

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

April 2021

CEPF Grant 111882

Saola Foundation for Annamite Mountains Conservation

*Rediscovering the Saola: Applying state-of-the-art methods to find a Critically
Endangered species in the Annamite Mountains of Lao PDR*

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Grant Summary

1. Saola Foundation for Annamite Mountains Conservation
2. Rediscovering the Saola: Applying state-of-the-art methods to find a Critically Endangered species in the Annamite Mountains of Lao PDR
3. Grant number 111882
4. Grant amount (US dollars): \$200,000
5. Proposed dates of grant: 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2024
6. Lao PDR
7. 10 April 2021
8. **Introduction:** Saola may be the most endangered mammal in the Indo-Burma region. In the twenty-nine years since the species' scientific discovery, improvements in *in situ* protection efforts in its range have not overcome parallel increases in exploitation pressure. Today there is yet no site in the Annamites where any subpopulation of Saola is secure from poaching, and the situation is now critical. Consequently, the IUCN Saola Working Group has embraced and endorsed the IUCN "One Plan Approach" as the only hope for saving Saola. For a highly endangered species, the One Plan Approach integrates long-term *in situ* protection of a species' habitat with an essential conservation breeding program aimed to stabilize and rebuild the remaining population while there is still time. The long-term goal of the Saola One Plan Approach is one or more viable populations of Saola living securely in the wild in the Annamite Mountains.

9. A first, essential step of the Saola One Plan Approach is to find remaining Saolas in the wild. The technical team of the Saola Foundation estimates that only about 10% of the effort needed to find the last Saolas has thus far been deployed. In the next few years, the Saola Foundation will work to fill this critical gap in effort, through a comprehensive, all-out search based in the best science and state-of-the-art methods. CEPF's support will be crucial to getting the program started. Without such a search, saving Saola through the One Plan Approach will not be possible, and the species will continue its present arc toward near-term extinction.

Even if our project's comprehensive search fails to find Saola, it will have significant conservation benefits for many other threatened species of the Annamites, and potentially beyond. What we learn in the course of this program, and its CEPF-supported components, will be applicable to finding – and thus protecting - other rare species.

Specifically, the CEPF-funded portion of our search program will cover these three components:

1. Development of tools to rapidly test samples in the field for Saola DNA.
2. Development of a highly trained, effective detection dog team in Lao PDR (to search for, e.g., Saola dung for rapid DNA testing).
3. Development with the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the intensive Saola search program.

10. **Summary of Previous Stakeholder Engagement Activities:**

The Saola Foundation for Annamite Mountains Conservation is a new organization, launched in September 2020. Travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic have hampered our ability to engage

with stakeholders since our public launch. Fortunately, this has been somewhat ameliorated by the presence in Lao PDR of our Lao Programs Director, Chanthasone Phommachanh. Following is a summary of our key stakeholder engagement activities to-date:

Government of Lao PDR

Mr. Sounthana, Head of Department of Forestry (DoF) Wildlife and Aquatic Resources Division:

Communications history: 01/15/2021, in-person meeting with Chanthasone at DoF office in Vientiane

Topics covered: Introducing the Saola Foundation, and Chanthasone's role.

Follow-up: Development of two Lao-language documents, introducing the Saola Foundation to other units of GoL.

Bolikhamsay Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office

Communications history: 04/08/2021, in-person meeting by Chanthasone at PAFO office in Pakxan.

Topics covered: Introducing the Saola Foundation, and Saola detection plans in Bolikhamsay.

Khammouane Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office:

Communications history: 04/012/2021, in-person meeting by Chanthasone at PAFO office in Thakhek.

Topics covered: Introducing the Saola Foundation, and Saola detection in Khoun Xe Nong Ma National Protected Area, and potential SF support to Khoun Xe Nong Ma National Protected Area.

IUCN Saola Working Group

James Burton, Chair of the SWG Governance Body

Communications history: Calls 10/24/2020, 01/22/2021, 03/16/2021 and 03/19/2021 with Saola Foundation CEO Lorraine Scotson.

