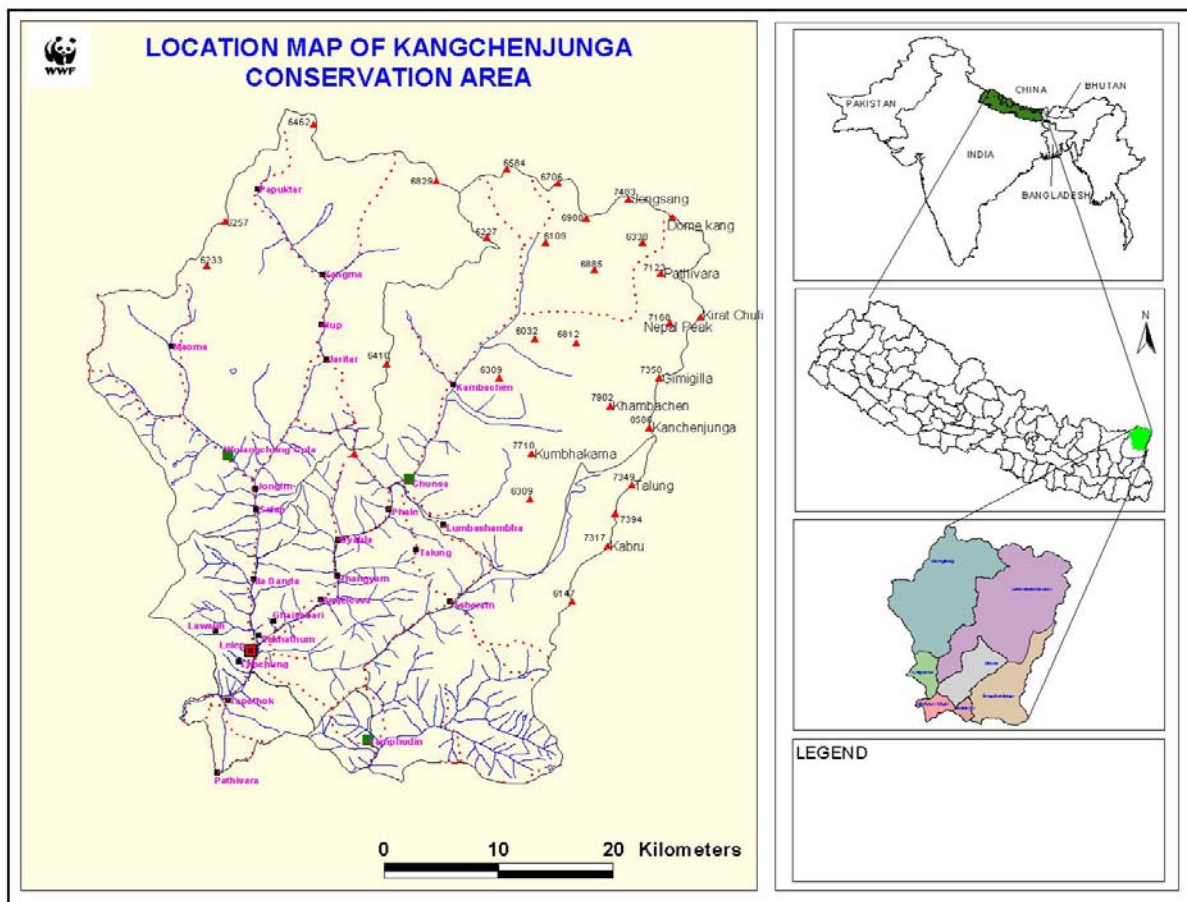


Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA)

Introduction:

In north-eastern Nepal, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) was conferred protected area status by His Majesty's Government of Nepal in 1997 and declared a *Gift to the Earth* as part of WWF's *Living Planet Campaign* in 2000. Now covering an area of 2035 sq km, Kangchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) is also part of the *Sacred Himalayas Landscape* currently being developed by WWF Nepal in partnership with The Mountain Institute (TMI) and the Integrated Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Adjoining KCA (east) is Sikkim, India and the Kanchendzonga Biosphere Reserve. KCA also shares a border with Quomolungma Nature Preserve in Tibet (north).



