The total project duration was thus increased from 60m to 78m.

148. At the time of the MTR, 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). This underspend at MTR can be related mainly to the limitations imposed by COVID pandemic.

149. At the time of this evaluation (TE), the review of financial records as recorded in the UNDP Quantum system (a changeover in systems occurred between MTR and TE) indicates that the actual expenditures allocated against the GEF project grant for the years 2018 to early September 2024 when the TE took place(77 months) represent about 88.8% (USD 7,161,086.94) of the total approved GEF grant of USD 8,069,178 versus an elapsed time of 98.7% (77 months out of 78). The breakdown of project expenditures by component and by year is presented in the table below.

150. Clearly the efficiency of disbursements and delivery accelerated after the MTR and at the time of the TE approx. 11.2% (908,091) of the total budget remains to be spent in just under 1.3% of the remaining project duration (i.e. about 1 month). Although this appear a not insignificant amount, in fact most is already committed and will be disbursed before operational closure.

151. Project management costs were US$ 342,259 or 4.8% of the total GEF budget which is consistent with the 5% threshold for project management costs.

152. The distribution of spending across the three components is broadly in line with the indicative budget outlined in the project document (see table below).

Table: UNDP-GEF Project Funds Disbursement Status as of early Sept. 2024 (GEF Grant in USD)

Component	Budget (USD)	2018	2019	2020	Total at MTR(USD)	% MTR	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total at TE USD	% TE
1	**2,547,067**	147,238	509,932	296,791	***953,961***	***37.5%***	362,183.52	165,560.67	250,348.31	601,255.39	110,872.30	2,147,390.19	***84.3***
2	**4,017,000**	74,836	754,308	128,578	***957,722***	***23.8%***	492,662.60	651,037.76	674,415.83	747,772.50	214,630.73	3,609,663.39	***89.9***
3	**1,120,865**	54,079	340,242	33,665	***427,985***	***38.2%***	128,980.57	219,764.07	158,964.41	129,358.87	30,386.59	1,061,775.51	***94.7***
Proj.Man	**384,246**	45,515	81,410	28,015	***154,940***	***40.3%***	65,699.94	49,782.79	39,927.43	59,923.89	55,766.79	342,259.05	***89.1***
TOTAL	***8,069,178***	*321,668*	*1,685,891*	*487,049*	***2,494,608***	***30.9%***	1,049,526	1,086,145.29	1,123,655.98	1,538,310.65	413,470.51	7,161,086.94	***88.8***

Table: % Disbursement by Component

Component	Total at TE USD	%	Original budget	%
1	2,147,390.19	30.1	2,547,067	31
2	3,609,663.39	50	4,017,000	50
3	1,061,775.51	15.1	1,120,865	14
Proj.Man	342,259.05	4.8	384,246	4.7
TOTAL	7,161,086.94	100	8,069,178	100

153. The project M&E Plan contains a line "Financial audit as per UNDP audit policies for NIM projects", responsibility "UNDP CO", which has a budget allocated of "USD 15,000 (3,000/year)" and the timing is indicated as "annually or other frequencies as per UNDP Audit policy".
154. To the TE Team this implies the project should have been audited at least once during its lifetime and it was noted that it had not been by the time of the TE. The UNDP Kazakhstan response to this was "project modality is Country Office support to NIM, so it is not a subject to HACT financial audits".
155. *Project Cofinancing*: Co-financing (including parallel co-financing) commitments at the outset of the project totalled 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 10 Co-financing: Cofinancing Commitments at start of the project and Actual at TE mission (29August)

Partner	Type	Commitments (USD) (*)	Total co-finan. 2018-2024 (USD*),	Total co-finan. 2018-2024 (USD**)	Difference of Committed and actual (at 2024 ExRate)
Forest and Wildlife Committee (PAs)	In-kind	70,510,507	139,075,241	95,640,815	+25,130308
Institute of Zoology	In-kind	59,249	519,409	357,193	+297,644
Almaty and Zhetysu Province	In-kind	8,229,217	25,191,408	17,323,909	+9,094692
East Kazakhstan Province	In-kind	7,177,711	13,714,026	9,431,015	+2,253,304
CSO – WWF	In-kind	318,992	3,244,071	2,230,919	+1,911,927
CSO - ACBK	In-kind	300,000	254,463	174,992	-125,008
Others (WWB)	In-kind	0.00	337,889	232,364	+232,364
UNDP	Cash	200,000	132,136	132,135.80	-67,864
Total (USD)		86,795,676	**182,468,644**	**125,523,342**	**+38,727666**

* 2017 exchange rate, ** 2024 exchange rate

156. 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.

157. Actual figures reported at the time of this TE totalled USD 125,523,342 or 145% of the total committed co-financing. This substantially increased co-financing (an additional 38.7 million USD) is mainly the product of considerably more in-kind contribution by the Forest and Wildlife Committee (an additional 25.1 million mainly derived from the fact salaries were approx. doubled for almost all PA and additional investments were made in equipment and infrastructures, particularly related to firefighting).

158. The two regions also substantially increased their cofinancing (plus 9 million from Almaty and Zhetysu regions and 2.2 million from East Kazakhstan (mainly related to doubling of Forestry staff salaries and additional investments in infrastructure and equipment). Co-financing from WWF (Russia) related to activities to restore areas in the Ile-Balkhash delta as part of a Caspian tiger re-introduction effort also exceeded expectations (+9.1 million). Finally, an additional source of co-financing was leveraged by the project from WWB, adding a further USD 232,364. The institute of Zoology also were able, through their additional snow leopard research and monitoring activities sponsored by other organizations, to increase their in-kind contribution by 297,444.

159. On the other hand, ABCK in-kind contribution was less than expected (minus USD 125,008) although their work on SMART patrolling was extremely well executed (see later in the report) and covered more PAs than originally envisage.

160. The only cash co-financing was committed by UNDP (USD200,000) – at the time of the TE mission this had so far only totalled USD 132,135 (minus USD 67,864) with only a month or so of the project remaining. Subsequently to the mission (16 October 2024) the project reported a total of USD 136,977 having been disbursed (minus 63,023 of

the committed cash co-financing). Reportedly this constituted equipment purchased for Ile-Balkhash nature reserve in the framework of the Turanian Tiger project (UNDP).

3.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation at entry

Issue	Rating
M&E at entry	Moderately Satisfactory
M&E implementation	Satisfactory
M&E overall rating	Moderately Satisfactory

161. A reasonable 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*.

162. 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. In the TE Team's opinion additional scrutiny of the indicators and targets would have been helpful (see later discussion on indicators in the report).

163. 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. It is noted by the TE Team that this Inception Workshop took place extremely soon after the project start (Project started April 2018, Inception workshop was conducted already in May 2018). On the one hand this was commendable urgency, but at the same time could be one of the reasons some of the M&E issues (specifically issues regarding some of the indicators) were perhaps not adequately addressed). The inception report also did not attempt to lay out in any detail or further elaborate the project document in terms the overall "technical" implementation – i.e. clarify more clearly how and by whom specific activities were to be achieved.
- *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) was undertaken between July and November 2020 and report submitted on 1st December 2020 (over a 5 month period). It should be noted that this MTR took place during the COVID pandemic and due to this the team leader could not undertake the normal field visit and verification. Additionally, the national team member was somewhat restricted in his possibilities to visit field sites (as was the project). This no doubt explains the long period between MTR start and completion. A final evaluation (this report) should have taken place three months prior to the final PSC meeting (in October 2024). However, due to difficulties to identify and recruit both the international and national evaluators the process was initiated in late July, and due to other commitments, the TE Team leader could only undertake the field mission in late August/early September 2024. However, a completed TE report should be finalized before the final PSC. The GEF's tracking tools

were completed for the MTR (with exception of Greenhouse Gas Calculations (Ex-ACT Tool). METT has been completed by the TE field mission but not the SFM and Greenhouse Gas Calculations (Ex-ACT Tool). Reportedly this latter TT will be completed in October 2024.

- *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, analyse, 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. Specific recommendations on this aspect will be provided in this report.
- *Audit*: The M&E Plan contains the requirement and budget for an annual financial audit – as discussed previously the UNDP CO states that "the project modality is Country Office support to NIM, so it is not a subject to HACT financial audits".

164. 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: *Alpine forest ecosystems*: 19 PAs *Floodplain (tugai) and saxaul forest*: 4 PAs
	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	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

with direct community benefits • ***Outcome 2.2:*** Strengthened enabling	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

165. 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 by the MTR concluded that they are SMART[11] indicators with clear targets and that they a good set of indicators that is used to measure how well the project is progressing toward its expected results, and "with clear targets, it makes them unambiguous indicators that are Specific, Measurable, Available and Relevant for the project in a Timely manner".

[11] SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound

166. The TE team would concur on the whole but will highlight below some indicators and targets that they feel actually fall short after more careful consideration.

167. The MTR 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.

168. The MTR drew attention to three indicators and their related targets i.e.

- *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.
- *Indicator #7* Level of achievement of Kazakhstan's forest PAs in securing their biodiversity and other associated values" with the target.
- *Indicator #12* with the target "Two functional and replicable models demonstrated as feasible to meet key gaps in private afforestation regulatory framework:

169. *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. 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. The MTR 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*."

170. The target for *Indicator 7* was "*At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment"* and the MTR noted the problems and issues with this and recommended a more feasible target of assessing the "pros and cons" og Green Listing" as a basis for future initiatives if deemed feasible and valuable at this point in the Kazakhstan PA development process.

171. *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."* The MTR noted that *"t*here 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". Based on this conclusion the MTR 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*".

172. The TE does not entirely concur with the MTR conclusions regarding the impossibility to attempt some new approaches to forest management apart from the purely "private" commercial one. It is agreed that the internationally standard "community" forestry approach is not workable in the Kazakhstan / Central Asian context, however, there has been substantial work done within other UNDP/GEF and other donor funded projects in Central Asia to develop approaches where engagement of local population in forestry development and protection has been tested and demonstrated. Two examples that can be cited are the UNDP /GEF and GIZ initiatives on "joint Forest Management" (JFM) in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and the pilot efforts to transfer control of tugai forest patches in the lower Vaksh river in Tajikistan to local villages (through payment of land tax by a group of local community actors) within a UNDP/GEF SLM project (2010). In this context it is felt the project could perhaps have pursued a wider agenda in this regard which would have provided a useful basis for future initiatives but did not do so following the narrowing of the ambition following this recommendation.

173. Additional to the issues raised and recommended on during the MTR, the TE team would also highlight some aspects of the indicators and targets that they feel were suboptimal or did not fully assist in meaningfully measuring project progress.

174. The Objective indicator #4 is "Population trends for globally significant species", within the PAs supported by the project, and the target is divided into 2 sets i.e. Fauna species and flora species. The TE Team would suggest there are several questionable issues with this indicator and its targets.

175. Firstly, (and perhaps least significant) it is rather "clunky" in that it requires a significant list of species in the PLF that takes up considerable space making the indicator excessively dense and complicated (thus fails in terms of SMART criteria) – a more concise approach would have been better.

176. Secondly, the TE Team struggles with the concept of "population trend" of specific flora species that is measured in hectares – it is hard to understand how an individual species of tree in a natural forest can be measured in ha. at the baseline and

then remeasured over time (except in the context of an artificial plantation). The project team stated that there was a "standard national methodology" for doing this, but the TE would argue that it is a nonsensical measure in the first place and thus whatever "methodology" was used it is a meaningless measure of progress or impact and should have never been included in this formulation.

177. Thirdly, using changes in fauna species numbers to measure this kind of project impact was common in previous generation of GEF projects but faced many questions as to real meaningfulness. On the one hand such indicators and targets give the impression of being specific and quantifiable, and measure high-profile biodiversity assets (flagship species, etc) and thus are superficially attractive. However, they have proved to be open to many issues and false interpretations unless very carefully set up.

178. The biggest assumption (actually included in the projects assumptions) is that such projects of fairly limited timeframe (4 or 5 years usually) will be able to result in significant management changes on the ground in the PA territories. Realistically, most such projects will have limited direct field impact until 3rd or 4th years and expecting those impacts to immediately translate into changes in the population trend of fauna species is somehow optimistic and not necessarily a fair measure of the project impact. Furthermore, positive or negative changes in species numbers can occur for such a wide variety of reasons that even if changes occur it can be hard (or misleading) to attribute them to project efforts (for example, normal climatic variations during the project period could result in significant changes irrespective of project actions, other factors unrelated to the project may impact change, such as immigration from other areas experiencing increased pressure, or actions unrelated to the project that reduced pressure). Thus, except in some specific situations, and only if carefully constructed, the TE believes use of fauna species indicators to measure such limited duration project impact is potentially fraught with issues and can be misleading.

179. Objective indicator #3: This indicator attempts to provide a measure of project "beneficiaries". Such indicators often face the challenge of sufficiently defining what constitutes a "beneficiary" and as a result the meaningfulness of the targets can be open to question.

180. In this case the indicator is quite specific in terms of PA and Forestry staff (essentially beneficiaries are PA or Forestry staff who received training or other capacity enhancement, and this can be easily measured). However, it is not so clear on the 3rd component of the indicator i.e. # of local resource users with improved sustainability of livelihoods.

181. From the "means of verification" column it says, "*Number of people living in rural districts directly targeted by the project*", while in the assumptions column it says "*All community members in targeted districts depend at least partially on pastoralism for livelihoods, and therefore will benefit from project activities on sustainable land management*. Interpreting exactly what is meant (who can be included) is rather unclear, especially as the total population of the districts targets by the project greatly exceeds the 38,000 EoP target in the PLF.

182. This is one reason why the eventual reported impact of the project greatly exceeds the PLF target (# *of local resource users with improved sustainability of livelihoods* is reported as 674,616 i.e. sum of all population living in districts targeted by the project). Though this is a reasonable figure to report based on the wording of the indicator/targets, its discrepancy with the PLF target demonstrates it was not a well-articulated or very helpful target in terms of measuring impact.

183. In summary, though the PLF overall provided a reasonable basis for M&E and for understanding the projects progress and impact, it had a number of quite significant limitations that undermined the meaningfulness of the monitoring and thus the clarity of impact.

3.3.5 Monitoring and evaluation implementation and overall assessment

184. During the inception phase the PRF was reviewed, and several reasonable changes made during the Inception Workshop. The TE would suggest that the project M&E would have benefited from a more in-depth evaluation and hence clarification and adjustment of the indicators and targets at that point. This would have helped ensure a more "watertight" case for reporting the project targets had been meaningfully met in some cases (number of local beneficiaries, impact on flora, etc.).

185. Some further adjustments were made to indicators and Targets at MTR stage but again the TE would suggest an opportunity was perhaps missed to clarify and tighten up the M&E framework overall. In addition, the adjustment of the indicator and targets related to "non-state" forestry to focus purely on "private" forestry perhaps curtailed potentially useful consideration of other approaches to devolving forestry management from the state to non-state actors.

186. The PSC has met 4 times with one final PSC meeting to take place in October 2024 (x1 in 2019, x1 in 2020, x1 in 2022, x2 2023, 2024 pending) and PSC minutes demonstrate it played a meaningful and active role in project implementation.

187. There have been 5 Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) starting in 2019 and a draft version of the 6th PIR for 2024 was available in September 2024 at the point of the TE. The CO ratings applied in the 2020, 2021, and 2022 PIRs were "satisfactory" for progress toward development objective (DO), and "moderately satisfactory" with respect to implementation progress (IP). The MS rating for IP was related to the low financial performance of the project (less than 50% deliver at mid-point) in 2020 and a perceived continued slow financial delivery in 2021 and 2022. Subsequent PIRs recorded Satisfactory DO and IP ratings based on improved delivery figures and achievements. National Partner ratings in all PIRs was Satisfactory.

188. Based on the above, the M&E implementation is considered Satisfactory (with the caveat that it could have been better if more effort had been made to tighten up and strengthen the indicators and targets).

189. Furthermore, the TE team would note that PIR reporting under Section C: Development Progress (columns on progress since last reporting period and Cumulative Progress since project start are often over verbose and frankly confusing. For example, it was only with considerable analysis and clarification that the basic achievements in terms of which PAs were newly created, which were expanded, and which were existing but had management effectiveness built could be deciphered (reporting under different targets seemed to differ).

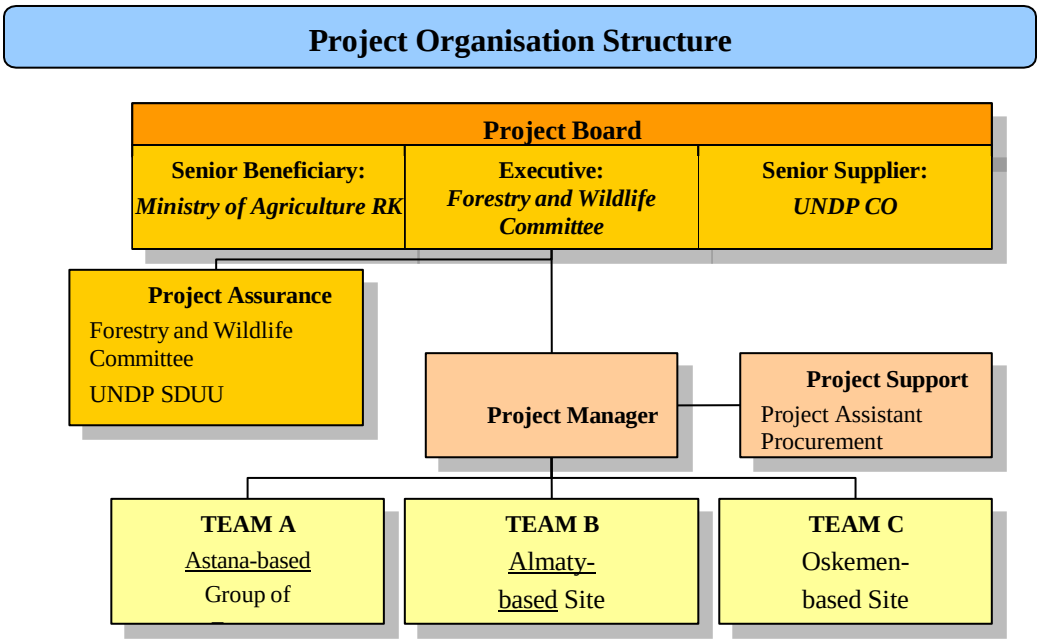
190. The overall M&E rating is Moderately Satisfactory mainly due to the TE Team belief that the M&E was adequate to monitor the broad progress towards the Outcomes and Objective, but it contained weaknesses from the design phase which undermined somewhat the meaningfulness of the overall M&E and could (and should) have been addressed (particularly at Inception phase) during implementation.

191. Tracking Tools should be completed before project close and uploaded with the TE report.

3.3.5 UNDP implementation/ oversight

Issue	Rating
UNDP implementation/ oversight	Satisfactory
Implementing Partner execution	Satisfactory
Overall Implementation/ execution	Satisfactory

Figure 3 Implementation arrangements



192. UNDP has carried out its project assurance role assisting with procurement where necessary through UNDP Operations. The PMU personnel are all engaged by UNDP although there is a clear autonomy in their decision-making with appropriate

oversight by the UNDP Programme. The UNDP CO Programme Manager and the RTA have taken a keen interest in the project providing support and guidance. The project has had to make adaptive management decisions and to respond to some significant events (e.g. the pandemic, transboundary cooperation issues, etc.) and the PMU has worked closely with the CO and RTA to navigate these challenges with some considerable success. These are clearly traceable in the project documentation (e.g. minutes of SC meetings, PIRs, etc.).

