

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

CEPF Grant 112606

American University of Central Asia

Improved Pasture Management in Chychkan, Toktogul and Suusamy

Kyrgyzstan

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8. Introduction

The Western Tian Shan corridor, a priority for CEPF, extends through western Kyrgyzstan and includes, among others, the priority KBA, Chychkan. Within this corridor, the area extending approximately 250 kilometers by road from the Suusamyр Valley, through the Chychkan Gorge, to the Toktogul reservoir, has diverse ecosystems. Suusamyр Valley (see Figure 1, uploaded with this proposal) is 471,000 hectares at an altitude of 2200-2600 meters above sea level. It is home to mountain pastures. Heading to Chychkan, the transition is to a mid-altitude ecosystem with more frequent presence of trees. Chychkan is at a transition point, for a norther, wetter part of the country to a southern, drier part of the country. Toktogul is dry. This diversity leads to the presence of several CEPF priority species, including smartweed (*Polygonum toktogulicum*), hawthorn (*Crataegus knorringiana*), Snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), birch (*Betula tianschanica*), wild apple (*Malus sieversii*), and wild pear (*Pyrus korshinskyi*).

The area faces two primary pressures. The first, somewhat outside the scope of this proposal, is the road that runs Bishkek to Osh, exactly through the area. The second, the focus of this project, is the use of the high valley for pasture, livestock breeding, and farming. Overgrazing and unsustainable farming threaten to replace the fragile native grassland. Unsustainable use makes pastures less resilient to drought, flood, and climate change.

Pastures cover more than 9 million hectares of the country, 46 percent of the country's land. They play a key role in ensuring the food security and wellbeing of rural inhabitants in the country. Despite their importance, about 70 percent of pastures are estimated to be moderately to severely affected by degradation. Suusamyр is one of the most productive pastures in the country. Herders from several neighboring provinces bring their livestock there every summer. There is little knowledge on the dynamics of pasture use in this region, meaning we are lacking the ability to inform good decisions.

Including the species named above, this region has 15 species in the Kyrgyz National Red Book, including Tien Shan argali (*Ovis ammon karelini*) and Marco Polo sheep (*O. a. polii*), saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), and scaled osman (*Diptychus maculatus*). Others of interest and significance include the brown bear, mountain goat, lynx, badger, wild boar, roe deer, gray wolf, hare, marmot, and rock vole. Stands of birch line the rivers and valley sides. These trees, the flowing rivers, and the wild game are important for commercial hunting, tourism, and local use, including b communities for collecting natural forest products and medicinal and aromatic plants, fruits and mushrooms.

This area is in the Jalal-Abad Region of the country, within the Toktogul District. The permanent population of Susamyр *ayil okmotu* (AO) lives in the central central and most low-lying part of the valley. 7,000 people live in six villages:

- Susamyр
- Kaiser
- Tunuk
- First of May
- Kozhomkul
- Kyzyl

Almost half the population is below the age of 18. The residents are almost completely ethnic Kyrgyz. However, the population of the valley is not native: they settled here after the establishment of support services for animal husbandry in the 1950s, and also after the creation of two state farms in the 1980s. Within the AO there are 5 schools with 1500 children, one hospital, one ambulance station and four health care stations. Apart from small businesses and government services, there is a livestock market.

AUCA has been working in this region for several years. We collected data to allow for creation of a normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) to measure vegetation health over a 15 year period. (See Figure 2.) Using our experience and free-of-charge platforms, such as Google Earth Engine and Q-GIS, we are able to develop natural resource use maps. As a university, we have been running summer schools, camps, workshops and other events in this region and throughout the country.

This project aims to address the threats posed by unsustainable livestock pasturing in a priority corridor and KBA. Our approach consists of:

Component 1: Data Collection and Mapping

We must collect data on the ecological functioning of the area and on pasture use. We will start with community and local government consultation to explain the project. Then, as a university (with two university partners) we will engage our students, under the guidance of university instructors, to collect relevant data, particularly on vulnerable species, in the project area. These field trips will be organized in summer 2022 and 2023. Prior to the field trips, all related students will be trained on proper community engagement, data collection, mapping, and gathering of specimens. We will only gather specimens of non-threatened species, so will not require special permission. We will maintain specimens in university herbariums for project use and for future use.

