

**Combined Safeguard Plan**

Stakeholder Engagement Plan  
Environmental Impact Assessment – Environmental Management Plan

**CEPF Grant 112650**

**Union of Photojournalists**

**Promotion of Ecotourism to Key Biodiversity Areas in Kyrgyzstan**

## **Grant Summary**

- 1. Grantee organization:** Union of Photojournalists
- 2. Grant title:** Promotion of Ecotourism to Key Biodiversity Areas in Kyrgyzstan
- 3. Grant number:** 112650
- 4. Grant amount (US dollars):** approximately US \$133,000
- 5. Proposed dates of grant:** 1 May 2022 – 30 April 2024
- 6. Countries or territories where project will take place:** Kyrgyzstan
- 7. Date of preparation of this document:** 22 April 2022

## **8. Project Background**

As discussed in the History and Mission Statement and in Organizational Strengths, Soyuz Fotozhurnalistov, or the Union of Photojournalists, finds itself in an unusual and opportune moment. From the start, we are experts in photography and information dissemination, which since 2012, led to expertise in the documentation of the ecology of Kyrgyzstan, which in turn, has led to promotion of ecotourism and conservation in the country. Further, because of the nature of photojournalism and engagement with people, we have developed relationships with communities and NGO partners where we advocate for their greater role in control of their own natural resources. This includes longstanding partnerships with stakeholders the village of Terek-Sai, including the NGO Jamaat Kubanych, and the village of Tegirmen-Sai, including the NGO Jamaat Alan-Too. This proposal is based on the Union of Photojournalists' goal of conserving the key biodiversity areas of Kyrgyzstan and, in particular, CEPF priority KBA 4 – Kassan-Sai (home to Terek-Sai) and priority KBA 5 – Aflatun-Padyshata (home to Tegirmen Sai). Our project has a focus at both a national level and a local level.

### **National Issue**

Kyrgyzstan's unique landscapes, nomadic heritage, and fascinating Silk Road history attract outdoor adventurers and culture enthusiasts alike. The covid-19 pandemic aside, tourism is an important part of the country's economy and development plans. The 2018-2040 National Development Strategy says, "long-term tourism planning is carried out taking into account the recreational capacity and throughput of the ecological potential of the territories." Further, 2022 is the year of mountain ecosystems, which are home to the country's KBAs, natural heritage, and tourism draws.

Kyrgyzstan has 32 KBAs, each with some level of "asset" in the form of communities, NGOs, government agencies, businesses, or individuals that understand the value of biodiversity and are ready to work for conservation on a local scale. These people need tools and their own assets to promote the place they live and their own work. The Union of Photojournalists includes media savvy communicators and travelers who know what sells, literally in terms of promoting sustainable tourism, and also in terms of changing people's attitudes about nature. In support of this, our organization:

- Created the first photo-information news agency in Central Asia ([www.photo.kg](http://www.photo.kg))
- Launched the Central Asian information photo portal ([www.photoasia.ru](http://www.photoasia.ru)).
- Implemented the project that created the Kyrgyz National Photo Archive ([www.foto.kg](http://www.foto.kg))
- Hosts an information and analysis website ([www.day.kg](http://www.day.kg))

One challenge is that there is little popular knowledge of the KBAs. Scientists know about them and CEPF knows about them, and they sometimes overlap with state nature reserves, and people about those parks. But politicians and citizens have little comprehension of these places. One thing we can do is to take pictures of the KBAs, then map them, then promote them as ecotourist destinations – thus emphasizing to decision-makers and citizens that there is actual monetary value in knowing about nature and conserving it.

Our NGO has the capacity to create an online resource, MAP.KG, for raising public awareness about the country's KBAs. This online resource can show, on a map, the location of the KBAs, photographs of the place and its species, and stories of local champions and communities. It can also point interested parties to research, to tourism opportunities, and tour companies, just like a chamber of commerce website might do. The Union of Photojournalists can also serve as a curator of the site. Every year, a huge number of materials are published about the country's natural attractions, and unfortunately, the majority are illustrated with poor quality photographs, are used in violation of copyright, or have no relation with the indicated places. Further, while there are professional and scientific photographers who specialize in nature and species photography, their work is fragmented and protected by copyright, making it difficult for communities to access or use for their own promotion.

