

**Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions
Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan**

CEPF Grant 112588

Youth Group on Protection of Environment

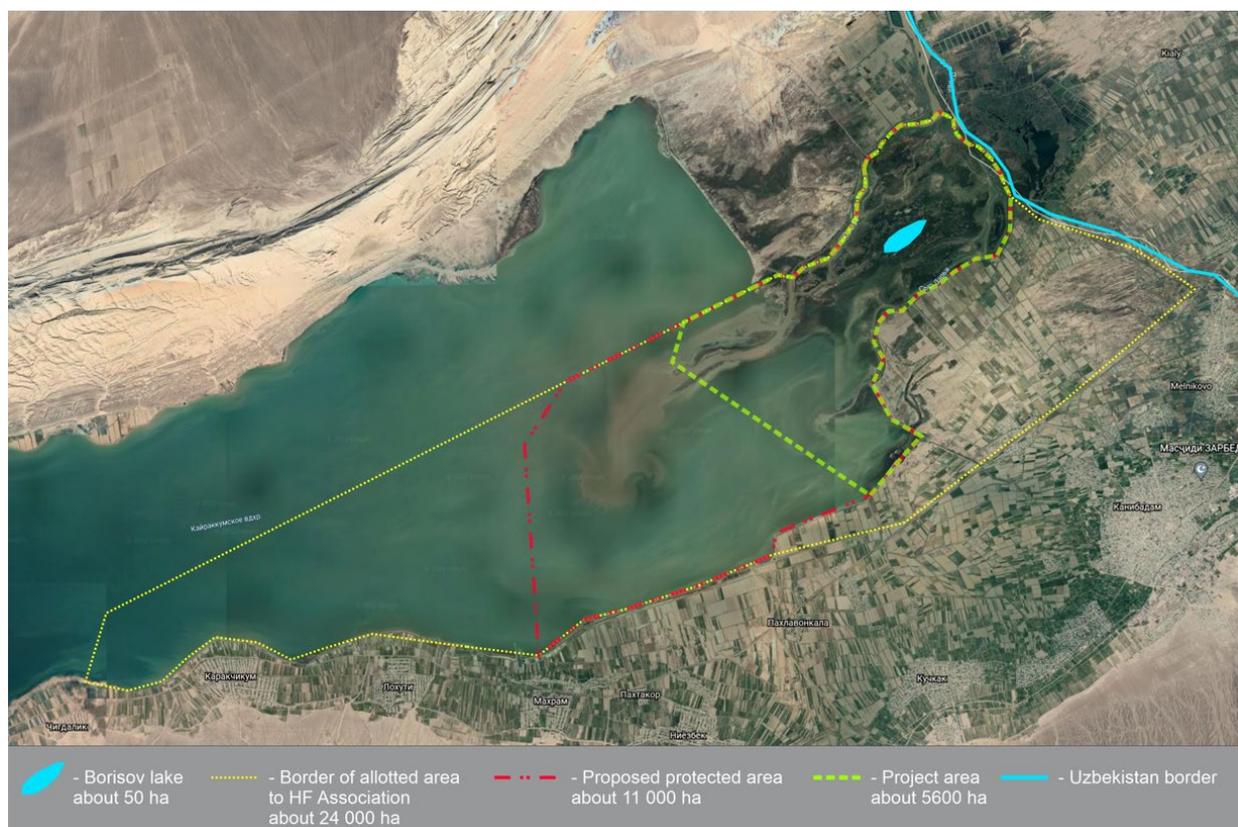
Protecting Tugay Forests and Threatened Species of the Kayrakkum Wetlands

Tajikistan

1. **Grantee organization:** Youth Group on Protection of Environment (YGPE)
2. **Grant title:** Protecting Tugay Forests and Threatened Species of the Kayrakkum Wetlands of Tajikistan
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8. Project background

