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**Integrated Conservation of Priority Globally Significant Migratory Bird Wetland Habitat: A Demonstration on Three Sites**

**Mid-Term Evaluation**

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May 9, 2008

Official Title: Integrated Conservation of Priority Globally Significant Migratory Bird Wetlands Habitat: Demonstration on Three Sites

Country: Kazakhstan

Region: Europe and Central Asia

Project Size: Full Sized

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**List of Acronyms**

ALM Agency of Land Management

AOEMD Atyrau Oblast Environmental Monitoring Department

APR Annual Project Report

AS Alakol-Sassykol

CBD Convention on Biological Diversity

CITES Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species

CoWR Committee on Water Resources

CoLR Committee on Land Resources

FHC Forestry and Hunting Committee

FC Fishery Committee

GEF Global Environment Facility

GEF-OP Global Environment Facility Operational Program

GoK Government of Kazakhstan

IMB Inter-Ministerial Board

IUCN International Union for the Conservation of Nature

KAS Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences

KCAZS Kazakhstan Central Asian Zoological Society

KHU Kazakh Hunters Union

LRC Land Resources Committee

LTFM Long-term Funding Mechanisms

MBWCF Migratory Bird Wetland Conservation Fund

MoA Ministry of Agriculture

MoEP Ministry of Environment Protection

NABU German Association for Nature Conservation

NGO Non-governmental Organization

NPS Nature Protection Society

NWL National Wetland Conservation Law

PA Protected Area

PDF-B Project Development Facility, Block B (GEF project development grant)

PEC Parliamentary Environment Committee

SEG Site Expert Group

SIC Site Implementation Committee

SPA Strictly Protected Area

TK Tengiz-Korgalzhin

TPR Tripartite Project Review

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNEP United Nations Environment Programme

URD Ural River Delta

WB World Bank

WRC Water Resources Committee

WI Wetlands International

WWF World Wildlife Fund

**Acknowledgement**

The evaluation team would like to recognize and congratulate UNDP-Kazakhstan and project staff for the efficient and professional organizational support they provided during this evaluation. Their impressive efforts reflect the skilled approach taken towards overall project implementation.

The project team has achieved a great deal in a relatively short time. We are hopeful that this evaluation will contribute to the project’s further achievements and trust that all parties will accept our candid observations with the same collegial spirit with which they are presented.

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**Executive Summary**

**Brief Description of the Project**

This project is designed to demonstrate the integrated conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in three priority wetland sites. The three sites lie along different migratory flyways and each enables the project to demonstrate solutions to different pressing issues affecting Kazakhstan's wetland biodiversity resources. Full project will integrate conservation and development in order to improve sustainability and effectiveness of wetland management. Project will develop participatory, multiple-use management regimes for existing protected area wetland sites. Sustainable livelihood demonstration modules will be developed in and around wetland sites where impacts from surrounding landscape are manageable.

The project’s objective is: “Government agencies, non-governmental entities, and local communities are maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems.”

**Context and Purpose of the Evaluation**

The purposes of this mid-term evaluation are:

1. Monitor and evaluate results and impacts;
2. Provide a basis for decision making on necessary amendments and improvements;
3. Promote accountability for resource use; and
4. Document, provide feedback on, and disseminate lessons learned.

This mid-term evaluation follows the specific guidance of UNDP/GEF by:

* Identifying potential project design problems,
* Assessing progress towards the achievement of objectives,
* Identifying and documenting lessons learned (including lessons that might improve design and implementation of other UNDP/GEF projects), and,
* Making recommendations regarding specific actions that might be taken to improve the project.

The evaluation serves as a means of validating or filling the gaps in the initial assessment of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency obtained from monitoring. The evaluation provides an opportunity for project managers to assess early signs of project success or failure and prompt necessary adjustments.

**Main Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned**

**The overall rating of this project is “satisfactory”.**

Overall Conclusion

This is a good project. The evaluation’s overall conclusion was positive and reflects the project’s “satisfactory” rating. The project has achieved a great many things and should be commended for these achievements.

This project is funded to demonstrate integrated conservation and sustainable use of wetlands biological diversity at three sites with the objective of maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems. At each site, the project’s mandate covers wetlands systems both within and beyond protected area boundaries.

The project is doing a very satisfactory job with improving the management and the expansion of two existing wetland strictly protected areas. The project has also done a very satisfactory job in promoting the establishment of a third wetlands protected area. The project deserves high praise for these efforts.

The project must still adequately address threats and demonstrate integrated conservation and sustainable use in the productive landscape. To date, project activities beyond the boundaries of protected areas have yet to produce high impact results, leaving wetlands and associated biodiversity in reserves and outside reserves highly vulnerable to unsustainable use.

Our findings do not evince a project at the brink of failure. We recognize that this is a mid-term evaluation. The project has made significant and commendable strides forward. It should not be expected to have delivered all “project end” results. We also recognize that this project adapted to a rapidly changing implementation environment. Most importantly, we recognize that achieving concrete results in the productive landscape is one of the highest challenges faced by any conservation project.

The project is at risk of drifting off target and losing momentum as it moves from supporting relatively “straight forward” activities related to protected area management and into the more complex and politically charged field of integrated conservation of wetlands ecosystems in the productive landscape. The project will need to work aggressively if it hopes to show substantial progress towards demonstrating integrated conservation and sustainable use prior to close.

Considerable corrective measures should be taken to increase the likelihood of this project meaningfully attaining its objective. We recommend that the project take concrete steps to strengthen its strategic approach. We recommend that the project foster the adoption and implementation/enforcement of a comprehensive legal framework to secure the long-term conservation of wetlands ecosystems. We recommend that project capacity to demonstrate integrated conservation successes in the productive landscape be enhanced and commensurate programming initiated.

With these and a few other relatively simple actions, the current effectiveness of this project will almost certainly be sustained or increased in the next phase of implementation. This is a good project. The challenge is: Can it be a great project?

Main Conclusions: Achievements to Date

***In the first four years of operation, the project has made significant achievements.***

The capacities of two protected areas were significantly increased. The protected areas now benefit from more informed and strategic management regimes, improved infrastructures, and higher funding and staffing levels. The project has set the groundwork for the expansion of these protected areas and the creation of a third.

Amendments were made to strengthen the national protected areas law to require management plans for all protected areas and allow for the creation of protected areas that include wetlands of international significance. The project facilitated GoK accession to two major international conventions, Ramsar and Bonn. Management plans for three endangered species are being prepared.

The project has made great strides in insuring sustainability for protected areas management. GoK investments have increased substantially. The project should be congratulated for this. They have helped catalyze and direct a portion of the GoK’s wealth towards wetlands protected area management. A new Trust Fund has been established and legally recognized. Efforts are under way for its capitalization. Nationally and at each of the project sites, the project has implemented a number of public awareness initiatives, including innovative school education programs.

Studies have been conducted to promote better water management and equipment provided to support water monitoring. New farming techniques are being demonstrated. Small enterprises were developed to promote crafts and cheese making. Recommendations were prepared to improve recreational fisheries management and tourism.

The project has established four very well provisioned project offices, one at each of the three demonstration sites and one in Astana. The project has a full time technical staff of over twenty persons.

These are just some of the project’s solid achievements. UNDP, project staff and project partners should each be congratulated for their efforts and successes.

Main Conclusions: Remaining Challenges

***The project has less than three years of time remaining. There is much to accomplish if the project is going to realize its objective.***

As noted throughout this report, the project has done an admirable job of strengthening protected area management. A major outstanding challenge, however, is fully securing water rights for wetland nature reserves. This critical threat was identified nearly ten years ago during the project design phase. Another issue that remains outstanding is final approval of proposed protected area expansions and creation. Hopefully, these new areas will be operational in late 2008 or early 2009. The project must be prepared to rapidly provide assistance. Other remaining challenges relevant to protected area management include testing and adapting relatively new biodiversity monitoring systems and protected area management plans. Finally, the effectiveness of some proposed expansions to meaningfully promote wetlands conservation should be clarified. For instance, a majority of the TK expansion is down-stream, semi-arid steppe with limited wetland conservation value.

The project still has significant challenges to address in the coming years with regards to successfully demonstrating wetlands conservation outside of reserve boundaries. Without securing the integrity of the ecosystem, the integrity of the reserves remains at risk from impacts originating outside their boundaries, including unsustainable hunting, fishing, agriculture, and water management.

The project was funded to meaningfully demonstrate such things as:

* Integrated management approaches that insulate wetlands inside protected areas from the adverse impacts of activities originating beyond protected area boundaries;
* Project outputs related to resource use, particularly irrigation and water resources management, unsustainable fisheries and hunting management, land use management, and the improvement of regulatory and management structures for tourism development;
* Sustainable alternative livelihood options that are wetlands benign and create incentives for wetlands conservation;
* National and local level institutional and policy changes that improve the integrity and viability of wetlands ecosystems; and,
* Secure financing for long-term wetlands conservation programming.

The project has set in motion activities to address many of these complex conservation and development challenges. However, the difficult issues of improving sustainable resource use have not been adequately addressed. Targeted activities have been slow to materialize and have not evidenced substantial impact to date. Proposed and implemented interventions too often fail to have a direct link with wetlands ecosystem conservation objectives. A few examples include:

* Farming initiatives that focus on dry-land operations rather than wetlands impacting operations;
* Alternative livelihoods such as felting and cheese production that do not truly demonstrate how to shift wetlands destructive activity to wetlands benign activity;
* Tourism that does not adequately address large-scale investments;
* Hunting activities that do not link clearly with biodiversity monitoring, community benefit and enforcement needs;
* Fisheries management that seems to focus more upon increasing production rather than improving management and conservation;
* Water management that proposes increasing water available to irrigators before addressing allocation and quantity/quality needs for project area wetlands; and,
* Regulatory and institutional interventions that have not yet tackled the real threats to wetlands ecosystems or shown achievements equal to those promised in the project document, i.e., establishment of a national permit system to regulate wetlands modification both inside and outside of nature reserves.

This leaves the project with much to achieve in the next 32 months.

**Main Recommendations**

***To maintain momentum and strengthen effectiveness, the project must improve its implementation approach.***

All project initiatives should be grounded in the principle that protected areas represent only one part of each demonstration site’s “wetlands ecosystem”. For instance, the Tengiz-Korgalzhn Lakes System encompasses an estimated 180 individual, isolated wetlands. The TK Ramsar designation encompasses more than 129. Only 54 of these, including the very large Tengiz and Korgalzhn Lakes, are located within the strictly protected area boundaries. The eastern shore of the AS ecosystem contains biologically important wetlands equal or greater to the size of those included in the present and proposed protected area boundaries. The proposed URD reserve does not include the biologically critical main-stem of the Ural River.

National and local government agencies, including those represented on the Steering Committee, must show a greater willingness to integrate their efforts and tackle hard issues beyond the borders of protected areas. This includes adopting and enforcing regulatory frameworks that comprehensively protect the integrity of wetlands ecosystems – not just strictly protected areas - and create meaningful incentives for stakeholders to engage in wetlands ecosystem conservation. This includes setting in place policies to insure tourism, resource extraction, agriculture and other economic developments are wetlands benign in these priority systems. These agencies must get much more serious about regulating water use and dealing directly with unsustainable hunting and fishing practices. Agencies must make certain institutional frameworks and capacities are in place to support implementation, especially enforcement of fishing, hunting and water use regulations.

The project has made some progress on the above, but it must become much more aggressive, efficient, and effective at addressing these issues if it is ultimately going to be considered a success. When the project was designed in the late 1990’s, these were all issues identified as barriers to sustainable management of priority wetlands ecosystems. Ten years later and four years into project implementation, they continue to be problems.

Major portions of this project have changed course significantly during the process of implementation. Many of the approaches included in the original project design have been abandoned, modified or replaced. In many ways, the funded project and the implemented project are fundamentally different.

The period between project design and implementation was too long and adaptive management is acceptable to accommodate changes to the implementation environment that likely occurred. However, dramatic changes to the project’s overall approach must be accompanied by thoughtful, transparent and documented strategies to make certain the project is on track to deliver. We saw no evidence of such a written strategy. Without this long-range vision and “tracking” document the project is and will continue to stray off course, the effectiveness of project activities will be diminished, and the project will be at risk of not fully attaining its objective.

The project should recognize this risk and re-assess the potential impact of current and proposed approaches to be certain investments precisely address priority threats to wetlands ecosystem conservation, GEF priorities and the achievement of the project objective. Based upon this assessment, the project should create a detailed, strategic and focused multi-year work-plan to guide implementation efforts to project close.

As the project looks towards demonstrating integrated ecosystem level solutions in the productive landscape, conservation issues represent complex challenges far more technically complex than those faced so far. The project must seek out ways to support project staff and partners to improve its technical capacity to effectively deliver outputs in the productive sector.

To date, this project has spent approximately $3.7 million and has approximately $3.6 million remaining. These figures presume that $1.5 million will be allocated to the Trust Fund. Based upon project history. We estimate the project will have a budget surplus of between $1.6 and $1.9 million at project close. Without the benefit of a clear, written strategy for project implementation, it is impossible to know what the project plans to spend its money on over the next 32 months. However, with a budget surplus, capacity constraints, and a lack of a clear strategy, the chances that money will be spent less efficiently and effectively will increase as the project feels pressure to allocate remaining resources.

**Lessons Learned**

*This project has already provided many valuable lessons that may benefit other GEF projects.*

1. Longer-term projects with extended start-up times may require independent monitoring and evaluation site visits at greater than normal frequencies to make certain they remain on track to produce all project deliverables.
2. Evaluating projects based upon their delivery of logical frameworks is not satisfactory unless these indicators provide a very clear measurement of quality and effectiveness.
3. Complex, integrated ecosystem management projects are technically demanding and may require careful consideration regarding existing implementation capacity.
4. If the project significantly modifies its logical framework and planned outputs mid-stream, justification for these modifications should be clearly detailed in a monitoring and evaluation tool that goes beyond the level of detail provided in most PIR’s and annual workplans.
5. Time allocated for conducting evaluations should be more commensurate with the size and complexity of the project if the evaluation is going to be more than perfunctory.

**Section One: Introduction**

**1.1 Project Background**

Type, Implementation Dates, and GEF Investment

This full-sized project is funded under GEF OP #2 “Coastal Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems”. The project commenced in August 2003 and is scheduled to conclude in August 2010. The total project budget was projected to be $34,380,000. UNDP/GEF’s contribution is $8,847,200. This includes $137,200 for the PDF-B phase.

Management

This is a nationally executed project. The Ministry of Environmental Protection is the Coordinating Agency. The Ministry of Agriculture is the Project Executing Agency. The MoA’s Forestry and Hunting Commission is the Implementing Agency.

The project implementation unit is situated in Astana. Additional project offices are established and staffed in each of three demonstration sites. UNDP provides support directly through national offices located in Almaty.

Objective

The project’s goal is: “To protect globally significant wetland biodiversity in Kazakhstan.”

The Project’s Objective is: “Government agencies, non-governmental entities, and local communities are maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems.”

