Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation
People's Trust for Endangered Species Final Report
December 1, 2014

Project title: **Empowering communities towards sustainable land management through Community Responsible Areas**

Project head: Bayarjargal Agvaantseren
Institute: Snow Leopard Conservation Foundation
Country project is based in: Mongolia

Project start and end date:
     Start date: September 2012
     End date: September 2014

Date of report: March 1, 2014
Species/ habitat: Snow leopard/Altay Mountains

IUCN conservation action/ research action being undertaken AND/ OR UK BAP target addressing
     1.2   Land/water protection, resource & habitat protection
     2   Land/water management, site/area management
     5.1.3   Law & Policy, legislation, sub-national level
     4.2   Education & awareness, training

I. Main aims of the project and your achievements to date

i. *Increase the amount of snow leopard and wildlife habitat protected by local people as official "Community Responsible Areas" (CRAs)*:

In 2009, a PTES Small Grant enabled us to begin the process of working with communities in our Snow Leopard Enterprises (SLE) handicraft program to map their lands. The scope and magnitude of this endeavour was tremendous considering that few maps exist at a finite level showing placement of herder settlements in relation to known geographical landmarks. We quite literally had to start from scratch with herders hand drawing sketches of their landscapes on blank pieces of paper, correlate these with established political maps, and transfer them into digitized GIS maps. This mapping exercise was initially envisioned for improving conservation agreements under Snow Leopard Enterprises (SLE). However, a new Mongolian law also made digitized maps useful for, and part of the process towards, enabling communities to register for legal land rights as Community Responsible Areas (CRAs).

Therefore mapping extended into this current project and during the course of this grant workshops/meetings were held to help 10 communities finalize their maps. Between our PTES Small and Continuation Grant, we have completed fully digitized maps of responsible areas with 32 of the 33 communities we are currently working with. We estimate total area under community responsibility is 7,856 sq km. Communities have copies of these maps, as do other stakeholders including national park administration, strictly protected area administration, environmental department administration, and environmental agencies[1]. Maps enclose winter and summer settlements and pasture use, sacred places, natural resources, and important nearby areas for wildlife.

Prior to initiation of this grant (i.e. between our PTES Small Grant and Continuation Grant), 11 communities were able to use their maps to complete the CRA process and gain their CRA certification. These communities were relatively mobilized and organized and only lacked digitized maps for finishing their applications. Since receiving this Continuation Grant, we have further helped 8 communities obtain their official CRA status. Currently, of the 33 communities we are working with, a total of 19 communities have their CRA certification.

ii. *Improve local people's pasture and natural resource management within CRAs for the benefit of wildlife and natural services:*

While our initial vision was to help communities develop management plans for their CRAs, during the course of this project we found the CRA process will take longer than expected for some communities. We decided to move forward with management planning—or preparations for management planning—for all communities regardless of their CRA status. We recognize that some communities have developed preliminary management plans and/or received CRA certification while others might still be trying to organize as coherent units. Thankfully, all communities have mapped their lands and have clear boundaries they agree to safeguard, thus are in a good position to develop plans for managing those lands.

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[1] Turgen and Tsagaan Shuvuut Strictly Protected Area Administration, Altay Tavan Bogd National Park, Khar Us lake National Park, Great Gobi National Park Administration, Environmental Department of Uvs Province, Environmental Agencies of Gurvantes South Gobi, Bogd Bayankhongor, Bogd Uvurkhangai

As a first step, we are working to collect detailed situational analyses for monitoring of threats and biodiversity indicators in all community-conserved areas in Mongolia. The situational analysis includes socio-economic surveys, attitude assessments, threats assessments (community-based perception and assessment of threats, ranked on intensity, urgency, and prevalence), key informant surveys, vegetation surveys, snow leopard presence surveys (based on community interviews), and prey surveys. This provides us with baseline understanding of issues, threat drivers, and wildlife abundance in these communities. Results are being summarized and shared in reports with senior staff at SLCF and Snow Leopard Trust.