One end result from our data collection will be ArcGIS and QGIS-based land use and biodiversity maps showing relevant natural resources and priority biodiversity species. (QGIS is an open source system.) (To explain what we mean, Figure 3 shows a sample of what we have done elsewhere to show soil types in Western Issikul.) We will develop separate maps for Chychkan, the Jangy-Jol *ayil aimak* of Toktogul and the western part of Suusamyр Valley. The Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences also has available data to further build the maps.

Component 2: Pasture Management Plans

Pasture management in the Suusamyр Valley is complex and unique. Local residents have rights to pasture, but people from neighboring districts have seasonal rights, as well. Each neighboring community has its own pasture plot within the valley. Each plot is administered by its own committee. By example, Jany-Jol has its own area within Suusamyр, and its committee should limit the number of users who come each summer. However, the reality is that individual pasture users frequently leave the

boundaries of their district's designated plot in the valley. This leads to frequent rounds of conflict, compromise, and dialogue between the pasture management committees.

Apart from the committees, there are also pastor management associations, which are like collectives – people who help one another with animal care and who can speak on behalf of each other.

The Jany-Jol pasture management committee is interesting because it has plots in Suusamy, Chychkan gorge, and its home district of Toktogul. Suusamy Valley is very large with many different pasture plots, so within the valley, AUCA will focus on the plots managed by Jany-Jol and by local Suusamy herders.

Again, within the same KBA, but moving west into the Chychkan district, there are then pasture plots for local people, plus for Jany-Jol, for other communities in Toktogul, and for the Talas District. Further, on the border between Chychkan and Toktogul is a state forestry enterprise that allows people to graze their cattle for a fee.

The point is that there are many jurisdictions and structures, which can lead to unclear rules, unclear rights, and unsustainable use. Within our area of focus, there may be 150 herders representing several pasture management committees.

AUCA will try to clarify the land rights of different pasture committees within the project area, starting by conducting interviews, prior to the grazing season in the early spring and after the grazing season in the late autumn. These meetings will be in the offices of the committees with questions and maps about where they think they can go and how many users there are. During the summer grazing season, we will conduct 50-70 field interviews with herders.

Through the committee interviews are our observed actual behavior during the grazing season, we will then develop maps documents showing supposed grazing practices and actual grazing practices. Then, from the data we collect in Component 1, we can develop plans with ideal grazing practices that optimize cattle productivity, grassland productivity, and species conservation. We will present our findings along the way to the users associations, the committees, the Toktogul forestry enterprise, and local governments. By the spring of 2023, we will have recommendations for improvements. We will present these recommendations to the committees under the representation of the Kyrgyz Jayity, the national pasture users association. If the recommendations are accepted, we will monitor these through the summer of 2023 and make modifications that we present in the spring of 2024.

To measure whether these recommendations are working, we will monitor two indicators. The first will be to select 20 herders from within the project area. We will interview them and inspect their animals to assess weight gain and animal wellbeing at the end of the summer. The second will be to measure water quality in specific small streams to determine if changed grazing is happening and if it is having a positive effect.

Component 3. Public Awareness and Education

One issue with grazing is that people do not realize how their own small actions, when combined with others, can have huge consequences. Thus, we will raise awareness in the communities that send their herders to the Suusamy Valley and Chychkan grazing areas. We will engage our university students to hold “conservation talks” with the committees, users associations, and general public, meeting in cafes

and hotels prior to and after the grazing season. Senior project staff from AUCA will develop the materials that the students use.

We will also hold summer camps and field trips for students to build awareness of the next generation. There are several groups that can support this beyond AUCA and the other two universities, including Kyrgyz Jayit, the ILBIRS public foundation, and Camp Ala-Too. We expect camps to have about 30 students where faculty members present topics and lead field trips on conservation and ecology.

One input to the “conservation talks” and summer camps will be leaflets, brochures, and other materials we develop on threatened species and the ecology of the region. We will prepare extra amounts of these to then share with local schools, local authorities, pasture committees and other interested parties.