Context

The Republic of Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world. Two of the world’s major flyways and their respective branches, the Central Asian-Indian Flyway and the East African Flyway, converge here. According to the Project Document the institutional, policy, and regulatory framework affecting Kazakhstan’s wetlands is incomplete and the application of it is uncoordinated. Kazakhstan is experiencing rapid and important social and economic changes. Most relevant to this particular project is the increasing amount of revenue generated from oil production.

Approach

The project is designed to promote the protection of globally significant wetland biodiversity. The project aims to do this by (i) creating a national level regulatory and institutional safety net for wetlands, (ii) by demonstrating how to maintain and enhance the viability of wetlands ecosystems on a landscape level in three demonstration sites, and (iii) set in place sustainable funding mechanisms to support long-term wetlands conservation programming.

The project is to support the drafting and adoption of a wide range of national legislative and regulatory instruments. The project is to support the creation of a “National Wetlands Conservation Law”. Meaningful reforms are to be made to existing and pending legislation related to the management of all land and water resources, including the establishment of a national permit system to mitigate wetlands harm and a strengthening of environmental impact regulations. Community management regimes are to be legally recognized.

On both the national and demonstration site level, institutional structures are to be re-organized to support legislative reforms and make certain decision-making processes regarding wetlands conservation integrate key concerns across ministerial, agency and local government lines, including activities such as agriculture, grazing, fisheries, tourism development, water use, hunting, and protected areas management.

To model integrated, wetlands conservation approaches, the project is designed to demonstrate wetlands conservation at three sites. The project is to support significant expansion of two existing wetlands protected areas and the designation of a third. The project will safeguard the status of these protected areas while working to make certain productive landscapes surrounding the protected areas are ecologically linked and managed in ways compatible with long-term conservation objectives. This includes building a greater knowledge base and awareness amongst local stakeholders, particularly resource users and decision-makers. The project will help shift current “destructive” human behaviors, particularly those related to water resource management, agriculture, fisheries, and hunting, to more sustainable alternatives using community-based approaches that provide opportunities for greater public involvement in decision-making and link benefits to wetlands conservation. This will include establishment of sustainable tourism, water resource management and fisheries models.

National and demonstration site work is to be symbiotic. Both levels of activity are to benefit from information sharing and technical support. Lessons learned are to be replicated nationally with the project supporting replication in at least two additional sites prior to close. Sustainable financing for wetlands conservation is to be secured, in part, through the establishment of a conservation trust fund.

Demonstration Sites

The three selected demonstration sites are:

Ural River Delta:

Located on the western edge of Kazakhstan. This is an important wetland for migratory birds on the Western Siberian/Caspian Sea branch of the East African flyway and critical habitat for sturgeon.

Tengiz-Kurgaldzhin Wetlands

Located in north-central Kazakhstan relatively near the capital city of Astana. TK is on the crossroads of the Central Asian and Siberian-South European Flyways and home to one of the world’s largest nesting populations of Greater flamingo (Phoenicopterus rubber).

Alakol-Sassykol Lakes Complex

Located in the extreme east of Kazakhstan at the base of the Tien Shan Mountains. AS is on the Indo-Chinese migratory flyway and one of two known nesting places in the world for the extremely rare Relict gull (Larus relictus).

Sites were chosen based upon six criteria:

* International biodiversity significance;
* National significance;
* Socio-economic importance;
* Level of threat to wetland biodiversity;
* Opportunities for economic development in surrounding areas; and,
* Urgency for action.

Project Outcomes

The project is to be founded upon five major outcomes.

Outcome 1 National wetland biodiversity conservation policy, regulatory and institutional framework approved and in place

Outcome 2 Well planned and effective protected area management

Outcome 3 Established awareness of wetland biodiversity values among local stakeholders and process for generating lessons learned

Outcome 4 Enabled conservation and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity in the productive landscape

Outcome 5 Sustainable financing for wetland conservation

GEF Alternative

The GEF supported alternative is to provide a policy and regulatory framework to support wetland conservation and sustainable use at the ground level that integrates biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in three (3) priority protected sites and the relevant surrounding landscape.

* At the Ural River Delta wetland the project is to demonstrate locally based public-private, multiple-use wetland management with an emphasis in the productive landscape on demonstrating effective partnerships between public (government), NGOs, and the private (commercial) organizations.
* At the Tengiz-Kurgaldzhin site the project is to demonstrate a more open and effective management approach for zapovednik (strictly protected natural areas) in Kazakhstan’s new social and economic landscape. Emphasis will be placed upon demonstrating more sustainable water resource management with a river basin management perspective.
* At the Alakol-Sassykol Site the project is to demonstrate a more open and effective management approach for zakaznik (wildlife reserves). Emphasis in the surrounding productive landscape will be on developing commercially viable, yet sustainable and biodiversity-friendly eco-tourism.

**1.2 Purpose of the evaluation**

This mid-term evaluation should assist GEF, UNDP, Project Managers and other stakeholders to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of project activities in relation to the stated objective. The evaluation is an opportunity for project stakeholders to discuss and critically assess administrative and technical strategies, issues and constraints. The evaluation assesses progress in addressing the baseline, threats, and root causes. The evaluation identifies any difficulties in project implementation and their causes. The evaluation provides general and specific recommendations to improve the project’s potential to achieve expected outcomes and meet objectives within the timeframe. The evaluation provides an opportunity to consider “lessons learned” to date that may be shared widely to facilitate adaptive management globally.

**1.3 Key issues addressed**

The key issues addressed by the MTE were:

* Is this project “on-track” to achieving what it set out to accomplish?
* What improvements should be considered to increase the likelihood of success?

Project performance was measured based on the quantitative and qualitative indicators. The evaluation considered issues related to management and substantive/technical implementation, including project delivery, implementation, and finances. Particular attention was given to the strategic approaches taken relevant to achievement of project objectives.

**1.4 The outputs of the evaluation and how will they be used**

The mid-term evaluation process provides all stakeholders with an opportunity step back from their daily implementation efforts to reflect upon and discuss the efficacy of project activity to date. The evaluation process serves as an important learning experience for all participants. The resulting report will ideally assist the project implementation team to: (1) assess and consider project success at achieving anticipated outcomes given current benchmarks and planned activities; (2) consider possible improvements/approaches to increase the likelihood of success; and, (3) ultimately, enhance both effectiveness (The project’s demonstrated ability to produce the desired outcomes) and efficiency (The project’s demonstrated ability to produce the highest value result for the lowest cost). A showing of effective action to rectify any identified issues hindering implementation should be a requirement prior to determining whether implementation should proceed.

Both the assessment process and resulting report should be considered as outputs of this evaluation.

The process and report should be used to (a) strengthen the adaptive management and monitoring function of the project; (b) ensure accountability for the achievement of the GEF objective, (c) enhance organizational and development learning; and (d) enable informed decision – making.

The MTE report highlights key issues. These highlights indicate several areas where follow-up investigation and monitoring by project managers and UNDP are required.

**1.5 Methodology of the evaluation**

One international and one national consultant conducted the evaluation. The evaluation commenced with a comprehensive desk review of all pertinent project documentation. This included an identification of preliminary focus topics/priorities and establishing the mission itinerary with the project management unit.

The two-week field-visit included semi-structured interviews with primary stakeholders, beneficiaries, and implementation partners. Site visits were made to each of the three project areas, the project office in Astana and UNDP offices in Almaty. These visits included interviews with key stakeholders, expeditious assessments of project areas and rapid inspections of major physical investments.

During the field visit, significant time was allocated for several meetings with project and local UNDP staff. This included in depth discussions regarding project management, relevance/achievement of outcomes, budget matters, and preliminary findings. Importantly, the project team and international consultant spent a significant amount of time reviewing and assessing the project’s logical framework.

Following the field visit, the consultants reviewed information gathered, re-assessed project documentation, and completed a draft MTE. This report was circulated to the project management unit, national and regional UNDP/GEF staff for comment. Based upon their inputs, the report was finalized for submission. Evaluators feel that their investigation was relatively thorough and diligent and we gained a very good “grasp” of project accomplishments, trends and challenges.

However, the amount of time allocated to conduct this evaluation proved to be insufficient. This is a large, programmatically diverse and geographically extensive project. It is also a project that has changed course significantly and is facing some serious challenges. The period of time spent in the field was sufficient. The drafting process consumed an enormous amount of time and in the end was rushed by the project’s end-of-year financial deadlines. It would have been easy to read the PIR’s, look at the indicators and check off the boxes. But with this project, that would not have worked.

**1.6 Structure of the evaluation**

The evaluation structure follows the guidance of UNDP and GEF, including UNDP’s “Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation for Results” and GEF’s “Monitoring and Evaluation Policies and Procedures”. The evaluation was guided by comprehensive terms of reference developed by the PMU and UNDP/Kazakhstan. These TORs defined the scope and framework for the evaluation’s final report.

**Section Two: The Project and Its Development Context**

**2.1 Project Start, Duration and Implementation Status**

Project Start: The Project Document was signed August 2003. Funds were first dispersed in October 2003. Project staff was hired in July 2004.

Duration: This is a seven-year project (84 months). The project is scheduled to close August 2010.

Implementation Status: This mid-term evaluation took place in October – November 2007 during the project’s fourth year (51st month) of operation.

**2.2 Problems That the Project Seeks to Address**

The following threats and root causes were identified during the project’s PDF-B phase.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Threats** | **Root Causes** |
| *Threat 1: Unsustainable use of biological resources* | * Inadequate level of management and protection for existing wetland protected areas * “Open access” property regime; inadequate local management and control over wetland resource use (i.e. hunting, fishing, grazing & grass cutting) * Lack of community awareness of protected area value; Insufficient public awareness * Inadequate alternative livelihood options for local people |
| *Threat 2: Unsustainable-use of water resources* | * Lack of integrated approach to water resource management * Inadequate water quality monitoring program * Water resources policies that do not include wetland conservation as a key objective * Inadequate law and policy framework for pollution control, i.e.; No requirement for major industrial users to use closed system of water use); Fines levied on polluters do not cover the real costs of pollution (health, ecosystem damage); inability to re-invest fines into pollution control/enforcement and treatment programs * Lack of effective enforcement of existing pollution laws * Inefficient and out-dated irrigation infrastructure * Lack of awareness among policy makers, local people and other stakeholders about the importance of wetlands and dangers of polluting water |
| *Threat 3: Uncontrolled Visitation/Tourism in Wetland Areas.* | * Absence of program/regulations for ecotourism development in the GoK * Inability of protected areas to re-invest entrance fees back into management of the protected area * Absence of basic services for visitors; lack of specifically designed viewing platforms and trails |

**2.3 Immediate and Development Objectives of the Project**

This project does not have a development and/or immediate objective statement.

The project’s goal is: “To protect globally significant wetland biodiversity in Kazakhstan.”

The project’s statement of purpose is: “Government agencies, non-governmental entities, and local communities are maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems.”

**2.4 Main Stakeholders**

* *Ministry of Environmental Protection:* CBD focal point. Responsible for regulating pollution and EIA’s. The project works with departments responsible for science and environmental monitoring and legislation.
* *Ministry of Agriculture:* Integrated water resources management, fisheries and wildlife management, and the sustainable use of and conservation of land resources. The project works closest with Forestry and Hunting Committee, Water Resources Committee, and the Fisheries Committee.
* *Forestry and Hunting Committee (FHC) of the Ministry of Agriculture:* This is the project implementing agency and the stakeholder working on a daily basis with the project. Development of protected areas, sustainable use of biological resources. The project works closely with the department of protected areas development.
* Other national stakeholders: Ministry of Economy and Budget Planning.
* *Local Stakeholders:* Oblast Akims, protected area managers, Territorial departments of nature resources management, enforcement agencies (fish and hunting inspections).

**2.5 Results Expected**

Project Outcomes

Outcome 1 National wetland biodiversity conservation policy, regulatory and institutional framework approved and in place

Outcome 2 Well planned and effective protected area management

Outcome 3 Established awareness of wetland biodiversity values among local stakeholders and process for generating lessons learned.

Outcome 4 Enabled Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetland Biodiversity in the Productive Landscape

Outcome 5 Sustainable financing for wetland conservation

Proposed End of Project Situation

* Government agencies, non-governmental entities and local communities will be maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems.
* A national wetlands policy and regulatory framework will be approved and in place, facilitating the mainstreaming of wetland biodiversity conservation issues.
* Policy makers will be applying new policy tools to wetland conservation and wetland criteria will be integrated into existing property regimes governing land and water ownership.
* The number of hectares under active wetland conservation management will have increased by 100%.
* The three globally significant migratory bird wetland habitat protected areas will have demonstrated management in a well-planned and effective manner.
* Community-based management will be the norm in each site and protected area managers will utilize effective, low-input research and monitoring activities to support their adaptive management of the three protected area sites.
* Staff will apply newly acquired, up-to-date principles in conservation biology and community based management.
* The project will have also assisted the Government in establishing a long-term funding mechanism that ensures the financial sustainability of biodiversity conservation efforts.
* Learning and evaluating will be a more important part of wetland biodiversity conservation and management.
* Wetland stakeholders will be more aware and more supportive of the purpose and objective of wetland conservation in the priority sites. Thousands of school children will be visiting wetland sites each year, learning about the Kazakhstan’s wetland biodiversity.
* Wetland managers will be applying a double-loop learning process to wetland management whereby lessons will be learned and best practices to wetland conservation in Kazakhstan developed and disseminated.
* Stronger regional connections (data sharing, management exchanges) among migratory bird habitat managers will be in evidence.
* Stakeholders will be enabled to conserve and sustainably utilize biodiversity in the productive landscape around the priority sites.
* Small-scale irrigators throughout Kazakhstan will be applying basic principles and lessons learned on biodiversity “friendly” irrigation management.
* People living in communities nearby the three priority wetland areas will be developing alternative livelihoods with the support of micro-credit and small business development services. As a result, pressure on wetland biodiversity resources will be declining.
* The MBWCF will have been established to ensure the long-term sustainability of activities in the project’s priority wetland sites.

Project Document’s “Objective” (Goal) Level Indicators

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Goal:  To protect globally significant wetland biodiversity in Kazakhstan. | * Populations of indicator species in priority areas remain at current levels or increase. * Populations of rare and endangered fauna and flora of priority areas remain at current levels. * Monitoring of wetland plant communities in 2006 indicates that the ecological integrity of priority areas remains secure with no significant decrease in habitat size. * Positive trends in indicator species numbers – birds, fish, plants. |
| Purpose:  Government agencies, non-governmental entities, and local communities are maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems. | * National policies in 2006 reflect wetland biodiversity conservation as a priority * Management model extended from three project sites to at least 2 other PA by 2006. * More than 10 local communities involved in wetland management in Kazakhstan by the end of the project. * 20% increase in the area of wetland reserves actively being managed in Kazakhstan * GoK has ensured through its water supply development policies to provide adequate water for wetland health to the three priority sites. |

Current PIR’s “Objective” (Goal) Level Indicators

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Objective: Government agencies, non-governmental entities, and local communities are maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems | * Populations of wetland indicator species in priority areas remain at the baseline level * Number of hectares of wetlands under conservation management * Water level required to maintain wetland ecosystems integrity and wetland productivity remains constant |

**Section Three: Analysis of Outcomes, Outputs and Partnership Strategy**

**3.1 Partnership Strategy**

The project works closely with a wide range of partners on national and local levels. On the national level, the project’s steering committee is quite active and serves as a non-formal bridging institution bringing together diverse institutions responsible for management of wetlands and associated activities. This same strategy is mimicked on the local level at each of the three pilot sites where local steering committees support project implementation.