3.3.6 Implementing Partner execution

193. The project was very strongly supported by the Forestry and Wildlife committee though perhaps sometimes the priorities were seen in a different light than was the project intent. For example, the TSA exercise was very clearly seen as a basis to justify return of the Forestry Fund territories to central government rather than as a new approach to better incorporate ecosystem service values into development planning processes.

194. Nonetheless the Forestry and Wildlife Committee has shown at every stage a very significant ownership of project efforts and pushed hard to make many of the more problematic and time-consuming steps happen in a timely way (such as review and clearance of PA and Forestry feasibility studies, draft legal and normative acts, etc. though not always with success yet). The considerable increase in in-kind cofinancing compared to the originally committed amount is a further indicator of the high level of ownership and support for the project by the Forestry and Wildlife committee.

3.4 Project results

3.4.1 Progress towards objective and expected results

Objective	Rating
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	Satisfactory

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						
Indicator	**Baseline**	**MTR status**	**EOP target**	**EOP Status**	**MTR Assessment**	**TE Assessment**
Date	**2018**	**2020**		**2024 (Sept)**		
1. Area of critical ecosystems with improved management, including tugai, saxaul, and mountain forests, and associated grasslands	N/A (zero hectares improved)	4,000,000	9,127,071 hectares	14,576,147 hectares	On target	Achieved (exheeded)
2. Forest area in Kazakhstan under indirectly improved management	N/A (zero hectares indirectly improved)	N/A (zero hectares indirectly improved) (achievement of result not expected at mid-point)	Forests managed by 120 forestry entities = 12,652,400 ha of forest landscapes	12,652,400 ha of forest landscapes	On target	Achieved
3. . # 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	N/A (zero beneficiaries)	a. Total: ~1,100 : b. PA staff: >1,000 PA staff with enhanced capacity c. Forestry staff: 100 leskhoz staff d. Local resource users: Total: 0 (0 men; 0 women) (achievement of result not expected at mid-point)	a. Total: ~41,000 : b. PA staff: >2,000 PA staff with enhanced capacity c. Forestry staff: 457 leskhoz staff d. Local resource users: Total: 38,753 (19,382 men; 19,371 women) (figures official from 2009 census)	a) Total: 676,958 (cumulative progress for 2018-2024, 341,318 men and 335,640 women). This exceeds the EoP target for this indicator by a factor of 16. b) PA staff: 1,701 employees (1,185 men and 516 women) with improved potential, constituting 85% of the EoP target.	On target	Achieved (exceeded)

				c) Forestry staff: 641 (514 men, 127 women) – EoP target achieved. d) Local resource users: Total: 674 616 (339 619 men; 334 997 women),		
4. Population trends for globally significant species, such as snow leopard, argali, goitered gazelle, and other threatened species within the expanded target PA estate	Please see GEF-6 BD Tracking Tool METT scorecards for all PAs, cells C38 and C39	Flora: N/A (project activities will not affect ecological status by midpoint) Fauna: N/A (project activities will not affect ecological status by midpoint)	Flora: Non-deterioration of baseline status Fauna: Increase relative to baseline	Increasing population trends observed in most key species both Flora and Fauna.	On target	Achieved *See text below for caveats to this rating*

Component 1 (PIR Outcome 1): Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems.

PIR Outcome 1	Rating
Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems	Satisfactory

PIR Outcome 1 (Project Component 1): Better integration of forest PAs in wider landscape, including enabling environment for sustainable management of conservation-important ecosystems						
Indicator	**Baseline**	**MTR status**	**EOP target**	EOP Status	MTR Assessment	TE Assessment
Date	**2018**	**2020 (Sept)**		2024 (Sept)		
5. Incremental area under conservation management through establishment of new PAs	N/A (only existing PAs)	558,715 in x2 PAs plus other PA expansion/creation in progess	1,729,485 ha net new hectares under protection (reduced from 1,830,000 in Prodoc at inception)	1,840,928 hectares of new ha. under protection	On target	Achieved (Exceeded).
6. Forest PA management effectiveness	Baseline METT Scores:	Systematic support to the target 14 pilot PAs since the beginning contributed to the overall increase in METT scores for the majority of PAs by MTR	30% improvement in score gap ((1 – METT value)*0.3) over baseline	Most PAs showed 30% or greater increase in METT score – but not most of newly created PAs	On target	Achieved (with some caveats discussed below)
7. Level of achievement of Kazakhstan's forest PAs in securing their biodiversity and other associated values	No forest PAs in Kazakhstan have achieved "Green List" certification	Green List certification assessment process initiated	At least 1 forest PA has had a preliminary Green List assessment[12].	Assessment reported in PIR as still ongoing.	On track (Target adjusted at MTR)	Not achieved by TE (ongoing).

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 - *Creation of new forest PAs and expansion of PA system (baseline work and subimision to Forestry and Wildlife Committee / regional authorities*.

Output 1.1.2 Newly established forest PAs are operationalized with improved management effectiveness, including community management mechanisms -*New PA Management plans, Training, Equipment, Community Councils, SMART patrolling*

[12] Modified version of the target level according to MTE recommendations (2020): Submit a feasibility study to the government and support the government to review and decide to proceed or not with the "Green List" standard

Output 1.2.1. Development and implementation of forest-specific management measures in PA management plans for PAs, covering 839 567 ha of HCVF - *HCVF identification / mapping, training in existing PAs, , equipment, etc.*

In brief, this component was about increasing the coverage of effectively managed forest PAs and introduction of HCVF concept into management though:

a. increase in net PA estate (target by 17,294.85 km2) - creation of new PAs (10) and expansion of existing (3),
b). the strengthening of management effectiveness of both new/expanded and 12 additional existing PAs (totalling 74,892 km2) measured by individual PA METT score 30% increase by EoP.
c). Introduction and adoption of "Green listing" in Kazakhstan to solidify effective management and ensure recognition.

Table on PA achievements

	Name	METT (start/EoP)	Size ha.
(A) Expansion of protected areas			
1	Kolsai Kolderi National Park	80-87 (Expansion; 24-24)	161,045 + 120,000
2	Zhongar Alatau National Park	59-71 (Exp. 27-27)	356,022 + 64,091.4
3	Karatau Reserve	81-87 (Exp. 17-17)	34,300 + 30,000
	Total A		**765,458.4**
B) Creation of new protected areas:			
1	Merke Regional Park	18-18	70,000
2	Koksu Wildlife Sanctuary	23-23	586,796
3	Ketmen Wildlife Sanctuary	21-21	218,474
4	Ussek Wildlife Sanctuary (instead of originally planned Ili River Delta)	16-16	230,000
5	Teriskey Reserve Zone	21-21	189,407
6	Saur-Manyrak Reserve Zone	17-17	332,160
7	Tarbagatay NP (created in 2018)	18-41	143,550.5
8	Ile-Balkhash State National Reserve (created in 2018)	(16-46)	415,164.2
	Total B		**2,185,551.7**
	Overall total new/expanded		***2,951,010,1***
C. Existing PAs that received Management strengthening (Training, Equipment, HCVF)			
1	Almaty Reserve	67-78	Development and updating of Management Plans Training in areas (Management Plan, conservation, science, monitoring, SMM, community outreach, eco-education, ecotourism, etc.). Strengthening of material and technical base (office equipment, cross-country vehicles, solar panels, radios, GPS, drones, etc.). Monitoring programs Implementation of SMART system Installation of camera traps/thermal imagers and other monitoring and protection equipment
2	Ile-Alatau NP	66-78	
3	Sairam-Ugam NP	71-80	
4	Aksu-Zhabagly Reserve	81-88)	
5	Katon Karagay NP	20-78	
6	Markakol Reserve	48-64)	
7	Zapadno-Altay Reserve	77-85)	
8	Charyn NP	68-78	
9	Syr Darya-Turkestan Regional Park	72-82	
10	Tarbagatay NP (created in 2018)	18-41	
11	Ile-Balkhash State National Reservat (created in 2018)	(16-46)	
12	Kolsai Kolderi National Park	80-87	
13	Zhongar Alatau National Park	59-71	
14	Karatau Zapovednik	81-87	
15	Merke Forestry	18-18	
D. Additional Existing PAs and Forestry that received project's support (non-pilot PAs)			
16	Altyn Yemel National Park (Camera traps, snow leopard monitoring, SMART system)		Trainings in areas (Management Plan, conservation, science, monitoring, SMM, community outreach, eco-education, ecotourism, etc.).
17	State National Nature Park "Burabay"		
18	Karkaraly State National Nature Park (Assisting in the development of the Management Plan)		
19	State National Nature Park "Buiratau"		
20	State Regional Nature Park "Medeu"		
21	Kyzylsay State Regional Nature Park		
22	State Forest Nature Reserve "Semey Ormany" (Assisting in the development of the Management Plan, purchase of radio stations (East Kazakhstan region, after big forest fires in 2023, and based on the PB decision from 11.09.2023)		
23	State Forest Nature Reserve "Ertis Ormany"		
24	Irgiz-Torgay State Nature Reserve		
25	State Nature Reserve "Altyn Dala"		

26	Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve	
27	Naurzum State Nature Reserve	
28	Barsakelmes State Nature Reserve	
29	Ustyurt State Nature Reserve	
30	Bayanayl State National Nature Park	
31	State National Nature Park "Kokshetau"	
32	State Nature Reserve "Akzhaiyk" (Assisting in the development of the Management Plan)	
33	Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve	
34	Naurzum State Nature Reserve	
35	Alakol State Nature Reserve	
36	Bokeyorda State Forest Nature Reservat	
37	Ulytau State National Park (SMART system, Assisting in the development of the Management Plan)	

Forest PA Estate Net increase in area:

- The project has, under this component, succeeded to increase the net forest PA estate by a reported 18,409.28 square Km – to clarify, it has undertaken all the works necessary for the government to officially establish this increase in Forest PA, and submitted it to the relevant authorities for further actions.

- As discussed in the MTR and repeated in PIRs, the original project ambition to have all this area legally established within the timeframe of the project (given the typical time required to undertake the gazetting process) was not realistic and so the target was revised. The Forestry and Wildlife Committee has acknowledged receipt of the documents (scientific background reports and feasibility studies) regarding the expansion or creation of new PAs. They, and the relevant regional authorities, appear from the TE Team observations, to be very committed to ensure the legal approval of these areas takes place in due course. One way to ensure this will be incorporating the PA expansion/creation into the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2035 that is currently under development.

- Although clearly, in an ideal world, the project would end with all the areas legally established, but the TE accepts that the project (the Project team and partners) has done all that was possible to ensure this will happen in the future. Nonetheless there does remain the risk that some areas may not eventually reach the expected status (or not do so for considerable time).

- The TE Team do think that it is important to take a "step back" at this point and contextualize the project achievement a little – to lay the solid basis for increasing the forest PA estate in Kazakhstan by 18,409 square km is an enormous achievement – this is an area equivalent to some countries (Swaziland or Slovenia for example). To achieve this, in an effective and technically sound manner that was also in accordance with national approved rules and processes, in 6 years of the project duration, is truly a praiseworthy result which should not be underestimated (even if there remain some inevitable risks and imperfections).

- A critical factor in this success was the experience brought by the project experts from past projects, and their very clear and evident dedication, hard work and intelligent adaption to the practical issues faced in the process.

Increasing effective management in Forest Projected areas.

- Achievements in this regard range from a). extensive trainings, workshops and seminars on practical capacity to improve effectiveness of management, b). Development of a modified PA management plan format/approach and its application to newly created PAs, c). relevant legal / administrative adjustments to allow more effective management, c). support to Ecotourism development and management in forest PAs.

- Management plans for 12 protected areas have been developed in collaboration with the PA staff and other relevant stakeholders. The MPs were prepared based on a "modified format" developed by the project experts based on experience gained during previous projects working with PAs in Kazakhstan. New features of the modified MP approach included focus on priority threat identification at the initial stage and thence more targeted management actions during the 5-year planning period, and the more direct linking of planned management actions to budgets contained in the plans. The approval of PA MPs by the relevant authorities (Forestry and Wildlife committee in the case of national PAs, regional authorities in case of regional PAs) will thus include approval of the budget. This is a significant change from the past where "standard" mainly recurrent budgets were applied without direct linkage to planned management actions. A regulation was added to the Law on Specially Protected Natural Areas, which obliges to consider the Management Plans as the main document for financial planning and came into force in 2020 – the project has therefore impacted the whole PA system management planning system and step by step (as past plans expire) all PAs (35) will be utilizing the new project introduced format.

- *Management effectiveness Training:* Training sessions were conducted to improve the skills of the staff of the pilots. These sessions focused on topics such as the development of Management Plans, the use of SMART system and drones for ecosystem protection and monitoring. Training PA staff on HCVF management principles and practices, including special training on local stakeholder and community engagement and participation. In particular a very well thought out and executed programme of support to introduce SMART Patrolling (equipment and training, follow up) has been undertaken in 10 PAs.
- A range of ecotourism activities in forest PAs was undertaken including conceptional / planning support (defining what is ecotourism in PA context and what it should entail, methods for estimating tourism carrying capacity/loads, etc.), development facilitation works (draft Concepts, architectural and artistic design, and design and estimate documentation for the creation of visit centers based at the Charyn and Katon-Karagai national parks), practical site support such as new trail developments, etc.
- The project reported (PIR2024) that the target for Indicator 6 (30% increase in METT score) had been achieved. However, from the table above it can be noted that this was indeed the case for all the existing PAs supported, but not the case for the majority of the newly established PAs – in the latter case most showed no change in baseline and EoP METT scores. This is understood by the TE Team to be a result of focus in the new PA sites being a). mainly on the establishment process, b). the new sites do not yet having a formal PA administration to build capacity (though they do have the existing Leshoz staff). Overall, the TE Team would recommend that the final PIR and project reports are clearer and more transparent on this aspect.

Green listing

- *Target - Introduction and piloting of Assessment for Protected Areas IUCN Green List Standard in at least 1 forest PA:* The work to achieve the target indicator was still in progress at the time of the TE. An analysis is currently being prepared to assess the applicability of this tool in the country, its consistency with the national legal framework, and its alignment with the priorities set by the FWC to improve the effectiveness of protected area management. Upon completion of the analysis, a detailed report will be presented with recommendations on necessary institutional changes to the current Law on Protected Areas and other normative legal acts. The report is planned to be submitted to the Forestry and Wildlife Committee in October 2024.

<u>Summary Conclusions Component 1:</u>

- Firstly, the project has made major achievements in terms of putting in place the basis for a very significant increase in the forest Protected areas net coverage. Conditions seem to be in place that make it likely all, or most, of these planned PAs will be legally approved and established in the next 12 to 18 months.

- Secondly, the project has undertaken significant efforts to build the capacity of target existing PAs (14) which have positively impacted the management effectiveness in the existing PAS, and some newly established PAs (as evidenced by significant changes in METT scores, often exceeding the 30% targets) – however, the majority of newly established PAs showed no significant change in METT score between baseline and EoP.

- TE Team would like to highlight several very positive and important aspects of the work undertaken within this component of the project, specifically: a). the introduction of a "modified methodology" for preparation of PA management plans during the project, b). the introduction of SMART patrolling, c). the work on improved clarification of Ecotourism and specifically introduction of concept and methodology for "tourism load" assessment and application in PAs.

- Though the new management plan methodology may not be "state of the Art" in international terms, the TE Team consider it to be a pragmatic and intelligent evolution to the previous "standard format". Its adoption and inclusion into the Protected Areas Law, and future application by the Forestry and Wildlife Committee, means that in due course the project will have impacted all PAs in the PA estate (as they periodically update their MPs and apply the new methodology).

- The TE Team believe that the work undertaken to introduce the SMART Patrolling approach to PAs was undertaken in a sensitive and exemplary manner and should have major benefits both in monitoring and research terms, and staff management terms.

- The work undertaken to better define the concept and application of the term "ecotourism" in PAs and the related work on how to assess and manage tourism "load / carrying capacity" in PAs is considered to be highly relevant and extremely important at this point in time. Evidence heard and seen during the field mission suggests inappropriate types of tourism and excessive visitor numbers to some sites is already a threat and management issue in some PAs.

Component 2: Promoting the integration of forest protected areas in the landscape context by creating conditions for the effective regulation and management of globally important ecosystems

PIR Outcome 2	Rating
Promoting the integration of forest protected areas in the landscape context by creating conditions for the effective regulation and management of globally important ecosystems	Satisfactory

PIR Outcome 2 (Prodoc Component 2): Promoting the integration of forest protected areas in the landscape context by creating conditions for the effective regulation and management of globally important ecosystems						
Indicator	**Baseline**	**MTR status**	**EOP target**	**EOP Status**	**MTR Assessment**	**TE Assessment**
Date	**2018**	**2020 (Sept.)**		**2024 (Sept)**		
8. Change in area of sustainably managed forest in forest ecosystems bordering protected areas	N/A	N/A (achievement of result not expected at mid-point)	>1,000,000 ha, as indicated by adoption of improved HCVF management practices in 6 targeted leskhozes	1,272,742 HCVF in the territory of 8 pilot forestry enterprises - 1,272,742 hectares recognized as HCVF.	On track	Achieved (with caveats)
9. Reduction in degraded and deforested area in targeted forestry territories bordering protected areas	11,305.60 ha Leskhoz: degraded ha, deforested ha	No net degradation area beyond baseline observed 7 nurseries	>5% improvement over baseline	70% improvement compared to the baseline. Degraded/deforested declined from 11,305.60 ha in 2016 to 7,696.8 ha.in 2024 (based on Leshoz reports).	On track	Achieved
10. Change in area of degradation in pasture and forest pasture landscapes bordering protected areas	Total: 0 ha with reduced degradation out of 73,000 degraded ha of pastureland	N/A (achievement of result not expected at mid-point)	Total: 73,000 ha with reduced degradation	81,681 ha of pastures with signs of reversed degradation 111% of the EoP target	On Track	Reported as Achieved but some significant concerns
11. Area outside PAs with enhanced conservation management (PA corridors and buffer zones identified in district integrated management plans)	N/A (no conservation measures planned in targeted districts)	N/A (achievement of result not expected at mid-point)	350,000 ha	Achieved 648,160 ha of potential ecologic corridors identified based on functional zoning) under enhanced conservation (185% of the EoP target),	On Track	Achieved
12. Number of good practice models for private afforestation established in Kazakhstan	N/A (no models yet established by project)	Afforestation initiated in four pilot models with identified key partners	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. Modified version of the target level according to MTE recommendations (2020): Model projects of private forest plantations are developed taking into account	Reported as achieved (based on revised target post MTR). Models for private forest plantation projects for the Southern region: 1) Pyramidal Poplar plantation project for business timber production; 2) Project for establishing a forest plantation from Pavlovnia felota for business timber production; 3) Walnut plantation project for fruit (nut) production.	On track (modified to remove community forestry)	Achieved (as per modified target)

			natural and climatic conditions and results/lessons learned from implemented pilots.			
13. Degree to which policy and regulatory context for managing natural resources incorporates ecosystem services	No methodology for considering full cost-benefit of ecosystem services incorporated in natural resource management policy and regulatory framework	One TSA initiated	At least one regulation adopted at provincial or national level that recognizes and incorporates TSA methodology	Reported as still in progress. However, TE concludes not feasible in remaining period to embed TSA to extent any "regulation" will be adopted.	On TRack	Not achieved (but with mitigating aspects).