We have completed data collection for 11 communities in the West; only prey surveys, attitude surveys and socio-economic surveys are pending for communities in the South.

In September 2014, we held a 5-day workshop for 49 community members and 16 district rangers from across our western program communities. During the workshop, we reviewed each community's CRA certification progress and identified challenges/opportunities at the local level for those who have been slow on the process. For communities working to gain their CRA certification, we made sure that the steps they need to complete the process are built into their management plans.

During the workshop, we also shared with communities the results of the threats assessments in the West. The threats assessments capture their perceived conservation challenges, while the auxiliary data we collected outside of the threats assessments enabled us to temper perceptions, when necessary, with direct research. Communities are now working on draft management plans with specific activities to reduce threats over the next 4-5 years. Team management, team building, and skills training for community-assisted monitoring were all included in the workshop. At the end of sessions participants agreed to discuss plans with their whole community and send back their updated versions. The goal is to have updated plans returned to SLCF before the end of 2014. We hope to hold similar workshops in the South in 2015, after situational analyses are complete.

iii. *Expand recognition for communities and their traditional role in conservation so they can protect their land from negative development, such as mining:*

Throughout this project, we have supported all communities towards official recognition by their local and provincial government. CRA progress information has been disseminated to 20 Local and National Environmental organizations in order to gain their support. Many local government officials understand the need and importance of the CRA certification, and most governors have agreed to support the application and will give communities permission to do conservation activities—as well as other events/activities in their local areas to build up conservation.

However, there are still some local governments not aware of communities trying to organize as Herder Organizations, and some district authorities—especially citizen representatives—lacking information about the process and benefits of forming Herder Organizations. We are working to overcome this by making sure they are better informed about community efforts and we involved environmental inspectors/Protected Area specialists during the September 2014 workshop mentioned above.

Ultimately, helping communities become Herder Organizations and gain CRA certification will help them better represent themselves before the government and speak out for their needs, and enforce legal rights over protecting their lands.

Examples of communities leveraging CRA certification to protect their land:
- Khan Burged community, South Gobi Province is actively using their certificate to secure their CRA from possible mining activities in the area with the collaboration of a local NGO from their province
- Saalit Huren community, Uvs Province is using their CRA certification to prevent illegal harvesting of wild onions (Allium altaicum) and to manage other important natural resources
- Umnu- Otor community, Uvs Province created a seasonal blockage at a mountain pass usually regularly by poachers in order to prevent illegal hunting of snow leopard wild prey
- Gegeetiin Borgio community, Uvurkhangai Province could stop people who were hand-mining for gold within their region. When they received their certificate, they showed it to miners and a community volunteer ranger collaborated with the village environmental inspector to stop the mining activities.

iv. *Empower communities with increased capacity for conservation management through education and training:*

During this grant we have used meetings, workshops, newsletters and informal meetings to ensure all 33 communities we are working with understand what a CRA is, what it takes to become a CRA, and what it means to be a CRA (i.e. responsibilities and legal rights under CRA status). Beyond that, we have held more intensive workshops and meetings to target specific issues surrounding either the steps to becoming or managing a CRA.

We completed was a series of 14 workshops held in May-July 2013 aimed at helping communities understand the responsibilities of and work towards becoming Herder Organizations. The workshops were attended by a total of 170 people, including herders local environmental inspectors, governors, and rangers from local government. These workshops were led in collaboration with an organization called People Centered Conservation (PCC). People Centered Conservation is a non-profit, non-governmental organization in with much experience helping communities become Herder Organizations.

In Mongolia, most herder families are only loosely organized under informal communities and the process of organizing as an official entity—with norms, responsibilities and proper oversight—is relatively new and sometimes daunting. However, becoming a registered Herder Organization is a necessary step for CRA certification and gaining more legal rights.

The May 2013 workshops helped communities with such issues as identifying challenges and possible solutions towards developing grassroots organizations, and obtaining an understanding of what it means to manage a Herder Organization. People Centered Conservation helped communities that were ready work through the process of developing organizational norms, community funds management (to economically support their future organizational efforts), and strategy planning.