**3.2 Assessment of the Project’s Logical Framework**

Summary of Findings

This project does not have a strong logical framework. The project does not have a succinct statement of purpose. The five “classic” outcomes are fine and continue to address conservation threats in a broad way. The project can easily claim that every indicator is achieved and still have failed to provide meaningful conservation impacts. Indicators present challenges to evaluating the project’s effectiveness.

Objective

The current logical framework states that the project objective is:

“Government agencies, non-governmental entities, and local communities are maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems.”

This objective statement does not reflect the project’s full purposes. The brief project description helps to clarify this objective by stating:

This project is designed to demonstrate the integrated conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity in three priority wetland sites. The three sites lie along different migratory flyways and each enables the project to demonstrate solutions to different pressing issues affecting Kazakhstan's wetland biodiversity resources. Full project will integrate conservation and development in order to improve sustainability and effectiveness of wetland management. Project will develop participatory, multiple-use management regimes for existing protected area wetland sites. Sustainable livelihood demonstration modules will be developed in and around wetland sites where impacts from surrounding landscape are manageable.

Outcomes

The project’s outcomes are satisfactory. They present five broad categories representing a “classic” conservation approach. These outcomes are designed to secure the institutional and policy environment, improve management of the “protected” landscape, improve education and public awareness, generate conservation incentives for the “productive” landscape, and establish long-term funding sources to help ensure financial sustainability.

Indicators

A comprehensive listing of each project indicator and associated ratings may be found in the MTE report annex.

Although the five primary components have remained the same, the project’s core indicators have altered over the course of implementation. The major shift occurred between 2005 and 2006 when the project’s indicators were radically overhauled.

The new indicators are an improvement, but are still problematic. The indicators are frequently vague and may easily be interpreted in different ways. As a result, many do not provide a reliable measurement of this project’s effectiveness. Most “indicator” problems could be easily fixed with slight adjustments.

*Recommendation:*

* *Indicators should be refined in order to provide a more accurate measurement of project success.*

*Objective Level Indicators*

Indicator 1 uses the status of avian species to show project success. The end of project target is to maintain the status quo for 11 bird species in three sites. (The population of Relict Gulls is to increase 3 fold from 2 gulls to 6 gulls). That is fine if the baseline situation was a healthy, functioning, well-managed wetlands ecosystem and the project’s objective is to simply maintain the status quo. However, wetlands were not well managed and were under threat by a host of major problems. The project set out to change that situation. Therefore, if the project is successful, bird numbers should alter as ecosystem health recovers. There should be some measurable trend – up or down - that indicates system vitality is improving.

It is quite possible that seven years is not long enough for many of these species to show significant change unless there is a catastrophic event. If this is the case, then using these species as indicators of project success would be futile.

There are other issues as well, for instance consistency and timing of inventories. In the TK system, the number of waterfowl increases dramatically during hunting season when pressure outside of the reserve forces greater numbers to seek refuge inside the reserve. If the project is successful, perhaps the numbers of some species in the reserve will actually decrease during hunting season as more habitat outside of the protected area becomes available.

There are an estimated 1,800 migrating Relict Gulls in the world. The AS system provides one of only two known nesting sites for all Relict Gulls. The project’s indicator target for AS is “6 non-breeding Relict Gulls.” The primary nesting site is located in the middle of the lake. Presumably, this indicator refers to birds frequenting the land portion of the protected area, possibly for purposes of feeding. The biological significance seems pretty limited. Gulls presumably fly to and from the protected area en route to nesting sites. How will the project differentiate between individuals?

If “priority areas” includes only the protected areas, then maintaining the status quo of bird species inside the protected areas is likely not an accurate measurement of project “impact” achieved from activities in the productive landscape. If “priority areas” includes the productive landscape, then what are the boundaries of this area and who will be conducting the monitoring?

And, of course, there are other “risks”. Nearly all of these species are migratory. Their status is not entirely dependent upon successful management of these three protected areas.

Focusing upon avian species does show the fundamentally important linkages between bird life and wetlands. It also reflects the project priority of securing migratory bird habitat, a national emphasis upon biological monitoring of birds, and the availability of this data.

Perhaps if bird species are going to be used as indicators of project effectiveness, then it might be better to use quantifiable measurements such as recruitment at specific wetland sites or numbers of nesting birds within protected area boundaries and outside of protected area boundaries. Of course, there are many other options including habitat types and less wide-ranging species.

Indicator 2 proposes that the project will be successful if there is a 45% increase in the “Number of hectares of wetlands under conservation management.” It is not clear whether this indicator refers to the inclusion of wetlands within protected area and/or the “conservation management” of wetlands within the project area both inside and outside of protected areas. It’s also not clear how the 215,000 ha increase in Indicator 2 reconciles with the 236,000 ha increase called for in Indicator 8.

Indicator 3 is the only objective level indicator that provides some clear measure of the effectiveness or contribution of project activity outside of protected areas to secure wetlands conservation objectives. The indicator applies only to TK and AS and measures project effectiveness in terms of water quantity. This is a useful indicator. Again, the target levels simply require the project to maintain the status quo. This does not reflect the effectiveness of project-sponsored improvements and it does not reflect seasonal flows. In addition, the indicator does not consider water quality. In both areas, improved flow rates and quality are critical to wetland conservation.

During the evaluation we were provided with a logical framework that includes an additional, non-numbered indicator that does not appear in any of the PIRs: “Number of wetland protected areas which replicate the management model developed in the project.” The baseline is 0, mid-term target 3, and end of project target 5.

This indicator is a good idea and obviously an attempt to rectify the lack of an indicator measuring project effectiveness at generating national level improvements. But what is the management model the project is supposed to replicate? If it means “management planning”, the indicator should state such.

None of the objective level indicators are linked to the project’s objective of NGO and local community action.

*Outcome One Indicators*

These indicators have been ratcheted down somewhat over the course of project implementation. The indicators no longer hold the project accountable to develop a National Wetland Conservation Act, to create an inter-ministerial board on wetland conservation, pass legislation for enabling community management and use of wetlands resources, integrate wetlands conservation into existing property and water ownership schemes, etc.

Project success is now indicated by the ratification of two international agreements (the Bonn Convention and Ramsar); a reduction in reported cases of poaching at project sites; and, “new regulatory and normative acts relevant to wetlands conservation and sustainable use” (adoption of new regulations to safeguard wetlands in protected areas; adoption of a decree for sustainable fishing; and, provisions for wetlands conservation in the Water Code).

Again, this indicator does not provide implementation guidance or offer evaluators an accurate measurement of project effectiveness. “Provisions” could mean anything, making a “false positive” rating inevitable. A better measurement would be indicators that measure whether the regulatory framework contains certain policies, i.e., National Water Code secures highest appropriation rights or reserved water rights for downstream protected areas; a permit system for the modification of wetlands outside of protected areas; or, fisheries regulations that outlaw the use of set-nets within five kilometers of a protected wetland. These sorts of indicators would speak more directly to project success at addressing identified root causes of threats.

Reports of poaching are not necessarily an indicator of project effectiveness. This could be reduced simply by less active enforcement and/or a shift in the market economy that no longer makes poaching wildlife an attractive commodity or a subsistence necessity. A fact often repeated to the evaluators while in the field. In addition, a weak regulatory framework makes legal resource use unsustainable but not a “poaching” offense.

*Outcome Two Indicators*

The current indicators have abandoned the original elements of “community management” and “sustainable, systematic research and monitoring program”.

Indicator 7: METT scores are very useful and encompass most management concerns. However, the other indicators of increased boundaries and increased staff numbers alone are not reliable indicators of improved management. Perhaps a better set of indicators would relate to the existence of adaptive management plans, on-going biodiversity surveys informing management practices, adequate budget support, trained staff, etc. – most of which are covered by METT.

Indicator 8 requires review. The current statement “The boundaries of protected areas increased to include valuable ecosystems” should either be quantified by “valuable *wetlands* ecosystems” or an additional indicator added showing exactly how many hectares of wetlands will be included within protected areas by project close.

This clarification is particularly important since most of the proposed 130,000 hectare expansion of TK is not “wetlands”. The expansion area is dry steppe land. Under the current Indicator 8 phrasing, these expansion areas would qualify as contributions to target achievement.

*Outcome Three Indicators*

Survey results are a common and useful method for measuring awareness. However, they do not make it abundantly clear to evaluators that the project is having a direct and effective impact upon the proper target audience and that this impact is resulting in behaviors that support the project’s wetland conservation objective. For instance, there is no way to evaluate that information provided is positively affecting decision-making. The indicators do not show that key resource users – irrigators and other water users, commercial fishermen, hunters, livestock grazers, etc. – are using information to change practices.

Evaluators through direct investigation, interviews, etc. can determine the effect of some awareness generating activities, but success is not reflected on the face of the reported indicators. “Fire” impacts are directly measurable, but again these numbers challenge the project to basically maintain the status quo for the duration of implementation. Indicator 12 is fine. Indicator 13 is not measurable.

*Outcome Four Indicators*

These indicators were radically changed between 2005 and 2006. Indicators specifically related to water and irrigation management, ecotourism, “cross-cutting” learned programming, and productive landscape conservation were abandoned at that time. Indicators related to fisheries management were altered significantly.

The current indicators for this outcome do not measure “effectiveness” and, therefore, do not provide evaluators with an accurate measure of project success.

Indicator 14 sets the goal of 20 households replacing destructive activities with alternative activities. There is no indication of the specific “destructive” activities that are being shifted. There is no baseline of “destruction”. The indicator provides no useful information. It would be much more helpful if this indicator referred to twelve poachers become ornithological guides; fifteen sturgeon fishermen become full-time bed and breakfast operators; or, twenty-two irrigation farmers fully adopt organic, dry land farming.

Indicator 15 suffers from the same weaknesses. Under this indicator it is possible for the project to claim to have supported several hundred hectares being used for activities that do not harm wetlands. However, in reality, more than half of these hectares were already in wetland benign dry land operations located far from the protected area borders. Again, the indicator does not provide an accurate measurement of project success.

Indicator 16 is very vague. What does “improved” fisheries management mean? This could be interpreted to mean more fish caught, hatcheries for non-endemic species established, more revenue generated, or more fish protected. The indicator does not provide project managers with clear goals and does not provide evaluators with an accurate sense of project success.

*Outcome Five Indicators*

Indicator 17 focuses only upon the establishment of the Trust Fund. Financial stability for the long-term implementation of wetlands conservation initiatives, particularly in a relatively wealthy country such as Kazakhstan, should be indicated by other factors such as dedicated government budgeting for wetlands protected area management, payments for water management regimes that incorporate and enhance wetlands conservation concerns, etc. Also, the indicator is not measurable. The original project document set a clear target of capitalizing at least US$5 million. Now the project is evaluated based upon its ability to set up and capitalize the fund.

**3.3 Project Achievements to Date: Outcomes and Outputs**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Ratings: The rating system follows UNDP’s “Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluating for Results”* | | | |
| *Outcomes Ratings* | Positive change | Unchanged (no change) | Negative change |
| *Outputs Ratings* | Yes (achieved) | Partial (2/3 or more) | No (not achieved) |
| *Indicator Ratings* | Yes (achieved) | Partial (2/3 or more) | No (not achieved) |

***Outcome 1:* National wetland biodiversity conservation policy, regulatory and institutional framework approved and in place**

*Outcome Rating: Positive Change*

*Summary of MTE Findings*

To date, the project has made solid gains regarding the development of policies to improve the management of wetlands inside protected areas. The project has also offered the GoK considerable support for the accession to major international agreements.

The project abandoned original outputs such as: (i) creating a national wetlands conservation law; (ii) supporting the establishment and implementation of a permit system to mitigate harm to all wetlands following best international principles and practices; (iii) creating regulatory incentives for sustained use of wetlands resources by local communities; and, (iv) establishing institutional frameworks to provide integrated wetlands conservation approaches, including an “inter-ministerial board” to oversee and coordinate cooperation for wetlands management.

These approaches may have needed modification based upon subsequent changes in Kazakh law and policy. However, alternatives currently proposed to address problems original interventions were to answer are not clearly satisfactory.

The project has not made adequate gains to: (i) strengthen institutional structures for integrated wetlands ecosystem management on national or local levels, (ii) conserve wetlands that occur outside the borders of protected areas, and (iii) insulate wetlands inside protected areas from the adverse impacts of activities beyond protected area boundaries, i.e., irrigation and water resources management, unsustainable fisheries and hunting management, land use management, grazing management, and the improvement of regulatory and management structures for tourism development.

The project should comprehensively address these critical institutional and policy matters in the near term. Evaluators view this as a very high priority for the remaining project period.

Project accomplishments to date include:

* Accession to Ramsar and Bonn conventions which was completed in 2005
* Development of a draft government resolution, “Fishery Development Concept until 2015”
* Provisions for the new RoK Law on PAs related to internationally significant wetlands and unique bodies of water, procedures for drafting and structuring of PA Management Plans, and possibilities for establishing a Biodiversity Conservation and PA Development Fund
* A Government Resolution (October 2006) promoting the expansion of the Korgalzhyn and Alakol Nature Reserves and establishment of a nature reserve at the Ural River Delta into the RoK PA Development Programme for 2007-2009; and,
* Development of the following regulations:

Rules for Preparation of Scientific and Feasibility Studies for Expanding or Establishing PAs;

Methodological Guidelines on the Nature Records Management in PAs having status of legal status;

Rules for Drafting Management Plans of Conservation Organizations;

Model of uniform (without shoulder marks), wearing order and norms of uniform provision to public inspectors of PAs;

Rules of Regulated Tourism and Recreation within National Natural Parks; and

Rules of Visiting of PAs by Individuals.

The current project work plans include amendment of the Water Code to include provisions to secure water rights for wetlands inside protected areas, the creation of legislation to protect wetlands of international importance and undefined regulations “on biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of biological, recreational and other wetlands resources.”

The MoA, Water Resource Committee has both water use plans and basin management plans for 8 basins. This includes a complete, digitized inventory of nearly all bodies of water. The project has done some work on this issue and should more fully integrate lessons learned from project demonstration sites into these plans to provide greater protection for wetlands ecosystems.

These are all excellent steps in the right direction, but they are likely not adequate. The project was funded at its current level with the ambition of going much further. Project success at addressing these difficult issues will directly impact the project’s final outcome, including sustainability.