- Component 2 of the project was the largest, most complex and arguably the most challenging of the project. It contained 3 Outcomes and 12 Outputs and was allocated about 50% of the entire project budget. It also aimed to introduce multiple completely new approaches. If component 1 was replicating and upscaling existing experience from past Protected areas orientated projects then Component 2 was intended to take the next step and address forestry and land use around PAs (for combined biodiversity, sustainably land use and livelihood objectives). This was therefore the innovative and incremental part of the project.

- Though there are 12 Outputs they can be thematically grouped into: forestry management aspects, pasture management aspects, integrated land use planning (district zoning), tourism strategies for forest PAs, Hunting farm regulations and management strengthening, and introducing a methodology to better incorporate ecosystem service values into policy planning (the TSA approach).

Summary of Key Component Achievements under Component 2

Outcome 2.1: Improved management of high conservation value forests and pastures in forest PA landscapes with direct community benefits *Output 2.1.1*. Revision and implementation of Forest Management Plans for 10 forestry units bordering forest PAs covering [5 365 100] hectares (with [2 783 000] forested area), including community input mechanisms.

Key Reported Achievements

- Strengthening the institutional framework through updating norms and standards in the field of forest protection, conservation and reforestation. Introduction of new approaches to medium-term planning and forest management.
- The project prepared a calculation and justification of the need for financial resources for the introduction of new natural norms and standards for the protection, use of the forest fund, reproduction of forests and afforestation in the areas of the state forest fund. **This calculation was approved by the republican budget commission in October 2024. These revised natural norms and standards will impact 156 forest and environmental institutions nationwide.**
- Two pilot management plans were developed for Ridder and Karadala forestry farms. The management plans define the main goals, objectives, as well as a set of activities and budget calculation necessary to achieve the set objectives of the institutions within 5 years. The implementation of the management plans will ensure a continuous process that will make the management of the institutions effective, efficient and adaptive over time.
- For the first time for Kazakhstan in order to improve the technological process of forest inventory works, an industrial drone was purchased, which allows airborne laser scanning and aerial photography for forest inventory, accounting and taxation.
- Strengthening the technical capacity of forest nurseries by introducing water-saving technologies (drip irrigation), improving sowing methods (Saxaul seeder) and improving agronomic works (tractors, plows, harrows, cultivators, etc.).
- The project systematically worked on strengthening the technical capacity of 8 pilot leskhozes to fight forest fires. Thus, over 12 units of machinery, more than 400 pieces of equipment and more than 150 radios were purchased during the whole project period.
- Strengthening of human resources capacity (development of a comprehensive training program for capacity building of forestry workers, training on HCVF, drone operations, forest fire monitoring, etc.).

Output 2.1.2. Forest pasture management plans (including grazing plans) developed and implemented with local community engagement in 4 pilot sites bordering PAs covering 73,000 ha of forest pastures.

Key Reported Achievements

- implemented pilot projects in 4 rural districts: 'Koksaray', 'Kaskasu', 'Belkaragai' and 'Sumbe':
  - Kaskasu (mountain pastures of the Western Tien-Shan): fallow - 1,463 ha, distant forest: 12,000 ha;
  - Koksaray (pasture ecosystems of riparian forests of the Syrdarya River): grasslands - 8,320 ha, forests - 15,000 ha;
  - Belkaragai (pasture ecosystems of Altai forests: wilderness - 3,300 ha, forest - 11,000 ha);
  - Sumbe (pasture ecosystems of riparian forests of the Charyn River): grassland - 3,862 ha, forest - 26,736 ha.
- Based on the results of pasture condition assessment, Pasture Management Plans were developed and approved for each pilot district.
- In each rural district, Public Pasture Councils were established from local residents, farmers and akims of rural districts, and in order to reduce the load on frontier pastures, the decisions of the councils organised the withdrawal of more than 7,000 conditional heads.

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.

Key Reported Achievements

- Four (4) standard projects for the creation of private forest plantations have been developed for the Eastern region of the country: 1) creation of a birch plantation for growing commercial timber; 2) creation of a spruce plantation for growing commercial timber; 3) creation of a willow plantation for growing timber for energy purposes; 4) creation of a poplar plantation for growing commercial timber.
- For the Southern region, three (3) standard projects for the creation of private forest plantations: 1) creation of a pyramidal poplar plantation for the production of commercial timber; 2) creation of a paulownia forest plantation for the production of commercial timber; 3) creation of a walnut plantation for the production of nuts.
- In May 2024, a round table was held with experts, representatives of business and government to discuss the current situation in the development of private afforestation in Kazakhstan, identifying problematic aspects and developing measures to solve them. The developed standard projects were presented at the round table.

Output 2.1.4 Integrated land and forest management plans developed and implemented in six administrative districts through community consultation covering 350,000 ha surrounding newly established PAs, including designation of buffer zones and corridors

Key Reported Achievements

- implementing landscape planning activities in 7 districts of Almaty and Zhetysu regions: Kegensky, Yeskeldinsky Rayimbeksky, Panfilovsky, Uigursky, Enbshikazakhsky, Kerbulaksky.
- The work was carried out over two years, from October 2020 to May 2022. The functional zoning schemes have been agreed with the akimats of the pilot districts and approved by the district maslikhats.
- The approved Functional Zoning Schemes are the basis for planning and management of land resources at the level of each rural district taking into account the landscape approach.
- The Project intends to replicate the experience, approaches and knowledge on landscape planning in other UNDP projects on biodiversity conservation.
- 648,160 ha (total area of potential ecologic corridors identified based on functional zoning) under enhanced conservation (185% of the EoP target).

Output 2.1.5 Tourism management strategies developed for forest PAs in cooperation with local communities, strategies integrated in PA management plans and under implementation

Key Reported Achievements: Reporting on this Output (in PIRs, presentations for TE, etc) was very scattered and unsystematic. It was not possible to find any specific reporting on creation of specific "tourism management strategies" for each or all of the target forest PAs. Some results extracted from PIR 2024 are indicated below but TE does not feel this is a very adequate representation of the considerable Ecotourism (and eco-education) achievements.

- drafting a document regulating the procedure for tourist and recreational activities in state national natural parks - The project developed Methodological Recommendations for calculating norms of recreational loads on tourist routes and trails of SPNAs. The document was approved by the Scientific and Technical Council of the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife and as a result of its testing, the calculation of norms of recreational loads on 27 tourist routes in four national parks, such as Katon-Karagai, Sairam-Ugam, Charyn, "Kolsai kolderi" and Syrdarya-Turkestan Regional Nature Park was made.

- seminars on eco-education and ecotourism
- an informational tour for guides and tour operators of the Turkestan region on the presentation of an updated tour route in the Sairam-Ugam National Natural Park, where 43 individuals (26 men and 17 women) were informed.
- virtual tours for 5 PAs (Western Altai nature reserve, Katon-Karagai SNNP, Sairam-Ugam SNNP, Tarbagatai SNNP, Kolsai-Kolderi SNNP);
- on building capacity of women entrepreneurs engaged in ecotourism activities in Almaty, East Kazakhstan oblasts and Shymkent city. A series of trainings on financial planning and marketing

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.

Key Reported Achievements: The project document contained 5 activities under this Output namely: 1. Biodiversity inventory analysis on forest hunting areas in three regions, .2. Research and analysis on effectiveness of current regulations, and coherence with biodiversity needs and priorities, 3. Proposal developed and adopted for revised regulations and management approaches, 4. Strengthened enforcement of hunting regulations - training, equipment for wildlife inspectors, 5. Education and awareness of stakeholders about regulations - local communities near hunting areas, hunting service providers, etc.

It is unclear from PIR and other sources if this output was ever systematically implemented. The main mention of Hunting farms and the Hunting Association in reporting is that they were included in PA establishment processes and in Forestry management plan development (x2). The TE accepts that activities 1,4 and 5 will have been covered adequately under other Outputs but there is no clear evidence supplied in the TE PIR (PIR 2024) regarding activities 2 and 3. Thus it is not clear if the specific actions and results expected under the project document Output 2.1.6 were specifically pursued.

However, the project has stated *post* TE mission that "activities 2 and 3 were implemented, but unfortunately, it has not been reflected in PIRs. The project implemented: 2. Research and analysis on effectiveness of current regulations, and coherence with biodiversity needs and priorities: Improvement of the methodology of wildlife accounting for mountain ecosystems was prepared (attached); Recommendations for amendments to the regulatory and legal framework on on-farm hunting management were prepared (attached). 3. Proposal developed and adopted for revised regulations and management approaches: Improvement of hunting regulations in forest ecosystems". Documentary evidence for this was provided.

***Eco-DAMU*- Micro Lending to support** "non damaging" economic activity (businesses) around PAs (Buffer areas – 50km from PA border): This initiative is somewhat "cross-cutting" and as such does not clearly fit under any of the above Outputs. The achievements under this initiative are somewhat poorly reported in the PIR (under cumulative progress) and in presentations for the TE. From interview during the TE mission achievements can be summarized as – 39 small businesses supported in areas around target PAs, total 227.2 million tenge (USD 521.8 thousand) loans disburse (typical businesses: bee keeping, tourism, woodwork, sewing, agricultural, etc).

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

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).

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

Output 2.2.3. Training program and improved forest research and data analysis capacities to support implementation and uptake of HCVF management approaches

Key Reported Achievements

- For the first time for Kazakhstan, more than 1.2 million ha of HCVF were allocated in 8 pilot forestry's (54% of the total area of the pilot leskhozes).
- Since 2020, a group of national experts under the coordination of international experts worked on testing the HCVF approach in the forest sector of Kazakhstan. Stage 1 (2020-2022) adaptation of the existing international concept and development of Guidelines on HCVF identification, assessment and management for Kazakhstan.

- Stage 2 (2022-2023) direct identification of HCVF on the territory of 8 pilot leskhozes (saxaul, mountain, floodplain). As a result, HCVF were identified on the area of 1.2 million ha out of the total area of more than 2.3 million ha of leskhozes. Management and monitoring recommendations were developed for each leskhoz.
- Stage 3 (2023-2024) - capacity building on HCVF issues : A training module on HCVF was developed for inclusion in the educational programs of higher education institutions training forestry specialists. The training module has been tested and integrated in the State University named after Toraigyrov.
- The developed HCVF management plans were included in the management plans of the pilot leskhozes "Ridder" and "Karadala".

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

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.
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
Output 2.3.3. TSA is integrated into capacity development and professional training courses.

Key Reported Achievements:

- For the first time for Kazakhstan, in accordance with the international TSA methodology, an assessment of the forest management system of Kazakhstan (for 15 years) with the elaboration of a scenario of its sustainable development was carried out.
- In order to develop strategic decisions on forestry development in Kazakhstan, in 2021, an assessment of the national forest management system in Kazakhstan was completed using the Target Scenario Analysis (TSA) methodology, thereby implementing 1 pilot project.
- The TSA recommendations were presented and approved at the level of the Ministry of Ecology and for Forestry and Wildlife Committee.
- To implement the TSA approach in long-term development planning in Kazakhstan, the project is currently developing a guide to using the tools of target scenario analysis and preparing proposals for using the TSA approach to improve natural resource management policies.
- For the practical application of the TSA approach, efforts are being made to strengthen national capacity to conduct economic and environmental assessments by developing a training module covering the 5-step approach of the methodology and testing it through training.
- the project team will focus on incorporating the TSA methodology approach into the concept of biodiversity conservation.

Comments and Summary Conclusions Component 2:

- Clearly a very great deal of relevant work and significant achievements have been made under this component and the project EoP targets have been achieved (within the definition of the indictors). As a result, the overall rating is satisfactory.
- The TE Team would particularly highlight the achievements in terms of district integrated planning as this is considered extremely valuable and an important step forward not only for Kazakhstan, but for the whole Central Asia region. This is a very innovative approach in the region and has the potential to have far reaching impacts that can benefit all aspects of district level management effectiveness (not just biodiversity issues as was the primary motive under this project).
- The extent of activities related to the forestry management system and the response in that context to events (fires, increased political focus, etc) are also noteworthy and impressive.
- The project recommended "revised natural norms and standards" were approved by the republican budget commission in October 2024 and will impact 156 forest and environmental institutions nationwide.
- Additionally, the TE Team would highlight the importance and value of work done on introducing Forestry Management planning for the first time in Kazakhstan, and for work on "ecotourism" that aimed to better clarify its definition, development in PAs and means to regulate and minimize negative aspects.
- However, as appropriate to the role of evaluators, the TE Team would like to also highlight some issues of uncertainty or concern. Firstly, in terms of the forestry system support and reform process the TE team would suggest that there is some divergence from the original intent in the project document. Overall, there is the impression that more focus and effort was given to immediate support and to HCVF aspects rather than addressing important practical forestry management system issues.

- An example of this is the discrepancy between project document intent to support 8 pilot Leshoz to develop management plans as a basis for introducing this important reform to the current system. The importance attached to this is reflected by it being the 1st output (Output 2.1.1) under Component 2, and activities to achieve it scheduled from 1st year. The project seems to have been slow to initiating this critical output and as a result was only able to complete 2 pilot forestry enterprise management plans in the final month of the project – this left no opportunity to support and learn lessons from their practical implementation. The adjustments needed to the forestry code to allow these plans to be officially adopted and financed is still pending as the project finishes.
- At the same time as the above critical Output was not progressing as intended in the project document, the project invested very significant efforts in HCVF training, inventory, legal adjustments and planning – though these efforts are praiseworthy there is the question as to whether they were the priority, and whether the focus and effort on the HCVF distracted from focus on more fundamental forestry management reform needs. In practice, it would seem that the HCVF work has little immediate benefit if the forestry management capacity is not first sufficiently built to be able to apply it.
- Additional to the HCVF work, the project put major efforts (again commendable) into support to short term Leshoz capacity to fight fires etc. But again, this was possible at the expense of addressing the under-lying forest management issues that made the forests more vulnerable to fires in the first place.
- The TE Team conclusion is that the project technical direction perhaps was allowed to drift in this context, and there should have been more effort to prioritise addressing the root cause of forest management issues (as per Output 2.1.1) relative to the shorter term issues (firefighting capacity, etc.) or aspects that were only viable once more fundamental issues were addressed (such as HCVF aspects of management).
- Pasture Management (Output 2.1.2): On paper the project exceeded the target (73,000 ha of pasture with reduced degradation – reported is 81k ha.). However, this is based not on field survey but on the assumption that if there are pasture use plans and Councils then the target was reached. Apart from this rather weak basis for verification the TE Team have concerns based on field visits and interviews. Out of 3 sites visited - in one case it seems that the community did not accept the pasture use plan or establish a Council (their main appreciation of the project was in terms of fodder issue support). In a second case both the pasture use plan and council were created but the hokim in questioned highlighted that due to rapid increases in the number of livestock held by local households the pasture was simply not enough, and overgrazing was still an issue. In conclusion – though the activities undertaken seem to have been energetically and fully carried out, the TE Team are not convinced that the approaches being used are a complete solution to the growing pasture use (and degradation) issues facing Kazakhstan. In this context, the TE would strongly recommend in-depth review and analysis of such approaches before their replication and upscaling in future projects.
- *The hunting farm system and its integration to sustainable biodiversity use and conservation*: The TE Team impression from both reporting (PIRs etc). and interviews was that Output 2.1.6 was not significantly addressed and there are still many fundamental issues facing the hunting system which were perhaps not addressed by the project. Given the already extremely "busy" project landscape this is perhaps not unsurprising and was a strategic choice. However, this therefore remains a significant aspect of the sustainable use of biodiversity in buffer areas that could and should be addressed more deeply in future.
- *Eco-DAMU Loan mechanism*: The TE Team recognise and greatly applaud this initiative and concept as an innovative approach to economically support communities around PAs that bear some of the "costs" of their establishment. However, the TE Team does have some significant uncertainty as to the actual impact that the current system has in relation to the objectives. Based on the TE Teams experience with similar such initiatives, the key to success and to meaningful benefits for PAs and biodiversity (and local communities around PAs) depends on very careful design and targeting. The TE Team impression currently is that this may not be the case – thus, before the scheme is further replicated and upscaled it would seem necessary to evaluate this (ideally an independent evaluation by people with relevant experience in this regard).
- *Targeted Scenario Analysis (TSA)* – The TE Teams impression regarding the TSA is that perhaps it was attempting to do to much to soon given the limited level and capacity in Kazakhstan regarding such approaches. Certainly, the project target of having a regulation related to TSA being in place (at either national or region level) by EoP was not realistic. We believe that the priority at this point in time will be to build national awareness, understanding and capacity of the concept and approach of TSA (and other approaches to adequately incorporating ecosystem service values into policy and plannings systems) so that there is then a more system level acceptance and knowledge for its application.

Component 3:

PIR Outcome 3	Rating
International cooperation and knowledge management	Highlu Satisfactory

PIR Outcome 3 (Prodoc Component 3): International cooperation and knowledge management						
Indicator	**Baseline**	**MTR status**	**EOP target**	**EOP Status**	**MTR Assessment**	**TE Assessment**
Date	**2018**	**2020 (Sept)**		**2024 (Sept)**		

14. Quality and coverage (50% of habitat) of snow leopard monitoring data in Kazakhstan as indicated by estimated accuracy and timeliness of national snow leopard population estimate	Latest population estimate 15 years prior (2001) with a 91% confidence level (lowest possible estimated population / highest possible estimated population, i.e. 100/110 = 91%)	Updated snow leopard population estimate for 2019	Publishing of annual population estimates with a 95% or greater confidence level	National reports on the status of the snow leopard have been prepared annually from 2019 to 2023. Reports in last years based on high quality data (at or above 95% confidence).	On track	Achieved
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	No formal international agreement between Kazakhstan and neighboring countries related to snow leopard conservation	At least one regional meeting held related to cooperation and coordination for snow leopard conservation	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	In process. Currently, the Project is coordinating the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the State National Nature Parks "Ile-Alatau", "Kolsai Kolderi", Almaty State Nature Reserve of the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State Nature Park "Chon-Kemin" of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic on the conservation of globally significant species - snow leopard and its habitats.	On Track	Achieved

Outcome 3.1 Increased capacities of Kazakhstan to monitor its wildlife, ensure law enforcement and share knowledge.
Output 3.1.1. Enhanced enforcement capacities of wildlife protection agencies through: (i) improved effectiveness of monitoring, apprehending, and prosecution of illegal activities; (ii) training materials developed and rolled out for wildlife protection agencies

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)

***Key Reported Achievements*:**

- The Project has played a crucial role in establishing an annual reporting system on the snow leopard population in Kazakhstan.
- Since the start of the Project, National reports on the status of the snow leopard have been prepared annually from 2019 to 2023.
- These national reports form a basis for essential monitoring information on the population both at national and international levels.
- The data's reliability at a 95% confidence level is supported by information gathered from camera traps and scientific studies conducted in the Altai Mountains, Zhetysu Alatau, Northern and Western Tien Shan.
- The Project actively continued its work on satellite tagging of snow leopards. Since
- 2021, the Project has successfully implemented a telemetry system for snow leopards in Kazakhstan.
- The Project organized the delivery of special capture equipment , navigation equipment, and training, allowing Kazakhstani scientists to gain extensive experience in the successful capture of snow leopards and the installation of telemetry collars.
- Since the beginning of the project, 11 satellite telemetry collars have been installed on snow leopards in the mountains of the Northern and Central Tien Shan.
- The obtained telemetry data revealed the movement paths of snow leopards, both within Kazakhstan and across its border. For example, there is a reliable migration path of snow leopards to China and Kyrgyzstan, recorded on migration maps.
- In February 2024, the project showcased all achieved results on snow leopard conservation to the management and representatives of the Global Environment Facility in PAs.

