# Executive Summary

1. The Russian Federation Komi Republic (KR) Protected Areas (PAs) project is a Global Environment Facility (GEF) Full-sized Project (FSP), with GEF support of $4.5 million United States dollars (USD) (not including project development funds (PDF)), and originally proposed co-financing of $15.9 million USD, for a total project budget of $20.4 million USD. Shortly after approval an additional component was added, with additional co-financing of $4.4 million USD from Germany’s International Climate Initiative (ICI) (nearly doubling the overall donor budget of the project), for a total planned budget of $24.8 million USD. The project is executed under the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) National Execution (NEX) modality, with the Russian Federation (RF) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection’s (MNR)Federal Supervisory Natural Resources Management Service (“Rosprirodnadzor”) as the national executing partner. The project implementation period is planned for five years.
2. The KR’s PA network consists of two large federal PAs – Yugyd va National Park and Pechora-Illych Nature Reserve – and 237 republic-level PAs. The region is home to the “Komi Virgin Forests” World Heritage site, with an ecosystem comprised primarily of taiga forest and temperate peatlands. According to the project document, the overall project goal is “A comprehensive, ecologically representative and effectively managed national system of protected areas in the Russian Federation ensures conservation of globally significant and threatened ecosystems.” The project objective is “A representative and effectively managed network of protected areas ensures conservation of pristine boreal forest and taiga ecosystems in the Komi Republic.” The project strategy is to enhance and strengthen the baseline PAs network into a well-managed system that adequately protects the biodiversity of the region.
3. The project objective is planned to be achieved through three main outcomes:

**Outcome 1:The protected area system of Komi Republic is redesigned so as to better capture globally significant biodiversity**

**Outcome 2:Increased institutional capacity for management of protected areas within the Komi Republic protected area system**

**Outcome 3:Application of business planning principles result in diversified revenue streams for the Komi Republic protected area system**

1. The fourth outcome under the carbon component has been incorporated with relevant indicators and targets in the project logframe. According to the project document for the carbon component, the “overriding goal” is “To enable sustainable conservation of biodiversity at 1.63 million hectares of high nature-value boreal forests and peatlands in the Komi Republic reducing carbon emissions by 1.75 million CO2 in a 10-years perspective.” The specific goal is “To support capacity development and improvement of infrastructure at targeted protected areas in the Komi Republic, enabling them to effectively mitigate human and climate change risks, develop, implement and monitor effectively climate change adaptation measures.” This additional project component is represented as Outcome 4 in the context of the full UNDP-GEF project:

**Outcome 4: Improved protected area system in Komi Republic for better conservation of globally important biodiversity and maintenance of carbon pools**