### **Local Issues**

CEPF KBA KGZ 4, Kassan-Sai, is in the Chatkal region, with various reserves within it, including Besh-Aral State Reserve and Ugam-Chatkal National Park. In the village of Terek-Sai, a local NGO called Jamaat Kubanych monitors the activities of gold mining companies in the region and is trying to protect endemic fruit trees (sievers apple, Nedzvetsky apple, Korchzhinsky pear tree) and the common vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). Among Jamaat Kubanych's achievements, they restored three hectares of land on the Kasan-Sai River that had been degraded by the Eventus gold mining company. They are now helping the community plant prune trees of the local Kainali variety next to endemic apple and pear trees. Possibilities exist to promote tourism to visit the state nature reserves, but also the five kilometer long Saray-Sai gorge, only 2 kilometers from Terek-Sai village. This was the location of mining of precious metals dating to the 6th century, is home to ancient buildings and relics, and has been proposed for UNESCO World Heritage designation.

CEPF KBA KGZ 5, Aflatun-Padyshata, is in the Aksy region. In the village of Tegirmen-Sai, the NGO Jamaat Alan-Too has been working since 2015 to protect the Avletim tract of land located between the Sary-Chelek and Padysha-Ata state reserves. The region suffers from the illegal logging of the endemic Semyonov fir and illegal hunting of the Siberian ibex. Jamaat Alan-Too has helped reintroduce deer to the region as part of a 2018 project funded by the Christensen Foundation, Leonardo DiCaprio and the Silicon Valley Community Council and has conducted horseback tourism in the region since 2016. Challenges the NGO faces in promoting tourism are the poor quality of guest infrastructure (e.g., showers, toilets) and guides' knowledge of natural history.

The opportunity exists for the Union of Photojournalists to work at two levels. We can develop national level knowledge and photos, in particular, of the KBAs, while promoting sustainable tourism and NGO engagement in two specific KBAs.

The project involves four components.

- Component 1: KBA tourism assets review
- Component 2: KBA photo database and Map.KG
- Component 3: Public awareness
- Component 4: Ecotourism business development support in Tegirmen-Sai and Terek-Sai

The first two components of this project are about collecting photos and information on KBAs and placing these in the public domain and are thus “stakeholder neutral.” Component 3 is about raising public awareness on KBAs, so is by definition, about stakeholder engagement and should not raise any issues. Component 4 is different. The project will work in two *jamaat* to promote tourism, with associated engagement of community members that requires a proper stakeholder engagement plan. Further, the work will support basic infrastructure improvement and agroforestry, thus requiring a basic environmental assessment. The work could include repair of visitor infrastructure, installation of bio-safe toilets, development of walking trails, and development and improvement of sustainable agriculture and agroforestry plots.

## 9. (EIA-EMP) Status of the area affected

The work will take place in the villages of Terek Sai (KBA 4, Kassan-Sai) and Tegirmen-Sai (KBA 5, Aflatun-Padyshata), on private land or on public land, in areas designated for housing and agriculture. The work is inside a key biodiversity area, but not in a protected area or on land that is pristine or the particular home of threatened or endemic species.

## 10. 2. (EIA-EMP) Anticipated impact

There is nominal environmental impact anticipated from immediate project activities:

- Repairing guest houses or shaded seated areas will have no anticipated negative environmental impact.
- Installing bio-safe toilets will be an improvement over the existing alternative, which is toilets with no proper sewer connection or septic system.
- Placement of walking trails through the village and along the river will be on existing tracks and will be an improvement for the environment, as these direct people away from fragile tracts.
- Agroforestry and sustainable agriculture plots will be placed in existing tillage areas – no removal of endemic vegetation will occur.

Beyond the above, in theory, if the project is successful, there will be more visitors to the sites. These visitors could generate solid waste that is not properly disposed of and could disturb wildlife. It is difficult to determine how many visitors there will be, but the project expects as many as 180 bed-nights per year between the two sites by 2025, with the hope that this number increases thereafter. Certainly, solid waste generation is an issue. It is less likely that visitors will have a noticeable affect on wildlife. These are already populated areas which wildlife tends to avoid. If people travel from the villages to the protected areas, their activities and access will already be controlled by the protected area authorities.

## 11. (EIA-EMP) Mitigation measures

Mitigation measures will follow standard best practice.

- Guest facility improvement or basic construction to minimize waste creation and ensure proper disposal of associated waste.
- Installation of toilets connected to septic systems and/or installation of toilets that ensure proper treatment of human waste.
- Design and placement of walking trails to ensure no disturbance to existing natural vegetation.
- Agriculture plots that meet sustainability guidelines for minimal to no use of pesticides, herbicides, or chemical fertilizers.

Assuming 180 bed-nights per year by 2025 and with some increase thereafter, we expect visitors to generate trash. The mitigation will be that we provide training to community members in proper management of this trash, including ensuring guest houses and rest areas have animal-secure receptacles and ensuring that the communities have a plan to collect and properly dispose of this waste.