9. Summary of Previous Stakeholder Engagement Activities

AUCA, as an organization and via its individual faculty and students, has ongoing and past relationships with communities and stakeholders throughout the Suusamyр Valley and Chychkan region. This includes:

- Study of the shrub encroachment in Suusamyр (funded by GIZ)
- Land Degradation Neutrality in the Kyrgyz Republic (this report includes component on pasture management in Suusamyр)
- Economic of Land Degradation in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan component was focused on pasture management)

As part of preparing this proposal, we held meetings and had discussions via email and telephone with:

- National Pasture-users Association “Kyrgyz Jayity”
- Suusamyр Pasture Committee
- Suusamyр Ayil Aimak
- Public Fund “Ilbirs”
- Kyrgyz National University
- Kyrgyz Agrarian University
- State Agency on Environmental Protection and Forestry

10. Project Stakeholders

Stakeholders are defined to include pastoralists from the Jany-Jol *ayil aimak* and from one Suusamyр *ayil aimak*. This includes those using the lands assigned to the particular pasture management committee. These could include people from the villages of Susamyр, Kaiser, Tunuk, First of May, Kozhomkul, and Kyzyl, as well as other neighboring areas. In total, however, the actual number of individual stakeholders might be the approximately 150 families whose living is derived from these pasture areas.

11. Stakeholder Engagement Program

The goal of the project is to promote better livestock rearing practices in the Suusamyр Valley and Chychkan KBA. Stakeholder engagement will include:

- Per Component 1, presentation of project plans for data collection to local affected communities.
- Per Component 2, presentation of pasture management plans to pasture management committee, pastoralist associations, and other stakeholders. These plans will only be implemented if the stakeholders agree.
- Measurement of herd health, where stakeholders can report whether the pasture management plans are beneficial or not.
- Public awareness programs on the value of biodiversity in the region and on how sustainable grazing is a viable option.

12. Consultation methods

The AUCA will engage its own personnel, graduate students, and undergraduate students to implement this program. The personnel involved all have years of experience on this issue, with many having worked exactly in the Suusamyр Valley. Consultation methods will include meetings with pastoralists and committees in the early spring and late fall, before and after the grazing season. We will engage our university students to hold “conservation talks” with the committees, users associations, and general public, meeting in cafes and hotels prior to and after the grazing season. Senior project staff from AUCA will develop the materials that the students use.

13. Other Engagement Activities

We will also hold summer camps and field trips for students to build awareness of the next generation. There are several groups that can support this beyond AUCA and the other two universities, including Kyrgyz Jayit, the ILBIRS public foundation, and Camp Ala-Too. We expect camps to have about 30 students where faculty members present topics and lead field trips on conservation and ecology.

14. Timetable

The project will proceed over 24 months and two grazing seasons. Timing will be a period of study in 2022 and presentation of pasture management plans in late 2022, with preparation and stakeholder engagement through the winter. If stakeholders agree, the plans will be implemented in the 2023 grazing season, with subsequent data review and reporting to the stakeholders after this. This will lead to revisions of the plans and presentation to stakeholders in the early spring of 2024.

15. Resources and Responsibilities

The team will include Bishkek-based faculty and students, many of whom have personal family links to this part of Kyrgyzstan. The team will include a Project Manager, Assistant, Administrative lead, and Community Outreach specialist, as well as individual faculty experts on grazing and ecology.

16. Grievance mechanism

AUCA will ensure that local stakeholders are aware of the work and understand how to voice complaints if any. We will:

- Have a communications and public relations specialist who is a point of contact for all issues.

During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, AUCA personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with AUCA, local authorities, or CEPF about any issue relating to the project. Before starting the project implementation, local communities will be informed of the objectives of the grant. They will be given telephone numbers and e-mails of contact persons at AUCA, the district government and pasture management committees, and CEPF. This information will also be put on all education materials that will be produced during this project implementation including posters, brochures, and booklets. Contact information of the Regional Implementation Team and CEPF will be made publicly available in Kyrgyz or Russian, as appropriate. If AUCA receives a grievance, it will communicate the grievance, together with a proposed response, to CEPF and the RIT within 15 days.

We will inform stakeholders that grievances should proceed in the order below. If the stakeholder is unsatisfied with the response at any step, they may proceed further.

- President at American University of Central Asia, president_office@auca.kg
- Regional Implementation Team via <https://www.mca.earth/en/contacts/>
- Conservation International Ethics Hotline: +1-866-294-8674 / secure web portal: <https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/10680/index.html>

17. Monitoring and Reporting

AUCA will report on this plan every six months, per the items above. This will include listing of activities and participants, grievances and their resolution, and changes to the project if these affect stakeholder engagement either positively or negatively.