Geography and Ecology. The Kayrakkum key biodiversity area (KBA), designated as KBA TJK 3 in the CEPF ecosystem profile, is a wetland, estuary, and reservoir fed by the Syr Darya river, which flows east to west, from Uzbekistan into Tajikistan. The area is a KBA for its presence of threatened species, co-occurring species, assemblages of species, and ecosystem type. The wetland/floodplain represents what is known as tugay forest. The eastern section of the wetland lies within Uzbekistan, but the western portion and the reservoir – that is, the area designated as TJK 3 – is wholly within Tajikistan. Within the larger KBA, which covers the entire wetland and reservoir of 100,000 hectares, the proper area of focus is the wetland and nearshore lake area on the eastern (upriver) side of the lake. This area has a combined 11,000 hectares, per the figure below.



TJK 3 is not a priority KBA per the ecosystem profile. However, the area is home to two priority species, the VU Yellow-eyed Dove (*Columba eversmanni*) and the VU Pike Asp (*Aspiolucius esocinus*). This project

will focus on the protection of the wetland and estuary – the habitat – of these two priority species. TJK 3 is within the Western Tien Shan corridor, priority corridor 9 for CEPF.

In protecting the habitat of these species, the project will also protect the following bird species: the NT Syrdarya pheasant, (*Phasianus colchicus*), MacQueen’s Bustard (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*), meadow pratincole, stone curlew. The project will also protect the following fish species: the CR Aral Thorn sturgeon (*Acipenser nudiventris Lovetzky*), various carp species (Aral barbel, Turkestan barbel), Eastern bream (*Abramis brama orientalis*), and one of the oldest Central Asian fish species, the EN *Capoetobrama kuschakewitschi*.

The wetland/floodplain is an important feeding and resting area for migratory birds. As the area becomes degraded, this habitat shrinks.

Within the wetland is the 50 hectare Borisov lake (figure above), the spawning site for most fish species in the lake. In the summer, the connection between Borisov lake and the main Kayrakkum lake is severed because of regulated flow of the river and increased consumption of water for agriculture. There are channels that connect Borisov to the river and main lake, but these are choked with weeds and silt. In particular, there are two channels of 1.5 kilometers (connecting Borisov to the river) and 2.5 kilometers (connecting Borisov to Kayrakkum) that need care (see figure below).



There is a lack of knowledge on these species and the ecosystem, and effects of the threats they face, which forms the basis of the first component of our project. Restoration of the bird habitat and of the channels for fish spawning form the basis of the third component of our project.

Public Administration. The KBA lies within the Sughd Region, within the Kanibadam District, within the Patar jamoat (municipality). The capital city of the region is Khujand, on the western side of Kayrakkum lake, approximately 90 kilometers from the wetland (project area) on the eastern side of the lake. (YGPE is based in Khujand.) Approximately 19,000 people live in the Patar municipal area. The principal city within Patar and Kanibadam is Konibodom.

Three government bodies have formal control over the area, whether the land, the water, or the use of resources:

- The Tajikistan (national) Committee for Environmental Protection (based in Dushanbe, but with representatives in Khujand). Responsible for laws, pollution, water use, and overall land designation.
- The Tajikistan (national) Ministry of Forestry (based in Dushanbe, but with representatives in Khujand). Responsible for forest cover in the wetland/floodplain.
- The District Government of Kanibadam (based in the city of Konibodom, very near to the project area). Responsible for enforcement of national agency laws and rules.

The District Government of Kanibadam has transferred day-to-day responsibility for control of use of the area by hunters, fishers, and others to the Hunters and Fishers Association. The Hunters and Fishers Association has authority to control access and maintain and restore the ecology of the area, but the Association lacks the equipment and trained personnel to do so.