Increased visitors could, in theory, disturb wildlife. However, the targeted natural areas, while they are key biodiversity areas, are still utilized by people for homes, farms, and pasture. There are already people present and wildlife tends to avoid these areas. The addition of a small number of visitors is not expected to increase disturbance. Nonetheless, we will train the guides and tourism hosts in “leave no trace” visiting protocols for their guests.

## **12. (EIA-EMP) Monitoring and evaluation**

Jamaat Kubanych in Terek-Sai and Jamaat Alan-Too in Tegirmen-Sai will be responsible for on-site implementation and monitoring. The Union of Photojournalists hired consultant and experts on ecotourism and biodiversity conservation will supervise these groups and ensure they are following best practice.

## **13. (EIA-EMP) Permissions**

State permission is not required for any of the proposed activities. All work will occur in land that is otherwise designated for such use. Permits, as required, for building or trail construction, will be requested from appropriate village and district authorities.

## **14. Summary of Previous Stakeholder Engagement Activities**

The community-based NGOs Jamaat Kubanych, speaking on behalf of Terek Sai, and Jamaat Alan-Too, speaking on behalf of Tegirmen-Sai, have consulted with the Union of Photojournalists on this proposal and formally invited us to engage in this work. The Department of Tourism within the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth Policy has also provided a formal endorsement of this work.

More broadly, documentation of KBAs involves coordination with numerous local stakeholders. Ak-Sai Travel Ltd., Gde.kg, Travel Experts LLS, and Talas Association of Hunters and Fishermen have all promised to provide support for the desk study and photo collection, as this will benefit them. The Aarhus Center in Osh has promised to help disseminate information the project in the southern part of the country. The Akmena Public Association, which has interests promoting biodiversity conservation and economic development in Chui and Naryn regions, is also a stakeholder, so we have coordinated with them as well as with Naryn State University, which will support work in Naryn region. Leader NGO

of Issy-Kul will coordinate photo and asset assessment in Issyk-Kul, Alysh Dan will coordinate Batken, and Orchun will coordinate in Osh.

## **15. Project Stakeholders**

Apart from the nationwide set of stakeholders who will, hopefully, use the website and database that we create, there are two sets of local stakeholders. We will work in two villages. Tegirmen-Sai has 2,005 people who are 100 percent Kyrgyz ethnicity. Terek-Sai has 1,894 people who are 99.5 percent Kyrgyz ethnicity.

## **16. Stakeholder Engagement Program**

The two communities will be closely involved in determining locations for interventions and the specifics of interventions. There will be no “taking” of land or access to resources of any kind. The two community-based NGOs, working with village committees will ensure that agreements are in place for all interventions.

The project will include capacity building and training in the villages in relation to nature guiding, natural history, and hosting of visitors.

## **17. Consultation methods**

The Union of Photojournalists will ensure proper dissemination of plans via town hall meetings and informal discussions with community members. Once the project is going, we will then hold periodic meetings with community members to ensure their continued support and engagement.

## **18. Other Engagement Activities**

The Union of Photojournalists will facilitate connections between the target villages and Bishkek-based tour operators and the Department of Tourism. We will also facilitate Bishkek-based events celebrating the country’s KBAs and will facilitate the participation of the representatives from Tegirmen-Sai and Terek-Sai at those events.

## **19. Timetable**

The project will proceed over 24 months.

- Months 8-12 will focus on preparatory work in the villages.
- Months 13-18 will include actual installation of improvements and the agroforestry plot.
- Months 19-21 will focus on capacity building in the villages.

## **20. Resources and Responsibilities**

The team will include a project manager, photographer, and consultant experts on ecotourism, ecology, and agriculture.

## **21. Grievance mechanism**

The Union of Photojournalists will work to ensure that local stakeholders are aware of the work and understand how to voice complaints, if any. We will post contact information at our headquarters in Bishkek and in the two villages in appropriate “town halls” or public spaces. This will include names, telephone numbers, and emails of all relevant project staff. We will also put this information on all education materials that will be produced during this project implementation including posters, brochures, and booklets.

We will hold public meetings explaining our activities, again providing materials with all contact information for the team. During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, our personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with FSBK, nature reserve personnel, or CEPF about any issue relating to the project.

We will share all grievances – and a proposed response – with the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days. We will inform stakeholders that grievances should proceed in the following order below. If the stakeholder is unsatisfied with the response at any step, they may proceed further.

- Executive Director, Soyuz Fotozhurnalistov, [photo.kg@mail.ru](mailto:photo.kg@mail.ru); +996-705-900-140
- 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>

## **22. Monitoring and Reporting**

The Union of Photojournalists will report on this plan every six months.