Output 3.1.2 Targeted additional implementation of Kazakhstan's National Snow Leopard Ecosystem Conservation Plan and international engagement in GSLEP

Key Reported Achievements

- In February 2024, the project participated in an international conference on snow leopard conservation organized by GSLEP in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, within the framework of CMS 2024.
- During this event, the project, as part of the Kazakh delegation led by the Vice-Minister of Ecology of Kazakhstan, presented a report on the work carried out on the study and sustainable conservation of the snow leopard, This event enhanced the visibility of the project´s results at the international level.
- Project is coordinating the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the State National Nature Parks "Ile-Alatau", "Kolsai Kolderi", Almaty State Nature Reserve of the Committee of Forestry and Wildlife of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State Nature Park "Chon-Kemin" of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of the Kyrgyz Republic on the conservation of globally significant species - snow leopard and its habitats.

Component 3 Comments and Conclusions:

- The TE Team can only compliment the Project team and partners on an exemplary implementation of this component. From the evidence seen (reports and interviews) the project has help build the national capacity in Kazakhstan for monitoring and research into snow leopards to the highest international levels.
- Efforts to reach regional agreements on snow leopard conservation, though delayed due to various barriers, are now on course to be signed.

Gender Target:

PIR Outcome 4	Rating

Cross-cutting: Gender mainstreaming during implementation	Satisfactory

PIR Outcome 3 (Prodoc Component 3): International cooperation and knowledge management						
Indicator	**Baseline**	**MTR status**	**EOP target**	**EOP Status**	**MTR Assessment**	**TE Assessment**
Date	**2018**	**2020 (Sept)**		**2024 (Sept)**		
16. Consistency of project gender mainstreaming approach with project plans	N/A – Project not under implementation; project design includes multiple elements designed to mainstream gender	Project gender mainstreaming action plan completed by end of 1st year of project implementation	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	Yes to all	On track	Achieved

Key Reported Achievements:

A) While developing the project's annual work plan (AWP), a gender perspective has been taken into account across the activities. The AWPs have also reviewed and agreed upon with the country office gender specialist. The composition of the Project Board and the observers has maintained a gender balance. The coordination councils under the pilot PAs has ensured that women constitute 30% of their composition.

(B) A gender impact assessment of the project outcomes is currently in progress, which will lead to the development of recommendations aimed at improving policies to better support women and vulnerable populations working or living near protected areas. The recommendations will be incorporated into the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.

(C) The project focused on enhancing the capacity of women from various target groups, including those in protected areas, forestry's, teachers, and more. 109 women underwent training to enhance their knowledge in various fields, including protected area management, sustainable forest management, ecotourism, eco-education, and monitoring. Other activities include the conference about gender and biodiversity, trainings for local artisans, providing them with equipment, improvement of living conditions for wives of inspectors in remote locations by installing solar panels.

(D) A focus was on building capacity of women entrepreneurs engaged in ecotourism activities in Almaty, East Kazakhstan oblasts and Shymkent city has been applied. A series of trainings on financial planning and marketing were organized, increasing participants' capacity and knowledge in these areas. During the training, the UNDP CO's Gender specialist also conducted an on-line session on gender equality to raise awareness of gender equality, existing biases, and gender stereotypes. Overall, 76 entrepreneurs were trained, including 58 women working in the tourism sector. The activity increased the skills of local women on ways of generating income from ecotourism activities and improving the competitiveness of their tourism products and services.

Crosscutting Gender Comments / Conclusions:

- The project appears to have made systematic efforts throughout to ensure gender balance within beneficiaries and stakeholder groups in all activities.
- Some issues raised during the TE were a). An initial analysis during PPG stage of **why** gender issues were relevant to the project at the outset would have been useful i.e. a more rigorous definition of the term and specific relevance's in the context of PAs, Forestry management and buffer zone populations (in biodiversity/natural resources context) at the start of the project might have helped focus efforts more systematically, b). more experience exchange between women stakeholders would be beneficial (between women working in PAs and forestry, eco-tourism, etc).

3.5 Relevance

Issue	Rating
Relevance	Highly Satisfactory

195. There is clear national ownership of the project's objective and outcomes which manifests itself in a high level of interest and support at national and local levels, specifically: Forestry and Wildlife committee, PA and Forestry Enterprise staff, local authorities, scientific and technical institutions that were supported by the project.

196. The project strategy was formulated in line with the National Development Planning: It is fully in line with the national "*Concept for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biological Diversity of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030*" developed in 2014. 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.

197. The BD Concept 2030 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 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.

198. Furthermore, 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".

199. The project objectives are directly aligned with the UNDAF 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), and with 4 Country Programme Document (CPD) Outputs (most pertinent of which are - Output 3. Natural resources are protected, accounted for and integrated in national and/or sub-national development planning, Output 4. National and sub-national institutions have strengthened capacities in environmental governance in protected territories and adjacent settlements).

200. 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.

3.6 Effectiveness

Issue	Rating
Effectiveness	Satisfactory

201. Overall the project has effectively worked towards achieving the its outcomes and objective despite a number of challenges, including the extremely ambitious extent of the project design, the COVID pandemic (that impacted year 2 and 3 of implementation), the change in project leadership in year 4 (departure of project manager and 4 month interlude before the replacement Project Coordinator was recruited), and increasingly complex UNDP procurement process (perhaps related to the transition to Quantum system).

202. The project team were highly experienced and highly motivated and despite the potentially overwhelming quantity of project outcomes, output and activities, have made a valiant and praiseworthy effort to effectively achieve results.

203. The project effectiveness has been most notable in the context of the protected area related aspects, the new and innovative district integrated planning, and in relation to the snow leopard scientific level work.

204. The TE team would suggest that effectiveness of implementation was perhaps impacted by insufficient clarity of technical direction in the sense that emphasis and overall effort seems to have been given more to Component 1, and the fundamental forestry management issues the project was intended to address under Component 2 were allowed to be delayed or overshadowed by more short-term support interventions. Additionally, some of the buffer area support initiatives such as the pasture and loans should have received more critical analysis and oversight.

205. The project seems to have had to play "catch up" with several very key aspects such as the establishment of new PAs and the preparation of Forestry Enterprise management plans with the result that these have barely been achieved before project EoP. This has had implications for effectiveness of results (new PAs METT scores unchanged, only 2 of the 8 originally planned Forestry management plans drafted and not implementable yet, etc).

206. However, given the extremely ambitious and complex project design, and the challenges faced during implementation, the TE Team consider the effectiveness of project implementation was satisfactory despite the limitations mentioned above.

3.7 Efficiency

Issue	Rating
Efficiency	Satisfactory

207. Overall, the project management unit has displayed a high degree of efficiency in the project's implementation. Financial management has been strong, and decisions have been taken rationally and without delay when necessary.

208. When challenges appeared in terms of timeliness of procurement processes the project and UNDP Co worked to find solutions.

209. Communication within the project has been very good with a shared enthusiasm and sense of common purpose, as evidenced by the high level of understanding of the project's purpose and outcomes amongst the various institutional stakeholders.

3.8 Overall outcome

Issue	Rating
Overall outcome	Satisfactory

210. Based on the findings documented in sections 3.1 to 3.7 of this report the TE Team believe that the project design was adequate but over ambitious given the complexity and challenges (even without COVID etc.) of the expected outcomes and objective.

211. However, despite this the project partners, in particular the project team and Forestry and Wildlife Committee, have managed to ensure the project achieve results on a remarkable scale.

212. Implementation has been effective and efficient and at times it has been adaptive without giving way to expedience. The project has largely achieved all its outcomes, albeit with some limitations and the benefit of an 18-month extension.

3.9 Country ownership

213. There is clear national ownership of the project's objective and outcomes which manifests itself in an enthusiasm and interest at all levels. This is particularly high amongst the PA and Forestry system, and scientific and research institutions. As already evidenced in this report the project's objective is closely aligned with national policy as well as preparing the country for future challenges related to environmental and ecosystem resilience.

3.10 Gender

214. The project appears to have made systematic efforts throughout to ensure gender balance within beneficiaries and stakeholder groups in all activities.
215. Some issues raised during the TE were a). An initial analysis of why gender issues were relevant to the project at the outset would have been useful i.e. a more rigorous definition of the term and specific relevance's in the context of PAs, Forestry management and buffer zone populations (in biodiversity/natural resources context) at the start of the project might have helped focus efforts more systematically, b). more experience exchange between women stakeholders would be beneficial (between women working in PAs and forestry, eco-tourism, etc).

3.11 Other cross-cutting issues

216. The project strategy was aligned with the UNDP Country Programme (see section 3.5 this report) and maintains this alignment with the current Country Programme Document for Kazakhstan.

217. The project also contributes to Gender (SDG 5: Gender Equality) as well as 4 other SDGs (2 Zero Hunger, 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, 13 Climate Action, and 15 Life on Land) with relevance to eleven SDG indicators:

SDG 14.3 By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world
SDG 2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality
SDG 2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed
SDG 2a Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries
SDG 5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws
SDG 12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources
SDG 13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries
SDG 13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning
SDG 15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species
SDG 15.9 Integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts
SDG 15.a Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

3.12 Social and Environmental Standards

218. The project received an overall "moderate risk" rating in the UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Protocol (SESP), which was included as Annex F to the Prodoc. This was consistent with the UNDP-GEF approach that **all** UNDP-GEF projects that include on the ground activities related to protected areas **must** be classified as at least "moderate" risk. The project was only relevant to 12 of the risk principles and standards (which have been grouped into six risks in the SESP), with five of the six risks assessed as "low", and the sixth risk assessed as "moderate" – this was related to protected areas establishment / expansion aspects of the project and thus change in land use and potential "costs" to local communities.

219. Evidence in project reporting and from field surveys indicates that indeed opposition from local communities were faced but that reasons behind this opposition was mostly related to misunderstandings of the practical impacts and, crucially, were addressed by extensive consultation and communication efforts with all parties.

220. The TE Team would note that, though the established/official process for PA establishment mandates such consultation and communication, it does not appear that all national staff at local level fully understand this aspect or how to implement it. Even with project supports this aspect was initially a barrier to the timeliness of the PA establishment process. This suggests that in the future additional support to establishing more clearly the "ways and means" to this aspect of PA establishment and embedding meaningful consultation processes with local populations and authorities into management, would be beneficial.

3.13 Sustainability

Issue	Rating
Financial sustainability	Likely
Socio-economic sustainability	Moderately Likely
Institutional framework and governance sustainability	Likely
Environmental sustainability	Likely
Overall sustainability	Likely

221. **Financial sustainability** is considered likely. Based on the evidence gleaned during the evaluation the government of Kazakhstan (including regional authorities) are fully committee to the continued financing of the protected areas and forestry system – in fact evidence showed it was increasing. Thus, in this context the financial sustainability seems quite secure. In terms of the introduction of new approaches to PA, forest, pasture, etc. it is more difficult to be certain of financial support. In the context of the genetic research and preservation of snow leopard genetic material the financial sustainability appears to be secure (grant provided by Ministry of Science and Higher Education).

222. **Socio-economic sustainability** is considered moderately likely. Tourism related support by the project is considered likely to be sustainable but other aspects such as the private forestry models and pasture management efforts are open to a much higher degree of uncertainty. Much will depend on the post project follow up to initial results achieved during the project. For this reason, an overall rating of moderately likely is given.

223. **Institutional framework and governance sustainability** is considered likely. The key responsible institutions (both at national and regional level) are well established and have evolving experience of undertaking incremental reforms to the PA and forestry framework. There is some risk that further adjustments in the institutional responsibilities and structure may occur (as has been the case in recent years) but tis is not expected to fundamentally weaken the institutional framework or governance.

224. **Environmental sustainability** is considered likely. The actions undertaken by the project are aimed at strengthening the effectiveness of conservation and sustainable land use in the target territories, and as such are likely to enhance environmental sustainability. There is some uncertainty that the pasture related actions of this project will directly achieve this but will provide additional experience that will contribute to enhancing pasture use sustainability in the future.

3.14 GEF additionality

225. The table below is based on the Summary of the Alternative Scenario table within the project CEO Endorsement document (page 22). An additional TE review column has been added and an evaluation of results by TE compared to expected provided. From this it can be seen that the expected GEF additionality was largely achieved.

Table 11 GEF alternatives

Summary of baseline scenario	Summary of GEF scenario	Increment	TE Assessment of Increment
Biodiversity			
- Outdated PA management plans, no business planning paradigm within the PA management planning process. - Under-represented tugai and saxaul ecosystems in the PA estate - Snow leopard habitat coverage by PA estate is 40%. While forest conservation remains a government priority, the mosaic (forest-pasture) areas important for the passage and feeding of the snow leopard in three landscapes (Tien Shan, Zhungar Alatau, and Altay) will not get sufficient protection. - Wildlife data collection from stakeholders (PA, hunting areas, community members) remains dispersed, uncoordinated, and thus, inaccurate, unreliable, and misinterpreted. - Suboptimal patrolling practices. Patrol planning is not based on spatial analysis of threats, risks, and monitoring data and does not use common information management system. There is no technical capacity within the valuable landscapes to implement efficient patrolling and law enforcement. - While green economy promoted as a national development concept, the use of payment for ecosystem service transactions is unfamiliar in practice; no science- based guidance on ecosystem services quantification and economic valuation.	- Up to date PA estate with modern management and business plans engagement communities and private sector with benefits for ecosystems and local development - Increasing the representation of tugai, saxaul ecosystems - Increasing representation of snow leopard habitat within the PA estate ensuring protection not only for forests but also grassland areas among the forests important for snow leopard ecology. - Landscape plans of administrative districts targeted by the project are in line with ecological requirements. - Ecosystem services valuated and partnerships with private sector and communities tested at conservation-important forests - Revised hunting and tourism polices remove disturbance and hunting pressure on snow leopard and its prey. - Improved capacities of research institutions, PAs and hunters will enable a long term data flow from Kazakhstan	- New protected areas at Key Biodiversity Areas, as follows: ○ Mountain forests and grasslands: ▪ Southwest slope of Zhetysu Alatau – 805,074 ha ▪ North-Central Tien Shan – 529,196 ha ▪ Kyrgyz range – 88,554 ha ▪ West Tian Shan – 19,700 ha ▪ Saur-Tarbagatai – 475,710 ha ○ Increased PA coverage of national priority snow leopard habitat of 1,087,000 ha - increasing PA coverage of priority snow leopard habitats from 40% to 89%. ○ Tugai/riparian forest and floodplain ecosystems in Ile river basin (612,848 ha), including saxaul shrub and desert ecosystems in Balkhash Lake region - For snow leopard, this includes most important northern transboundary habitats of the snow leopard that will enable populations mixing and viability in the international context. - Removal of threats (73,000 ha of degraded pastureland, 11,306 ha of degraded forestland, poaching), and better protection of globally threatened species listed in IUCN Red Data List: snow leopard, argali, goitered gazelle. Improved capacities of stage agencies for anti-poaching and anti-trafficking performance. - Illegal trade in snow leopard products strictly controlled using best international surveillance, information and enforcement approaches - The project results contribute to CBD PoWPA (expansion of PAs, integration of PAs in wider landscapes, and community engagement schemes) and Aichi Targets	New protected areas at Key Biodiversity Areas: Evaluated as achieved. The only limitation being limited increase in METT score for majority of new PAs. For snow leopard, this includes the most important northern transboundary habitats of the snow leopard that will enable populations mixing and viability in the international context. Evaluated as achieved Removal of threats (73,000 ha of degraded pastureland, 11,306 ha of degraded forestland, poaching), and better protection of globally threatened species listed in IUCN Red Data List: snow leopard, argali, goitered gazelle. Improved capacities of stage agencies for anti-poaching and anti-trafficking performance. Evaluated as mainly achieved. Main threat where there is some uncertainty of real impact relates to pasture (73,0000 ha.). Illegal trade in snow leopard products strictly controlled using best international surveillance, information and enforcement approaches. Evaluated as achieved. The project results contribute to CBD PoWPA (expansion of PAs, integration of PAs in wider landscapes, and community engagement schemes) and Aichi Targets. Evaluated as achieved
Sustainable Land Management			
- Grazing in mountain pastures in snow leopard habitat exceeding carrying capacity by 1.5 times resulting in erosion, mudslides, and worsening of water quality - Land use planning (large infrastructure placement, tourism overloads, hunting practices) follows the short-term economic imperative threatening the resilience of soil and vegetation stability in the long term, which not only undermined the ecology of	- Integrated land use plans developed and launched in four mountain regions - Shift to sustainable pasture management in mountainous areas promoted: rotational grazing; pasture watering to stimulate grasses for vigorous growth and healthy root systems through pasture watering water supply points	Competitive pressures between land uses in alpine, tugai and saxaul forest pasture reduced in 1.90 million ha (720,000 ha of community forest-pasture lands, and 1,175,700 ha of forest-pastures in state forest lands): - Decrease in grazing pressure and improved condition of mountain meadow ecosystems - Reduced infringement of cattle on forests - Reduced human-wildlife conflict - Improved vegetation cover, fodder productivity and pasture	Partially achieved. Within PAs territories. evaluated as achieved. Evaluated as partially achieved in pasture sites outside of PAs.