Topics covered: Introducing the Saola Foundation; coordination of detection activities in Lao PDR; CEPF proposal coordination; SWG Lao National Coordinator introduction.

Follow-up: Mutual support letters for integrated LoIs to CEPF

Rick Barongi and/or David Field, SWG Governance Body members:

Communications history: Calls 01/29(?) /2020 and 12/11/20 with SF President Bill Robichaud, and 9/25/2020 with Bill Robichaud and Lorraine Scotson . Additional calls in February 2021 between Saola Foundation Board Chair Steve Burns and Rick Barongi

Topics covered: SWG-Saola Foundation fundraising coordination

IUCN Lao Programme

Natalia Pervushina and SWG Lao National Coordinator Soutchai Khamphouxay:

Communications history: 01/13/2021- mix of in-person meeting with Chanthasone Phommachanh at IUCN office in Vientiane and call with Lorraine Scotson and Bill Robichaud.

Topics covered: Introduction of Saola Foundation and new SWG Lao National Coordinator (Soutchai)

Followup: Call with James Burton and Soutchai 03/19/2021

Wildlife Conservation Society

Joe Walston, WCS New York

Communications history: Call 11/30/2020 with Bill Robichaud and Lorraine Scotson

Topics covered: Introductory call, and potential coordination with WCS Molecular Lab
Followup: Agreement to partner with WCS Molecular Lab in Saola search program

Colin Poole, WCS Asia

Communications history: Call 11/24/2020 with Lorraine Scotson, followed by call with Bill Robichaud

Topics covered: Introductory call, and confirmation of WCS's support for SF's strategic plan and WCS's willingness to cooperate.

Santi Saypanya and Manoly Sisavanh, WCS Lao Program

Communications history: September 2020 to March 2021, various in-person meetings in Vientiane and phone calls with Chanthasone Phommachanh, Lorraine Scotson, Bill Robichaud and Rob Timmins.

Topics covered: Collaboration between SF and WCS-Lao, and in particular WCS-Lao's involvement in the Saola search program.

Stakeholder meetings and follow up communications are currently recorded and monitored by the Saola Foundation CEO, pending an organizational content management system, which is in development. Ultimately, records of all meetings (agendas, minutes, actions and follow-up) will be recorded in a central database, accessible to the board and core staff.

11. Project Stakeholders:

Our Saola search program stakeholders fall into two main types: Government of Lao PDR, and local, national and international civil society.

Government of Lao PDR (GoL):

- Department of Forestry (DoF), and DoF's following divisions:
 - Division of Protected Area Management
 - Division of Protected Forests
 - Division of Wildlife and Aquatic Management
- Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Division of International Cooperation
- Ministry of Defense
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Provincial and relevant district Agriculture and Forestry Offices in the Saola's range in Lao PDR.

Civil society:

- Relevant local communities in the Saola's range in Lao PDR.
- IUCN Saola Working Group (SWG)
- IUCN Lao Programme, in particular the SWG National Coordinator hosted there;
- Free The Bears, Lao PDR
- Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Program
- Wildlife Conservation Society Molecular Laboratory Bronx Zoo
- Other national and international conservation NGOs working in the Saola's range in Lao PDR
- Donors to the Saola Foundation, and in particular our group of twelve founding donors.

12. Stakeholder Engagement Program:

Fundamental to Saola conservation is the reality that no single organization or sector of society can do this alone – not NGOs, government, donors, nor local civil society alone can save Saola. All of these stakeholders will be essential to success, and all need to work together, in positive collaboration. Consequently, stakeholder engagement is a fundamental, ever-present part of the Saola Foundation’s operational mode and our own ‘DNA’.

Primary goals of our Stakeholder Engagement Program are to inform key stakeholders and partners of the importance, priority and urgency of the Saola search program, and to encourage their support to and involvement in the effort. Engagement methods will vary, and are in part dictated, at least for the present, by ongoing Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions.