*Recommendations*

* *Conduct a comprehensive policy and institutional gaps analysis*

The project should hire a knowledgeable environmental policy expert to conduct a comprehensive institutional and policy gaps analysis to make a clear determination of needs and provide solid advice regarding the best way forward. Particular attention should be given to institutional and policy frameworks related to water law with due diligence provided to review of existing legislation such as the Water Code, the new Ecological Code, EIA provisions, species conservation policies and land laws. This analysis would benefit greatly from lessons learned to date from project implementation activities. The analysis should review findings made during the project design phase and update these findings based upon lessons learned to date. The analysis would also benefit from reviews conducted through other projects, narrowing these findings to focus specifically upon the adequacy of current legislation and regulation to promote wetlands conservation. The proposals should include policy and institutional approaches for wetlands conservation that cover both productive and protected landscapes. The analysis should include a strategy for completing proposed revisions within the near-term vetted with the coordinating, executing and implementing agencies. The senior level expert hired to conduct this work must have extensive international experience and the proven ability to draw upon this experience to provide best principles and practices. A major part of this effort should include building the capacities of local and national agencies of interest, including training on best wetlands regulatory and decision-making experiences. Based upon the outcomes of the Gaps Analysis, the project should work quickly and effectively to promote the adoption of necessary reforms.

* *Amend the Water Code to provide comprehensive, ecosystem level protection for wetlands that occur both inside and outside of protected areas*

The primary measurement of project success with Outcome One will likely be the Water Code. This is one of the most important things that the project needs to get right. For instance, existing and potential water diversions at both AS (existing diversions by irrigators) and TK (potential non-drinking water diversion of the Nura river for Astana) represent high-level threats to these protected areas. Evaluators were not able to review the Water Code but were led to understand by both international and national experts that the current law does not provide sufficient regulatory protections for wetlands.

The project recognizes the importance of this issue and is working towards a successful result. For instance, the project intends to prepare an inter-ministerial agreement to guide provision of water to wetlands to be approved by The Forestry and Hunting Committee, Fishery Committee, and Water Resources Committee.

Final Water Code revisions will ideally protect wetlands both inside and outside of protected areas and contain provisions such as: adequate and clear definition of wetlands; establishment of permit system for wetlands modification that mitigates wetlands damage, including specification of allowed and permitted activities; guarantee or “reserve” water quality and quantity rights for protected areas; provide priority water rights for endangered species; etc. There are numerous international examples of national water laws with sound wetlands conservation provisions that the project should draw upon.

* *Create institutional structures capable of supporting integrated, ecosystem approaches to wetlands conservation on both national and local levels*

The challenge remains for the project to demonstrate a strong institutional framework that will result in sound, ecosystem level decision-making regarding wetlands conservation on the national and local levels. The Project must still demonstrate exactly how particular institutions will be legally accountable and have the regulatory capacity to monitor and protect wetlands both inside and outside of protected areas.

Planned policy reforms at the national level, particularly the establishment of Water Code provisions that establish a permit structure to mitigate wetlands damage, will be helpful. On the “demonstration” site level, the project should be working much more aggressively to institutionalize changes to current decision-making structures. By the end of the project, local decision-making processes in each of the three project sites should be more integrated and reflect ecosystem management objectives. Mechanisms need to be set in place to help local government institutions more fully identify and address wetlands needs in development planning. The project should be more actively promoting community involvement in decision-making regarding wetlands management. Capacity building for local decision-makers should be a major part of this effort. This includes exposure to best international principles and practices.

For instance, the project has stimulated the development of “zoning” maps for each project area. It would be very useful if in the future these zones could become the basis for legally enforceable land use plans that promote wetlands conservation in the productive landscape. Basin Authorities and Councils were established over the last several years in Kazakhstan and the project has begun working with these organizations. It would be very useful if the project could further capitalize on this opportunity and help clarify the legal mandate, responsibility and capacity of these institutions to conserve wetlands outside of protected areas and insulate wetlands inside protected areas from adverse.

* *Create regulatory structures that address issues related to productive sector activity that adversely impacts wetlands conservation*

As noted, the project has not yet fully succeeded at creating sound regulatory frameworks to guide the management of critical wetlands threats stemming from activities such as fisheries and hunting management, grazing management, land use management, and tourism development. Doing such should be a priority. Establishing a wetlands permitting structure in the national Water Code would help immensely. Similarly, better hunting management regimes – an activity planned by the project – will also assist. The quality of all of these activities must be high and reflect best international principles and practices. The project is working towards the creation of Resource Management Councils at each project site. Again, this is a great opportunity and it would be very helpful if the project could successfully demonstrate the capacity of these Councils to effect wetlands conservation in the productive landscape.

The project has drafted reforms for fisheries management. Evaluators met with government fisheries officials on both the national and local level. We also held discussions with fishermen and conservation specialists at project sites and were able to watch fishermen practicing fishing methods that are currently illegal. This is an area of project activity that is wrought with political, economic, biological and social challenges. Reforms should be scrutinized more closely and re-assessed based upon best international principle and practices.

* *Address issues of pollution prevention, including possible oil pollution mitigation needs*

Garbage disposal at both AS and URD are significant issues not addressed by the project. Of course the level of impact to wetlands diversity was not quantified, but it must be substantial. Many riparian zones are covered with waste. One very positive result of project activity not documented is the recent “outlawing” of disposable fishing nets imported to AS from China. Dozens of these nets still litter wetlands outside of protected areas.

The project should consider implementing both regulatory changes and public awareness campaigns to mitigate garbage disposal practices.

The possibility of requiring the preparation and implementation of Emergency Prevention and Control by oil and gas companies in territories adjoining AS and URD sites should be discussed with FHC and MoEP. The project might provide technical assistance to MoEP and FHC/MoA for preparation of new articles for the Environmental Code and Law on Conservation and Use of Flora and Fauna.

* *Strengthen wildlife and natural resource law enforcement outside of protected areas*

By all accounts, wildlife law enforcement outside of protected areas is tremendously poor. Until the GoK addresses this issue, passage of laws and regulations is a mute effort. Enforcement agencies are under staffed, under trained, and under equipped. Enforcement of fishing regulations is poor at all three sites. The black market is full operational, particularly at URD. By all accounts, this is the direct cause of sturgeon extinctions. Water use regulation, monitoring and enforcement by the GoK are apparently very lax. At AS, water seems to be a de facto “open access” resource. Less than a hand-full of wildlife law enforcement officials monitor hunting and fishing activity in the vast wetlands complexes surrounding TK. The project should be aggressively seeking out ways to stimulate and support improvements in each of these sectors.

***Outcome 2:* Well planned and effective protected area management**

*Outcome Rating: Positive Change*

*Summary of MTE Findings:*

Many persons interviewed stated that the project’s support for improved protected areas management is outstanding. The evaluators agree. METT scores already show major improvements. A vast amount of project effort has gone into this component and it is paying dividends. The project has managed to very effectively strengthen the management of both existing protected areas and lay a very sound foundation for the management of the proposed URD. The project has motivated substantial increases in GoK financial support for protected area management. The development of protected area management plans technically and financially supported by RSPB in cooperation with the project was a significant achievement.

The next challenge will be to: (i) make certain protected area expansion and creation proposals are adopted rapidly to allow adequate time for project support, (ii) provide significant assistance to the URD to make certain project gains are realized, (iii) expand wetlands management and monitoring lessons learned within the protected areas to the surrounding landscapes to provide for more integrated management schemes, (iv) secure sustainable funding from government sources, and (v) replicate lessons learned nationally.

Major accomplishments to date include:

* Scientific Studies for expansion of the Korgalzhyn and Alakol Nature Reserves and creation of the Akzhayik Nature Reserve at the Ural River Delta prepared and approved by the Scientific and Technical Council of the Committee for Forestry and Hunting (MoA RoK).
* Feasibility Studies prepared and the land for a new PA at the URD and expansion of the Korgalzhyn and Alakol Nature Reserves under reservation
* Two PA Management Plans under implementation
* Methodological Guidelines for Systemic Monitoring of Biodiversity Components and Habitats drafted and approved
* Structure of the Action Plan for Species Management for Glossy Ibis, White Headed Duck, and Ferruginous Duck approved and working group established for drafting
* Protected areas infrastructure strengthened
* Training courses on basic knowledge in site management, legislation, financial issues and ecotourism implemented, including several study tours to natural reserves in Russia and oversees
* Nomination documents prepared and submitted to GoK for inclusion of Korgaljin Reserve to the UNESCO World Heritage List

Many of these outputs represent “firsts” for Kazakhstan, including “international standard” protected area management plans, monitoring guidelines, and species action plans. The GoK has adopted the management planning process launched by the project for national replication facilitated by training programs sponsored by the project.

The project supported elaborate field studies to complete “Nature-Scientific Justifications” for the expansion of reserves at AS and TK and the establishment of a nature reserve at URD. At both AS and URD, local authorities have set aside lands for reserves. Reservation of new lands for TK is expected soon.

The justification studies created the basis for long-term monitoring programs and the elaboration of both management plans. Again, this represented a “first” for Kazakhstan and GoK agencies have now adopted this as a “best practice” for protected areas nationally. On-going monitoring and data collection activities sponsored by the project are quite impressive, particularly in TK.

Substantial infrastructure support was given to all three protected areas, greatly improving both enforcement and biodiversity monitoring functions. Each PA received cars, minivans, monitoring equipment, computer equipment and motorboats. This catalyzed GoK development and implementation of a “National Protected Area Strengthening Program” with increased budget allocations for each PA, including hiring of additional staff numbers.

The expansion efforts at each of the project sites deserve recognition.

The project has facilitated the completion of very important creation and expansion steps. In 2006 and 2007, the Government passed two resolutions recognizing and approving the expansion and creation efforts. As noted above, local authorities have recently set aside lands for reserves. These are all positive signs indicating that the protected area expansion and creation process will likely be finalized before the end of 2008 with the new territories operational (budget, staff, equipment, etc.) soon after this. However, this will leave the project with very little time prior to close to support management capacity. This is particularly a concern in URD where no protected area infrastructure or management plan currently exists.

*Recommendations:*

* *Integrate protected area management with management of surrounding productive landscapes, using capacities built within protected area administrations to build wetlands management capacities outside of protected areas.*

Success at conserving the integrity of protected areas relates directly to success at conserving the surrounding productive landscapes. Protected areas are ecologically linked with surrounding landscapes. Very significant numbers of wetlands of high biological value occur outside of the protected area boundaries. (The Ramsar site for TK, which includes the buffer zone, totals some 353,000 hectares. There are 180 lakes in the TK region. 101 of these are located outside the reserve). Resource use activities on surrounding landscapes continue to impact protected areas and in many cases represent the most important threats to protected areas. Meanwhile, management of protected areas occurs to a large extent in isolation from surrounding productive landscapes.

The root cause of this gap is related to the failure of current institutional and legal structures on national and local levels to provide adequate mechanisms for complementary management. This was discussed in Outcome One.

Protected areas should be working with project assistance to promote recognition of these linkages.

The project should be serving as a catalyst to meaningfully stimulate and formalize: inter-agency coordination; cooperation between local, private and public land managers; land use planning (functional and ecological zoning); adaptive species management, including “take” quotas based upon broader, cooperative scientific research and monitoring; and, systems for regulating the use of wetlands and water outside of protected areas that is much more ecologically comprehensive.

Landscape level management approaches should be the norm. Capacities built within protected area administrations should be applied to support improved management of productive landscapes. This should include improving law enforcement outside of protected areas. Skilled protected area biologists should be supporting and building capacities outside of protected areas, including biodiversity monitoring of wetlands ecologically linked but politically removed from protected areas.

Formal mechanisms should be set in place to make certain results of these activities are used to inform productive landscape management decisions. The development planning processes undertaken by each of the municipalities proximate to pilot sites should reflect the biodiversity conservation needs of protected areas.

As noted previously, the project’s functional zoning activities will ideally become a catalyst for land use planning and more integrated, cooperative, and landscape level conservation.

* *Support expanded public participation in protected area management*

The newly approved protected areas management plans provide for public participation in management decision making. The project should provide expert support to assist the two existing protected areas to implement these requirements. Participation should be designed to increase local “ownership” of protected areas while maintaining the protected area administration’s ability to make management decisions based upon best available science and practice.

* *Provide Near-Term Assistance for Functionality of the URD Reserve*

The establishment of the new URD reserve is an exciting step forward. The project field staff has created a very strong local constituency. Their efforts to negotiate the new protected area represent a genuine enthusiasm. They should be recognized for this.

Official designation of this protected area will likely occur sometime in early 2008. However, due to the GoK budget process, the reserve will not be staffed and functional until sometime in 2009, very near the time of project termination.

To make certain project gains are fully realized, the project should work with the GoK to speed up functionality. This may include an agreement where-by trained and salaried government protected area staff from other project sites are assigned to work immediately in the URD reserve. The project would then provide short-term financial assistance for infrastructure requirements, including purchase of vehicles, boats, computer, etc. required to make the protected area functional in the near term. This would provide an opportunity for the project to immediately begin tasks necessary to launch the protected area, including the design of a protected area management plan, community outreach and enforcement efforts, etc. If this is not done, the next year of project activities in URD will not meet their maximum potential.

* *Quantify and summarize protected area and project area information in a format suitable for project evaluation*

It would be useful if simple tables similar to these could be completed for future evaluations. This may require further detail regarding wetlands type, i.e., bog, fen, prairie pothole, riparian, marsh, etc., as well as habitat prioritization.

The following tables were developed several months after the field mission and presented during finalization of the MTE draft. They are quite useful.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Location** | **Existing Protected**  **Area** | **Core**  **Existing (ha)** | **Buffer Existing**  **(Ha)** | **Proposed Expansion (ha) in 2005** | **Actual approved expansion following recommendations** | | **Brief description of expansion’s wetlands values (%, habitats, etc.)** |
|  |  |  |  |  | **total** | **Wetlands out of total** |  |
| TK | 326,878 | 258,963 | 67,915 | 130,000 | 284,208 | 65,512.8 | 23.1% wetlands  - 13,468.8 ha of wetlands in the East : of fresh and salt lakes ecosystems, floodplains and riparian areas Flamingoes, waterfowl habitats.  - 5,101 ha in the South - salty lakes, lakeside meadows, - feeding sites for ruddy shelduck, sandpiper.  - 46,943 ha wetlands ha in the West – moulting place of common shelduck, ruddy shelduck, flamingoes.- |
| AS | 46,440 | 19,713 | 26,677 | 74,799 | 63,645 | 61,019.7 | 95.9% wetlands |
| URD | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50,400 | 111,500 | 111,500 | 100% wetlands |
| TOTALS | 373,318 | 278,676 | 94,592 | 255,199 | 459,353 | 238,032.5 | 51.8% wetlands |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Location** | **Total Project Area (ha)** | **Total Wetlands in Project Area (ha)** | **Wetlands in Existing Protected Areas (Ha)** | **Total Wetlands in Proposed Protected Area Expansion (Ha)** | **Total wetlands in Existing +expanison** |
| TK | 1,601,286.6 | 480,385 | 258,963 | 65,512.8 | 324,475.8 |
| AS | 913,900 | 876,430 | 19,713 | 61,019.7 | 80,732.7 |
| URD | 304,039 | 304,039 | 0 | 111,500 | 111,500 |
| TOTALS | 2,819,225.6 | 1,660,854 | 278,676 | 238,032.5 | 516,708.5 |

***Outcome 3:* Established awareness of wetland biodiversity values among local stakeholders and process for generating lessons learned**

*Outcome Rating: Positive Change*

*Summary of MTE Findings:*

The project has generated an impressive amount of public awareness materials, media outreach campaigns, educational materials, and training programs that cover a fairly wide variety of topics. The quality of these materials is excellent and presentation professional.