1. According to GEF and UNDP evaluation policies, all GEF funded FSPs must have an independent mid-term evaluation. This mid-term evaluation reviews the actual performance and progress toward results of the project against the planned project activities and outputs, based on the relevant evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, results and sustainability. The evaluation methodology was based on a participatory mixed-methods approach, which included three primary elements: a) a desk review of project documentation and other relevant documents; b) interviews with key project participants and stakeholders; and c) field visits to relevant project sites in the KR. The evaluation is based on evidence from the start of project implementation (October 2008) to September 2011, and includes an assessment of issues prior to approval, such the project development process, overall design, risk assessment and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) planning. The desk review started in August 2011, and the evaluation mission was carried out from September 13 –23, 2011.
2. At the mid-point the project is on track for achievement of the expected outcomes, although there are some risks for the remaining implementation period. Based on the evaluative evidence collected during this mid-term evaluation, the project **Progress toward Overall Project Achievement and Impact** is rated ***highly satisfactory***. Although there have been some challenges in the first half of project implementation, the project has also exceeded expectations in some respects, and is applying an inclusive, transparent, and efficient implementation approach, which bodes well for the long-term results and sustainability of the project. At the same time, the project objective is a long-term goal, and achieving this objective will require the ongoing effort of many stakeholders based on the solid and significant foundation created under the project.
3. Project **relevance** is considered ***satisfactory***. At the regional level, the project is supporting the environmental protection and sustainable use policies and priorities of the Government of the KR. The project is supporting the strengthening of the KR PA system, and improving management capacity for regional and federal level PAs in the KR. This is a natural starting point for biodiversity conservation in the region, and includes activities on expanding coverage to underrepresented ecosystems, and revising the PA network to incorporate the highest value biodiversity areas. The project team is collaborating with multiple municipalities and villages within the project target area, and is supporting sustainable livelihoods in these areas. The project is relevant to and supportive of Russia’s national biodiversity conservation priorities and strategies, including the revised National Forest Code (2007), Ecological Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2002), and the Federal Law on Protected Areas (1995) (including its revisions in 2001, 2004, and 2005). In addition, the project supports Russia’s commitments for implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and is relevant to the GEF’s strategies and priorities in the biodiversity focal area.
4. Based on all aspects of project implementation and financial management, project **efficiency** is rated as ***satisfactory***.The project management arrangements are well designed to produce cost-effective execution of the work plan. The project is widely complemented for its inclusive and transparent operations, and numerous stakeholders emphasized their appreciation for the excellent work of the project team, noting that this is among the significant factors contributing to the project’s success. Anotherelementenhancingefficiency is that the project has secured tax exemption status, significantly increasing the leverage of project resources. However, obtaining the exemptions certificates, combined with long procurement procedures, have slowed some project activities, particularly under the carbon component; projections indicate 58% disbursement by the end of 2011 – slightly behind schedule for the currently planned mid-2013 completion. Co-financing has already exceeded 100% of the planned amount, and includes 29 different co-financing partners, compared to the originally foreseen 10.
5. Excellent implementation progress has been made under each of the project’s four outcomes, with important results to date. Based on the strong results already completed and the progress toward the final expected results, overall **effectiveness** is rated ***satisfactory***, with two of the four project outcomes rated highly satisfactory. Under Outcome 1, the PA inventory and proposal to expand the KR PA network are highlights, as well as the agreement to combat helicopter poaching. The proposal for revision and expansion of the KR PA system would increase PA coverage in the KR by more than 800,000 hectares. The establishment of a regional PA directorate is the key output under Outcome 2, and the outlook on its achievement isuncertain butoptimistic. Also under Outcome 2 the project has strengthened partnerships with the private sector, developed a private sector eco-rating system, established a civil society organization to support PA development (the non-commercial partnership (NCP) “Union of the Komi Republic Specially Protected Nature Areas”), and conducted extensive public awareness activities. The most significant result under Outcome 3 is the production of the Yugyd va and Pechora-Illych business plans, the first of their kind in Russia. Rosprirodnadzorplans to replicate this approach throughout Russia’s federal PA system. Also under this outcome the project has supported an impressive expansion of the tourism infrastructure network in the region. Outcome 4, the carbon component, is getting underway following the procurement and installation of specialized scientific equipment for carbon stock assessment and flux monitoring. This component hasalready produced interesting findings on annual emissions due to forest fires, and the temperature dependence of carbon flows in typical Komi ecosystems. For the project as a whole, following the initial excellent work thus far there remains much to be completed in the remaining implementation period. Among the recommendations of this evaluation is for a logframe revision that will better allow assessment and tracking of the full range of project results.
6. While the mid-term evaluation is not well placed to provide ratings on sustainability, this evaluation report includes a sustainability rating, as required. The **sustainability** of project results is rated ***moderately likely***, based on an assessment of the four components of sustainability. At this stage there are not significant risks to sustainability, though there are multiple issues that will require further assessment at project end. These include the progress in implementation of the PA business plans, the validity of the business plans’ assumptions and revenue projections, the long-term viability of the non-commercial partnership, and the level of institutional capacity reached by the regional PAs directorate, assuming it is established.
7. The table below provides a summary of the priority issues for the remaining implementation period, in the view of this evaluation.