The 11,000 hectares of wetland/floodplain and nearshore area, the area critical for the conservation of priority species, has no formal protection, although it is included in the 2001 Ramsar Convention list. Technically, all three government bodies have a role in creating a formal protected area, but ultimate authority lies with the Committee for Environmental Protection. While the area is not formally protected, it is government land and the three agencies have set limits, or the ability to set limits, on activities in wetland. There are current rules limiting access to the area shown as Project Area in Map 1 – people are not allowed to graze animals, fish, collect wood, or clear land inside those boundaries, although compliance is not total.

The lack of formal protection of the area forms the basis of the second component of our project.

Additionally, part of the floodplain lies within Uzbekistan, and the river flows from Uzbekistan, adding an additional layer of administrative complexity to the eventual better management of the ecosystem.

Threats. Over the past 15-20 years, with hard economic conditions and changing rainfall and river flow due to climate change, the ecosystem has suffered greatly. In the general area surrounding the lake, there has been uncontrolled agricultural expansion (with associated chemical and soil runoff), cutting and burning of forests, and in the lake and river, use of nets and non-sustainable fishing methods. The area has no formal protection and surrounding communities have little awareness of the wetland and estuary as key biodiversity area. The people of Patar use the lake area for wood, fish, farming, and to pasture animals.

The lack of awareness of the value of the ecosystem, and low capacity by the managers, is the basis of the fourth component of our project.

Prior Work through Small Grant 110847. YGPE received a small grant from WWF-Russia, under CEPF, from October 2020 to December 2021. The work that we are proposing now is an extension and expansion of the work we did in the small grant. For simplicity, we refer to the earlier small grant as Phase 1 and this new, larger grant as Phase 2. The goals of Phase 1 were:

1. Restoration of the tugay forest.
2. Removing silt from the floodplain channels to help fish.
3. Basic capacity building for the Hunters and Fishers Association.
4. Basic awareness raising of the local population.

At a small scale, Phase 1 was successful, but through that experience, we have learned how to be more efficient and to achieve sustainable results. For example, survival of planted trees was lower than desired because of damage from livestock and limited water. Therefore, we have built a plant nursery in an area of 1.2 hectares. The nursery provides protection for the seedlings from the livestock, and ensure better care and watering. The trees and seedling will be grown and adapted here, and further replanted in the deforested areas. The building of the nursery was agreed and approved by Environment Protection Department and State Forestry Department. We cleaned one small river channel, connecting the spawning spot – Borisov lake with the river stream but with only limited manpower and tools. (In Phase 2, we will have funds to pay for heavier equipment to remove silt from 2 other important channels).

Through Phase 1 and through prior work in the region, we have established relationships with the Hunters and Fishers Association, local communities, and government bodies, thus know their capacity needs. (Letters of support from the stakeholders are attached in the application form).

During Phase 1, we have done desk research on the ecology of the lake and wetland/floodplain. We have found that information is scarce. The most recent research was done in 2012. Knowledge on fish and bird species and ecology is lacking, and knowledge on the biodiversity value of the KBA to local communities is lacking.

Also during Phase 1, we facilitated a connection between the Hunters and Fishers Association and representative of the Ministry of Forestry of Uzbekistan. Indications are that the Uzbeks are supportive of tugay forest restoration on their side of the border.

To respond to these issues, the YGPE project will have four components.

1. Data collection and baseline establishment
2. Protected area creation
3. Wetland and floodplain restoration
4. Community engagement and information campaign

Implementation of this work has two sets of possible negative outcomes that this safeguard plan is designed to mitigate against.

- 1. Negative environmental consequences from channel clearing and tree planting**
 - Heavy equipment used to remove silt from channels could damage floodplain.
 - Disposal of silt could be done improperly

- Planting of trees could introduce disease or pests into the area.

2. Negative social consequences from improved site monitoring and establishment of protected area

- People who access resources in the floodplain and lake – from hunting in the floodplain, from fishing in the estuary, to collect firewood – may be restricted to do so. Technically, such activities are already forbidden, but this project could lead to more consistent enforcement.