The lush subtropical and temperate forests in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area are vital for species conservation in the Eastern Himalayan Ecoregion Complex, and include

several floral hotspots. The only extensive pure stands of Himalayan larch in Nepal are found in KCA, as are extensive forests of juniper and rhododendron. Studies of flowering plants in KCA have indicated the presence of approximately 2000 species. As such, KCA boasts 16% of the total flora species in Nepal, though it covers only 1.4% of the country's total land area.

Focal mammals of conservation significance in Kangchenjunga Conservation Area include the red panda, snow leopard, grey wolf, Himalayan black bear, Himalayan Tahr (wild goat), blue sheep, and musk deer.

This particular area of Nepal is also renowned for its alpine meadows, high altitude wetlands, high peaks (eleven peaks higher than 7000 m) and glaciers, which feed major rivers in KCA and provide important hydrological services not only within KCA but also to downstream communities in Nepal and India. Kangchenjunga Conservation Area is named after Mt. Kangchenjunga (8,586m), the second highest mountain in Nepal and third highest in the world. The area is home to 5000 people, 48% of which are *Limbu*, representing one of the region's many ethnic groups. Over 25% of the population in Kangchenjunga is *Sherpa*.

Conservation Challenges

Kangchenjunga's forests are currently under heavy pressure due to slash and burn agricultural practices and an increased demand for firewood, medicinal plants, timber and other products required to meet the needs of local people, tourists and mountaineering expeditions. Furthermore, cross-border illegal harvesting, livestock grazing and trade of non-timber forest and wildlife products have increased pressure on the resources in KCA, especially given the ban on grazing and harvesting of resources in the adjoining Kanchendzonga National Park in Sikkim, India. As in TAL, biodiversity loss in KCA has further been exacerbated by political instability and armed conflict.

Impacts of Biodiversity Loss on People

The sustainable management of forest resources in KCA is critical for both biodiversity conservation and people. Where local communities largely depend upon natural resources for their livelihoods, conservation objectives can only be achieved when their basic needs for food, fuelwood, timber, fodder and income are met. The number of

households in KCA living below the poverty line is estimated at 34%. Average food sufficiency is 5.5 months, with less than 10% of households producing enough food for household consumption. Major crops are maize, wheat, barley, soya bean and buckwheat.

NTFPs contribute significantly to the household economy of this rural population of 5000. However, NTFPs are threatened from by over-harvesting for trade, despite their importance as a source of valuable income, food, medicine, building materials and fuel. Recent studies conducted by WWF Nepal in KCA clearly demonstrate the need to strengthen community management of NTFPs and links between conservation & livelihoods. Conservation and sustainable use of NTFPs and enhancement of livelihoods in KCA can be achieved if: a) communities take on increased responsibility for management of forest resources; b) ecological monitoring and sustainable harvesting practices are developed and followed; c) communities have greater access to and understanding of the market system; d) sustainable enterprises bring local benefits especially to poorer households; and d) local and scientific knowledge underpins appropriate management systems. Darwin funding has been secured specifically for these activities.

Equally important for the livelihoods of people living in KCA is their livestock (yak, horse, sheep, and goat). Increasingly large numbers of livestock, however, have reduced grazing areas available to free-ranging ungulates such as blue sheep, Himalayan Tahr and musk deer – key prey species for snow leopard. Degradation of snow leopard habitat in KCA and a decline in the snow leopard's natural prey population has resulted in an increase in livestock depredation and human-wildlife conflict. Human conflict is one of the main threats to the snow leopard's survival in this area. Snow leopards are the targets of retaliatory killings by local people. Snow leopards are also killed by poachers, driven by an increased demand in Tibet for their fur and bones.

Opportunities for Change – KCA Handover

Kangchenjunga was first designated as a Conservation Area in 1997. In 1998, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) joined hands with WWF Nepal to launch the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) in an effort to help ensure sustainable management of the region's pristine ecosystem.

With the aim of strengthening community management of KCA, a KCA Management Council was formed with the support of WWF Nepal in April 2003. KCAMC now comprises of seven Conservation Area User Committees, 44 User Groups, and 32 Mother Groups. These community based institutions support effective implementation of all KCAP activities.