Table Priority Issues for Remaining Implementation Period

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| **Priority Issue** | **Summary** | **Priority Actions or Risk Mitigation** |
| Establishment of KR PA directorate by project end | One of the key expected outcomes of the project is the establishment of a regional PA directorate that would be responsible for improving management for the KR PA network of 237 PAs, in addition to any areas established under the project’s proposal to expand the PA network in the KR. Despite initial positive political support, government turnover, budgetary questions, and institutional barriers have thus far stymied the achievement of this result, and there is no immediate prospect of reaching this goal. | There continues to be positive stakeholder support for this activity, and the project still has theresources to assist in establishing and setting up such an agency. As the project team continues to work intensively on this issue through lobbying and building public awareness, the project team and steering committee should consider a 6-12 month project extension if it appears this goal will not be reached by the end of the project but could be reached with slightly more time. |
| Implementation of business planning activities, including continuous assessment of projected revenues, and individual and institutional capacity development for the NCP to ensure its long-term utility and viability | The two business plans developed thus far (for Yugyd va and Pechora-Illych), and the business plans anticipated by the end of the project, are an important and valuable result from the project. However, the most important step is to move toward implementation of the business plans, as assisted by the newly established NCP. | As business plan implementation begins, there should be occasional re-assessment of the revenue projections, as the many assumptions in the business plans play out over time. Some revenue projections may be optimistic (for example, nearly $1 million USD in tourism revenue related to Pechora-Illych Nature Reserve within seven years), but the value of the business plans is the cost and revenue framework they have established, and it would be acceptable for specific figures in the business plans to be revised and updated over time to reflect realities on the ground, while maintaining the long-term goal of eliminating the PA funding gap.  Business plan implementation will be assisted by the NCP; as the NCP develops as an organization it will start with small-scale activities (such as leveraging revenues for the elk farm). To fully support the generation of revenues for the PA system foreseen in the business plans, within a few years the NCP will need to be operating at larger-scale, and strategizing for complex marketing operations and financial partnerships. During the next two years, while the NCP still has the foundational springboard of project support, the project should invest in individual and institutional capacity development to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NCP. With further capacity development the NCP has the potential to be the future catalyzing force for financial sustainability for the KR’s PAs once the project is complete. |
| Ensuring support for ongoing maintenance of infrastructure constructed | The project has contributed heavily to the development of various types of infrastructure, particularly for tourism and PA management. While much of the infrastructure is low-maintenance, there needs to be a clear plan about which stakeholders will take on the financial responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the new infrastructure to ensure its long-term sustainability. | By the end of the project there should be clear agreements and plans among relevant stakeholders (particularly UNDP, the national executing agency, the Yugyd va National Park administration, Pechora-Illych Nature Reserve administration, the NCP, any relevant private sector partners (such as the elk farm or tourism operators), and local government) with specific commitments and financial plans for the maintenance and upkeep of infrastructure developed. |
| Establish specific formal partnership agreement between Yugyd va National Park Administration and Gazprom Transgaz Ukhta. | A framework agreement has been established between the national park administration and Gazprom, as a result of long-standing cooperation considering the location of the pipeline in the national park. Gazprom has provided various forms of support since the national park was established, and according to Gazprom stakeholders, they are fully willing to enter into more specific partnership agreements with the national park. | The project should support and encourage Yugyd va National Park administration in establishing a specific and concrete partnership agreement with Gazprom that outlines areas for ongoing and future cooperation. |
| Confirmation of legally protected status for all republic PAs | It was determined during the PA inventory that 42 PAs (19 game parks, 15 nature monuments, 6 objects of cultural use and 2 genetic reserves) have been established by local government institutions, which do not have the legal right to establish PAs on territory managed by the Forestry Committee. According to the project team, the project is working with the KR government to confirm appropriate legal status for these PAs, but this issue remains unresolved. | Confirming the legal status for these PAs should be a key goal to be achieved before the end of the project, and would be a significant positive result if reached. This evaluation does not propose additional or different steps to be taken, but would like to highlight this issue as a key priority for the project during the remaining implementation period. |
| Full boundary demarcation and definition for republic-level PAs, in collaboration with the Forestry Committee | Although the republic-level PAs have been declared for many years, many have not been legally demarcated through official surveys and registration in the cadaster. Without officially established boundaries they are at risk for incursion from development. In an example given by one stakeholder, in an unspecified region of Russia where land is expensive, the local government argued that since there was no boundary there was no PA, and houses were built on the land. Surveying and recording boundaries accurately is a critical task, but one that is well beyond the scope of the project to accomplish, as it will require years and significant resources to complete this effort. | All stakeholders agree that legally demarcating the full network of republic level PAs will be a long-term and expensive process, and there appears to be little more that can be immediately done by the project on this critical issue, besides developing strategies in collaboration with key partners, such as the Forestry Committee and KR Ministry of Natural Resources, to plan for the long-term effort to survey and legally demarcate boundaries. It could also be helpful to identify a prioritization process so that PAs most at risk can be the first ones to have their boundaries legally demarcated. The project is working to increase the profile of republic-level PAs to increase public awareness about them at the municipal district level, thereby reducing the likelihood that threats will materialize. For example, the project has published booklets for each of the KR’s municipal districts highlighting the PAs in each area. |