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

As shown in the first figure above, the Project Area covers the floodplain and the area where the river enters the lake. This area is biologically intact, with various endemic species. It falls under the formal control of the three agencies named above, but is under the day-to-day control of the Hunters and Fishers Association. It is protected by rules and regulations of the agencies, but does not have a formal or permanent protected status.

10. (EIA-EMP) Approach

We will remove weeds and silt from the two channels identified in the second figure. These channels are combined 4 kilometers in length. We will do this in late summer, when water is at its lowest point. This will require the use of a tractor or digging machine. We will secure permission from the relevant office of the Committee on Environmental Protection to ensure that the work has no negative environmental impact. (Technically, we are restoring natural function, but need to ensure no damage occurs in the process, such as from improper digging, improper disposal of removed silt, or operation of the machinery.)

In July-August 2022, YGPE will announce a tender and get quotations from at least three different specialized companies. The contractor will be selected based on the best price and technical proposal. The working process will be monitored and supervised by representatives of Kanibadam Government, Hunters and Fishers Association, the Committee on Environment Protection, and YGPE. All four of these groups will approve the contractor's workplans and provide formal acceptance of the work.

We will also grow indigenous trees in a nursery on site and replant these in the floodplain. The Ministry of Forestry has approved the selection of tree species, the areas to replant, and the methods to replant to ensure compliance with their best practice.

11. (EIA-EMP) Anticipated impact

This work is restorative. The channel clearing will allow natural water flow. We will remove silt and weeds that resulted from upstream farms. For the tree planting, only native species appropriate for tugay forest will be planted.

There is no foreseen negative impact from either activity. The worst foreseen outcome is that heavy equipment damages the area we are trying to restore, or improperly disposes of waste. The worst foreseen impact from tree planting is that the trees die. As we will be using local species, there is no anticipated risk of introduction of invasive species.

The anticipated positive impact is eventual increased fish population from the water flow and restoration of up to 300 hectares of tugay forest.

12. (EIA-EMP) Mitigation measures

The Kanibadam Government, Hunters and Fishers Association, the Committee on Environment Protection, and YGPE will all assist in the design of the scope of work for the digging contractor, in the evaluation of the offers, and the approval of work, thus ensuring that there are no inadvertent outcomes.

The Ministry of Forestry will approve the selection of proper tree species and planting methods and locations.

13. (EIA-EMP) Actions to ensure health and safety

- Workers will have access to first aid and proper protective equipment.
- The Hunters and Fishers Association will use a small boat to monitor lake health. The boat will have personal flotation equipment.
- The team will maintain mobile phones in case of emergencies.

14. (EIA-EMP) Monitoring and evaluation

Ikromjon Mamadov will be responsible for ensuring that channel digging and tree planting is conducted in adherence to this plan.

15. (EIA-EMP) Permissions

The Kanibadam Government, Committee on Environment Protection, and Ministry of Forestry will provide all permissions.

16. (Process Framework) Participatory implementation

YGPE proposed work in this region is based on its ongoing relationships with regional government agencies, local governments, and communities. We are based in the region, with ongoing work since October 2020.

The Government of Kanibadam provided formal endorsement of this project. (Letter from Government of Kanibadam from January 14, 2022. Signed by Mr. Naimjon Kodiri, Vice-chairman of Kanibadam).

The Hunters and Fishers Association, as representatives of nearby communities, provided formal endorsement of this project. (Letter from Hunters and Fishers Association of Sughd region from January 13, 2022. Signed by Mr. Sh.D.Mamadjonov, The Chairman of Hunters and Fishers Association of Sughd region).

As the work proceeds, we will engage the people in the Patar jamoat (primarily Kanibadam), as well as residents from Khujand, for consultations on management of the floodplain. We will explain that we intend to make recommendations that could lead to new regulations or new impositions of existing regulations. YGPE will conduct consultations with requisite stakeholders to ensure their understanding and agreement.