As part of this workshop, we reviewed the newly passed laws and regulations related to Natural Resource management from the central government, allowing for CRA certification. Also, during the workshop we distributed information on snow leopard ecology, biology, behaviour as well as preventative measures that might help herders lose fewer livestock to predators. A small video was made by our Mongolia Conservation and Education Manager, Tserennadmid Mijiddorj, in collaboration with a Japanese student and shown to workshop participants. They put together photos and videos focusing on our community-based programs, and including educational components about snow leopard habitat and prey.

During the remainder of this project, we continued to promote lessons and ideas from the PCC workshops during meetings with communities, and to show the video. As mentioned above, during the course of this project, we helped an additional 8 communities become Herder Organizations as part of the process for obtaining their CRA certification.

We held another big workshop in September 2014, as mentioned above. Half of the time was spent working with communities on management planning, and the other half was spent on training community representatives--called 'community volunteer rangers'--to assist in collecting data towards monitoring the management plans. We trained 16 volunteer rangers on simple data collection framework in conjunction with district park rangers. We are providing equipment (GPS units and binoculars) to volunteer rangers as they get trained.

OUTPUT SUMMARY
- **Meetings and mapping sessions held for 10 communities to create and finalize digitized maps**
- **14 workshops held in 2013 by PCC for (south communities) to assist with forming Herder Organizations**
- **2 workshops held in 2014 (west communities) to assist with forming Herder Organizations**
- **4 meetings held in 2014 (south) in follow-up to 2013 workshops**
- **Social and biological baseline data collected for 11 communities to inform management planning within mapped lands (west)**
- **Big 5-day workshop held in 2014 for 49 community representatives and 16 district rangers to help with management planning and train volunteer rangers (west)**
- **32 communities have fully digitized maps of responsible areas**
- **19 communities are registered as Herder Organizations (8 during the course of this project)**
- **19 communities have CRA status (8 during the course of this project)**
- **16 west communities working on management plans**
- **16 volunteer rangers trained**

II. List and details of any aims that haven't been achieved and why

We largely feel that we have met our aims. However the goal of having communities become CRAs will take longer than anticipated, and might not be feasible for some.

The hardest task is helping communities work together to form Herder Organizations, particularly if they have internal rifts or lack a history of being organized. Having been able to survey the various

issues some communities are facing, there are a few that might not make it to this goal. However, for those who can, we want to ensure their capacity to work together is strong and well-informed. As part of the sustainability of this project, we are providing communities with as much support and tools as possible for working together, but not rushing any community to organize faster than they are capable of maintaining over the long-term. This has resulted in fewer certified communities than originally projected, but it will ensure that those who do obtain their certificates can remain strong and sustain these gains into the future.

Collecting adequate data to help communities with their management planning has also been more labour intensive and time consuming than originally planned. We wanted to be as thorough as possible and collect data from a combination of community-based threats assessments as well as rigorous social and biological surveys. We then took time developing methods for sharing such a large amount of data back with communities in an effective way to facilitate decision-making. We are pleased with results thus far, but will need another year before all communities are reached in the South.

III. Was your methodology sound and repeatable in other areas? Have you revised it whilst undertaking your project?

We feel our methodology is largely sound: Mapping→forming Herder Organizations→Registering as CRAs→Management Planning. More time (workshops, outreach, training) is often necessary to help communities form Herder Organizations, and obtain CRA certification, and this phase can become protracted. In that case, we feel it is advisable to continue with management planning regardless, and build Herder Organization registration and CRA certification as goals within the Management Plan (if still appropriate for the community—again, there are a few communities where this type of organization is not feasible at this time). Also, in addition to sharing information with communities on the CRA process and their rights and responsibilities for sustainable land management, we are sharing data, collected from within and around communities, to help them better understand threats to snow leopards and wildlife in their areas.

This methodology is repeatable, and we have already begun making it a part of our normal activities when ushering in a new SLE community to discuss CRAs and begin the mapping process.