GoL agencies:

Most of our engagement with GoL stakeholders will proceed mainly through in-person meetings – both formal, structured meetings and informal, free-ranging discussions. This is the most effective in the Lao and GoL context, but they will be supplemented, where appropriate and/or required, by the submission of written letters or other documents. Although we are somewhat constrained at this writing by the inability of the Saola Foundation’s CEO, President or Technical Director to travel to Lao PDR due to Covid-19 restrictions, our strong National Programs Director, Chanthasone Phommachanh, who lives in Lao, will proceed in the meantime with engagement meetings with GoL.

Local communities in the Saola's range in Lao PDR:

Although the CEPF-funded components of the Saola search program will focus mainly on technical preparation and engagement with GoL, not on field implementation, these CEPF-funded components will lead directly to and sometimes overlap with the co-funded field phase, which will include engagement with local villagers in the program areas. The Saola Foundation’s National Programs Director, Chanthasone, already has strong, positive relationships with many of the villages in the area of the program, and our engagement will build upon that. Over the past 15 years, Chanthasone has built up a strong resumé of experience in positive engagement and collaboration with Lao villagers in remote areas of Lao PDR. This engagement will proceed through in-person meetings, either within the village, or in the course of participatory fieldwork.

IUCN Saola Working Group:

Since our inception, the Saola Foundation has established strong, positive engagement with the SWG. The results of this can be seen in the reciprocal letters of support each organization wrote for the other’s CEPF Letter of Interest in this current funding call. This positive engagement has been fostered and maintained by regular contact (through email and by phone and video conference calls) between the Foundation’s CEO (Dr. Lorraine Scotson) and the Chair of the SWG’s governance body (Dr. James Burton). This has been further supported by regular contact between other members of the Saola Foundation’s Board of Directors and counterparts on the SWG’s governance body. In addition, most of the Saola Foundation’s staff are members of the SWG.

Other conservation non-government organizations (NGOs) working in Lao PDR:

Engagement with other conservation partners working in the Saola’s range has thus far proceeded and will continue by in-person meetings when possible, and by email contact and video conferencing calls when the only or best option. The most important of these partners currently is the Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Program, with whom all staff of the Saola Foundation have a very good relationship, going back many years.

Donors

Donors are a key stakeholder group in the Saola search program. They will be essential to providing co-funding for program elements not covered by CEPF support, and they will wish to know how their funding has been used, and its impact. The Saola Foundation's donors are spread throughout much of the world, and are comprised mainly of individuals and institutions such as zoos. With Covid-19 travel restrictions, our main means of engaging with donors are one-on-one phone and video conference calls, public online events to which donors are invited, and the Saola Foundation's e-newsletter. Over the span of the CEPF-funded project components, we expect the ability to meet with key donors in-person to gradually increase and return to something approaching normal. The trend is good.

13. Consultation methods:

GoL agencies:

As noted above, our engagement with GoL will be mostly through in-person meetings, principally by our Lao Programs Director, Chanthasone Phommachanh and an experienced national consultant who will be engaged specifically for this purpose. This is the most culturally appropriate engagement method. These meetings will be supplemented by the submission, where appropriate and/or required, of written letters or other documents.

Local communities in the Saola's range in Lao PDR:

Little or no work in local communities is expected under the CEPF-funded components. Subsequent villager engagement during the field phase of the Saola search program will proceed, by necessity and local custom, through in-person meetings, either within the village, or in the field. In the village, meetings most often will be led by the village chief, with GoL central level, district and/or provincial Forestry staff in attendance. Fieldwork components will provide numerous opportunities for less formal consultation with local residents involved in the project.

IUCN Saola Working Group:

Our pattern of regular contact with the SWG will continue throughout the Saola search program, mainly through email and phone and video calls between the Foundation's CEO, Lorraine Scotson, and James Burton of the SWG governance body. In addition, Lorraine and the Saola Foundation's Technical Director Rob Timmins and Lao Programs Director Chanthasone Phommachanh are members of the SWG, providing further opportunities for engagement with the SWG, including its Vietnamese members.

A key phase of consultation with the SWG has already been completed, during our coordination in the preparation of our respective LoIs for this round of CEPF funding. This led to each organization writing letters of support for the other's proposed project.

Other conservation non-government organizations (NGOs) working in Lao PDR:

Consultations with other conservation partners working in the Saola's range will be by in-person meetings when possible, and by email contact and video conferencing calls when the only or best option.