Major accomplishments to date include:

* Development of several publications including: Atlas of Key Species, in Kazakh and Russian; List of Supported Biodiversity at three project sites; PA Management Planning Guidelines; wall and desk calendars for 2007 with photo materials on birds biodiversity; information bulletins, fire reduction booklets, etc.
* Website launched [www.wetlands.kz](http://www.wetlands.kz)
* Fire prevention information boards produced and installed
* Wide variety of seminars and training programs for protected area staff
* Press conferences and other media outreach activities
* Training modules and workshops for water users on irrigation safe for wetlands biodiversity and water resources management; Ecoeducation for the Tengiz-Korgalzhyn and Ural River Delta project sites
* School curriculum for all three project sites; including training and materials to support the ecoeducation modules which covers wetlands conservation issues
* Visit Center of the Korgzlshyn Nature Reserve
* Regional Workshop in Astana to exchange experiences and to disseminate lessons learnt among GEF/UNDP Projects in Eastern Europe and CIS
* Organized a series of ecological actions such as Wetlands Day, March of Parks with active participation of schoolchildren in all project sites.

The project has shown a relatively high level of activity with this component. The school programs being implemented in each project site are particularly interesting and useful. The visitor center designed by the project and built the GoK at TK will very likely have high educational and public awareness value, particularly since it is located relatively close to the capital, Astana.

A very interesting initiative recently started by the project and co-financed by the protected areas involves presenting workshops at schools and universities to discuss conservation issues. The project selects certain participants and brings them to the protected areas where they work for several months.

*Recommendations:*

* *Develop a communication strategy to guide public awareness activities*

There is some question regarding the effectiveness of the public awareness activities to reach critical target audiences. The project would benefit from developing a concise communication and marketing strategy that: (i) has a clear message goal, (ii) identifies the most important target audiences, based upon their potential positive/negative impacts to wetlands conservation, (iii) generates a clear baseline of the current situation and how the public awareness campaign will impact that situation, and (iii) creates a plan of action to develop and deliver necessary conservation messages and information. This would help to increase efficiency and effectiveness and provide project management with a better understanding of impact.

Key target groups would likely include: decision-makers, resource users, protected area managers, local communities and community based organizations, potential sustainable business entrepreneurs practices, water users, etc. However, the strategy should further focus these groups to identify key target audiences and proposed communication strategies, i.e., the five largest commercial fishing operators at URD; governors at each of the three project sites; the ten owners of hunting concessions around TK; four major tourism operators at AS; the school children of parliament members in Astana, etc.

A fundamental element of the strategy should be building strong, informed local constituencies amongst stakeholders and providing greater access for local stakeholders to decision-making processes.

* *Expand eco-education and youth conservation corps (youth in protected areas) programs*

The eco-education programs established by the project are quite exciting and excellent. The project should build and expand this program in two ways. First, each of the three pilot sites has their own independently developed eco-education module for different aged children. Consideration should be given to adapting these three different modules so they may be used by each of the three pilot sites. Second, the project should consider supporting national replication of the combined modules.

* *Create national inventory of wetlands*

The project cooperated with a Ramsar initiative to inventory nineteen wetland sites. It is not clear how these nineteen sites were selected, i.e., result of national survey using Ramsar selection criteria. As discussed in the project document, the project should consider the usefulness of developing a national inventory of wetlands to identify all wetlands of international importance based upon a clear set of criteria. If possible, the inventory should categorize wetlands ecosystems to define priority sites for replication of project successes. Apparently, much of this data is already available and possibly digitized within the MoE.

**Outcome 4 Enable Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetland Biodiversity in the Productive Landscape**

*Outcome Rating: Positive Change*

*Summary of MTE Findings:*

The project has made progress and succeeded in piloting several interesting initiatives. However, the actual level of conservation benefit or impacts of project activity under this component are not apparent. Now that protected area management strengthening tasks are “on track”, perhaps the project will invest more energy into identifying and implementing creative solutions to the challenges of Outcome 4.

This component is quite possibly the most complex, challenging and critical to the project successfully demonstrating integrated conservation possibilities outside of protected areas.

In 2005 – 2006, the project evaluated the project sites to determine main economic problems, focusing upon agriculture, hunting, fishery and oil development sectors. Socio-economic studies offered valuable information regarding potential alternative economic options. The project team then elaborated a strategy to promote sustainable management practices in all three project sites.

Project staff is technically strong and highly motivated. Never-the-less, project interventions have been a bit slow to gain traction. Many have not precisely addressed key issues. Some are simply misguided.

There is a strong need for the project to re-assess and strengthen activity initiated under the component to make certain investments and efforts are strategically focused to provide maximum wetlands conservation benefits. The project should be delivering hard-hitting, tangible conservation examples that will alleviate “destructive” behaviors and create incentives for activities that are conservation supportive.

The outcome is relatively well-organized thematically to address key resource sectors: water management, tourism, alternative livelihoods, fisheries, hunting and agriculture.

Continued study and monitoring of water resource management must be translated into activities that will actually deliver effects, i.e., better irrigation management, reduced levels of pollution, etc. Purposed support for the re-habilitation of canals at AS is a very dubious endeavor.

Most farm programs don’t have a tangible connection to wetlands conservation. The largest project to date involves providing alternative cropping methods for a dry land farm that will have no perceivable impact on wetlands conservation.

Sustainable livelihood options are not on track to deliver major impacts and they are not clearly linked to sustainable conservation of wetlands. The traditional crafts concepts implemented are interesting and are having some level of economic success. This is very good. However, the project applies the same two activities – cheese making and felting to produce hats and slippers - at both TK and AS. There are no such activities in URD.

Internal market tourism is a rapidly growing industry in Kazakhstan. Approaches taken by the project lack a clear strategy to capitalize upon this opportunity. The marketing and business planning parts of the equation are weak and opportunistic. The approach to date seems to be, “Build it and they will come.” The project is not addressing large tourism initiatives that will have serious impacts on wetlands resources at the pilot sites.

Fisheries and hunting activities are in stages too early to tell what specific impacts will be.

Finally, the regulatory, policy and institutional changes necessary to provide a fostering environment for these activities is non-existent. For instance, while the project focuses upon developing small scale tourism initiatives in AS, the GoK has declared the region a “mass tourism development site.” Economic incentives such as subsidies and resource use fees to encourage organic farming or better irrigation water management are not in place. Policies do not direct revenue from sport hunting operations into conservation and community development initiatives. Etc.

Major accomplishments to date include:

Alternative Livelihoods

* Studied production sector status for each demonstration site, including agriculture, fishery, forestry and hunting
* Produced report on potential alternative livelihoods
* Reviewed previous micro-credit activities at project sites
* Completed functional zoning exercise to identify priorities for productive landscapes at each demonstration site, including application of ecosystem approach and GIS technologies
* Cheese and felt making demonstration activities operational at TK and AS
* Conducted business planning seminars at URD

Water Management

* Assessment of hydrological regimes and irrigation conducted at each demonstration site
* Recommendations on sustainable regime of water ecosystems and systemic monitoring
* Proposals prepared for water supply to TK and AS
* Justifications prepared for MoES to develop observation network basin monitoring for AS and TK
* Guidelines on systemic monitoring for TK and AS prepared, including installing automated meteorological equipment
* MoES budgets establishment of monitoring and hydrological stations at URD, including project procurement of UAZ van and instruments to measure water quality
* Initiated work on rural water user associations at AS, including 405 subsidies for water suppliers to surface irrigators

Eco-Tourism

* Assessed eco-tourism potential for 3 sites and identified experts for concept development
* Ecotourism concept developed for AS
* Installing observation platforms at TK and AS.

Agriculture

* Seven pilot farms selected to demonstrate sustainable land use practices
* Forage and industrial crops sown to assist farmers gain sustainable income and sequester 2.0 tons of carbon per hectare. Total area 423.5 ha: 240 ha TK, 82 ha AS, 1.5 ha URD
* Commenced 4,000 ha sustainable pasturelands management project at TK in cooperation with Kazakhstani Farmer Fund, local farmers’ NGO, and GEF SGP
* Conducted field workshop for URD farmers, decision-makers and media to demonstrate high-yield, irrigated forage sown with minimal soil treatment
* Solar generators installed at 5 farms (2 at TK, 2 at AS, and 1 farm at URD)

Fisheries and Hunting

* Assessment of fishing practices conducted
* Biological justification prepared to expand prohibited fishing area at pre-estuarial section of Ural River. Justification approved by Fishery Committee. Project submitted for EIA.
* Recommendations for sustainable fishery prepared for TK
* Commenced preparatory work to implement recommendations for sustainable game husbandry

*Recommendations:*

* *Elaborate with local governments sustainable development policies that use wetlands conservation as key development objective*

Local governments at each project site have existing development plans. The project should begin working with these municipalities in the near term to elaborate medium and long-term development policies that support wetlands conservation. This should include spatial planning supported by the project’s elaborate GIS lab. The policies should set benchmarks and goals for key resource use areas such as agriculture, irrigation and water management, fisheries, and hunting. This should entail inclusion of a variety of agencies, private landowners, and resource users. The process should serve to catalyze greater discussion and learning regarding wetlands conservation and sustainable development alternatives. The final deliverable should result in the integration of wetland biodiversity conservation principles into productive sector activities. Key national level project staff should be used to support this process. The resulting policy should include provisions that create incentives for investment in sustainable, environmentally benign activities.

* *Develop comprehensive tourism management policies and plans for AS project site*

The project has developed a “Concept of Ecotourism Development on AS Project Site” and a guide for community-based tourism. The project should now conisider working pro-actively with local and national authorities, local communities and protected area managers to design not only strategic tourism plans but also policies, including sustainable tourism guidelines and incentives, for each of the pilot areas that will help direct tourism development towards wetlands conservation objectives.

Tourism continues to be both a threat and opportunity for each project site. Project activity to date has focused upon stimulating small-scale tourism activities such as “home stays”. The project has also been working to promote and regulate tourism activity within protected areas. These are both generally positive activities. However, these activities are operating in tandem with general GoK goals of developing mass tourism schemes. This is particularly the case in AS, identified by the project document as the demonstration site for sustainable tourism. The GoK has declared AS a mass tourism development zone and the local government is in the process of tendering out tourism development sites along the shores of AS.

With the possible exception of ornithological tours, international destination tourism to most of the project sites is limited and will likely remain so for some time. The internal tourism market represents a major opportunity. With a growing number of relatively wealthy and mobile Kazakhs, the national tourism industry is expanding rapidly. If the project does not act pro-actively to make certain this growing market is properly channeled, it will quickly become a threat to wetlands conservation. A striking example is the increased use of high-powered recreational motorboats near relict gull breeding areas. The project should seek out opportunities to cooperate with large-scale tourism developers to make certain planned hotels and resorts promote and develop sustainable tourism practices. This should include assisting both large and small tour operators to understand, foster and cater to nature-based tourism markets.

These efforts will likely require greater cooperation with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism and involvement of the representatives of this Ministry into activities of the National Steering Committee.

In addition, the project should work to concentrate tourism infrastructure outside of protected areas, driving sustainable business opportunities to places where communities will benefit rather than promoting development within protected areas. At each of the demonstration sites, wetlands and other areas of high biodiversity value surround protected areas. Sustainable tourism in these areas would help to secure the integrity of these lands and amplify the vitality of protected areas.

By creating clear policies for tourism development that encompass protected areas and surrounding productive landscapes, the project will help local communities and decision-makers to alleviate emerging threats and identify and promote sustainable tourism development opportunities.

* *Strengthen alternative revenue generation options*

In URD, the project sponsored a very useful business-planning seminar for local entrepreneurs. This should be replicated regularly in other demonstration areas and used as a method to prompt local stakeholders to identify opportunities. For instance, the project could be working with local stakeholders to create business plans for wetlands benign endeavors and then assist these stakeholders to access funds through the GoK program on micro-credit lending now available at project sites. Kazakhstan’s growing wealth means that there are also “large-scale” options that would provide locals with jobs in ecologically benign industries. The AS is proposing to create a trade zone with China. The project should be working on this level to make substantial impacts.

* *Re-assess the efficacy of current agricultural development projects*

The project has initiated several interesting sustainable agricultural development projects. It must be recognized that initial selection and activation of agricultural activities was challenging. From what the evaluators were told, the project had to start slow and will build momentum. Perhaps as a result of this or other factors, it is not clear how many of the initiated activities will maximize or even create positive impacts for wetlands conservation. One person’s farm accounts for more than 50% of the hectares claimed under the project’s current reporting scheme. This is a dry land farm with no causal relationship with wetlands conservation. The project should carefully assess these programs, identify real problem areas, and invest only in sustainable agricultural programs that shift activity directly from wetlands “adverse” activities to wetlands “enhancement” activities.

The project should likely be working more closely with MoA to design more rigorous policies and extension programs that provide a broad base of farmers with alternatives, particularly looking for ways to shift away from irrigation intensive agriculture. The project should promote sustainable agriculture based on organic farming principles. Policy changes should discourage the use of artificial fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides in territories adjoining wetlands especially where the generation of agriculture wastewater represents the threat for wetland and lakes ecosystems. The EU has several outstanding programs in all of these areas that would serve as positive examples.

* *Ensure continuous monitoring of all irrigation enhancement activities at Alakol and focus water management efforts on regulating water allocations*

De facto “open access” water allocation regimes are a primary factor impacting wetlands integrity at Alakol. Diversions at the head-gate direct nearly all available in-stream flow to irrigators. Upstream users have de facto prior appropriation rights and maximize these rights. “Downstream” wetlands do not enjoy appropriation rights. This results in negative impacts to the protected area wetlands both in terms of water quality and quantity. Because of weak regulatory and enforcement regimes, upstream users are allowed to waste water and there are no incentives for proper maintenance of irrigation canals.

The project is working towards a comprehensive solution. In December 2007 – after the completion of the MTE – the MoA approved the development of a water use scheme for the AS basin. This may represent an excellent opportunity for the project to support adoption of a policy for the AS that secures necessary water rights for wetlands.

The project currently plans to “revitalize” irrigation canals by purchasing heavy equipment for irrigators to increase flow levels under the guise of “cleaning” canals. This should not be implemented unless the project first hires an independent, international water resource specialist who assesses the proposal and supports the investment. The 2007 PIR states that the ditches and diversions are fully destroyed. The head of the local irrigation company was hired by the project to complete the report that advised project investment. We inspected the head-gate diversion and were informed that it is operational. We investigated approximately twenty kilometers of canals. These are fully operational but for the fact that irrigators do not conduct simple maintenance, i.e., clearing debris from culverts. What the irrigators want to do is enlarge the canals so they have the capacity to deliver more water for newly proposed agricultural activities. The project’s proposed intervention does not address the root causes of the problem: (1) the need for a regulatory structure that guarantees downstream wetlands and wetland reserves water rights in perpetuity, including both quality and quantity necessary to support biodiversity conservation; and, (2) the need for adequate incentives for irrigators to maintain infrastructure. Simply providing the equipment needed to increase the capacity of irrigation canals without addressing these two issues will almost certainly result in increased amounts of water diverted from the Tentek River and increased pollution loads delivered to the wetlands.