Snow Leopard but jeopardizes local development in the long term.		regeneration - Increased incidence of SLM approaches applied by small-scale holders leading to soil and vegetation quality improvements	
Sustainable Forest Management			
Within each of the three forest ecosystems targeted by the project (tugai, saxaul, alpine mountains), forests play a key role and cover significant areas (indicated in Section A.1.1). At the same time, the unique nature of these ecosystems is that forest biotopes closely interact with non-forest biotopes (e.g. in the case of tugai there is close relationship between forests and the water regimes of river channels and floodplain meadows; in the case of saxaul – between pastureland and forests; in the case of alpine mountains – between forests and alpine grasslands). Conservation and sustainable management activities, therefore, may not focused solely either on biodiversity, or land degradation or forestry; rather a set of similar interventions designed by the project (i.e. the protected area establishment, the territorial land use planning and implementation, the support to incentives for communities in sustainable forest and land management, etc.) target the ecosystems as a whole and synergistically produce biodiversity, SLM and SFM benefits.			
- Highly centralized forest planning and management - No incentives for engagement of local communities and private sector in SFM - Share of private sector/local community engagement in forest regeneration, forest management, agroforestry, is close to zero. - Forest values are assessed exclusively from the perspective of timber value - Forest management plans make no provisions for the special management / conservation needs of Mountain, Saxaul and Tugai forests - No management standards in place and no training of forestry professionals in the area of valuation and sustaining of ecosystem functions of conservation important forests - Outdated and ineffective methods for assisted regeneration of certain forests types with low regeneration capacity (e.g. Tian Shan Spruce) - Continued loss of valuable mountain, saxaul and tugai forest ecosystems - Low share of forests in the Protected Area estate	- Policies and regulations in place for increased efficiency and effectiveness of forest management, and engagement of private sector and communities in SFM - Forest valuation in national economic statistics and forest budget planning takes into account the ecosystem functions of conservation important forests - Forest management planning routine incorporates HCVF principles and forestry professionals are trained to apply it - Improved forest monitoring and research enables faster regeneration of conservation important forests with low natural regeneration rates (spruce forests) - Decreased loss of saxaul, tugai and mountain forests at target areas - Increased representation of forests in the protected area estate	- SFM-1: Maintaining positive status and reduced pressure on conservation-important forests on 1,899,134 ha (through Output 1.1.2 and Output 1.2.1): ○ 1,316,318 ha of mountain forests ○ 582,816 tugai and saxaul forests - SFM-2: Maintained flow of forest ecosystem services and improved resilience to climate change at 1,174,500 ha of forests outside protected areas. - Integrated economic and environmental valuation of forests and SFM criteria and indicators embedded in national forest investment policies and subsidies in the forestry sector. - Share of investment of the private sector and communities in SFM is at least 12% by year 5 of the project at the target areas - Increase of forests in protected area system from 5.75% to 7% - Protected Area system is expanded by inclusion of 1,284,286 ha of conservation important forests - Reduced soil erosion under 1.01 mln ha under saxaul forests in Balkhash Lake region - Carbon benefits: avoidance of emissions in the equivalent of 5,838,328 resulting from sustainable forest management and grassland management. Using FAO EX-ACT calculator, using current rates of forest and and grassland degradation as baseline assumptions (FAO EX-ACT file available separately).	SFM1 – achieved SFM2 – Achieved Partially achieved: The TSA process has introduced concepts of EnvVal but not embedded. Not achieved Achieved Achieved Uncertain – Likely achieved No data (FAO EX-ACT calculator not undertaken by TE)

3.15 Scaling up/ replication effect

226. The project has been successful in scaling up and there is potential for replication of some important new initiatives/results for Kazakhstan.

227. **Scaling up** is evident in the actions undertaken in Component one tht has taken the experience from past GEF financed projects related to protected areas establishment and management effectiveness strengthening and has up scaled it very significantly (i.e. an additional 18 k km2). It is important to highlight that this scaling up has also included adjustment and evolution of methods and approaches that evidence increased national capacity (particularly in the context of the project experts employed).

228. **Replication**: At TE there was evidence of some important replication of specific new innovative methods and approaches introduced by the project, For example, the new adjusted management plan methodology has already been adopted and is already being rolled out systematically to PAs as and when current management plans expire – this is a very significant impact. Likewise the new approach of establishing "Coordination Councils" for PAs to provide a mechanism for PA and adjacent territory stakeholders to interact has been adopted and is being rolled out to all PAs.

229. Other examples of replication include: the SMART patrolling system, which was replicated in Ulytau National Park, Bokey Orda Reserve, Altyn Dala Reserve and Irgiz-Turgai Reserve; the adoption by the he Forestry and Wildlife Committee of experience in regard to tourism development strategy which the project developed for three national parks (Katon-Karagai, Sairam-Ugam, Kolsai Kolderi); a model agreement of joint activities with business, which was also passed to other national parks as an example; an update of the methodology for snow leopard monitoring which is now being applied in all PAs and hunting farms where snow leopards are present; the adoption of the project training program for forestry staff by the Kazakh research Institute of Forestry; and replication of success in mechanizing the planting and seeding processes in forestry operation (as part of the state order, the Republican Forest Breeding and Seed Center purchased 20 seeders for sowing saxaul on the dried bed of the Aral Sea).

230. In other aspects, specifically the forestry management planning methodology, TSA and spatial planning / zoning (integrated land use planning) at district level evidence of replication is not yet evident. In part this maybe a result of some of the more significant new methods/approaches occurring late in project timeframe (and thus limited opportunity for such replication to occur). Additionally, a number of these new approaches (forestry management plans, private forestry models, TSA, district integrated planning) are still at early "experimental" stage and will need robust and realistic evaluation in order to capture lessons learned and identify what needs to be adjusted and fine-tuned in order to make them effective and replicable. UNDP and the Government of Kazakhstan have a number of new projects at start up stages that intend to build on the project experience and thus replication is likely in future through such support. Additionally, through some adjustments or legal changes (such as the adoption of new methodology for PA MP preparation) replication will be occurring. However,

231. **Demonstration**: The project has introduced and undertaken the demonstration of many important new approaches. Of these the TE Team consider the *district integrated planning approach (zoning)* to be very important and with very significant potential. Other important such demonstrations include the 2 Forestry Enterprise Management Plans (1st in Kazakhstan history), private forest models, the TSA studies, introduction of tourism load concepts and methodologies, amongst others. A critical need in all these cases is to ensure in-dept review, analysis and capturing of lessons learned so that future replication will allow their evolution and practical sustainability /applicability to be developed

232. **Production of public good**; the project has contributed to the conservation of important ecosystem services and new methods and approaches for integrated planning and sustainable use of natural resources by rural communities. It has therefore contributed to the maintenance of key ecosystem services in the country and the socio-economic opportunities and resilience of rural populations. The preservation of forest related genetic materials will contribute to both Kazakhstan and global environmental security and can be argued to be a public good generated by the project.

3.16 Progress to impact

233. The TOC provided in the project document describes 4 long term impacts (global environmental benefits):
- Threats to Biodiversity reduced and biodiversity status enhanced
- Forest degradation reduced, HCVF ecosystems maintained and restored, forest ecosystem services restored and enhanced
- Land degradation reduced to maintain and enhance ecosystem services in pasture integrated in HCVF landscapes
- Status of snow leopard and associated prey and ecosystems enhanced.

234. The TOC was based on 3 "theories of change" – The *first main theory-of-change* relies on the idea of protected areas as core conservation zones for biodiversity, including rare species and valuable ecosystems. The *second theory-of-change* was based on the recognition that as critical as protected areas are, they are <u>not a complete solution</u> for the effective conservation of biodiversity. Biodiversity conservation must also take place beyond the boundaries of protected areas and be integrated in the sustainable management of natural resources in the landscapes where moderate to intensive economic activities also take place (a. created linkages between PAs so they are not "islands", b. improve conservation in sustainable productive landscapes). The *third theory-of-change* approach relates to coordination and knowledge management for biodiversity conservation activities. This approach was because biodiversity outcomes are improved if, a.) stakeholders have quality scientific information to base management decisions on; and b.) if conservation efforts are coordinated among stakeholders.

235. In effect the project intended to reach the expected impacts by a). upscaling / replicating past PA establishment and management

effectiveness experience, b). reduce the island effect of PAs and reduce threats to biodiversity in productive landscapes by addressing threats to biodiversity in buffer areas, and c). strengthen monitoring and knowledge sharing (particularly regarding snow leopards, their prey and habitat).

236. The Objective indicators are broadly aligned with the 4 TOC Expected impacts – the table below has been used to assess the projects achievement towards these impacts. Though the project has in many ways fallen short of the expected impacts in the TOC this is perhaps inevitable given their ambition (for a 5-year project).

237. What is clear is that the project has contributed very significantly on the road to achieving these impacts but leaves a great deal that now needs to be systematically followed up (particularly in the forestry management system context). In the context of pasture management, the TE team would suggest that currently there lacks a sufficiently holistic long-term approach to how pastures should be owned and managed (and livestock numbers regulated) in Kazakhstan – thus activities as supported in this project are too "piecemeal" to effectively address the challenges. This would seem (given the geographical extent, socio-cultural importance, and biodiversity / ecosystem health significance) to be an urgent priority to address in the country.

Table 12 Progress to impact

TOC Expected Impacts	Objective indicators	EoP target	Impact Conclusion
Threats to Biodiversity reduced and biodiversity status enhanced	Area of critical ecosystems with improved management, including tugai, saxaul, and mountain forests, and associated grasslands	9,127,071 hectares	Impact is likely but not fully assured. PAs establishment not fully completed but likely to occur in due course). New PAs management capacity not significantly strengthen (see METT scores). New modified management planning approach adopted and will strengthen effectiveness of whole PA estate in Kazakhstan However, overall forest PA estate management effectiveness was strengthened, however.
Forest degradation reduced, HCVF ecosystems maintained and restored, forest ecosystem services restored and enhanced	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	In terms of the indicator **(see the 2 qualifiers)** the project did not reach the expected impact (i.e. HCVF regulations are proposed but not yet approved, the restructuring of forest system under FWC is still at consideration stage). However, the project has achieved significant actual and potential impact to the overall forest management via short-term capacity building of target forestry's to address fire and disease threats, HCVF inventory and management planning, pilot new MP approach for 2 Leshoz, private forestry models, extensive proposals on legislation/regulations/norms for forest management system enhancing. Follow-up to actions initiated by the project will be crucial to translate the potential impact into actual impact.
Land degradation reduced to maintain	a. # direct project beneficiaries	a. Total: ~41,000 : b. PA staff: >2,000 PA staff with	The most significant impact the project had in this context was

and enhance ecosystem services in pasture integrated in HCVF landscapes	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	enhanced capacity c. Forestry staff: 457 leskhoz staff d. Local resource users: Total: 38,753 (19,382 men; 19,371 women) (figures official from 2009 census)	through the 7 district integrated planning pilots/demonstrations. Training of PA and forestry staff also has significant impact. There is some uncertainty in terms of real impact achieved in terms of sustainable pasture management impact.
Status of snow leopard and associated prey and ecosystems enhanced.	Population trends for globally significant species, such as snow leopard, argali, goitered gazelle, and other threatened species within the expanded target PA estate:	Flora: Non-deterioration of baseline status Fauna: Increase relative to baseline	There is no doubt the project has had significant impact in status of snow leopards, prey species and related ecosystems (though new PAs, ecological corridors, very significant increase in monitoring and data on numbers, movements, etc,). International agreements signed.

4.0 Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons

238. Based on the evidence set out throughout this report it is possible for the TE to reach the following conclusions summarised below:

4.1 Project design and development conclusions

239. The project relevance was extremely pertinent and timely. The project theoretical basis (TOC) was sound and logical.

240. However, the project scope, both geographically and in terms of the number of Outputs (particularly in Component 2) was, in the opinion of the TE Team, too ambitious. The extent of the geographical scope inevitable complicated and impacted the logistical challenges faced during implementation. The extent of outputs made the project extremely "busy" and potentially overwhelming. This, it is believed, was partially responsible for some of the technical direction issues faced during implementation (see below) and the late timing of some key outputs (though other factors also played a part.

241. The indicators/targets level of impact achievable in a 5-year project also appears in many cases to be unrealistic in the real world. For example, there seems to be a poor awareness in the project design of how long legal and administrative processes to establish PAs or introduce national level regulations can take, leading to unrealistic expectation of impacts by project EOP.

242. Furthermore, while the overall set of project indicators and targets were reasonably focused on measuring pertinent progress towards impact, their formulation was in many cases not actually very feasible, or potentially misleading. Examples would be indicators that expected national regulations to be achievable by the project end (although critical steps are not within the projects power) or indicators that are poorly fitted to a relatively short duration project, and / or open to many potential factors and biases that could make them misleading (such as species numbers changes or pasture condition).

4.1 Project management conclusions

243. As discussed above this was an extremely ambitious and very output heavy project. Added to these challenges were the global COVID pandemic very soon after project start, the loss of the project manager in 2023, and the transition for the UNDP system from Atlas to Quantum. Despite these added challenges, the project has achieved an enormous number of well executed, intelligently planned and very valuable achievements, and has largely reach the expected targets (at least in terms of the revised definitions).

244. Management of the project has been, from the evidence seen, very capable and pragmatic with intelligent adaptions during implementation to reach achievable goals (such as the adjustments of unfeasible targets, adaption of activities related to non-state forestry models, etc.). These changes have been discussed and agreed with the SC, UNDP and with support from the RTA.

245. A very experienced, effective and extremely dedicated project team of experts was quickly recruited by UNDP at the project start and have provided continuity throughout the project. It is largely due to this important capacity that the project has managed to achieve the level of results that it has.

246. The project was addressing many new approaches for Kazakhstan, particularly under Component 2 - most critically in this context was the national Forestry management system enhancement/reform aspects in this context the use and application of international experience, to add and further the existing significant national capacity, was also critical. International experience and know-how in the form of consultants with relevant international experience was utilized by the project to introduce methods/approaches not within the experience of the project national experts and partners. The international experts recruited were well qualified and it seems very committed.

247. However, in some cases it is felt they were not given sufficient opportunity to advise/ guide overall technical direction i.e. their TORs and contracts were too "piecemeal" and occurred too late to help influence/guide direction. In several cases the recruitment processes appear to have been long and as a result the timing of some key project results were impacted. The TE Team feel the input of earlier and more systematic international expertise, particularly at the early stages (inception phase and early work planning/scope definition phases) would have greatly helped focus and possibly rationalize what the project would attempt to achieve. This is particularly the case in terms of the national forestry system support were there is an impression that the fundamental needs were not prioritized, and despite very great efforts, the key actions for impact were delayed until the last moment (leading to less impact than was expected in the project document).

248. National ownership has been extremely high with very significant engagement and support of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee and institutional collaboration in the project across a range of agencies and institutions. There has been significant stakeholder participation.

249. Financial management has been robust and transparent. Total expenditures of the GEF project grant reported in the UNDP combined delivery reports (CDRs) through to July 2024 US$ 7,17,953 or 88.96% of the US$ 8,269,178 GEF project grant and the project is on track to fully execute the budget by close of project. Project management costs were US$ 4.7% of the total GEF budget which is consistent with the 5% threshold for project management costs. The distribution of spending across the three components is broadly in line with the indicative budget outlined in the project document.

250. In-kind Cofinancing of the project greatly exceeded the original commitments. However, the UNDP cash co-financing situation by TE was below the committed (USD 63,023 not delivered).

4.2 Project outcome and impact conclusions

251. The project has achieved an impressive set of results and the scope and extent of these are fully recognized by the TE Team. Undoubtably the project has had a very significant impact on the process to increase forest protected area estate in Kazakhstan, the effectiveness of management, and on ensuring a secure basis for snow leopard monitoring and conservation.

252. In terms of impact outside of protected areas it has made very significant contributions to the evolution of more effective approaches to state and non-state forest management, and to district level methodologies/approaches to more integrated planning (that better recognize forestry and natural resource use issues within the larger landscape context and integrate their consideration with other socio-economic issues). The project has contributed significantly to the conceptualization of "eco-tourism" in protected areas and the initial introduction of methods to manage and regulate such activities in a way that is compatible with the objectives of PAs. The project has replicated important natural resource management approaches in the "buffer areas (such as the pilot pasture sites, Eco-DAMU loans, etc.) from which additional experience has been gained that can contribute to these initiatives being refined and strengthened in the future.

253. In short, the TE Team have been impressed by the scope of achievements, the dedication of the project team, and the level of commitment of all national stakeholders. However, it is the task of the TE to assess and draw conclusions on how the project has met the overall expected outcomes detailed in the project document, including what has not always been ideal, and based on that draw conclusions and recommendations of value to future project design and implementation. The TE Team would like to highlight that the elaboration of some of the projects less positive aspects should not be understood as diminishing the very significant achievements discussed above, and is intended constructively.

254. Though the project has (just) met most of the adjusted EoP targets, a closer analysis of the results indicates it has fallen short of the full intended impact of the project document in some significant ways that do have implications for impact.

255. One example is the number of pilot forestry management plans and the timing of those that were achieved – originally it was expected to introduce such new planning approaches to 8 pilot Leshoz (forest enterprises) and to do this in time to be able to

support initial implementation, refine them based on experience of initial implementation, and ensure by EoP the necessary steps to introduce into the national forest legislation had occurred. This would have represented a major impact to the evolution of the forestry management system in Kazakhstan. In practice, for various reasons, this vital component of the project was only initiated at a late stage and had to be limited to 2 pilot sites. The finalization of these 2 plans occurred in final stage of the project with limited opportunity to test in practice, and the legal basis for their adoption and financing is still pending. Thus, though they represent an important achievement they do fall short of expected impact and will require significant follow-on support *post* project if they are to have the impact expected. Another example relates to the new PAs established – for fully understandable reasons these have taken longer than planned, but as a result most have not experienced the expected increase in METT scores.

256. These are two examples used to illustrate that, despite the project's extensive achievements, it has not in the strictest sense, achieve the expected impact as discussed in various sections of the report including Table 12 (Progress to impact section). The three main reasons identified for this are as follows: Firstly, the unrealistic ambition of the original project document and the expected impact in a project of this duration. As previously discussed, such projects need to be viewed (and thence designed) not as "stand alone" interventions that can fully address all the identified threats and barriers but rather as steps in a continuum of development assistance – i.e. within a programme approach. They also need to be designed with more realistic awareness of the rate at which national or regional legal and institutional reform process can occur, and with more realistic awareness of the complexity of undertaking activities in the field aimed at introducing new methods or approaches outside the historical experience of most national stakeholders. Such things cannot and should not be "rushed". Furthermore, there is a need for more realism in terms of what can be achieved by introducing new/better management on the ground (in terms of changes in species numbers in PAs, pasture condition, etc), and the large number of factors that can influence that beyond the control of any project of short duration.

257. Secondly, it appears the inception phase of the project was undertaken very rapidly (within a month of the project start) and though the inception report did address in a minor way some of the indicators/targets, it did not (in the opinion of the TE Team) sufficiently review the overall project feasibility, or propose in detail how the key activities would be rolled out within the project timeframe to ensure the maximum possible impact in the available duration. This is a common missed opportunity in our experience and the inception phase / report is often treated as a *tick box* exercise when in fact it is the single most important stage in the project that can ensure a sound basis for implementation. The addition at this point of some experienced international input could perhaps have allowed the project to rationalize and prepare a clear and feasible roadmap to implement the PA establishment and forestry management planning etc. activities in the time available. Other issues, like some critical assessment of the pasture use activities and ECO-DAMU would have perhaps also benefited from an "outsider" independent viewpoint.

258. The last point leads on to the 3rd reason that the TE concludes contributed to the project not being able to fully meet expected impact in its timeframe i.e. prioritization of key technical directions and systematic use of international technical inputs. As an example, the value of international consultant inputs regarding the forestry management aspects would, we believe, could have been significantly enhanced if he had been tasked / involved initially with planning the overall forestry management system activities to pursue, and then employed on a long-term contract to support that process. Instead, it seems he was required to have several contracts for specific tasks within the process, but limited opportunity to provide insight or guidance to the overall process. Given the importance of this aspect of the project, and the new nature of the activities for which limited national capacity existed, this was an unhelpful approach (but unfortunately very common in such projects).

259. The project has initiated several new methods and approaches for Kazakhstan that have very significant potential impact (including the district "zoning" demonstration, the forest management planning approach, TSA, etc) – however, the project document did not include any specific systematic activities to ensure these new approaches would be carefully evaluated and lessons learned during the project in order to create a basis for future replication. In the TE Teams opinion, it is essential this is done and in future projects any such "new or innovative" approaches automatically include project activities to ensure such evaluation and experience capture exercises take place.

