

**The Great Himalayan National Park
The Management Plan (April 2004-March 2009)**

Executive Summary

If we genuinely want to contribute to biological diversity conservation, we need to first resolve the socio-economic issues of the local people. The habitat of wild animals and plants will be better conserved if the local villagers stand by the forest guard and assist her/him in protection of natural resources. Biodiversity conservation at GHNP is gradually becoming synonymous with the People Management. In 1999 the rights of the local people in the Park were settled which resulted in displacement of their livelihoods. At GHNP the local community concerns and enhanced conservation interface are being addressed through a livelihood-based approach primarily routed through Women's Saving and Credit Groups (WSCGs).

An asset-building programme in combination with environmental awareness education, women empowerment, and Joint Forest Management is leading to a decline in biotic pressures upon the natural resources/biodiversity of the GHNP. The WSCGs, are now being federated into Village Forest Development Society at Panchayat or village council level. Rural poor and women will have the opportunity of making a CHOICE (decision - making) and raising their VOICE in preparation and implementation of the village level micro-plans. This further supports the important aspect of social/environmental justice and gender sensitivity. Eliciting cooperation in wildlife protection from these HHs is now an easier task for the Park officials.

The present management plan for the GHNP (2004 to 2009) provides for an Ecozone (an area adjacent to the Park) which contains villages that have historically had some livelihood dependence on the resources of the Park, which is now a *sanctum sanctorum* for biodiversity conservation. The Plan looks at the whole issue of biodiversity conservation from many stakeholders' perspectives; not merely from a wildlifer's viewpoint. The Plan looks forward to a sustainable future. It has three important aspects (i) basic principles for future biodiversity conservation, (ii) strengthened and participatory institutional framework at the Park level, and (iii) shared policy objectives.

Two Parts of the Management Plan of the Great Himalayan National Park

The present Management Plan is firmly based on multi-stakeholder consultations and multi-disciplinary analysis. The process of preparing the Management Plan has helped not only to get better information from key informants. It has also stimulated a strategic series of informed debates between these stakeholders on the policy and institutional issues affecting biodiversity conservation. In this regard, Part I of the Plan develops an understanding of the present. Part II defines a future vision. Thus, the Plan assesses the current situation in relation to a possible future. The analysis has not been confined to strict 'wildlife' concerns, but has given equal attention to cross-sectoral and livelihood-level issues.

Part 1: Description and Evaluation

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the area. The biophysical settings of GHNP are described, and a statement of significance provides the national and global context. The Park is naturally protected by very high peaks and ridges on its northern, southern and eastern boundary. The western boundary has habitations, which depended on the Park's natural resources. To facilitate implementation of World Bank aided Conservation of Biodiversity Project (1994-99) an area upto 5 km. from the western periphery of the Park had been created as an Ecozone. The GHNP, its ecozone and the Sainj and Tirthan Wildlife Sanctuaries are collectively referred to as the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA).

Chapter 2 gives the background information and attributes of the terrain. It provides data on soil types, climate and rainfall, geological conditions, biodiversity values, and notification of the Park.

Chapter 3 looks into the historical and socio-political perspective of the human settlements and conservation efforts in the region where the GHNP is located. This account is mainly based on the material by the research team of the Wildlife Institute of India. Before the advent of roads and projects in the area, village life used to be a relatively self-sufficient system of subsistence and inter-relations with the natural world. In modern times there has been a lot of immigration into the area, which has impacted the status of the natural resources. A time line provides key events leading to the creation of the Great Himalayan National Park.

Chapter 4 focuses on the medicinal plant trade and grazing prior to the settlement of rights and final notification of the Great Himalayan National Park in 1999. The statistics about livestock and human population is given. The medicinal plant collection and trade from the Park has been contributing to the incomes of about 50 to 60% households in the Ecozone. The pastoral system that used to be in place in the area of GHNP is discussed in detail. The abrupt non-availability of GHNP (64.2% of the GHNPCA) to the resident and outside migratory graziers has had a great impact on the local economy.