* *Create an educated strategy and policy for sustainable management of sport hunting at TK*

Some community members claimed that the amount of subsistence poaching at TK has apparently declined significantly in line with Kazakhstan’s economic growth. However, the dozens of wetlands around TK reserve are an historical and increasingly popular destination for sport hunters. Although sport hunting may certainly be managed sustainably, current practices are questionable. The project recognizes the conservation and livelihood opportunities represented by sport hunting and is planning to work with one concession holder to create a sustainable management model. If approached properly, these sport hunters could be big advocates for wetlands conservation. The project would benefit from (a) exposing project staff, protected area managers, biologists, and sportsmen to sustainable international sport hunting models; and, (b) the insights of an international expert with experience in the regulation and management of sound sport hunting regimes.

There are some excellent international management models that the project should be well acquainted with prior to commencing the current planned activities. Ideally, this would be in an area relatively similar to TK such as the prairie lands of the US or Canada (Montana, North Dakota, Alberta) where migratory waterfowl is relatively well managed by states, provinces, federal governments and tribes. In each instance, revenue generated from sport hunting is used for species conservation.

There is also a need to address regulatory instruments related to establishment of take levels. The excellent biologist staff at TK should be involved in defining these regulations for the surrounding productive lands to strengthen linkages between protected area and productive area management.

At a minimum, policies should be set in place to (i) set take limits based upon scientifically rigorous data; and, (ii) make certain revenues from sport hunting are re-invested directly in local conservation and community development initiatives.

* *Re-Assess and technically strengthen current strategies for sustainable management of fisheries*

Fisheries management is a critical issue for all three protected areas. Current unsustainable practices adversely impact not only fish diversity but also avian diversity. In URD, sturgeon populations seem to be nearing extinction. Over-harvest of fish species using less than sustainable methods seems to be continuing unabated in each of the project sites. Solutions being discussed such as fish farming (possibly using non-endemic species), stocking plans, and concession areas situated at the immediate border of the relatively small protected areas do not seem well-advised and are quite possibly contrary to conservation objectives. These ideas certainly do not provide long-term solutions that address problems directly.

The project would benefit greatly from hiring the services of a fisheries management and conservation expert with solid international experience. This person would be responsible for completing a rapid assessment of commercial, subsistence, and sport fishing and recommending a comprehensive set of regulatory and enforcement interventions to address problems.

***Outcome 5:* Sustainable financing for wetland conservation**

*Outcome Rating: Positive Change*

*Summary of MTE Findings:*

The only output for this component is the establishment of the Trust Fund. The project has set in place all legal requirements. The project has a full-time staff member working diligently to secure financing. Requests are progressing with the GoK to make a budget allocation, the Kazyna fund, and others. The financial situation of GoK has changed significantly in the eight years since the project was originally designed. The GoK has the financial capacity to fully fund protected areas management. The project should therefore expand the outputs of this outcome to include setting the stage for GoK adoption and financing of critical wetlands conservation activities. Positive indications for success include current GoK annual funding increases for protected areas. In addition, the project should expand this outcome by considering creative local financing mechanisms for sustainable economic development linked to wetlands conservation, i.e. revolving funds, sport hunting and fishing revenues, etc.

Major accomplishments to date include:

* Capacities built through participation in international training programs
* Trust Fund concept prepared and conference held with stakeholders to discuss
* Preliminary legal assessment for establishment of trust fund in Kazakhstan conducted
* Law of Protected Areas Law provisions allow for conservation Trust Fund creation
* Trust Fund registered in accordance with regulatory procedures
* Founders (Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, Ecological Forum of Kazakhstan NGOs Association and Eco-Altai NGO) and Board of Directors selected
* Documents submitted for consideration by the Nation-Wide Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers
* Fundraising campaign launched with concepts presented to government authorities, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and representatives of domestic and foreign companies

*Recommendations:*

* *Work with GoK to create a long-term funding strategy that identifies requirements to sustain critical wetlands conservation activity within the demonstration sites and to replicate these lessons nationally. Formalize the funding strategy through GoK adoption.*

The project should carefully identify and document post-project national wetland conservation funding needs and priorities. This should be fully vetted with GoK and policy instruments set in place to make certain funding levels necessary to insure sustainable programming will be realized. Activity will require involvement and approval of several government Ministries to make certain migratory bird habitat is conserved both inside and outside of protected areas. This effort should address technical and human resource issues, including (i) increasing salary levels for protected area staff to retain existing and recruit new capable staff and (ii) identifying human resource and institutional support requirements to monitor and regulate the use of wetlands outside of protected areas.

* *Continue Trust Fund capitalization efforts*

Although the financial situation of Kazakhstan has changed dramatically since project inception, valid reasons for capitalizing the Trust Fund remain. The most important are that the Trust Fund will function as a permanent body with financial and technical resources capable of providing additionality to GoK efforts and will catalyze continued attention to wetlands conservation needs.

* *Align Trust Fund’s scope to include capacity to finance conservation initiatives nationally*

The Trust Fund should have the capacity to fund migratory bird wetland conservation initiatives nationally rather than exclusively within the three demonstration sites. This will assist with present capitalization efforts and establish the Fund as a national leader for wetlands conservation issues.

* *Began building technical capacity of Trust Fund to implement programming*

In the near term, the project should support the development of the Trust Fund’s technical capacity to identify, fund, and implement wetlands conservation activity. This will better prepare the Trust Fund to immediately launch programming immediately after capitalization and will likely increase Trust Fund credibility with potential donors. It will also help the Trust Fund to more succinctly identify potential operating costs.

**Section Four: Key findings**

**4.1 Project formulation**

**4.1.1 Implementation approach**

The project’s implementation approach requires strengthening. Structurally, the project seems to operate very smoothly and benefits from the support of a good team of dedicated professionals. Programmatically, the project is beginning to show signs of drifting off track as it begins to face new challenges related to integrated conservation objectives.

The project has four very well equipped offices, one in Astana and one at each of the three project sites. The project has had a significant amount of staff turn-over during implementation. There are now more than twenty full-time technical staff. All appear to be capable and motivated. Communication between the main implementation office in Astana and the three field offices appears to be fluid, both in-terms of formal and informal reporting.

As noted, the project has generated an enormous amount of activity. The cumulative impact of these accomplishments will certainly result in wetlands conservation improvements. The project has produced approximately 100 technical reports. Over a two-year period (2006 and 2007) the project hired more than 120 individual short-term consultants. (Please see the annex in this report.)

The question that haunted us throughout the evaluation was, “Why isn’t this very well funded and staffed project accomplishing more tangible results and making clearer progress towards the objective?”

The project has not yet adequately dealt with regulatory and institutional strengthening requirements. The implementation approach is slow at delivering solid results that demonstrate effective solutions to threat factors such as irrigation and water management, fishing practices, farming, grazing, and hunting. Too often evaluated project activities lack clear connections to wetlands ecosystem conservation objectives. Tough, complex issues identified during project development phase still stand as the project’s primary barriers to meeting project objectives.

Road Map

Dramatic changes have been made to this project’s logical framework and implementation approach over the course of four years.

The project is more or less following Outcome 2 (“Well planned, effective protected areas operations”) and Outcome 5 (“Sustainable financing for wetland conservation”) as planned at the time of funding. The other outcomes are being implemented in ways fundamentally different from what was originally proposed. This altered implementation approach lacks a clear strategy, weakening the effectiveness of many interventions.

In Outcomes 1, 3, and 4, a great many of the approaches included in the original project design have been abandoned, re-prioritized, modified or replaced with new activities not envisioned in the original proposal. Some critical elements do not seem to follow the over-all intent and purpose of the original project design.

A few examples,

* The original project document called for the project to protect wetlands nationally by drafting a new piece “wetlands law” that included a permitting system to regulate damage to wetlands. These permits are standard international practice. The project abandoned the idea of a “wetlands law” and lost sight of this outcome’s intent to comprehensively protect wetlands nationally.
* The project document divided activities between each demonstration site according to “priority threats” so that individual demonstration sites would provide examples of different interventions. This is even the project’s stated GEF Alternative. During the implementation, this approach has shifted in many cases from “demonstrating specific interventions in different project sites” to “demonstrating the same thing in all project sites.”
* The project document called for the project to identify all internationally significant wetlands in Kazakhstan and describe threats, opportunities and priorities for their conservation and use.
* The project as funded was to pilot community-based management initiatives for resource use.

Rather than going through the entire list here, we have simply included the project document’s Section 4: “Project Components and Expected Results” and Annex III “Detailed Activities Annex” as annexes to this report. Comparing these sections of the project document with the current project reveals two fundamentally different projects: the one that was financed and the one that we evaluated.

Adaptive management is fine and necessary, especially in a place like Kazakhstan where change is rapid. This project had a very long start up period. The project document was written in the late 1990’s. The project entered the GEF Work Program in 2000 and commenced implementation in 2004. Obviously there were some changes to the implementation environment that may have required modifying the project’s approach.

During the evaluation, we were not presented with any clear, written justification for why the project is not engaging in approaches proposed in the original project document or why the project has decided to launch new, unplanned approaches. Trying to rectify current project activity with proposed project activity consumed an enormous amount of our time and proved impossible.

The project no longer has a multi-year implementation strategy. The project is very busy conducting activities many of which are quite impressive, but it is not always clear why the project is conducting this activity or what the project’s priorities are. That is not a healthy situation for a large, complex project.

The project completes annual workplans for approval by UNDP and the Implementing Agency. The workplans are not strategic plans to guide over-all project implementation. The plans list simple, one line proposals for project activities for a 12-month period in a table organized by component. The workplan offers no meaningful explanation as to the strategic purpose of each activity other than a reference to project indicators. They certainly are not “long-term” strategic documents that ground current activity to a multi-year strategic approach.

The project document is the basis for GEF investment and is intended to provide a road map for project implementation to make certain GEF priorities are addressed. By gradually straying so far away from the original project document’s guidance without replacing this with a transparent, written, multi-year and widely available project strategy, this project risks losing its direction and makes project resources vulnerable to in-effective allocation.

*Recommendations:*

* *Re-assess the project’s implementation approach and adopt an improved multi-year implementation strategy/work plan that generates coordinated and precise interventions for alleviating threats and a clear path to attaining the project’s objective.*

The project is in its fourth year of operation. There are approximately thirty months of activity remaining. If the project is going to be considered a “success” and significantly alleviate threats to these three globally significant wetlands systems, it must re-evaluate its current interventions and adopt an implementation approach that identifies and addresses root causes head-on and in a highly effective manner.

A major part of this strategy should discuss replication and “up-take” of project successes. This is a “demonstration” project. As such, a key indicator of success is that the examples generated are being applied to effect conservation in other places. This should go far beyond all protected areas adopting management planning principles. This is a good step, but should not represent the limits of satisfaction for a project of this size.

* *The project’s national and local steering committees should fully vet and approve the improved implementation strategy/work plan and confirm implementation support.*

This workplan should be fully vetted with the National Project Steering Committee and local advisory committees. Represented organizations should commit to fully supporting implementation, including:

* + Adopting and enforcing regulatory frameworks that protect the integrity of wetlands outside of protected areas and create incentives for wetlands ecosystem conservation;
  + Addressing water use regulation and, and particularly irrigation management, in a comprehensive manner;
  + Dealing directly with unsustainable hunting and fishing practices;
  + Setting in place policies to insure tourism, resource extraction, agriculture and other economic developments are wetlands benign; and,
  + Making certain institutional frameworks, capacities and resources are in place to support implementation.
* *Re-assess and revise the logical framework as necessary.*

The logical framework is one contributing factor. The framework should provide a map for project implementation. The framework should serve as a compass to help project managers and others stay on the path towards reaching the project’s objective. It should also challenge the project to achieve. The existing framework does not provide these services.

* *Adopt implementation techniques that more fully integrate various components to approach conservation more holistically.*

The project seems to suffer from a compartmentalized implementation approach that views activity within protected areas and activity outside of protected areas as two completely separate issues, when in reality political and not necessarily ecological borders separate these landscapes. As a result, the project is not leveraging the impact of various activities by integrating efforts and creating cross-cutting solutions that produce synergy. For instance, strengthened biological monitoring capacities within protected area administrations should be amplified to build monitoring capacities outside of protected areas and to inform decision-making in the ecologically connected productive landscapes. This integration should start with the home office team in Astana. This staff should then maximize time spent at each of the field sites, working as a team to design and implement coordinated approaches.

* *Recruit short-term technical expertise to support full-time project staff, build capacities, and provide international best principles and practices to key project activities.*

Technically, the project is not always applying best international principles and practices to the completion of some tasks, especially those related to law and policy and the productive landscape. This significantly weakens project effectiveness.

There are a lot of very good examples integrated conservation programming out in the world. This project has spent very little money on international expertise. The project should not hesitate to recruit qualified international experts that can bring this experience to the project. These experts would support and build the capacity of full-time staff, helping them to identify and implement solutions that represent best international principles and practices. For instance, RSPB’s investment in an international consultant to assist with the development of protected area management planning paid significant dividends.

Technical support should be sought for sectors such as: law and policy, fisheries management, hunting management, water and irrigation management, holistic or landscape level conservation management planning, and sustainable tourism development.

* *Retain the services of an international expert capable of assessing and supporting over-all project implementation approaches.*

The project would benefit greatly from consistent project implementation guidance. The project evaluators consider this to be of high importance. An international technical advisor (CTA) worked for the project for two years during the initial implementation period (2004 - 2006). Although having a capable full-time CTA would benefit this project, it is not necessary or advisable to hire another at this late stage. However, the project should retain the services of a senior level international integrated conservation expert with project implementation and management experience to assist the project to stay “on-track”. This person should have a broad base of experience and a working knowledge of most sectors of project concern, particularly those related to Outcomes 1, 3, 4 and possibly 5.

Initially, this person would be tasked with working with the project to identify implementation weaknesses and strengthening options, including bolstering of the project framework to address root causes and devising an effective and streamlined work-plan to guide the project to completion. This person would then visit the project offices and demonstration sites twice each year for approximately two weeks. During these visits, the expert would conduct a rapid assessment of on-going activity, making certain the project is still on-track to deliver high-impact, high-quality products and providing any necessary advice regarding approach modifications. Results would be reported directly to the project Steering Committee, UNDP/Kazakhstan, and the GEF regional office to help inform project monitoring and evaluation. The expert would be available year-round to offer short-term technical advice and assistance via internet and telephone, providing a cost-effective alternative to a full-time CTA. Finally, the expert would be tasked with assisting the project to devise a close-out strategy, including replication, sustainable financing options and full stakeholder adoption of best practices.

