

## Protection Funded for Himalayan Snow Leopards, Bears

### Full Text

WASHINGTON, DC, June 24, 1999 (ENS) - The snow leopards, white clawed bears, Central Asian mountain goats and wild sheep of the West Tien Shan mountains are about to benefit from a new multi-million dollar biodiversity protection project. The World Bank and Global Environment Facility approved Tuesday a grant equivalent to US\$10.15 million for a Central Asia Transboundary Biodiversity Project in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan.

The project will support the protection of vulnerable and unique biological communities within the West Tien Shan, a mountain range shared by the three countries located on the western edge of the Himalayan Mountain system.

The region contains habitats ranging from sub-tropical to tundra, which support unique and globally significant communities and threatened species such as the snow leopard, white clawed bear, and the Central Asian mountain goat and wild sheep.

The region also contains wild relatives of horticultural, agricultural, and medicinal plants.

The ecosystem and biodiversity of the area are under threat from increasing and uncontrolled overuse of natural resources, decreasing capacity to effectively manage the ecosystem, and the rapidly changing local and regional economic situation.

The project will assist the three countries to improve the policy and legal framework for biodiversity conservation.

Developing and implementing a strategy for budgetary reform is part of the project. During project preparation, management prescriptions were drafted for four protected areas: Aksu Djabagly Zapovednik, Chatkal Zapovednik/Ugam-Chatkal National Park, Sary Chelek Zapovednik, and the Besh Aral Zapovednik. The project will finance the finalization of these management plans and their implementation. The funds will cover technical assistance, training, communications and other equipment, and infrastructure.

At each site, there will be rapid biological assessments to rationalize protected area boundaries, identify appropriate land and resource use and zoning needs, and improve habitat management and species protection.

There will be funding for training and a small grants program to promote the development of biodiversity friendly activities in and around protected areas. The small grants program will finance model programs for sustainable use of biodiversity activities, to be developed and implemented by local communities, NGOs and individuals living in villages around the project protected areas.

The project will finance the participation of local communities in habitat restoration and reforestation in areas adjoining the protected areas. Priority will be given to areas that function as wildlife corridors, or are otherwise important for biodiversity conservation.

In order to reduce pressure on local forests for fuelwood, the project will support a study on alternative energy sources and potential financing for its implementation under the small grants program.

Total cost of the project is US\$13.65 million, including a combined amount of US\$2.0 million from the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan and US\$1.5 million from parallel financing.