Specifically, this will include detailed consultations with local stakeholders to understand:

- Current land use requirements (e.g., for grazing, hunting, fishing).
- Possibilities for alternative zones of land use, if restrictions were put in place.
- The varying needs of different “classes” of users, such as men, women, old versus young, hunters, livestock owners, livestock herders, nearby residents, further distanced users and owners, etc.
- Economic, social, legal, or other constraints pushing people toward [or away from] a particular land area or land use.

As any plan develops, these “classes” of stakeholders will be engaged:

- At the input stage prior to drafting of plans.
- At the review stage to comments on drafts.
- As allowed by local administrative procedures, to “endorse” final drafts before they are formally approved by the government.

There will also be outreach activities to schools and a local awareness campaign to improve people’s understanding of the importance of the reserve to local human well-being.

17. (Process Framework) Criteria for eligibility of affected persons

Eligible “affected” persons include the people in the Patar jamoat who use the floodplain to graze cattle, collect wood, fish, and hunt. These activities are technically not allowed without permission. The total number of people estimated to do such activities is estimated to be less than 350. In general, all such people live within 20 kilometers of the floodplain.

18. (Process Framework) Measures to assist the affected persons

Anticipated “effects” are largely about limiting people the ability to do things they are already not supposed to be doing: no further uncontrolled grazing of livestock in floodplain boundaries, no illegal hunting within floodplain boundaries, no fishing in the estuary without permits or outside of designated seasons, no cutting healthy trees for firewood. Local households will still get certain amount of firewood from sanitary cutting.

Measures to assist these people will be via two mechanisms.

The first is in the form of ensuring consultation and input into any reserve management plan. In this sense, anyone engaged in this work will do so voluntarily from the start, advising on the formal design of a protected area. By example, community members will advise on:

- Reserve boundaries.
- When and where fishing is allowed, and with what gear.
- Where grazing is allowed outside of reserve boundaries.

We do not anticipate that a protected area will be formally declared during the life of the project, but people will have input into its design. Ultimately, declaration of a protected area will be a government process that, by law, requires following consultative processes.

During the project, we do anticipate more regular enforcement of existing rules on access to the area. The Hunters and Fishers Association will have “watchmen” and, in the bird feeding area, surveillance video cameras. There will be signs posted that say the area is under patrol. Thus, the second mitigation measure will be to engage community members in tree-planting, clearing of the river channel, and the research studies into fish and bird species. We hope that this engagement of carefully identified people makes them allies of the floodplain.

19. (Process Framework) Conflict resolution and complaint mechanism

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

- Post information in Tajik and Russian in district offices in Kanibadam, ministry offices in Khujand, at our own offices in Khujand, and at the various entries to the floodplain.
- Explain our activities at all stakeholder meetings.
- Create fliers about the project’s objectives and planned activities. These fliers will include contact information for YGPE staff. We will distribute these fliers at all stakeholder meetings.

During all meetings and in general interactions with the public, YGPE personnel will inform local people and other stakeholders that they have the right to raise a grievance at any time with YGPE, local authorities, nature reserve personnel, 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 YGPE, the district government, 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 Tajik or Russian, as appropriate. If YGPE 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.

- Ikromjon Mamadov, Project Manager, YGPE, office@ygpe.tj, +992 88 7787779
- Khisrav Sherमतov, RIT country coordinator, shermatov.khisrav@gmail.com
- Lizza Protas, RIT Team Leader, WWF-Russia, lprotas@wwf.ru
- Conservation International Ethics Hotline: +1-866-294-8674 / secure web portal: <https://secure.ethicspoint.com/domain/media/en/gui/10680/index.html>

20. (Process Framework) Implementation Arrangements

The project will be coordinated from YGPE offices in Khujand. The primary field-facing personnel will be:

- Ikromjon Mamadov, Project Manager

- Khurshed Alimov, Community Mobilizer
- Askar Abduvaliev, Ecologist