The IUCN Saola Working Group has also an important role in bringing NGO partners together. The IUCN Lao Programme (host of the SWG's Lao national coordinator) currently plans to host in late April 2021 an in-person and Zoom consultation meeting for all Lao-based conservation partners working in the Saola's range. This will be a good opportunity for the Saola Foundation to consult collectively with these partners regarding our search program and the CEPF-funded components specifically.

Donors:

Our engagement with financial supporters of the Saola search program, our co-funders, is focused mainly on information-sharing, rather than consultation. That said, we are always available to promptly discuss directly with donors any concerns or questions they may have about the work they support. Most commonly we do this by informal, one-to-one phone or video calls.

14. **Other Engagement Activities:** This section will describe any other engagement activities that will be undertaken, including participatory processes, joint decision-making, and/or partnerships undertaken with local communities, NGOs, or other project stakeholders. Examples include benefit-sharing programs, community development initiatives, resettlement and development programs, and/or training and microfinance programs.

A key part of the Saola search program and its CEPF-funded components will be working in Lao PDR with GoL, Free the Bears, and other members of Lao civil society to form professional Saola detection teams – skilled in the use of detection dogs, in wildlife tracking, and in rapid field testing of DNA. The formation and training of these teams will provide excellent opportunities to deepen engagement with these stakeholders.

We currently plan to host a technical webinar, led by our technical staff, Rob Timmins and Chanthasone Phommachanh, to explain the why and wherefore of the Saola search program, and answer stakeholder questions. The main target audience will be donors and conservation NGO partners, but the webinar will be accessible to all stakeholders who speak English and have an internet connection. This is planned for mid-2021, possibly before initiation of the CEPF-funded components, but we consider it an important part of the Saola search program, and it will help set the stage for strong, positive stakeholder engagement during the CEPF-funded phase.

15. **Timetable:**

One of the most important stakeholders for the CEPF-funded components of the Saola search program is the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) – particularly of course for the component of development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to implement the search program. This will require engagement with the central level of GoL – such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and Department of Forestry (DoF) – and local level, such as Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices (PAFO) and District Agriculture and Forestry Offices (DAFO).

Given the crucial importance of this engagement, we describe it in detail in the following table, by the corresponding activity number from our proposal.

GoL engagement:

Activity #	Activity description	Stakeholders involved	Date range	
3.1.2	Saola Foundation CEO and President meet with senior officials of MAF to introduce MoU concept.	MAF/DoF	9/1/2021	12/31/2021
3.1.3	At direction of MAF, work with DoF to draft the MoU.	DoF	9/30/2021	3/31/2022
3.1.4	With DoF assistance consult with provincial levels of government about MoU	PAFOs (relatively informally at this stage)	10/15/2021	3/31/2022
3.1.5	Formally submit MoU to MAF and Ministry of Foreign Affairs	MAF, MoFA	11/30/2021	3/31/2022
3.2.1	Work with DoF on revising the draft MoU as necessary and facilitate appropriate review of the MoU by concerned parties within GoL.	DoF and its relevant divisions.	11/30/2021	8/1/2022
3.2.2	Host and facilitate workshop with relevant ministries to introduce and discuss MoU with central level and provincial stakeholders	MAF DoF PAFOs DAFOs Provincial governors District governors MoFA Ministry of Defense	2/1/2022	6/1/2022
3.2.3	Conduct follow-up meetings with provincial stakeholders to clarify stakeholder understanding and any concerns and facilitate formal provincial level support letters for the MoU.	PAFOs Provincial governors Provincial MoFA Provincial military	3/1/2022	6/1/2022
3.3.1	Host formal signing ceremony if successful.	MAF, DoF	5/1/2022	8/31/2022
3.3.2	Develop and draft first year workplan with DoF and provincial officials	MoU Implementation Management Committee	2/28/2022	10/31/2022

Timetable for engagement with other stakeholders, beyond GoL, is summarized in the following table:

Stakeholder	Engagement activity	Dates
Relevant local communities in Lao Saola range	Outreach meeting to introduce the search for Saola	TBD Start dates in 2021/2022
IUCN Saola Working Group	Coordination calls between the SF CEO and Chair of the SWG governance body; Virtual and in-person SWG Partners Meeting to discuss coordination	Ongoing - Periodically throughout project duration April 2021
IUCN Lao Programme	Regular in-person and video meetings Virtual and in-person SWG Partners Meeting to discuss coordination	Ongoing - Periodically throughout project duration April 2021
Free the Bears	Formal partnership agreement Email and periodic video meetings Daily in-person interaction and coordination	Possibly by Sep 2021 Ongoing - Periodically throughout project duration Possibly by September 2021
Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Program	Formal partnership agreement Coordination of activities via regular email, in-person and video meetings	June 2021 Ongoing - Periodically throughout project duration
Wildlife Conservation Society Molecular Laboratory	Subgrant agreement Coordination of activities via regular email and video meetings Training workshop held at the lab.	July 2021 Ongoing - Periodically throughout project duration Early 2022
Other Lao-based conservation NGOs	Updates on program activities and outcomes via regular in-person and video meetings Virtual and in-person SWG Partners Meeting to discuss coordination	Periodically throughout project duration April 2021
Saola Foundation donors	Phone calls, emails and/or personal visits by the SF President and SF CEO SF e-newsletter SF Annual Report	Periodically throughout project duration At least 4 times/year February 2022, 2023 and 2024

16. **Resources and Responsibilities:** This section will indicate what staff and resources will be devoted to managing and implementing the Stakeholder Engagement Plan. Who within the project team will be responsible for carrying out these activities? What budget has been allocated toward these activities?

Below is a list of the persons primarily responsible for engagement with each of the search program stakeholders. Some costs for specific meetings within the CEPF-funded components are included in our program budget. Other costs will be covered by Saola Foundation core funding.

CEO: Lorraine Scotson (LS)
 President: William Robichaud (WR)
 Technical Director: Rob Timmins (RT)
 Lao Programs Director: Chanthasone Phommachanh (CP)
 Board of Directors Chair: Steve Burns (SB)

Stakeholder	Primary responsibility
Department of Forestry (DoF)	LS, WR, CP
DoF Division of Protected Area Management	CP
DoF Division of Protected Forests	CP
DoF Division of Wildlife and Aquatic Management	CP
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Division of International Cooperation	LS, WR
Ministry of Defense	LS, CP
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	LS, WR, CP
Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Offices (PAFO) in Saola range	CP
Relevant local communities in Saola range	CP
IUCN Saola Working Group	LS
IUCN Lao Programme	LS, CP
Free the Bears	LS, RT
Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Program	LS, WR, RT, CP
Wildlife Conservation Molecular Laboratory	RT
Other Lao-based conservation NGOs	LS, WR, RT, CP
Saola Foundation donors	WR, LS, SB

17. **Grievance mechanism:** All projects that trigger a safeguard must provide local communities and other relevant stakeholders with a means to raise a grievance with the grantee, the relevant Regional Implementation Team or the CEPF Secretariat.

This grievance mechanism must include, at a minimum, the following elements.

The CEPF-funded components of the Saola search program will not involve significant work with indigenous peoples, and so do not trigger a safeguard.

Any grievances raised about the Saola Foundation during the CEPF-funded phase of the program will be communicated to the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days, together with a proposed response. If the claimant is still not satisfied following the response, the grievance may be submitted directly to the CEPF Executive Director via the dedicated email account (cepfexecutive@conservation.org) or by mail.

The contact numbers and emails of the RIT and CEPF Director will be made available to the public and all stakeholders on the Saola Foundation’s website.

18. Monitoring and Reporting: This section will describe any plans to involve project stakeholders (including affected communities) or third-party monitors in the monitoring of project impacts and mitigation programs. Describe how and when the results of stakeholder engagement activities will be reported back to affected stakeholders as well as broader stakeholder groups.

No mitigation programs are planned or required.

The results of the stakeholder engagement activities in Section 15 will be reported back to all stakeholders at least every 6 months of the project implementation. Information will be shared through the Saola Foundation's website, and in the course of in-person meetings.