**4.1.2 Country ownership/Driveness**

The level of country ownership and “drive” is very high regarding activities within protected areas. This is evidenced by the potential creation and expansion of protected areas, increased support for protected area staff and infrastructure, significant government funding for the development new visitor centers, the high level of cooperation between protected area and project staff, accession to Ramsar and Bonn, etc.

The level of country ownership and drive to protect wetlands at demonstration sites outside of protected areas and/or insulate protected areas from adverse impacts originating outside protected areas boundaries is less clear. For instance, the government has not adopted regulatory and institutional reforms required to create a national safety net for wetlands conservation, resource abuse – particularly in terms of fisheries management – continues to be tolerated, national and local authorities are not acting as a referees for water allocation and appropriation issues, and there are no signs that these authorities intend to take an integrated approach to wetlands management that encompasses the productive and protected landscapes.

*Recommendation:*

* *Discuss issues of “country drive” related to productive landscapes with the project Steering Committee and local advisory committees and define strategies for improvement.*

**4.1.3 Stakeholder participation**

The level of participation and support from protected area administrations is quite strong. Public awareness and educational activities, particularly those directed towards school children, has likely increased participation of this sector. The project’s Steering Committee and local advisory committees have provided legitimate avenues for government authorities to be involved in project decision-making. Although the direct wetlands conservation impacts of agricultural support initiatives may be questionable, these activities have succeeded in involving members of this sector in project activities. The same can be said for micro-enterprise development, i.e., small tourism development initiatives, felt and cheese making projects.

Project documentation discusses the establishment of resource management committees for each project site. Protected area management plans recognize the need for community participation. The project does not have a specific “stakeholder involvement strategy” that makes certain key stakeholders are involved in and benefit from targeted activities. However, having a project office at each site greatly facilitates “informal” stakeholder participation.

One good example of stakeholder involvement was shown at URD where 8 fishing companies participated in the working group tasked with determining the site for the new protected area.

*Recommendation:*

* *Develop very brief “stakeholder involvement strategies” for each project demonstration site, including formal mechanisms to improve participation of key resource users and linkages to public awareness activities.*

**4.1.4 Replication approach**

The methods piloted by the project for the conservation and management of protected areas are being taken up by the GoK for application nationally. For instance, all protected areas will now develop management plans for the next five years based upon project examples. The project deserves high praise for this. Public awareness materials and education materials will be used in other areas. Workshops and other training programs have involved stakeholders not directly involved with demonstration site activities, promoting a greater dissemination of lessons learned. Media coverage of many project initiatives has been extensive. Finally, the project sponsored an international, regional workshop to discuss lessons learned. This is another project highlight.

Prior to project completion, a set of concrete lessons learned will be packaged and distributed broadly. The project is also considering the development of a national wetlands conservation strategy. This would be a very positive step. The project should also consider taking up recommendations including in this MTE regarding the development of various strategies and policies within each demonstration site that could serve as concrete, replicable examples nationally, including conclusion of a GoK funding strategy for wetlands conservation.

**4.1.5 Cost-effectiveness**

Cost effectiveness is generally measured by a combination of efficiency and effectiveness in light of expenditures or budget allocations. The project’s weak indicators make identification of ‘effectiveness’ a less than scientific pursuit.

The general impression is that this a relatively cost-effective project for work that specifically focuses within the borders of the demonstration site protected areas. The project has achieved major results with a relatively low amount of investment. The cost-effectiveness of project activity outside of protected areas is quite low. This is not because the project has spent much and gained little. It is because the project has spent little and gained little. Again, the level of impact does not seem commensurate with the level of resources available to the project.

From 8/04 – 11/07, the project spent approximately $778,000 on Component 2 allocating money as follows: $215,000 for equipment, $448,000 for contracting local consultants and companies, and $81,000 for travel. This figure does not include salaries for full-time project staff, capacity building and training and other activities drawn from separate budget lines.

Nearly all of this money went into creating expansion justification studies that required two years to complete. These studies are certainly useful. They built capacity and a basis for continued monitoring. However, the cold-hard business minded would say that the “efficiency” of delivering this output was quite low. The basic sites were identified for protected area status at the time the project document was written. Nearly ten years later, the sites have still not gone through the full official designation process. It’s still relatively good value and in the end will likely deliver the goal. It’s just not particularly efficient and cost-effective.

**4.1.6 UNDP comparative advantage**

UNDP is well situated to support this project. They have a long-standing reputation for delivering environmental and biodiversity conservation projects in Kazakhstan. This includes several on-going and pipelined GEF projects (i.e., Altai Sayan, Agro-Diversity, Steppe Ecosystem). The small-grants program is another valuable asset. This historical involvement and support for conservation programming provides UNDP with solid institutional capacities, a knowledge pool of informed staff, and long-standing, positive relationships with key stakeholders.

**4.1.7 Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector**

The project enjoys close linkages with a wide variety of related interventions. Examples include:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Project** | **Examples of Cooperation** |
| World Bank Nura river mercury clean-up project | The project signed the Memorandum on cooperation with WB project identifying the specific activities to be taken by each project. |
| GEF/World Bank Central Asia Biodiversity Conservation project | The Project has inherited the GIS laboratory developed within the GEF/WB project on Biodiversity Conservation. It also used the results of the GEF/WB project related to preparation and application of the methodology for elaboration of PA management plans. |
| TWINBAS project | The project coordinated research activities and measurements regarding identification of the optimum water level model in the Tengiz-Korgalzhyn lakes system with the EU project TWINBAS. This model will then help the authorities to make wise decisions on water use. This work led to the GoK allocating millions of dollars to re-generate dams on the TK system. |
| UNDP Project “National Plan for Integrated Water Resources Management for Kazakhstan and Water Efficiency” | The project cooperated with UNDP project on Integrated Water Resources Management System focused on establishing of Basin Councils. The project’s experts on water management participated in the second forum of stakeholders “Integrated Water Resources Management in Kazakhstan”. |
| UNEP Siberian Crane | The Project exchanged information with the UNEP Siberian Crane Project and with the Kazakhstan Biodiversity Conservation Association (BCA) on the issues related to the preparation of a list of candidate Ramsar wetlands and a list of joint actions for the implementation of the Ramsar and Bonn Conventions. |
| GEF/UNEP Project ‘Strengthening Network of Training Centers for PA Management’ | The workshop for PA staff was conducted on ‘Management plans development for Zapovedniks, National Parks, and Nature Reserves of Kazakhstan in cooperation with UNEP project and Association for Conservation of Biodiversity in April 2007. Another joint workshop on ‘Organizing Security Service at PAs’ was conducted at the Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve and Alakol Nature Reserve in May 2007. |
| RSPB | Cooperation on PA management plans development, participation in development of nomination documents for Ramsar Convention, training workshops. Identification of the list of Important Bird Areas. |
| NABU | The cooperation with NABU (Germany) concerned the inclusion of Korgalzhyn reserve into the World heritage list. |
| CAMP | The project has hired consultants from CAMP program for delivery of felt production, cheese making workshops for local community members in the project sites. |

**4.1.8 Management arrangements**

Implementing, executing, and coordinating agencies each take an active interest in this project. UNDP staff appears to be excellent and highly capable. The current project coordinator has been with the project since spring 2007.

The national project manager appears capable. He is the original project manager, but was only hired in 2005. He once worked for the implementing agency and enjoys very solid professional relations with all main stakeholders. These contacts substantially facilitate communication.

Hiring and contracting procedures, although not investigated thoroughly, appear to be transparent. Each of the project staff responsible for various components on the national level and the three site managers are capable and seem highly motivated.

An often-repeated complaint relates to UNDP’s capacity to respond efficiently to budget allocation requests. Apparently the slow response time caused by UNDP bureaucracy occasionally hampers the project’s implementation mobility, significantly slowing response times to opportunities. This was not verified by the evaluators.

**4.2 Implementation**

**4.2.1 Financial Planning**

The project’s financial planning and management is run according to UNDP procedures. Financial management is under immediate control of UNDP. Each year, a detailed financial plan is determined based upon the 7-year financial plan. The annual plan is approved by UNDP and the implementing agency, If the project wishes to make an allocation, they make a request to UNDP. Each quarter, the national director from the Committee of Forestry and Hunting signs a statement that the money was spent.

UNDP monitors project procurements on a weekly basis. Financial planning seems to have improved with the annual plans now containing budget information.

The project has more than adequate funding remaining to execute planned activities. The project likely “under-spent” on components 1, 3, and 4. This reflects a slow start-up in these areas and, again, reflects weaknesses in the project’s strategic approach. This project actually decreased its spending on Components by 30% in 2006. It increased its spending on Components by nearly 150% in 2007.

Spending on Component 4 increased over 80% between 2006 and 2007. The 2007 budget is $472k. Allocations include: $156k for contracting local consultants and companies, $100k for “travel”, and $180k for purchasing equipment.

One of this project’s biggest expenditures is “travel”. The project has spent over $750k on international and domestic travel. This represents over 20% of all project investments.

Project Annual Travel Expenses

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Component/Year** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** | **Subtotals** |
| Component 1 | $0 | $244 | $1,100 | $300 | $1,644 |
| Component 2 | $0 | $35,000 | $21,000 | $26,000 | $82,000 |
| Component 3 | $0 | $18,000 | $50,000 | $34,000 | $102,000 |
| Component 4 | $1,500 | $40,000 | $32,000 | $102,000 | $175,500 |
| Component 5 | $0 | $8,000 | $24,000 | $28,000 | $60,000 |
| Project Management | $23,000 | $53,000 | $22,000 | $28,000 | $126,000 |
| Training-Capacity Building | $34,000 | $110,000 | $52,000 | $21,000 | $217,000 |
| **Subtotals** | $58,500 | $264,244 | $202,100 | $239,300 | $764,144 |

Project Expenses as of November 17, 2007

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity/Year** | **2004** | **2005** | **2006** | **2007** | **Subtotals** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Component One | $900 | $244 | $4,750 | $4,100 | $9,994 |
| Component Two | $202,000 | $366,000 | $71,000 | $139,000 | $778,000 |
| Component Three | $3,500 | $50,000 | $162,300 | $215,000 | $430,800 |
| Component Four | $10,500 | $90,000 | $85,000 | $472,000 | $657,500 |
| Component Five | $3,000 | $17,000 | $41,000 | $65,000 | $126,000 |
| Capacity Development | $900 | $2,000 | $8,500 | $4,000 | $15,400 |
| Project Management | $241,000 | $397,000 | $443,642 | $268,000 | $1,349,642 |
| Training and Workshops | $15,000 | $139,000 | $57,000 | $20,000 | $231,793 |
| Other | $111,000 | $814 | $0 | $0 | $111,814 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Subtotals** | $587,800 | $1,062,058 | $873,192 | $1,187,100 | $3,710,150 |

The project’s total budget is: $8.85 million

The project has spent $3.72 million.

The project’s remaining budget is: $5.13 million

The project is to allocate $1.5 million to help capitalize the Trust Fund at a 1:3 ratio. If this occurs, **the project has an actual remaining budget of $3.63 million.**

Based upon project history and presuming the Trust Fund will succeed in its funding goals, we estimate the project to have a budget surplus of between $1.6 and $1.9 million at project close.

To date, the project has spent $1.3 million on management, including full-time staff. Presuming project management stays relatively constant at around $23,000/month ($275k/year) and the project has 32 months remaining, the project will spend $736k on management between now and close.

Deducting project management from the total remaining budget ($3.63 million - $736k) leaves the project with $2.89 million to spend on Components in the next 32 months.

To date, the project has spent $2 million on Component work. (This does not include Component servicing by project staff that comes out of the project management budget). The average, cumulative monthly expenditure on components is $39,000. Using this figure ($39,000/month x 32 months) the project will possibly spend another $1.25 million on components before project close. Combined with the projected allocations for project management ($736k management + $1.25 components) the project will spend approximately $2 million in the next 32 months.

This scenario leaves a projected budget surplus of $1.63 million if the Trust Fund absorbs $1.5 million. The projected budget excess is $3.13 million if the Trust Fund fails to meet its ratio goals.

Initial costs related to studies for Component Two (approximately $529k), protected area equipment for Component Two ($216k) and the 2007 Component Four expenses ($472k) represent more than 60% of the total amount spent on all Components to date.

If these three activity sets are removed and we use 2006 expenditures as an average (an “idle” year for Components 2 and 4) the picture changes significantly. In 2006, the project spent only $364k on all Components. If this is the “norm”, the project will spend approximately $1.75 million ($1 million for Components and $750k for project management) by close.

This second scenario leaves a projected budget surplus of $1.9 million or $3.4 million if the Trust Fund does not meet goals.

Without the benefit of a clear, written strategy for project implementation, it is impossible to know what the project plans to spend its money on over the next 30 months. Everything above is just conjecture based upon project history.

For instance, the 2007 workplan contained one line about international travel: “Component 3.15:  Experience sharing at international level, $35,000”. In reality, the project spent more than $230,000 in 2007 on “travel” and sent people to Finland, China, Austria, and other places. The evaluators requested but did not receive information regarding the specific locations, purposes, and costs of these international trips.

With a budget surplus, capacity constraints, and a lack of a clear strategy, the chances that money will be spent less efficiently and effectively will increase as the project feels pressure to allocate remaining resources.

Co-Financing

The project estimates that co-financing to date is approximately US$ 28 million with US$ 24 million “in-kind” contributions by the GoK. Co-financing supported key project achievements. RSPB funding, for instance, significantly contributed to the design, capacity building, and development of protected area management plans. The new visitor center at TK represents a government investment of nearly $1 million.

Other major contributions include:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Contributor** | **Activity Funded** | **Amount** |
| AGIP Company | Non-clarified social project | $12,000 |
| NABU (German NGO) | Inclusion of TK as UNESCO site | $610,000 |
| Twinbas (EU) | Water monitoring equipment | $210,000 |
| RSPB (England): | Development of protected area management plans | $100,000 |
| GoK | Purchase of reserve equipment and upgrading of visitors centers | $950,000 |
|  | Total | $1,882,000 |

* *Recommendation: Extend project duration by one year.*

There are several reasons why this project’s closing date should be extended by at least one year. The project practically commenced with the hiring of staff one year after the initial budget allocations. A one-year extension will likely magnify the return on start-up costs without requiring significant replacement purchases, i.e., office equipment, etc. The new protected area and expansion areas will require operational support after the current planned close. The project seems to have adequate funding for an extension period. Extending the project period will enhance strategic allocation of remaining funds.

**4.2.2 Monitoring and Evaluation**

The project follows standard GEF and UNDP reporting procedures. The Project submits a quarterly, semi-annual, and annual report to UNDP, MOA, MOE, and GEF. The project completes a very useful “annual information bulletin.”

Regional UNDP/GEF officers (Bratislava) have visited the project twice. These visits included inspections of demonstration sites.

UNDP-Kazakhstan officers along with representatives of the implementing agency complete field inspections twice each year. This includes completion of a field report presenting findings.

In December 2006, GEF conducted an ad hoc evaluation. This included a desk review and video-conference. Many of the conclusions of this review are indicative of the weakness of existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

The MTE conducted in October – November 2007 is the first in-depth independent evaluation.