260. In additional to the "new" approaches, the project has replicated from previous projects experience several approaches (examples being the pasture management pilots and ECO-DAMU). There are sufficient reasons to be uncertain regarding the adequacy/effectiveness of some of these replicated approaches, and the TE Team believe this warrants undertaking careful evaluation of them before further replication in future projects.

261. As discussed above the project has achieved significant results but is also ending with a significant number of important issues pending completion. These include, amongst other thing: legal establishment of the new PAs, the capacity development of the new PAs, the approval of the 2 pilot forestry management plans (and changes to forest code to allow their implementation and budgeting), several proposed legal/normative documents, etc. In addition, there are several important new methods/approaches introduced by the project (such as the forestry management plans, district zoning pilots and TSA, etc.) that should be carefully evaluated and lessons learned before they are replicated or upscaled.

262. In this context all parties will need to focus on ensuring adequate follow up if the full impact of the project's efforts is to be captured in the future. Given the significant level of such issues, it is extremely important a comprehensive project "Exit Strategy" is prepared to ensure these valuable initial results are followed through on effectively. The project has prepared an Exist strategy with national counterparts (principally the Forestry and Wildlife committee) but this focuses mainly on immediate aftermath of the project and does not include any efforts to also plan follow up within the context of the longer term national and UNDP programmes.

4.4 Recommendations

Rec #	TE Recommendation	Entity Responsible	Time frame
A	Category 1: Project closure		
A.1	Develop a more holistic Exit strategy that adds clarification on how project achievements, experience and lessons learned will be captured and passed on within the future UNDP programme	PMU and UNDP CO	October 2024
A.2	Complete all required GEF tracking tools, specifically SFM and FAO EX-ACT by project closure.	PMU	October 2024
A.3	Undertake an in-depth evaluation and analysis of the new and innovative approaches and mechanisms introduced by the project to ensure their real-world application and usefulness is clearly identified, lessons learned are captured, and future replication (if justified) is supported (specifically: Forestry management plans, district ILMP approach/zoning, private forestry models, TSA). *NB – given the limited remaining time UNDP CO may have to identify other means to achieve these evaluations (see recommendation B.1)*	PMU	December 2025
A4	Ensure follow-up and support to the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife regarding the various legal adjustments, PA establishment processes, Forest Management plan pilots, etc. in order to minimize the sustainability risk in this regard (during remaining project duration) *NB – given the limited remaining time UNDP CO may have to identify other means to ensure this follow up.*	PMU	December 2025
B	Category 2: Follow-up		
B.1	During future project development (or the initial implementation of new projects), ensure the critical review and analysis of past initiatives that are planned to be replicated or upscaled in order to ensure their maximum utility and impact is fully understood. Two specific examples would be the TSA approach and the Eco-Damu Loan mechanism.	UNDP CO, UNDP RTA	Ongoing
B.2	Ensure that key experience, initiatives, and lessons learned are integrated into the new national "Biodiversity Concept" currently under development (alignment with GBF 2030)- In particular: GBF targets 1: Plan and Manage all Areas to Reduce Biodiversity Loss (integrated planning at local level – district zoning experience from 7 districts), GBF Target 2 (Restore 30% of all Degraded Ecosystems) and GBF Target 3 (Conserve 30% of Land, Waters and Seas).	FWC, UNDP CO	During next 12 m.
B.3	Ensure that in future projects greater emphasis and attention is paid to the inception phase to ensure that adjustments that are needed are made and an in-depth practical plan for implementation of all components is fully elaborated in consultation with all stakeholders. Ideally international technical support should be available at this stage to support this process.	UNDP CO	Ongoing

B.4	Initiate a process to establish a roster system and data base of national experts and consultants in order to facilitate the future retention and timely recruitment of important national capacity and expertise that is available in the country in regard to biodiversity, sustainable rural development, etc	UNDP CO	Ongoing
B.5	Ensure that when projects undertake to test or demonstrate new approaches or management systems the appropriate international technical assistance is employed at the *planning stage* so their expertise can help guide the overall technical direction of such initiatives. Ideally such inputs should take place at the inception phase (see above).	UNDP CO, RTA	Ongoing
B.6	That UNDP (CO and RTA) undertake consultation with the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife, and other relevant key partners, in order to develop a longer-term cooperation framework to guide future systematic project development that maximizes continuity and synergy towards global / national targets.	UNDP CO, RTA, FWC, Others	In next 12 m
B.7	Prioritize in future relevant projects and initiatives the strengthening and capacity support of the hunting farm system in Kazakhstan as a potentially key component of socio-economically sustainable management and conservation of biodiversity in productive landscapes.	UNDP CO, RTA, FWC	Oingoing
B.8	Support in future projects the opportunity for female staff and representatives in PAs, Forestry structures, local councils, etc. to network, share experience / act as mentors and advisers to each other.	UNDP CO	Ongoing

4.5 Lessons learned

263. Project Design and M&E needs to incorporate a realistic awareness of the time that legislative and institutional process occur: One major issue facing the project in terms of meeting the targets and expectations in the project document was the assumption that the project has the direct possibility to complete all many processes (such as PA legal establishment). Clearly this is not the case, and through projects can do much to ensure the conditions/ circumstances for such processes are in place, and provide follow up while project lasts, there will always be a risk that they will take longer to complete than expected or will fail for reasons beyond the project control. This reality needs to be better recognized in the design of Outputs and activities and in the formulation of M&E indicators and targets.

264. Make the most efficient use of international technical support: International technical support, particularly for initiatives new to the country, needs to be brought on board at the earliest stages possible to facilitate "getting off on the right foot" i.e, to ensure the wider experience can be applied at the start of implementation to plan in detail what are the priorities and approaches best suited to achieve the expected impact. A frequent problem the TE Team have observed is that projects often attempt to develop international consultant TORs based on an imperfect understanding of what needs to be done which then leads to inefficiency of practical implementation. Apart from helping to ensure planned implementation is strengthened and project team understanding is built, such early assistance then allows the project to identify more clearly and systematically what further support they will need during implementation and thus ensure TORs for international (and national) consultants are based on the real needs.

265. Ensure greater emphasis in future on supporting beneficiaries' financial sustainability post project: One major lesson learned from the interviews, particularly in Ridder, is the beneficiaries' lack of planning for sustainability. Most participants were heavily reliant on ongoing external support and had not considered how to fund their activities independently. This suggests a critical need for training on financial sustainability, resource mobilization, and long-term planning. Future projects should ensure that beneficiaries are equipped to maintain operations after the project concludes, reducing dependency on external actors (Quote -"We haven't really thought about how we'll manage without the support. Right now, we just depend on the equipment and assistance we've been given.")

Annexes

Annex 1 Terminal Evaluation Terms of Reference

Title:	International Consultant for services of Terminal Evaluation for UNDP- supported GEF-financed projects
Place of work:	Home based with business trips within Kazakhstan
Period:	37 working days during July 2024 – August 2024 (9 weeks)
Contract type:	Individual contract
Project ID and title:	00101043, UNDP-GEF Project "Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits"

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with UNDP and GEF M&E policies and procedures, all full- and medium-sized UNDP- supported GEF-financed projects are required to undergo a Terminal Evaluation (TE) at the end of the project. This Terms of Reference (ToR) sets out the expectations for the TE 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/Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MENR). The project started in April 2018. The TE process must follow the guidance outlined in the document 'Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects' (https://erc.undp.org/methods-center/guidelines/gef-project-evaluation- guidelines).

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Kazakhstan has approximately 12.6 million hectares of forest, which makes it one of the most forest-rich countries in Eurasia, although 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 High conservation value forest (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 (PAs).

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 Astana, Kazakhstan.

The main beneficiaries are:

- Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the RK;
- 4 pilot specially protected natural areas;
- 8 pilot forest protection institutions;
- Departments of Natural Resources and Nature Management Regulation of Almaty, Zhambyl, Zhetysu, East Kazakhstan and Turkestan regions;

- Akimats of pilot districts and rural districts, etc.

The project budget is:

- GEF grant: $8,069,178;
- Co-financing from UNDP: $200,000$
- Co-financing from national partners: $86,795,676.

TE PURPOSE

The TE report will assess the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. The TE report promotes accountability and transparency and assesses the extent of project accomplishments. The information, findings, lessons learnt, and recommendations generated by the TE will be used by the Project Board, UNDP, GEF and other relevant stakeholders to inform future programming.

The TE team will consist of two consultants. The TE International Consultant will be leading the evaluation process and will be in charge of organizing and directing the TE and producing the TE report. The TE International Consultant will be working remotely with feasible support by the TE National Consultant, who will be providing and responding to all questions and comments of the International Consultant at the back to back mode. The TE National Consultant will provide necessary substantive and operational support in carrying out this evaluation. The TE National Consultant will have more opportunities to travel inside the country and assist the International Consultant in conducting interviews and gathering information, as well as its subsequent analysis.

TE APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

The TE report must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful.

The TE team will review all relevant sources of information including documents prepared during the preparation phase (i.e. PIF, UNDP Initiation Plan, UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Procedure/SESP) the Project Document, project reports including annual PIRs, project budget revisions, lesson learned reports, national strategic and legal documents, and any other materials that the team considers useful for this evidence-based evaluation. The TE team will review the baseline and midterm GEF focal area Core Indicators/Tracking Tools submitted to the GEF at the CEO endorsement and midterm stages. The terminal Core Indicators/Tracking Tools that must be completed before the TE field mission begins.

The TE team is expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach ensuring close engagement with the Project Team, government counterparts (the GEF Operational Focal Point), Implementing Partners, the UNDP Country Office(s), the Regional Technical Advisor, direct beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful TE. This includes interviews with responsible parties (partners and beneficiaries) such as: Committee of Forestry and Wildlife of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 14 pilot specially protected natural areas, 8 pilot forest institutions, Institute of Zoology, Departments of Natural Resources and Nature Management Regulation of Almaty, Zhambyl, Zhetysu, East Kazakhstan and Turkestan oblasts, World Wildlife Fund, ACBK, independent consultants, key experts in thematic areas, Project Management Committee (PMC) members, scientific institutions, local authorities and others.

In addition, the TA team is planning to conduct field missions in Kazakhstan: Astana, Almaty, Almaty, Almaty, Zhetysu, Zhambyl, East Kazakhstan and Turkestan oblasts.

The TE seeks to answer the key questions below that should cover the following key areas of evaluation criteria:

Relevance

- How does the project relate to the main objectives of the GEF Focal area, and to the environment and development priorities at the local, regional and national level?
- To what extent was the project in line with national development priorities, country programme outputs and outcomes, the UNDP Strategic Plan, and the SDGs?
- To what extent does the project contribute to the theory of change for the relevant Kazakhstan country programme document outcome?

Effectiveness

- To what extent have the expected outcomes and objectives of the project been achieved?
- Have there been any unexpected results achieved beyond the planned outcomes and objectives?
- To what extent has the UNDP partnership strategy been appropriate and effective?
- Which project areas are the most relevant and strategic for UNDP to scale up or consider going forward?

Efficiency

- Was the project implemented efficiently, in line with international and national norms and standards?
- To what extent have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?
- To what extent do the M&E systems utilized by UNDP ensure effective and efficient project management?

Sustainability

- To what extent are there financial, institutional, socio-political, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?
- To what extent will target men, women and vulnerable people benefit from the project interventions in the long-term?
- To what extent do project interventions have well-designed and well-planned exit strategies which include a gender dimension?

Gender equality and women's empowerment

- How did the project contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment?
- Is the gender marker assigned to this project representative of reality? Impact
- Are there indications that the project has contributed to, or enabled progress toward reduced environmental stress and/or improved ecological status?

The specific design and methodology for the TE should emerge from consultations between the TE team and the above-mentioned parties regarding what is appropriate and feasible for meeting the TE purpose and objectives and answering the evaluation questions, given limitations of budget, time and data. The TE team must use gender-responsive methodologies and tools and ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as other cross-cutting issues and SDGs are incorporated into the TE report.

The final methodological approach including interview schedule, field visits and data to be used in the evaluation must be clearly outlined in the TE Inception Report and be fully discussed and agreed between UNDP, stakeholders and the TE team.

The mission organization should retain enough flexibility for the evaluation team to determine the best methods and tools for collecting and analyzing data. The evaluation team may apply questionnaires, field visits and interviews, and the evaluation team should be able to revise the approach in consultation with the evaluation manager, appointed by the UNDP Country Office, and the key stakeholders. These changes in approach should be agreed and reflected clearly in the TE Inception Report.

The final report must describe the full TE approach taken and the rationale for the approach making explicit the underlying assumptions, challenges, strengths and weaknesses about the methods and approach of the evaluation.

DETAILED SCOPE OF THE TE

Based on the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines, UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluations and in consultations with the UNDP Kazakhstan Country Office, the Evaluation will be participatory, involving relevant stakeholders.

The Evaluation will be conducted by the two independent evaluators (the Evaluators) – one TE International consultant (team leader) and one local TE National consultant, - who will propose an evaluative methodology to implement the evaluation effectively, applying such data collection methods as extended desk reviews, stakeholder meetings and interviews, field visits and others. The methodology and a detailed plan for the Evaluation process will be proposed by the Evaluators and agreed as a part of the Evaluation Inception Report.

The TE will assess project performance against expectations set out in the project's Logical Framework/Results Framework (see ToR Annex A). The TE will assess results according to the criteria outlined in the Guidance for TEs of UNDP-supported GEF-financed Projects (https://erc.undp.org/methods-center/guidelines/gef-project-evaluation-guidelines).

The Findings section of the TE report will cover the topics listed below. A full outline of the TE report's content is provided in ToR Annex C.

The asterisk "(*)" indicates criteria for which a rating is required.

Findings

i. Project Design/Formulation

- National priorities and country drivenness
- Theory of Change
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Social and Environmental Standards (Safeguards)
- Analysis of Results Framework: project logic and strategy, indicators
- Assumptions and Risks
- Lessons from other relevant projects (e.g. same focal area) incorporated into project design
- Planned stakeholder participation
- Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector
- Management arrangements

ii. Project Implementation

- Adaptive management (changes to the project design and project outputs during implementation)
- Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements
- Project Finance and Co-finance
- Monitoring & Evaluation: design at entry (*), implementation (*), and overall assessment of M&E (*)
- Implementing Agency (UNDP) (*) and Executing Agency (*), overall project oversight/implementation and execution (*)
- Risk Management, including Social and Environmental Standards (Safeguards)

iii. Project Results

- Assess the achievement of outcomes against indicators by reporting on the level of progress for each objective and outcome indicator at the time of the TE and noting final achievements
- Relevance (*), Effectiveness (*), Efficiency (*) and overall project outcome (*)
- Sustainability: financial (*), socio-political (*), institutional framework and governance (*), environmental (*), overall likelihood of sustainability (*)
- Country ownership
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Cross-cutting issues (poverty alleviation, improved governance, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster prevention and recovery, human rights, capacity development, South-South cooperation, knowledge management, volunteerism, etc., as relevant)
- GEF Additionality
- Catalytic Role / Replication Effect
- Progress to impact

Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- The TE team will include a summary of the main findings of the TE report. Findings should be presented as statements of fact that are based on analysis of the data.
- The section on conclusions will be written in light of the findings. Conclusions should be comprehensive and balanced statements that are well substantiated by evidence and logically connected to the TE findings. They should highlight the strengths, weaknesses and results of the project, respond to key evaluation questions and provide insights into the identification of and/or solutions to important problems or issues pertinent to project beneficiaries, UNDP and the GEF, including issues in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Recommendations should provide concrete, practical, feasible and targeted recommendations directed to the intended users of the evaluation about what actions to take and decisions to make. The recommendations should be specifically supported by the evidence and linked to the findings and conclusions around key questions addressed by the evaluation.

- The TE report should also include lessons that can be taken from the evaluation, including best practices in addressing issues relating to relevance, performance and success that can provide knowledge gained from the particular circumstance (programmatic and evaluation methods used, partnerships, financial leveraging, etc.) that are applicable to other GEF and UNDP interventions. When possible, the TE team should include examples of good practices in project design and implementation.
- It is important for the conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned of the TE report to incorporate gender equality and empowerment of women.

The TE report will include an Evaluation Ratings Table, as shown below:

ToR Table 2: Evaluation Ratings Table for "Conservation and sustainable management of key globally important ecosystems for multiple benefits**" project**

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating[1]
M&E design at entry	
M&E Plan Implementation	
Overall Quality of M&E	
Implementation & Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	
Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	
Effectiveness	
Efficiency	
Overall Project Outcome Rating	
Sustainability	Rating
Financial resources	
Socio-political/economic	
Institutional framework and governance	
Environmental	
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	

TIMEFRAME

The total duration of the TE will be 37 working days over a time period of 9 weeks starting on July 05, 2024. The tentative TE timeframe is as follows:

Timeframe (working days)	**Activity**
05.07.2024	Preparation period for TE team (handover of documentation)
(08-11.07.2024) 4 days (recommended 2-4)	Document review and preparation of TE Inception Report to describe methodology and milestones
(12-18.07.2024) 5 days	Finalization and Validation of TE Inception Report; latest start of TE mission
(22.07-05.08.2024) 15 days (recommended 7-15)	TE mission: stakeholder meetings, interviews, field visits, etc.
(05.08.2024)	Mission wrap-up meeting & presentation of initial findings; earliest end of TE mission
(06-12.08.2024) 5 days (recommended 5-10)	Preparation of draft TE report
(13-19.08.2024)5 days	Circulation of draft TE report for comments

(20-23.08.2024)4 days	Incorporation of comments on draft TE report into Audit Trail & finalization and issuance of TE report with the audit trail
	Audit Trail should include the TE details how all received comments have (and have not) been addressed in the final TE report *(See template in ToR Annex H)*
(26-28.08.2024) 3 days	Preparation and Issuance of Management Response by the Commissioning Unit in consultation with the project key stakeholders
(29.08.2024)	Expected date of full TE completion including TE report, management response uploaded to ERC.

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

---

1 Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation/Oversight & Execution, Relevance are rated on a 6-point scale: 6=Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5=Satisfactory (S), 4=Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3=Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2=Unsatisfactory (U), 1=Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability is rated on a 4-point scale: 4=Likely (L), 3=Moderately Likely (ML), 2=Moderately Unlikely (MU), 1=Unlikely (U)

EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

#	Deliverable	Description	Estimated Duration	Target due date	% payment
1	TE Inception Report submission and approval by the Commissioning Unit	TE team clarifies objectives, methodology and timing of the TE. Preparation, finalization and validation of TE Inception Report.	9 working days	18 July 2024	30%
2	Draft TE Report submission and review by the Commissioning Unit	TE mission: stakeholder meetings, interviews, field visits, etc. Initial Findings of mission and full draft report *(using guidelines on report content in ToR Annex C)* with annexes are presented to Commissioning Unit and project management.	16 working days	12 August 2024	30%
3	Final TE Report* and Audit Trail submission and approval by Commissioning unit and RTA	Revised final report and TE Audit trail are submitted to the Commissioning Unit with the management response.	12 working days	29 August 2024	40%

*All final TE reports will be quality assessed by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). Details of the IEO's quality assessment of decentralized evaluations can be found in Section 6 of the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines.[2]

TE ARRANGEMENTS

The principal responsibility for managing the TE resides with the Commissioning Unit. The Commissioning Unit for this project's TE is the UNDP Kazakhstan Country Office. The Project Team will be responsible for liaising with the TE team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews.