1. Below are the key recommendations of this evaluation report; the specific audience for the recommendation is included in brackets. Additional recommendations are included at the end of the report.
2. ***Key Recommendation 1:***While the ideal long-term status would be for the existence of a regional PA directorate, as a risk mitigation strategy the project team and key stakeholders should strategize about specific feasible alternative options for the management of the KR PAs for the medium-term that could be catalyzed by the project if it appears that establishing a regional agency will not be a viable option. Options could include providing capacity development support on PA management for Forestry Committee staff, and putting additional emphasis on the local management committee mechanism.*[Project Team and key government institution partners]*
3. ***Key Recommendation 2:*** Capacity development for the NCP: During the next two years, while the NCP still has the foundational springboard of project support, the project should invest in individual and institutional capacity development to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NCP. With further capacity development the NCP has the potential to be the future catalyzing force for financial sustainability for the KR’s PAs once the project is complete.*[Project Team, Non-commercial partnership]*
4. ***Key Recommendation 3:*** The mid-term of a project is early to recommend a project extension, but the option of a 6-12 month extension should be opened for consideration in the final year of project implementation. In addition to the initial slower-than-anticipated project implementation rate, the question of the establishment of the regional directorate for PAs remains uncertain. If this key outcome has not been achieved at the end of the project’s planned implementation period – *and it is anticipated that it could be achieved with project support under a short extension* – it may be worthwhile for the Project Steering Committee (PSC) to consider such a move. An extension should not be considered under this rationale if the establishment of a regional PAs directorate remains an open-ended question, without achievement of the final goal clearly in sight.*[UNDP, Executing Agency, PSC]*
5. ***Key Recommendation 4:***The project team must ensure that the necessary time and resources are set aside to turn the scientific data and knowledge gained from the carbon component research into practical recommendations for effective forest and ecosystem management in response to and planning for future climate change. The project team should plan to produce forest management and PA management technical guidelines that are as specific as possible on ways to strengthen ecosystem resilience to mitigate the effects of climate change.*[Project Team, key government institution partners]*
6. ***Key Recommendation 5:***The project team, UNDP, and relevant stakeholders should work to develop a proposal for logframe revision that would improve alignment of indicators and targets with SMART criteria, and would enhance the results-focused approach. A revision should then be approved by the PSC at its next meeting in early 2012.*[Project Team, UNDP, Executing Agency, other partners as relevant]*