Internally, each of the three project sites reports to the main implementation unit on a regular basis, including comprehensive quarterly and annual reports.

*Recommendations:*

* *Improve “Project Implementation Report” format and content*

The primary evaluation document is the annual “Project Implementation Report”. The PIR is a useful tool and the project does a satisfactory job of completing these. However, there is significant room for improvement in the way PIR’s work. A PIR does not do an adequate job of evaluating the quality and impacts of project activities. This is particularly problematic when the indicators are weak. Simply saying something is completed does not mean it is completed well. These are problems that UNDP/GEF should consider addressing across the board.

* *Increase frequency of on-site, external monitoring*

According to the project document, this project was to have three independent evaluations, two during implementation and one at project close. Had this advice been followed problems would have likely been identified much earlier.

* *Improve MTE ratings system*

The current MTE ratings system fails to provide a clear measurement of quality. These are “low barrier” ratings that do not provide managers and others a full assessment of project value or quality. For instance, nearly every outcome, output and indicator of this project will receive an MTE “positive” rating. However, once the lid is taken off and one begins to dig deeper into what actually has occurred, it becomes very apparent that there are very critical differences in the shades of “positive change” resulting from project investments.

**4.2.3 Execution and implementation modalities**

This is a nationally executed project. The Ministry of Environmental Protection is the Coordinating Agency. The Ministry of Agriculture is the Project Executing Agency and the Forestry, Fishery and Hunting Department is the Implementing Agency. The National Project Steering Committee (NPSC) provides guidance and support to project implementation activities. Each of the three project sites has a “Site Project Implementation Committee”.

All entities appear to be functioning appropriately with high levels of involvement and interest by both the national and local steering committees.

**4.2.4 Management by the UNDP country office**

Management by the UNDP country office seems to be quite strong. The office takes an active interest in the project, participates actively in management, and enjoys strong communication with the project. Non-formal visits between the project and UNDP office occur regularly. The UNDP Resident Representative takes an active interest in project management, including discussions with Government and other implementation partners regarding co-financing and programming. UNDP’s project coordinator is relatively new to the job, but appears to be highly motivated and capable.

**4.2.5 Coordination and operation issues**

All coordination and operational issues are satisfactory. Consultation, coordination, and collaboration between IAs, and IA and EAs appears satisfactory.

**4.2.6 Identification and management of risks (adaptive management)**

The project seems to be doing a satisfactory job of identifying and managing risks. Risks and alleviation tactics are tracked in quarterly reports.

One risk that may be considered in the future is the creation of URD. It is presumed that the protected area will be established but this may be a risky assumption. This is an area historically used by many hunters from the Atyrau Oblast for recreation. Many of these people are influential community members. The URD is also located in a very oil rich environment. As oil prices increase, the desire to explore the Delta will increase. Finally, local fishing operations are very skeptical of any government interference.

**4.3 Results**

**4.3.1 Attainment of Objective**

This is a mid-term evaluation and the project is not expected to achieve all results by the halfway point. The project has made very good progress towards the objective and established a firm foundation for successfully carrying out future activity on many fronts.

Very significant challenges lay in front of this project. Many issues related to the project's proposed “GEF Alternative” and “End of Project Situation” remain very distant. The project has not yet demonstrated:

* Integrated management that insulates wetlands inside protected areas from the adverse impacts of activities originating beyond protected area boundaries;
* Project outputs related to resource use, particularly irrigation and water resources management, unsustainable fisheries and hunting management, land use management, grazing management, and the improvement of regulatory and management structures for tourism development;
* Sustainable alternative livelihood options that are wetlands benign and create incentives for wetlands conservation;
* National and local level institutional and policy changes that improve the integrity and viability of wetlands ecosystems; and,
* Secure financing for long-term wetlands conservation programming.

Signs evidenced during the evaluation and discussed in this report raise concerns regarding project capacity to fully realize the objective by project close. By adopting a technically sound implementation approach that fills capacity gaps and simplifies project activity to strategically focus upon solving key problems in a direct and meaningful way, the project will likely attain its objective. If not, this project is at risk.

**4.3.2 Prospects of Sustainability**

If the project can successfully set in place and implement outstanding regulatory improvements prior to project close, the prospects for sustainability are quite high.

Financially, the project has already catalyzed substantial increases in funding and support for protected area management from the GoK. The GoK has the financial capacity to continue this support beyond project completion. Sustainability will be augmented by capitalization of the Trust Fund.

Programmatically, the project has stimulated a great deal of enthusiasm for wetlands conservation among major stakeholders. This support will continue well beyond project completion. The project has helped significantly to build the capacities of several key institutional stakeholders, particularly those responsible for protected area management. Programming related to protected area management seems to be fully “owned” by stakeholders. The FHC appears willing to take over these project activities. An interesting comment made by one interviewee was, “Even if the GoK picks up all that the project calls for, who’s going to do it? The youngest ornithologist in Kazakhstan is over 40.”

As pointed out in this report, the project has not yet managed to achieve policy reforms necessary to uphold continued conservation of wetlands ecosystems.

**4.4 Assessment of Performance**

The over-all project assessment is satisfactory. The project has delivered nearly 100% of its mid-term indicator targets. However, these mid-term targets are not an accurate indication of project success. The project has built protected area management capacity at two existing protected areas, provided management planning and monitoring models that may be replicated, and done a very sound job of proposing a third, new wetlands protected area. However, over-all project effectiveness and efficiency is often marginally satisfactory. The effectiveness of some project outputs is too often limited due to weak strategic alignments with the project’s overall objective of maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of wetlands ecosystems. By focusing a majority of resources to date on protected area management, the project has delayed activities related to sustainable use and conservation on an ecosystem level. Delivery of some key results will occur relatively late in the project lifespan, limiting the project’s ability to actually support implementation and demonstrate best practices. Financial planning reflects these weaknesses.

**Section Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Overall Conclusion

This is a good project. The evaluation’s overall conclusion was positive and reflects the project’s “satisfactory” rating. The project has achieved a great many things and should be commended for these achievements. As anticipated during an MTE, the project has many tasks yet to accomplish.

This project is funded to demonstrate integrated conservation and sustainable use of wetlands biological diversity at three sites with the objective of maintaining and improving the integrity and viability of Kazakhstan’s priority wetland ecosystems.

The project is doing a very satisfactory job with improving the management of wetlands within two protected areas and establishing the foundation for the creation of a third. The project has not yet adequately addressed threats or demonstrated integrated conservation and sustainable use in the rest of the ecosystem.

Primary Recommendations

1. Amend the Water Code to provide comprehensive, ecosystem level protection for wetlands that occur both inside and outside of protected areas.

We recognize that the project is moving forward on this front with recently proposed amendments to the Water Code and the strengthening of Water Basin Authorities.

However, creating a comprehensive legal and institutional framework that guarantees the conservation of wetlands both inside and outside of nature reserves is quite possibly the most important challenge this project faces. Wetlands within the project areas but beyond the borders of nature reserves do not enjoy adequate legal protection. Wetlands within nature reserves continue to be vulnerable to negative water uses beyond their borders.

It will hopefully be a very high project priority to catalyze the creation of a legal and institutional framework that makes it unlawful to significantly modify any wetlands – particularly those within the project areas - without a permit. This same framework should guarantee wetlands both inside and outside of nature reserves have first priority water use rights, including both the quantity and quality necessary to support biodiversity values. This framework should benefit from an adequately funded and high-capacity institutional structure mandated with monitoring wetlands health and enforcing these legal provisions. These factors should be included as indicators of Outcome One success.

2. Re-assess the project’s implementation approach and adopt an improved multi-year implementation strategy/work plan that generates coordinated and precise interventions for alleviating threats and a clear path to attaining the project’s objective

This project was designed nearly ten years ago and the implementation environment has changed significantly over this time period. The project is entering into a phase where it must work more extensively within the productive landscape if it is to effectively achieve its objective. This is generally the most complex and challenging aspect of any conservation project.

To meet with success, the project would benefit greatly from a well-thought-out, multi-year strategy or work-plan that creates a clear vision of what they hope to achieve and why. Ideally, the strategy will be integrated in its approach – drawing upon the strengths of each component - and will succinctly identify primary challenges to wetlands conservation, pinpoint activities targeted specifically to address those challenges and focus the allocation of project resources on achieving these targets.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Indicators should be refined in order to provide a more accurate measurement of project success
2. Conduct a comprehensive policy and institutional gaps analysis
3. Amend the Water Code to provide comprehensive, ecosystem level protection for wetlands that occur both inside and outside of protected areas
4. Create institutional structures capable of supporting integrated, ecosystem approaches to wetlands conservation on both national and local levels
5. Create regulatory structures that address issues related to productive sector activity that adversely impacts wetlands conservation
6. Address issues of pollution prevention, including possible oil pollution mitigation needs
7. Strengthen wildlife and natural resource law enforcement outside of protected areas
8. Integrate protected area management with management of surrounding productive landscapes, using capacities built within protected area administrations to build wetlands management capacities outside of protected areas
9. Support expanded public participation in protected area management
10. Provide near-term assistance for functionality of the URD reserve
11. Develop a communication strategy to guide public awareness activities
12. Quantify and summarize protected area and project area information in a format suitable for project evaluation
13. Expand eco-education and youth conservation corps (youth in protected areas) programs
14. Create national inventory of wetlands
15. Elaborate with local governments sustainable development policies that use wetlands conservation as key development objective
16. Develop comprehensive tourism management policies and plans for AS project site
17. Strengthen alternative revenue generation options
18. Re-assess the efficacy of current agricultural development projects
19. Ensure a continuous monitoring of all irrigation enhancement activities at Alakol and focus water management efforts on regulating water allocations
20. Create an educated strategy and policy for sustainable management of sport hunting at TK
21. Re-Assess and technically strengthen current strategies for sustainable management of fisheries
22. Work with GoK to create a long-term funding strategy that identifies requirements to sustain critical wetlands conservation activity within the demonstration sites and to replicate these lessons nationally. Formalize the funding strategy through GoK adoption
23. Continue Trust Fund capitalization efforts
24. Align Trust Fund’s scope to include capacity to finance conservation initiatives nationally
25. Began building technical capacity of Trust Fund to implement programming
26. Re-assess the project’s implementation approach and adopt an improved multi-year implementation strategy/work plan that generates coordinated and precise interventions for alleviating threats and a clear path to attaining the project’s objective
27. The improved implementation strategy/work plan should be fully vetted with the project’s national and local steering committees and their implementation support confirmed
28. Adopt implementation techniques that more fully integrate various components to approach conservation more holistically
29. Recruit short-term technical expertise to support full-time project staff, build capacities, and provide international best principles and practices to key project activities
30. Retain the services of an international expert capable of assessing and supporting over-all project implementation approaches
31. Develop very brief “stakeholder involvement strategies” for each project demonstration site, including formal mechanisms to improve participation of key resource users and linkages to public awareness activities
32. *Recommendation: Extend project duration by one year.*
33. Improve “Project Implementation Report” format and content
34. Increase frequency of on-site, external monitoring
35. Improve MTE ratings system

**Section Six: Summary of Lessons Learned**

1. Longer-term projects with extended start-up times may require independent monitoring and evaluation site visits at greater than normal frequencies to make certain they remain on track to produce all project deliverables.
2. Evaluating projects based upon their delivery of logical frameworks is not satisfactory unless these indicators provide a very clear measurement of quality and effectiveness.
3. Complex, integrated ecosystem management projects are technically demanding and may require careful consideration regarding existing implementation capacity.
4. If the project significantly modifies its logical framework and planned outputs mid-stream, justification for these modifications should be clearly detailed in a monitoring and evaluation tool that goes beyond the level of detail provided in most PIR’s.
5. Time allocated for conducting evaluations should be more commensurate with the size and complexity of the project if the evaluation is going to be more than perfunctory.

**Section 7 Performance Summary Table**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Key Findings** | **Rating** | **Comments** |
| ***Project formulation*** |  |  |
| Conceptual Design | S | Difficult to determine due to long start-up. However, in light of 8 – 9 years since project design, the assessment, identification of threats/root causes and nearly all proposed interventions all appear remarkably accurate to contemporary situation |
| Stakeholder Participation | S | Difficult to evaluate. Project designed nearly ten years ago. |
| ***Project Implementation*** |  |  |
| Implementation approach | MS | See section in MTE report. |
| Use of the Logical Framework | S | Project uses logical framework, but logical framework not useful as M&E tool particularly in terms of effectiveness |
| Technical Capacities | S | Project requires strengthening to improve quality of responses particularly integrated conservation in productive sector. |
| Country ownership/Driveness | MS | Support for protected areas strong. Motivation to fully address difficult productive landscape issues such as law enforcement, improved biodiversity monitoring, integrated management, and sustainable development incentives not evident |
| Stakeholder participation | S | Project did not address community-based management initiatives |
| Replication approach | S | Very good with protected areas. Not as strong in other sectors |
| Cost-effectiveness | S | Project sometimes takes too long to deliver tangible results |
| UNDP comparative advantage | S | UN has long-term experience with conservation sector |
| Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector | S | Project cooperates well within sector and has leveraged significant and real co-financing |
| Financial planning | MS | Project has spent heavily on PA but not allocated resources adequately to other components. This seems to be reflected in results. |
| Monitoring and evaluation | S | Project should have had two independent evaluations during project life-spam. MTE should have occurred earlier in 2007. PIR’s and GEF desk reviews fail to provide adequate indication of project challenges. |
| Execution and implementation modalities | S | All parties active. |
| Management by the UNDP country office | S | UNDP/KZ provides active support and appears capable |
| Coordination and operation issues | S | All communication, coordination and operation issues appear satisfactory |
| Identification and management of risks (adaptive management) | S | Project has adequately identified and managed risks, however adaptive management is not marked by strategic approaches. |
| ***Results*** |  |  |
| Outcome One: National policy, regulatory and institutional framework | MS | Project not on track to fully satisfy funded obligations. The project has supported accession to key international agreements and promoted improvement of protected areas regulations. Project has not legally secured integrity of wetlands ecosystems nationally or in project areas, i.e., permit requirements and water rights for wetlands. |
| Outcome Two: Well Planned and Effective Protected Area Management | HS | Project has provided strong support for PA management. |
| Outcome Three: Public Awareness and Process for Lessons Learned | S | Project has generated very good materials and training programs. Requires better strategic alignment. |
| Outcome Four: Conservation and Sustainable Use in Productive Landscape | MS | Project has not addressed these issues adequately. Low rating reflects lack of strategy. Level of effort by project staff is sincere and motivated. |
| Outcome Five: Trust Fund | S | Project has established all frameworks, moving towards funding. Some risks exist, but economic growth in favor of success |
| Attainment of objective | S | Project has delayed addressing too many key issues. Objective related to Outcomes 1 and 4 particularly at risk. |
| Prospects of sustainability | S | Project benefits from improved government budget and economy. |
| **Overall Project Rating** | **S** |  |

Ratings

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| HS | Highly Satisfactory |
| S | Satisfactory |
| MS | Marginally Satisfactory |
| U | Unsatisfactory |
| NA | Not applicable |