2 Access at: http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/section-6.shtml

Consultant should arrive to Astana: travel expenses, daily allowances and all other costs related to the trip are to be included to the financial offer. During period from 22.07-05.08.2024 Consultant will have the following trips within Kazakhstan, which will be organized with the support of the project.

N	Destination	Days
1	Astana	3
2	Almaty	1
3	Almaty and Zhetisu regions	4
4	East Kazakhstan region	3
5	Turkestan and Zhambyl regions	4
	Total	**15**

Payment for services will be made from the Project funds with satisfactory discharge of duties and achievement of results.

- The Consultant must fully accept and agree to the requirements of the TOR and the General Terms of the individual contract, including the UNDP individual contract template;
- The Consultant will work under the direct supervision of the UNDP CO Kazakhstan.
- The Consultant is responsible for the quality and timely submission of the deliverables.
- The Consultant ensures timely and rational planning, implementation of activities and achievement of results in accordance with the Terms of Reference.
- The Consultant provides the results of work in accordance with clause 5 of this Terms of Reference.
- The Consultant shall provide reports in electronic form in MS Word format in English.

Prior to approval of the final report, UNDP will circulate the draft for comments to relevant stakeholders: Project Manager, Head of Environment and Energy Unit, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, UNDP/GEF RTA.

The UNDP and the stakeholders will submit comments and suggestions within 10 working days after receiving the draft.

TE TEAM COMPOSITION & QUALIFICATIONS

A team of two independent evaluators will conduct the TE – one team leader (with experience and exposure to projects and evaluations in other regions) and one team expert, from the country of the project. The team leader will be an international consultant, working remotely with a feasible support by the national consultant who will be providing and responding to all questions and comments of the international consultant at the back to back mode; the team leader will be responsible for the organization and planning of the TE, harmonizing the approach and actions with the stakeholders, finalizing the Inception report, overall design and writing of the TE report. The team expert will be a local expert will facilitate the International Consultant/Team Leader and provide necessary substantive and operational support in carrying out this evaluation.

Both Consultants of the TE team cannot have participated in the project preparation, formulation and/or implementation (including the writing of the project document), must not have conducted this project's Mid-Term Review and should not have a conflict of interest with the project's related activities.

Qualifications for an International Consultant:

The successful candidate will demonstrate the following education, experiences, skills and competences:

Education

- At least Master's degree in natural resources management, economics, environmental research or other closely related field;

Experience

- Relevant experience with results-based management evaluation methodologies;
- Experience applying SMART indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios;
- Experience in evaluating projects;
- At least 5 years of experience in the CIS countries 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;
- Demonstrated understanding of issues related to gender and experience in gender responsive evaluation and analysis;
- Familiarity with environment-related legislation, policies and management structures in CIS would be an asset;
- Excellent communication skills;
- Demonstrable analytical skills;
- Experience on evaluation in GEF funded projects/programs is an asset.

Language

- Fluency in written and spoken English.
- Fluency in written and spoken Russian would

be an asset. Functional competencies

- Excellent communication skills.
- Demonstrable analytical skills.

EVALUATOR ETHICS

The TE team will be held to the highest ethical standards and is required to sign a code of conduct upon acceptance of the assignment. This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation'. The evaluator must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The evaluator must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses without the express authorization of UNDP and partners.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

- 30% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the final TE Inception Report and approval by the Commissioning Unit.

- 30% payment upon presentation of findings and satisfactory delivery of the draft TE report to the Commissioning Unit.
- 40% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the final TE report and approval by the Commissioning Unit and RTA (via signatures on the TE Report Clearance Form) and delivery of completed TE Audit Trail

Criteria for issuing the final payment of 40%:

- The final TE report includes all requirements outlined in the TE TOR and is in accordance with the TE guidance.
- The final TE report is clearly written, logically organized, and is specific for this project (i.e. text has not been cut & pasted from other TE reports).
- The Audit Trail includes responses to and justification for each comment listed.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Recommended Presentation of Proposal:

a) **Letter of Confirmation of Interest and Availability** using the template[3] provided by UNDP;
b) **A detailed personal CV,** including previous work experience related to this assignment;
c) **Financial Proposal** in US $ that indicates the all-inclusive fixed total contract price and all other travel related costs (such as flight ticket, per diem, etc), supported by a breakdown of costs, as per template attached to the Letter of Confirmation of Interest template.
If an applicant is employed by an organization/company/institution, and he/she expects his/her employer to charge a management fee in the process of releasing him/her to UNDP under Reimbursable Loan Agreement (RLA), the applicant must indicate at this point, and ensure that all such costs are duly incorporated in the financial proposal submitted to UNDP.

Annex 2 Agenda of the Field Trips with International Consultant for Project Terminal Evaluation

TE Mission schedule
27 August – 6 September 2024

TIME	ACTIVITY Events	LOCATION Location	Person in charge
August 27, Tuesday			
Astana			
09:00-13:00	**Assel Nurbekova,** Head of Energy and Environment Unit, UNDP	Mambetova str., 14	
	Gaukhar Nursha, Gender Specialist (UNDP)		
13:00-14:00	Lunch		
14:00-16:00	**Daniyar Turgambayev,** Chairman of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee, Project's National Director	House of Ministries, 15th entrance	
16:00-17:00	**Ustemirov Kairat** Took part in Targeted Scenario Analysis (TSA) work as a national consultant		

17:00-18:00	**Gulaiym Tnymbergen**, Gender Specialist (Expert) Currently, conducting gender impact assessment	Samal microdistrict 12	
August 28, Wednesday			
09:00-15:00	Project Team	Samal microdistrict 12	
tbc	Departure Astana – Almaty	Evening flight	
20:00	Accommodation in Almaty	Kazzhol Park Hotel	
Almaty city / Almaty region			
August 29, Thursday			
09:00-09:30	Departure to the Institute of Geography and Water Security		
09:30-11:00	Institute of Geography and Water Security **Temirbaeva Roza**, PhD in Geography, Senior Researcher, Laboratory of Geotourism and Geomorphology Implementing partner of the project for the development of functional zoning schemes for 7 pilot districts of Almaty and Zhetysu regions.	Pushkin St. 99	
11:00-13:00	Kazakh Research Institute of Animal Husbandry and Fodder Production **Kanat Shanbayev**, Senior Researcher of the Department of Fodder Production and Pasture Resources Management (replacement of Nurgul Meldebekova, who is not available on that day) Implementing partner: Kazakh Research Institute of Animal Husbandry and Feed Production LLP, the company from May 2021 to August 2022 implemented 4 pilot pasture projects in 4 rural districts: Sumbe, Kaskasu, Koksaray, Belkaragay **Bakhtiyar Sadyk,** independent expert Sustainable pasture management. Expert support in the selection and preparation of pilot projects on pastures was provided. Monitoring the implementation of pasture management.	Zhandosova St., 51	
13:00-14:00	Lunch		
16:30-18:00	Ile-Alatau SNNP **Saltanat Usserbayeva**, head of science and monitoring department PA Management Plan, Training, Capacity Building, Ecotourism Development	Zhandosov Street, 1	
14:30-16:00	Interview with Kazakhstan Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity **Sergey Sklyarenko** (Director of the Center for Applied Biology) **Oleg Lukanovsky** (research fellow)	67 Khodzhanova St., office 205	

	Implementing partner of the project for the development and implementation of the Smart Patrolling system in pilot protected areas (Sairam-Ugam, Kolsai-Kolderi, Zhongar-Alatau, Charyn, Altyn-Emel, Tarbagatai National Parks, Aksu-Zhabagly, Markakol, Karatau reserves, Merken forestry). Implementing partner of the work on the development of the Recommendations for Crossings for Wild Animals		
19:00	Accommodation in Almaty	Kazzhol Park Hotel	
Friday, August 30 – Constitution Day (day off) – place tbc			
09:00-10:30	Interview with the Institute of Zoology (available on 30th Aug) **Alexey Grachev**, head of the theriology laboratory Implementing partner for conducting comprehensive research on the study and monitoring of the snow leopard in 3 pilot regions: Altai and Saur-Tarbagatai, Western Tan-Shan, Northern Tan-Shan and Zhetysu Alatau.	Place tbc	
10:30-11:30	**Irina Kovshar** (available on 30th Aug) – English speaking Eco-education, eco-tourism. Provision of expert support in implementation of project activities on ecotourism development in pilot PAs. Expertise and support in implementation of pilot projects on additional environmental education.	Place tbc	
11:30-13:00	**Sokolov Sergey** (available on 30th Aug) OkhotProekt LLP, Director Carrying out work on the introduction of a new approach to the system of mountain hunting farms. Conducting trainings for the hunting farms - on winter wildlife counting route.	Place tbc	
13:00-13:30	Lunch		
13:30-17:00	Departure from Almaty to Chundzha village Distance ~ 244 km, travel time ~ 3 h 32 m		
17:00-18:30	Visit centre of the Charyn National Park **Gulmira Nysanbayeva**, director PA management plan, training, capacity building, ecotourism development, SMART patrolling		
19:30	Accommodation in Chundzha		
August 31, Saturday			
09:00-10:30	Interview in the Karadala forestry **Rafael Allaberdiev**, Chief Engineer of Forest Crops Providing support in strengthening professional and technical capacity (agrotechnical and fire-fighting machinery and equipment), allocation of HCVF, development of a Management Plan, etc.	tbc	

10:30-12:00	Interview at Abai Secondary School (available on 31st Aug) **Zhanargul Smagulova**, Director A pilot school where a pilot project was implemented under the program of additional environmental education	tbc	
12:00-13:00	Interview in the Akimat of the Uyghur District **Yuldashzhan Mitalipov**, head of land department Partner from the Uyghur District Akimat in the implementation of the Uyghur District Functional Zoning Schemes	tbc	
13:00-14:00	*Lunch*		
14:30-16:00	Interview in the Sumba rural district **Bekbolat Soltanbayev**, Sumbe rural district akim A pilot project on pastures in the Sumbe rural district of the Uygur district. Partner for the implementation of a pilot project on sustainable pasture management. Within the framework of the pilot project, the Pasture Management Plan of the rural district was developed, and the Public Council was created	tbc	
16:00-17:30	Visit to the project of the "Eco-Damu" program on quails **Sanat Kokymbaev**, individual entrepreneur Participant of the 2nd stage of the Eco-Damu Lending Program. He was given a loan in 2021. Poultry project. He created a quail mini-farm.	tbc	
18:00	Accommodation in the village of Chundzha		
September 1, Sunday			
10:00-13:30	Departure from Chundzha village to Almaty Distance ~ 244 km, travel time ~ 3 h 32 m		
14:00	Accommodation in Almaty, free time	Kazzhol Park Hotel	
Zhambyl region			
Monday, September 2			
06:10-07:10	Departure Almaty – Taraz, Scat airlines		
07:30-08:30	Accommodation in Taraz		
09:00-09:30	Departure to the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Regulation of the Zhambyl region		
09:30-11:00	Interview in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Regulation of the Zhambyl region **Nartay Yegemberdiev**, deputy head of the department Creation of the Merke Regional Park, snow leopard monitoring (camera traps), Smart patrolling	133A Abay St.	
11:00-13:00	Departure from Taraz city to Merke village Distance ~ 157 km, travel time ~ 1 h 58 m		

13:00-14:00	Lunch		
14:00-15:30	Interview in the Merke forestry **Samat Tokushbekov**, director Creation of the Merke Regional Park, snow leopard monitoring (camera traps), Smart patrolling	Ismailova st. 119	
15:30-17:30	Departure from Merke village to Taraz city Distance ~ 157 km, travel time ~ 1 h 58 m		
18:00	Accommodation in Taraz		
Turkestan region			
Tuesday, September 3			
08:00-09:30	Departure from Taraz city to Zhabagly village Distance ~ 104 km, travel time ~ 1 h 33 m		
09:30-11:00	Interview in the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve **Sakhit Kyntaev**, Director Protected Area Management Plan, Training, Capacity Building, SMART patrolling	34 Abay St., Zhabagly village	
11:00-13:00	Departure from Zhabagly village to Kaskasu village Distance ~ 114 km, travel time ~ 1 h 41 m		
13:00-14:00	Lunch		
14:00-15:00	Interview in the rural district of Kaskasu **Duysebayev Meirzhan**, Deputy Akim of Kaskasu rural district, Tolebi rayon Partner for implementation of the pilot project on sustainable pasture management in Kaskasu Rural District.	110A Kuandyk St. Kaskasu village	
15:00-16:00	Departure from Kaskasu village to Shymkent Distance ~ 55 km, travel time ~ 1 h 10 m		
16:30-18:00	Interview in Sairam-Ugam National Park **Kalzhigit Kalybaev,** head of tourism department PA Management Plan, Training, Capacity Building, Ecotourism Development, SMART parolling	Ilyaev str. 24/1 Shymkent city	
18:00	Accommodation in Shymkent		
September 4, Wednesday			
09:00-11:00	Departure from Shymkent to Turkestan Distance ~ 170 km, travel time ~ 2 h 22 m		
10:30-13:00	Interview in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Regulation of the Turkestan Region **Kamytbek Zhorabayev**, head of Forestry and Protected Areas Department Expansion of the PA network, work with the Syrdarya-Turkestan SRNP	M-distr. "Zhana Kala" 32/20	

	Akyl Abdikhadirov, director general Syrdariya-Turkestan State Regional Natural Park Protected Area Management Plan, Training, Capacity Building		
13:00-14:00	Lunch		
14:00-16:30	Departure from Turkestan to Shymkent Distance ~ 170 km, travel time ~ 2 h 22 m		
19:45-21:40	Flight Shymkent – Astana		
22:00	Accommodation in Astana		
Astana			
September 5, Thursday			
10:00-11:30	Agrarian Credit Corporation JSC **Representative** – TBC Partner of the Eco-Damu Loan Program, which aimed at developing environmentally oriented businesses (beekeeping, guest houses, souvenir business, etc.) through preferential lending to the rural population living around national parks, nature reserves within a radius of 50 km	Astana, Imanova street 11	
	Preparation of preliminary conclusions		
September 6, Friday			
	Preparation of preliminary conclusions		

Annex 3: People interviewed by TE Team

People interviewed by TE Team Leader (Astana, Almaty Region, South Kazakhstan)

Name	Position / relation to project
Daniyar Turgambayev,	Chairman of the Forestry and Wildlife Committee, Project's National Director
Ustemirov Kairat	Took part in Targeted Scenario Analysis (TSA) work as a national consultant
Assel Nurbekova,	Head of Energy and Environment Unit, UNDP
Ms. Bibigul Izbair,	Project coordinator
Ms. Aray Belgubayeva,	Expert on protected areas and biodiversity
Ms. Akmaral Agazhayeva,	Landscape planning expert
Ms. Dinara Savazova,	Expert on sustainable forest management
Ms. Aiman Omarbekova,	Wildlife expert
Mr. Talgat Taukenov,	Environmental monitoring expert
Ms. Gulaiym Tnymbergen,	Gender Specialist (Expert) Currently, conducting gender impact assessment
Temirbaeva Roza,	District integrated planning (zoning) - Laboratory of Geomorphology
Kanat Shanbayev	Kazakh Research Institute of Animal Husbandry and Fodder Production (Pasture management).
Bakhtiyar Sadyk,	independent expert Sustainable pasture management.
Saltanat Usserbayeva,	Ile-Alatau SNNP head of science and monitoring department
Oleg Lukanovsky	Kazakhstan Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity (SMAT Patrolling introduction).
Alexey Grachev	Institute Zoology (study and monitoring of the snow leopard in 3 pilot regions)
Irina Kovshar	Provision of expert support Eco-education, eco-tourism.
Sokolov Sergey	Hunting Association (expert Conducting trainings for the hunting farms)
Gulmira Nysanbayeva,	Director Charyn Gorge NP, Chundzha
Rafael Allaberdiev,	Chief Engineer of Forest, Karadala leshoz (1 or 2 sites for Leshoz management plan pilot), Chundzha
Zhanargul Smagulova,	Director Abai Secondary School, Chundzha

Yuldashzhan Mitalipov	head of land department (Partner from the Uyghur District Akimat in the implementation of the Uyghur District Functional Zoning Scheme)
Bekbolat Soltanbayev,	Sumbe rural district akim - pilot project on pastures in the Sumbe rural district of the Uygur district
Sanat Kokymbaev,	individual entrepreneur Eco-Damu" loan reciever
Nartay Yegemberdiev,	Deputy head of the department, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Regulation of the Zhambyl region (Creation of the Merke Regional Park)
Samat Tokushbekov	Merke forestry - director
Sakhit Kyntaev	Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve
Duysebayev Meirzhan	Deputy Akim of Kaskasu rural district, Tolebi rayon – pasture pilot site
Kalzhigit Kalybaev,	head of tourism department, Sairam-Ugam National Park
Kamytbek Zhorabayev,	head of Forestry and Protected Areas Department Expansion of the PA network, work with the Syrdarya-Turkestan SRNP
Akyl Abdikhadirov,	director Syrdariya-Turkestan State Regional Natural Park
???? Sergey did you note names?	Representative Agrarian Credit Corporation JSC (on Eco-DAMU)
Remote Interviews (Zoom, Whatsapp)	
Marlon Flores	UNDP TSA
Alexander Bondarev	International Forestry consultant
Monica Moldovan	UNDP RTA

People Interviewed by TE National Team Member (East Kazakhstan)

East Kazakhstan Meetings				
Regional Level				
Ust-Kamenogorsk	Kusainov Murat Manarbekovic	Department of Natural Resources and Environmental	The departments are partners and local executive authorities that assist the project in the implementation of work and	Interviewed Aug 06

	h, head of department	Regulation of the East Kazakhstan Region	activities with pilot forest institutions and protected areas	
Ust-Kamenogorsk	Zheniskhanov Rakhat	Project Representative	Coordination of local project activities	Interviewed remotely Aug 27
Local /site level				
PA Stakeholders				
Ridder, Semipalatinskaya St., 9	Vinokurova Lyudmila Nikolaevna, deputy director	West Altay State Nature Reserve	Protected Area Management Plan, Training, Capacity Building	Interviewed Aug 16
Ridder, Semipalatinskaya St., 9	Orsarinov Kairdy - director	West Altay State Nature Reserve	Protected Area Management Plan, Capacity Building (Equipment)	Interviewed Aug 16
Belkaragai Rural District (Katon-Karagai, East Kazakhstan Region)	Yelchibekov Aybek Tolepberdinovich, 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	Interviewed Aug 31 in Belkaragai
East Kazakhstan region, **Katon-Karagay** district, Katon-Karagay village	Elemessov Samat, Head of the **Department of Tourism and Education**	Katon-Karagay SNNP	Within the framework of the project, support was provided in the development of the **Strategy for the Development of Ecotourism,** the calculation of the norm of recreational loads for tourist routes was carried out. 1 pilot tourist route has been equipped. An eco-class has been equipped at the Katon-Karagay State National Nature Reserve. A virtual tour of the Katon-Karagay SNNP has been developed	Interviewed Aug 30 in Katon-Karagay
Katon-Karagay district, O. Bokeyev St. No115	Tynybekov Zhanbolat Batalovich, director general	Katon-Karagay State National Natural Park (SNNP)	PA management plan, training, capacity building, ecotourism development, snow leopard monitoring, virtual tours	Interviewed Aug 29 in Katon-Karagay
East Kazakhstan region, **Kurchum district**, Urunkhaika village.	Timur Aikenov, director	Markakol State Nature Reserve	PA Management Plan, training, capacity building, SMART patrolling	Interviewed Sept 04 Remotely (WA)