Chapter 5 deals with a very important aspect of the recent conservation efforts at the GHNPCA. The World Bank aided Conservation of Biodiversity (CoB) Project (1994-99) occupies the central stage. The CoB Project was expected to contribute significantly through village level organization to biodiversity conservation of the GHNP. However, the World Bank's Project completion report says that the 16 village committees formed during the CoB Project became defunct during the Project period, itself. The women's saving and credit groups covering poor families and a Biodiversity Conservation Society established in the post Credit closure period are functioning well.

The chapter also describes important socio-economic issues such as literacy, caste profile, position of women in villages, etc. The new mechanisms of integrating the local people in Park management (such as Women Saving and Credit Groups, Village Forest Development Society, SAHARA, and *Jujurana Jeeve*), and mechanisms to manage the Park such as Biodiversity Conservation Society (BiodCS), and Friends of GHNP are discussed in detail. Other aspects of research and monitoring, forest fires, competence based training for the staff and community and current position of staff are described.

Part 2: Planning and Recommendations

Chapter 6 provides a landscape/an eco-regional perspective along with a livelihood approach for the biodiversity conservation at the GHNP. The livelihood approach is a way of thinking about objectives development, scope and priorities, to enhance progress in poverty elimination. Basically, this is a way of integrating and further developing recent thinking and best practices. In order to achieve this, the Park planning depends on two major goals: (i) working with the local communities to reduce their dependencies on the Park's natural resources, and (ii) interventions to manage, monitor and protect the natural habitats and resources. In both of these cases, it requires putting people at the center of Park's biodiversity conservation.

Chapter 7 discusses the strategies to work with the local communities to reduce/mitigate their dependencies on the GHNP's natural resources. To do this, zonation is one of the most important aspects. The strategy at GHNP has been based on participatory management of natural resources, wherein active preparations are made to take joint decisions about biodiversity conservation by the local communities and the Park administration. It is expected that such efforts of the Park staff and community will begin to "pay" in terms of economic gains by the local villagers, which may lead to further conservation of Park biodiversity. From 2000 through the present, the organized WSCGs are involved in asset building. The continuance of process of group formation and asset building is recommended as future strategy. Vermicomposting, apricot oil production, hemp produce, ecotourism, street theatre and wage labour are some of the options that have been explained in detail.

Providing compensation in form of asset building with respect to the loss of livelihoods is the *quid pro quo* for the local communities. The Plan provides for resolving the man-animal conflict with emphasis on social and environmental justice for the poor people living close to the GHNP, and development of a competence based training programme for the GHNPCA staff and the local community and NGOs.

Chapter 8 discusses the strategies to manage, monitor, and protect the natural resources. Habitat management including watershed monitoring, role of forests as gene pools, and carbon sinks, vaccination, exclusion of exotics, proactive wildlife

protection with the help of local community, wildlife protection maps, wireless communication system, prevention of poaching, group patrolling and reporting, knowledge about illegal trade in WL derivatives, community based street theatre for nature awareness have been discussed. Emphasis has been put on *in situ* medicinal plant conservation, effective management of grazing in the ecozone, wildlife surveys and estimation, fire protection, and research and monitoring. A separate section deals with the merger of the Sainj WLS into the GHNP so that a compact and viable conservation unit be in place.

Chapter 9 discusses important conservation concerns such as rewarding upland poor for the environmental services they provide. Recommendations have been made to create awareness about watershed protection services that the mountain communities provide to the down stream beneficiaries in the form of reduced siltation, improved water flows, and values such as gene pool and carbon sink etc. The chapter ends with a very relevant query “Will economic well-being contribute to Biodiversity Conservation”?

Chapter 10 provides details about Staff, Funding, Inter-Sectoral Co-operation, NGO and CBO Participation and Budget.

There are ten Appendix at the end of the Plan which support the main text.