IV. Please detail how your project has contributed to the long-term conservation of the species you are working on. If it has not, please explain

The majority of snow leopard habitat in Mongolia falls outside of Protected Areas, which means a greater proportion of the burden of snow leopard conservation falls to local people. Long-term conservation of the species cannot therefore take place without considering the needs of these families and the ways in which they interact with snow leopards and the environment. This project has empowered 19 herder communities to establish CRAs. By forming CRAs, herders commit to working together to safeguard their land and their natural resources over the long-term, and we are helping them develop management plans to guide this. Legal recognition of CRA's also gives herder communities long-term security in land tenure, which can be passed down to the next generation. This will help ensure a continuance of these conservation activities over time and long-term support for the management plans.

Through the trainings, we are working to build the long-term capacity of communities to support their CRAs and management plans through monitoring and advocacy. Since the threat dynamics are shifting in Mongolia, and we are seeing increased pressure from external threats such as mining in snow leopard habitat, we hope this project will enable herders to be more vigilant about these types of emerging issues and, when possible, lobby to reduce their impacts within their CRAs.

V. Has long-term monitoring been put in place to ensure the outcomes are sustainable? How will this be funded, undertaken?

By the end of 2015, we hope that all communities will have management plans in place. These plans will continuously be revised and updated, and success towards their objectives will be monitoring by communities, park rangers and SLCF. If a community is not a CRA yet, but has reasonable enough capacity to become one, this (or steps towards this goal) will be maintained within the management plans. If a community cannot reasonably work towards becoming a CRA at this time, then management planning will be used to help them improve basic governance or other internal issues standing in the way of cohesiveness. For communities that are already CRAs, the management plans will help us gauge whether they are meeting the goals under being a CRA in terms of natural resource management. Greater interaction with communities to monitor their plans will hopefully serve to alert us if any of these elements are breaking down, e.g. communities are having internal issues threatening their stability as a Herder Organization, etc. This will allow us to help communities weather transition periods while maintaining conservation activities.

We hope to complete the management planning process with all 33 communities in 2015, and have submitted a proposal to Regina Bauer Frankenberg Foundation to fund this work.

VI. Please detail how you have/ plan to disseminate your results (please include a rough timetable) e.g. giving talks, preparing papers, producing management guidelines, submitting evidence to change government policy, getting media interest, carrying out workshops for conservation officers, . Would you like to work with PTES to achieve media coverage for your project? Do you have any plans to publish the findings from your work in journals?

We will continue to disseminate our results in our thrice-yearly newsletters, which is distributed to herders within our 33 communities, 10 National Parks and 15 District and Provincial Environmental sectors. We also continue to share our results with Snow Leopard Trust. The management plans produced by the communities will be shared with district governors and local park staff, where relevant. When possible and appropriate, we will also keep contacts at the federal level apprised of this work during regular meetings.

VII. Please give a breakdown of how you budget was spent compared with the budget in your original application.

PROJECT BUDGET				
CATEGORY	ITEM	Projected Costs	Actual Costs	
Staff costs	SLE western program coordinator	£ 1,109	£	1,029.12
	SLE southern program coordinator	£ 1,109	£	927.36
Travel (including fuel):	Airfare round trip to Western Mongolia	£ 808	£	1,024.00
	Gas for travel	£ 2,778	£	3,842.56
Subsistence	food and lodging for staff-workshops and follow-up	£ 2,160	£	2,147.20
(board & food):	Workshop lunches for communities	£ 1,563	£	1,536.00
	Tea break supplies at workshops	£ 66	£	83.20
Report production:	Reports	£ 186	£	-
Consumables:	Materials for workshops	£ 314	£	128.00
Administration:	Communication costs	£ 185	£	192.00
Other:	Venue renting	£ 1,158	£	1,493.12
	PCC-consulting (not originally budgeted)		£	1,520.00
TOTAL		£ 11,436	£	12,402.56

We spent an additional £5,000 towards subsistence (lodging and food) for community participants and staff during workshops, particularly the September 2014 workshop when we brought in herders from rural communities in western Mongolia for a multi-day stay and covered their full room and board. As noted below, we received additional support from Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund to cover some of these costs.