Forestry Enterprises and institutions				
Ridder city	Damir Saidigumarov, deputy director of the forestry (recommended by Slonova Evgenia Vasilyevna)	Ridder forestry	Strengthening human and technical potential (purchase of agrotechnical and fire-fighting machinery and equipment, allocation of HCVF, development of a management plan, etc.)	Interviewed Aug 09 in Ust
Ridder city	Kusainov Kairat, director of the forestry	Pikhtovskoe forestry	Strengthening human and technical potential (purchase of agrotechnical and fire-fighting machinery and equipment, allocation of HCVF, development of a management plan, etc.)	Interviewed Aug 08 Remotely
Ridder city	Kalachev Andrey, head of the branch	Altai branch of LLP "Kazakh Research Institute of Forestry and Agroforestry named after A. Bukeikhan"	A scientific instrument for determining the root rot of trees RESISTOGRAPH R650-EA and a device for measuring tree rings LTM06-P were purchased and transferred to the balance sheet.	Interviewed Aug 16
Ridder city	Natalia Troeglazova, Deputy Head	Kedrovskoye lesnichestvo of Pikhtovsky Forestry institution	Participant of the project training events, trainings, seminars on forest fire monitoring, etc.	Interviewed Aug 16
Integrated Land use planning and land use improvement in and around PAs, Forestry lands.				
Eco tourism and sustainable livelihoods				
Uryl village, **Katon-Karagai** district, East Kazakhstan Oblast.	Skrynnik Olga Alekseevna, owner	Guest house "Yasnaya Polyana",	In 2023 she was trained on business planning.	Interviewed Aug 29 in place (guest house near Uryl)
East Kazakhstan region, **Katon-Karagay** district, Katon-Karagay village	Jalymbekov Bakytbek, **Woodworker**		Bakhytbek from the village of Katon-Karagay, with the support of the UNDP project, **was trained in 2019 at the Qazaq Oner Artisans Center, support was also provided, and a lathe was purchased**. At present, he has opened his own wood workshop in Katon-Karagay, has a small souvenir shop.	Interviewed Aug 29 in Katon-Karagay
East Kazakhstan region, **Katon-Karagay** district,	Meruert Trusbaeva, patchwork		Meruert Trusbayeva from the village of Katon-Karagay, with the support of the UNDP project, was trained in 2019 at	Interviewed Aug 29 in Katon-Karagay

Katon-Karagay village	master, artisan		the Qazaq Oner Artisans Center, support was also provided, and a sewing machine was purchased. Currently, there is a small sewing workshop, where she is engaged in sewing patchwork products in the national style.	
East Kazakhstan region, **Ulken-Naryn district,** Soldatovo village	Musobaev Anuar Kazhmukanovich, beekeeper	Participant of the **Eco-Damu Lending Program**	**Beekeeping project**. In June 2021, he expanded the apiary, purchasing additional bee colonies and equipment. Developed regular customers. Has its own points of sale in Semey and Karaganda. Products are sold wholesale. The project is sustainable and cost-effective.	Interviewed Aug 31 on the road Ust-Altai

Annex 4 Documents reviewed

Annex 5 Detailed methodology

The TE will utilize three sources of primary data and information:

Desk review: the documentation covering project design, implementation progress, monitoring and review studies, local and national development plans, policies and regulatory instruments. This will cover and elaborate on the documents listed in the UNDP TOR, a working list of which is presented in Annex 8.

Interviews, stakeholder consultations and field missions: additional information collection and validation will take place through remote and (where possible) face-to-face consultations with a wide range of stakeholders (Annex 6), using "semi-structured interviews" with a key set of questions in a conversational format. This will be accompanied by site visits to the pilot projects. The questions asked will aim to provide answers to the points listed in the evaluation matrix in Annex 9. The initial list of generic questions will be refined according to specific stakeholder interviews during the field mission and any follow up Skype/Zoom, WhatsApp, etc., calls as necessary. Interviews will be confidential, and the information used discreetly without accreditation. Information from interviews will be triangulated and validated, where necessary, before inclusion in the analysis and reporting. Interviews will start with an introduction about the aims and nature of the evaluation and informing the interviewee that they have the right not to respond if they so wish.

Interviews and the information collected will be disaggregated to reflect the different stakeholders (e.g. Implementing Agency – Executing Agency – PMU – implementing partners – beneficiaries as well as gender). Information from the interviews will be collated and analyzed to provide evidence-based conclusions on the overall performance, impact and achievements of the project as well as crosscutting issues.

Direct observations of project results and activities: wherever possible from the project area including consultations with local government and local agencies, local community representatives, project partners, CSOs and participants in field activities. A list of stakeholders to be interviewed is in Annex 3.

The TE will review the Theory of Change to the project's strategy prepared during the MTR.

Gender equality and women's empowerment will be assessed through collecting gender-disaggregated results arising from project activities, inclusion of women participants and relevant women's groups in the evaluation interviews and specific questions regarding the extent to which they were included in project's design and implementation and/or benefited from the project. Gender and disadvantaged groups will be included in all appropriate questions and crosschecked against specific questions related to these issues. Specific attention will be given to analyzing examples, best practices and lessons learned regarding women's empowerment arising through the project's scope of activities.

Following the data collection phase, the TE will analyze the information according to the TE guidelines and the ToR in order to draw conclusions and propose recommendations. A draft TE Report will be circulated to key stakeholders for comment and feedback. Section 6 provides a timeframe for key deliverables and milestones. The final TE Report will be submitted including an audit trail documenting the feedback from stakeholders and how these have been addressed by the TE.

Annex 6 Evaluation Question Matrix

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 Signed Evaluation Consultant Agreements Form

Evaluators/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 limitations, findings and recommendations.
7. Should reflect sound accounting procedures and be prudent in using the resources of the evaluation.
8. Must ensure that independence of judgement is maintained, and that evaluation findings and recommendations are independently presented.
9. Must confirm that they have not been involved in designing, executing or advising on the project being evaluated.

MTR Consultant Agreement Form

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

Name of Consultant: **Mark Anstey**

Name of Consultancy Organization (where relevant): _____

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

Signed at *Gex, France* on Monday 23 September 2024

Signature: 

Annex 8 Ratings Tables

Monitoring & Evaluation	Rating
M&E design at entry	
M&E at implementation	
Overall quality of M&E	

UNDP Implementation/Oversight & Implementing Partner Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	
Overall Quality of Implementation/Oversight and Execution	

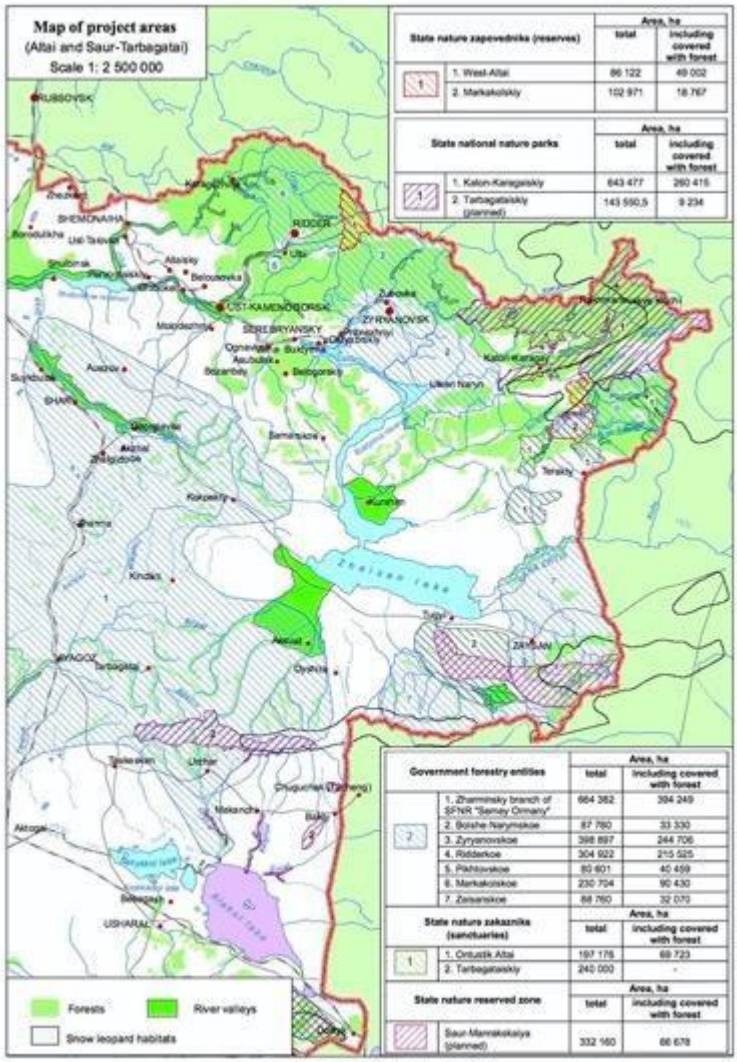
Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	
Effectiveness	
Efficiency	
Overall Project Outcome Rating	

Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Financial resources	
Socio-political	
Institutional framework and governance	
Environmental	
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	

Ratings for Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation/Oversight, Execution, Relevance	Sustainability ratings:
6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS): exceeds expectations and/or no shortcomings 5 = Satisfactory (S): meets expectations and/or no or minor shortcomings 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS): more or less meets expectations and/or some shortcomings 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): somewhat below expectations and/or significant shortcomings 2 = Unsatisfactory (U): substantially below expectations and/or major shortcomings 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe shortcomings Unable to Assess (U/A): available information does not allow an assessment	4 = Likely (L): negligible risks to sustainability 3 = Moderately Likely (ML): moderate risks to sustainability 2 = Moderately Unlikely (MU): significant risks to sustainability 1 = Unlikely (U): severe risks to sustainability Unable to Assess (U/A): Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability

Annex 9 Project areas

East Kazakhstan



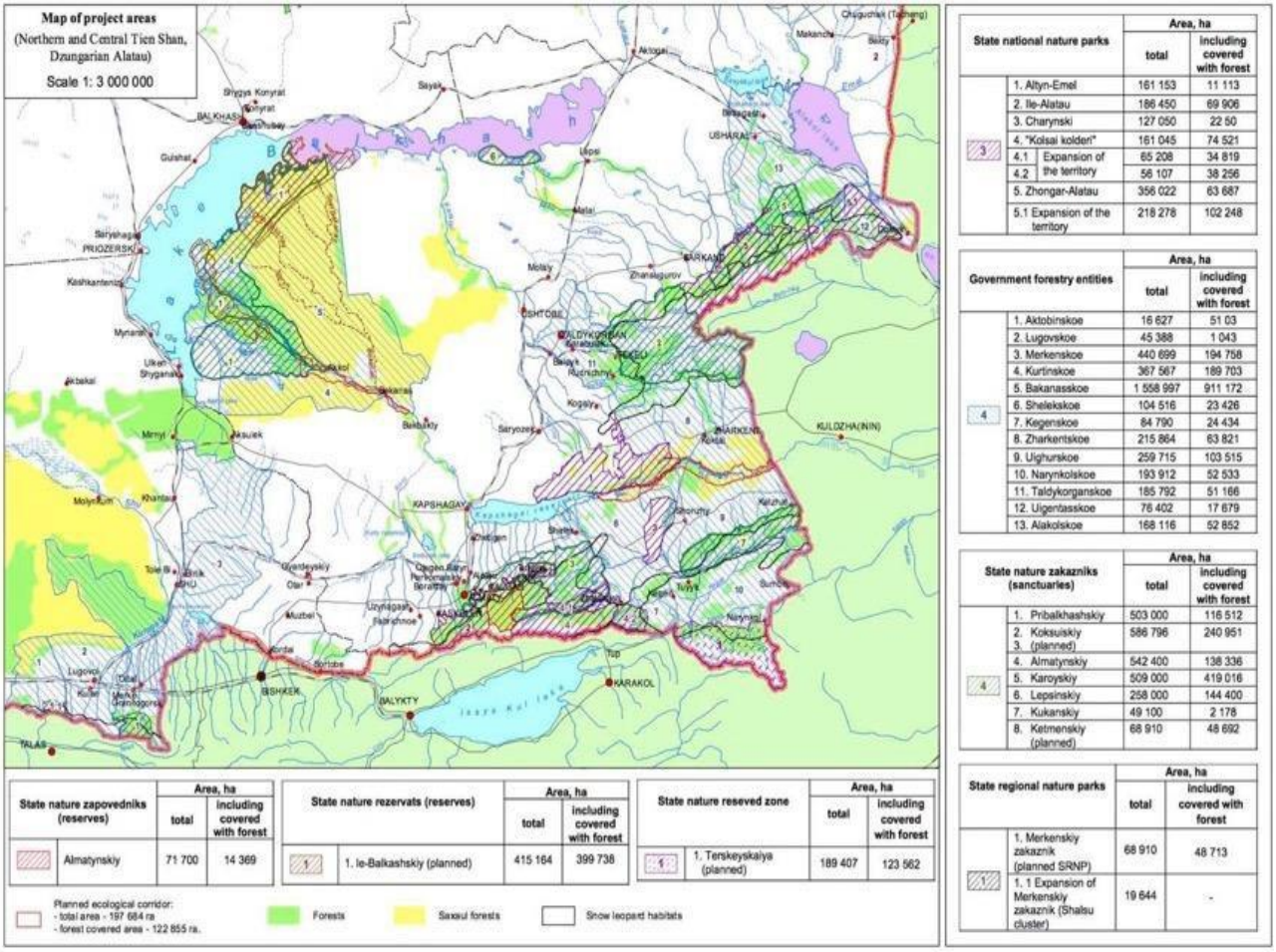
State nature zapovednika (reserves)		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
1	1. West-Altai	86 122	49 002
	2. Markakolskiy	102 971	18 767

State national nature parks		Area, ha: total	Area, ha: including covered with forest
1	1. Kalon-Karaigaiskiy	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. Zharminsky branch of SFNR "Semey Ormany"	664 382	394 249
	2. Bolshe-Narymskoe	87 780	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



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

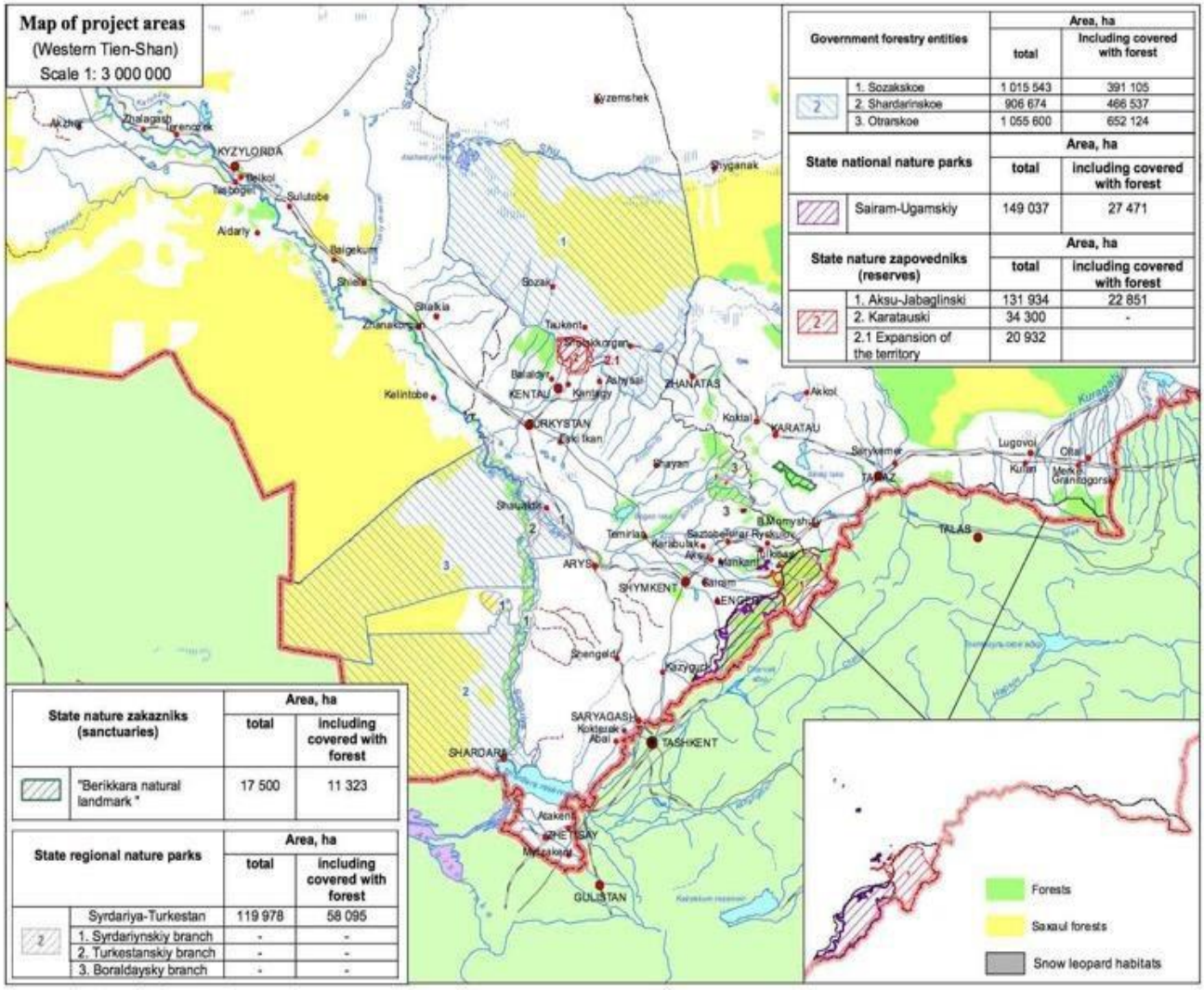
State nature rezervats (reserves)		Area, ha	
		total	including covered with forest
1	1. Ile-Balkashskiy (planned)	415 164	399 738

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

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

Almaty Region

South Kazakhstan



Annex 10 Signed UNEG Code of Conduct form

Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form To be signed by all consultants as individuals (not by or on behalf of a consultancy company) before a contract can be issued.

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

Name of Consultant: Mark Anstey

Name of Consultancy Organisation (where relevant): N/A

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

Signed at Gex, France on 23 September 2024

Signature: 

Annex 11 Signed TE Report Clearance form

Evaluation Report Reviewed and Cleared by

Commissioning Unit (M&E Focal Point)
Name: Dosbol Tursumuratov
Signature: DocuSigned by: Dosbol Tursumuratov 5F778BE6736141D... Date: 29-окт-2024

UNDP Country Office, Head of Energy and Environment Unit
Name: Assel Nurbekova
Signature: DocuSigned by: Assel Nurbekova 0FD5303AB938497... Date: 29-Oct-2024

UNDP GEF RTA
Name: Monica Moldovan
Signature: Signed by: Monica Moldovan 910CBCF3261D4D1... Date: 30-Oct-2024