In 2004, KCAMC submitted the *Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Plan* to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation for endorsement. The goal of the KCA Management Plan is to (a) reduce pressure on KCA forests and alpine meadows through effective community ownership and management; (b) conserve and manage representative species and habitats; (c) raise awareness about biodiversity and livelihoods linkages; (d) provide alternative livelihoods opportunities; (e) strengthen capacity of KCAMC and affiliated institutions; (f) promote coordination among key stakeholders; and (g) advocate to strengthen policies, legislation, and regulations.

On 31, August 2006, the cabinet of the Government of Nepal passed a resolution to hand over management of Kangchenjunga Conservation Area to KCAMC. This landmark decision sets an important precedent for community management of protected areas in Nepal. The KCAMC will now be responsible for overall management of KCA as outlined in the KCA Management Plan, while 7 Conservation Area User Committees will prepare and implement annual operational plans. 44 User Groups and 32 Mother Groups will assist with implementation.

WWF Nepal is expected to continue to provide technical and financial support to the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Management Council for the next five years as part of the *Sacred Himalayan Landscape Programme*.

Key WWF Achievements (1998-2006)

WWF has been working in Kangchenjunga since 1998 to promote the sustainable management of forest resources by: establishing and enhancing capacity of Conservation Area User Committees, User Groups and Mother Groups; supporting community forestry, plantations and natural forest regeneration; promoting the sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants; and raising conservation awareness. As in

TAL, WWF's strong partnerships with local communities have ensured its ability to operate in conflict-sensitive areas.

Recognising the critical role that local women play in utilising, conserving and managing natural resources, WWF's efforts in KCA have emphasized building women's capacity for sustainable resource management through literacy training, credit-saving schemes, group management and skill development. Currently 32 Mother Groups are actively involved in income generation schemes such as kitchen gardening, sewing training and horticulture and implementing environmental and social programmes in the area. Among other things, these Mother Groups supervise scholarships and monitor the progress of 32 girl students. WWF also supports community health posts, tourism, trail and bridge maintenance as well as the implementation of basic social services such as toilet construction and the building of drinking water schemes. Alternative energy and appropriate technologies including back-boiler water heating systems and improved cook stoves have also been constructed. These activities have helped motivate local people thereby ensuring strong community participation and support for WWF's conservation efforts in the area.

During the past five years in KCA, WWF Nepal has achieved:

- Extension of KCA from 1650 sq km to 2035 sq km
- Increase of forest cover through reduction of immediate threats and plantation
- A revolving fund for NTFP enterprises in KCA established.
- Formulation of government policy in support of community-managed protected areas
- Enabling environment for effective management of KCA created, including development of *Kanchenjunga Conservation Area Management Plan*
- Management capacity of community-based organizations enhanced
- Management responsibility of KCA handed over to KCAMC in August 2006
- KCA included as part of *Sacred Himalayan Landscape Programme*

WWF has also significantly helped reduce livestock loss by establishing Snow Leopard Conservation Committees, local wildlife survey and monitoring teams, and providing support for improved livestock pens, veterinary care and community herders. Finally, WWF is pioneering mechanisms such as community-based livestock insurance schemes, to help compensate households suffering from livestock loss.

WWF UK Support to KCAP

WWF UK has been supporting KCAP since its inception in 1998. Funding (GBP 200,000) has also recently been obtained by WWF UK from Darwin to support programmatic work on non-timber forest products and medicinal plants.

WWF UK support to KCA (FY05-FY07) as part of the Eastern Himalayas Programme totaled GBP 250,000, not including funding from Darwin for the same period.

September 22nd – Official Handover of KCA to KCAMC.

The Government of Nepal's decision to handover management responsibility of KCA to KCAMC is historic and one of WWF Nepal's greatest achievements. KCA will be the first community-managed conservation area in Nepal, if not in Asia.

The handover of KCA also coincides with recent and massive political change in Nepal, giving further rise to community hopes for peace, empowerment and livelihoods improvement.

The handover ceremony will take place in Taplejung, district headquarter of Kangchenjunga. Local communities members, including KCAMC, community based organizations, local and district partner organizations, local NGOs and government line agencies will be in attendance, as well as government officials from Kathmandu, the Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation (MFSC), Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) representatives, WWF Nepal team and invited guests.