



NEWS RELEASE

Countries Converge in Kyrgyz Republic for New Global Initiative to Conserve the Snow Leopard and High-Mountain Ecosystems

President Almazbek Atambayev announces snow leopard recovery program to confront poaching, manage landscapes, assist mountain communities and address climate change threats

Bishkek, KYRGYZ REPUBLIC, October 23, 2013 – President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambayev and officials representing 12 Central and South Asian countries outlined and endorsed an ambitious new global initiative in Bishkek today to protect and conserve critical ecosystems in high-mountain landscapes inhabited by the iconic but endangered snow leopard.

Joining with conservation experts from around the world and the international donor community, the 12 nations* endorsed the Bishkek Declaration on Snow Leopard Conservation and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Recovery Program (GSLEP).

“I deeply appreciate the fact that our initiative to organize a Global Snow Leopard Forum in Bishkek was supported by the range countries as well as by international and non-governmental environmental organizations. By endorsing Bishkek Declaration on Snow Leopard Conservation and the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Recovery Program range countries are committing to scaling up joint snow leopard conservation efforts,” said **Almazbek Atambayev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, in his welcome address to Forum participants.** *“If we do not take decisive measures to protect the snow leopard today, we will forever lose this priceless animal, a true gift of nature. Today we are taking first steps. I am confident that together we will be able to achieve the goal we set – to protect our beautiful nature and the symbol of our mountains, the snow leopard.”*

Threats to the snow leopard and its high-mountain habitats are increasing. In addition to the problems of encroaching development and infrastructure, the species is vulnerable to poaching and also to persecution by herders due to snow leopard attacks on livestock. Experts estimate the worldwide population of snow leopards at between 3,900 and 6,400. Their fate depends on the sustainability and conservation of mountain-steppe and mountain tundra in the region.

The iconic cats are also likely to feel the effects of climate change over time. Retreating glaciers in Central Asia could increase the risk of droughts, and increased scarcity of water may impact pastures and the availability of food for both wild prey and domestic livestock.

The Global Forum is meant to sound the alarm about the increased threats to the survival of snow leopards and the critical ecosystems they inhabit, and also to initiate implementation of the GSLEP, a long-term, science-based global conservation strategy. It represents the first time the countries are working together in the region to protect a species.

GOALS OF THE FORUM

* The Snow Leopard Range Countries are **Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan**

In the Bishkek Declaration, the 12 countries “pledge to ensure that snow leopards and the people who live among them thrive in healthy ecosystems that contribute to the prosperity and well-being of our countries and the planet.” At the Forum, delegations from the range countries and experts reached beyond this basic aspiration to set a solid and measurable goal by 2020 that would commit countries to work together to identify and secure at least 20 healthy landscapes of snow leopards across the cat's range by 2020, or 'Secure 20 by 2020.'

“Range countries’ investment in the conservation of the snow leopard will help achieve critical development outcomes in Central and South Asia, particularly in the sustainable management of scarce natural resources, as well as in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Conservation and strong regional cooperation will help local communities with alternative income-generating opportunities, drastically reduce poaching and the illicit trade in wildlife,” said **World Bank Regional Director for Central Asia Saroj Kumar Jha.**

Countries unanimously endorsed the comprehensive new global program today, promising a multifaceted approach across the snow leopard range to:

- **Engage local communities in conservation, promote sustainable livelihoods, and address human-wildlife conflict;**
- **Combat poaching and illegal trade networks, including through transboundary collaboration and enforcement;**
- **Seek to manage habitats on a landscape level;**
- **Work with industry and enterprises that operate in snow leopard habitats;**
- **Establish a core Secretariat to coordinate conservation activities, monitor program implementation, and mobilize financial resources for the program**

This week’s forum marks a milestone moment where all the countries expressed willingness to come together on national strategies and seek support from the international donor community toward a common agenda. A major starting point is collaboration on intensified scientific research and monitoring in snow leopard habitats, all of which are in remote regions where adequate baseline data are rarely available.

President Atambayev initiated the multi-country effort in 2012, reaching out to international organizations such as the World Bank, Global Environment Facility, and United Nations Development Programme to help organize the high-level meetings and gain support from aid organizations and international donors to lend financial support to the 12 range countries.

Based on preliminary estimates from the 12 snow leopard range countries, the program in the first 7 years (2013-20) could cost US\$150-200 million, though these figures are still being fine-tuned. Much of this cost will be borne by their governments, but international donors and multilateral development banks, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector are here to assist with possible financing for the program.