VIII. Have you succeed in raising other funds for the project? If so, this is really good news! Please list the sources and levels of investment.

The primary focus of our PTES Continuation Grant was to help communities obtain CRA status and begin management planning. During the course of this grant, we decided to use this opportunity working with communities to develop much more robust management plans based on extensive data collected from in and around communities, and to increase community capacity through special training of volunteer rangers. These are vital to the continued success of the management plans, however costs for these activities was outside of our original PTES budget. With the help of Snow Leopard Trust we were able to raise supplementary funds to support this work from Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund and David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation. Disney provided US$11,500, and David Shepherd provided £4,350 towards surveys/situational analysis and volunteer ranger training.

IX. What are the best lessons you've learned so far?

This project reminded us that rural community development can take much longer than originally anticipated. It also extended our experience with engaging local stakeholders as well as herder communities. There are a number of valuable lessons we learned during the project:

- We gained better understanding of and more experience collaborating with local governments. We came to realize that local governments in Mongolia still need to be guided on participatory development and improved awareness of community needs. We cannot take for granted that they are aware of issues on a community level for all communities in their areas. Local governments also sometimes need to be reminded of their accountability to herder organizations, which can run counter to their expectations since in rural Mongolia, governments often operate in a very top down manner.
- We have learned that promoting community empowerment is one of the keys to rural communities being able to make their own decision and take greater responsibility for their lands in the rapidly-changing social and economic situation facing Mongolia today
- This project reminded us again that creating close working relationships with stakeholders is crucial to developing strong conservation communities
- We cannot overstate the importance of constant engagement and effective communication with rural communities, however we also realize this is difficult when there are 33 communities that need guidance and are spread across thousands of kilometres. This has helped us to realize the importance of building capacity within communities for leadership, mobilization, conservation engagement, etc. We believe some of this will be accomplished through improved training to SLE leaders and volunteer rangers, and will continue to explore solutions to this issue.

Moving forward, we will perform much better during future projects regarding community development through these lessons learned. We will pay more attention towards building community capacity to take over their responsibilities of managing their own land and rights. This project has helped us build a solid foundation of experience and understanding, and given us an excellent start along this road.

X. Please provide a Project conclusion/ summary: (300 words) including objective(s) at outset, lessons learned, recommendations for future practice

At the outset of this project our objectives were to help communities 1) Finalize their GIS maps demarcating up to 10,000 sq ha for their Community Responsible Area , 2) Form recognized Herder Organizations that allow them to have rights to use their land, 3) Register their lands as CRAs, 4) Learn about their legal rights and responsibilities, including sustainable land management requirements within the CRAs, and 5) Draft conservation management plans for their CRAs. Thanks to this grant, 32 communities have finalized GIS maps; 19 communities have formed Herder Organizations and registered their lands as CRAs; 33 communities have a basic understanding of their rights and responsibilities as a CRA, 11 have thorough information on threats to wildlife in their areas, 16 have increased capacity for community-assisted monitoring towards threat reduction; and 16 communities are working towards developing draft management plans.

We have learned that promoting community empowerment is one of the keys to rural communities being able to make their own decision and take greater responsibility for their lands in the rapidly-changing social and economic situation facing Mongolia today. However we have learned that the process of helping communities organize and mobilize to secure their rights can be difficult and take longer than anticipated, especially if communities lack a foundation of trust and cooperation.

We also cannot take for granted that local governments fully understand and automatically support these types of community-level initiatives, or that they understand their responsibilities back to community stakeholders.

Despite these challenges, we feel the project was an incredible success. As we continue to take these efforts forward we will leverage management plans to better chart out community needs and actions towards gaining CRA certification, continue to improve communication with local governments, and continue to look for ways to increase engagement and capacity building with community leaders.

Photos attached with report:
Attached are two photos taken during the September 2014 workshop with western communities. The photos are an example of a draft management plans drawn up by a community for natural resource management and snow leopard threat reduction in their Community Responsible Area. Draft plans are being taken back for review with communities and will be submitted to SLCF later this year.