The Forum is hosted and organized by the President and Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, with organizational support, financing, and sponsorship from the Global Tiger Initiative, NABU, Snow Leopard Trust, United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, Global Environment Facility, Snow Leopard Conservancy, USAID, WWF, and the Snow Leopard Network.

Remarks from Leaders of International Organizations

Alexander Avanesov, UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative: *“The Snow Leopard is the natural and cultural heritage of the Eurasian Continent. Unfortunately, we must openly confess that snow leopard is on the verge of extinction, and its conservation depends on our joint efforts. The adoption of the Global Snow Leopard Conservation Program will create a solid foundation for future cooperation of the governments of snow leopard’s habitat, international organizations and civil society.”*

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Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility: *"I applaud the leadership of President Atambayev and the commitment of the other range countries in organizing this historic effort to save the snow leopards and their habitat. The Global Environment Facility has supported 19 projects across most of the snow leopard range countries gathered here. Initiatives such as the Tian Shan Mountain Project in the Kyrgyz Republic protect snow leopard habitat, while at the same time delivering environmental and economic benefits to some of the remotest communities in Central and South Asia. This new Global Forum, combining the efforts of the range countries and other partners, will help us get most out of our investments to protect this iconic animal and unique mountain landscape."*

Rodney Jackson, Executive Director, Snow Leopard Conservancy: *"The Forum is a very timely opportunity for range states, NGOs, donors and the public to join forces to ensure that the endangered snow leopard is perceived as a national and global treasure. Involving sacred sites guardians and other holders of indigenous wisdom will greatly strengthen implementation of conservation action for the snow leopard, its prey and habitat."*

Olaf Tschimpke, President of NABU: *"This international conservation conference brings together states and nature conservation organizations and is therefore a milestone in the conservation of the snow leopard. As the initiator of the forum, we are particularly pleased about this first cross-border cooperation. Together with the Kyrgyz state, the NABU has been committed to the protection of the snow leopard since 1998. Only recently, the NABU installed camera traps in the Kyrgyz Tian Shan mountains which will be used for the monitoring of snow leopards."*

Charu Mishra, Executive Director for the Snow Leopard Network: *"The Global Forum is an historic opportunity to bring snow leopard conservation into the forefront of political consciousness in Asia. Never before has the cause of snow leopard and associated biodiversity conservation received such high visibility at the highest levels of range country governments."*

Mary Melnyk, USAID's Asia Environment Team Leader: *"As a development agency, USAID aims to drive sustainable global growth, and its goals as part of that include conserving the world's biodiversity and addressing the impacts of climate change. The conservation of snow leopards and their habitats achieves many benefits that go beyond saving a majestic species, such as conserving mountain ecosystems critical to Asia's water supply and helping local communities adapt to climate change."*

Carlos Drews, Global Species Program Director, WWF International: *"Snow leopards are the ambassadors of Asia's high mountains. Conserving these endangered animals and their habitats means managing ecosystems sustainably, adapting to the impacts of climate change, and maintaining water security for over a quarter of the world's people. WWF therefore stands ready to support the 12 range countries as they work together to save the snow leopard and so much more."*

Brad Rutherford, Executive Director, Snow Leopard Trust: *"It's a great success that we've managed to secure a strong conservation commitment from all the snow leopard range countries. Now, it's up to everyone involved to carry the momentum created here in Bishkek forward and secure the snow leopard's future."*

For further reference:

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| Global Snow Leopard Forum Web | en.akilbirs.com |
| Forum Facebook Community | https://www.facebook.com/TimeToSaveTheSnowLeopard |
| Forum Twitter Feed | @SnowLeopardLair |
| Snow Leopard Forum Video Clip | http://bit.ly/17dYgdm |
| World Bank – Kyrgyz Republic | www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic |
| Global Environment Facility (GEF) | www.thegef.org/gef/ |
| United Nations Development Programme | |

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<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/environmentandenergy/overview.html>

Snow Leopard Trust

www.snowleopard.org/

NABU

www.nabu.de/en/
www.nabu.de/snowleopard

Snow Leopard Conservancy

<http://snowleopardconservancy.org/>

WWF

<http://worldwildlife.org/species/snow-leopard>

Snow Leopard Network

www.snowleopardnetwork.org/sln/Homepage_En.php

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