

PRESS RELEASE



Global effort to save the endangered snow leopard: Ministers from snow leopard range countries discuss progress and next steps

2nd Steering Committee Meeting of the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) to be held in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The Snow Leopard is a culturally, ecologically, and economically important symbol of healthy high-mountain ecosystems and the communities living there, yet this cat is under threat of extinction across its entire range. Therefore, a new international effort with a shared vision to conserve snow leopards and their valuable high-mountain ecosystems has been initiated through GSLEP. The GSLEP program is a joint initiative by all 12 snow leopard range countries*, international organizations, civil society and the private sector aimed at long-term survival of the snow leopard in its natural ecosystem. It was launched following the adoption of the *Bishkek Declaration* at the Global Forum on snow leopard conservation held in October 2013 under the leadership of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambayev.

At the invitation of the government of Nepal, the GSLEP program Steering Committee, which includes the environment and forest ministers or their nominees of all snow leopard range countries, will hold its 2nd meeting on the 20th of January 2017 in Kathmandu, Nepal. Prior to the Steering Committee meeting, a two days Management Planning Stocktaking Workshop will be held on 17th and 18th January 2017 in Kathmandu.

“It is our pleasure to host our colleagues from across the snow leopard range countries in Kathmandu for this important meeting”, says Shankar Bhandari, Nepal’s Minister for Forests and Soil Conservation. “We are confident that the meeting will help to chart out the most effective ways to conserve snow leopards and their valuable high-mountain ecosystems together with enhancing livelihood of the people living in the ecosystems.”

“The snow leopard is revered and beloved throughout its range - but the threats it faces are increasing: poaching, retaliation killings, scarcity of prey. In addition, climate change is threatening to fragment much of the cat’s habitat”, says Zahid Hamid, Minister for Climate Change from Pakistan, and Chairperson of the GSLEP Steering Committee. “These issues can’t be solved by individual countries alone. But through the GSLEP process, which brings all 12 snow leopard range countries to the table as partners, we have a historic opportunity to secure the future of this cat and its mountain ecosystems.”

Under the leadership of the Steering Committee, range countries have identified 23 landscapes to be secured as snow leopard habitats by the year 2020. At this upcoming meeting, committee members will review the progress that has been made toward securing those landscapes, and define next steps and priorities. They will also prepare an agenda for a Snow Leopard Summit and Green Investment Forum, to be hosted by President Atambayev in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in the summer of 2017.

“The snow leopard is an ambassador of our mountain ecosystems and the people who live in them. These people are our most important allies in protecting this cat. For conservation measures to be successful, they must be planned and implemented in partnership with local communities, and go hand

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in hand with sustainable rural development initiatives”, says Abdylkalik Rustamov, the Steering Committee’s Co-Chair and Director of Kyrgyzstan’s State Agency for Environment Protection & Forestry.

Key agenda items for the meeting include:

- Identifying **resource mobilization strategies** for management plans that will serve as blueprints to secure them
- Working towards developing a **joint strategy to enhance capacities** in research and monitoring of snow leopards as well as in participatory conservation on a landscape scale.
- a common approach to **understanding and combating poaching and illegal trade** of snow leopards across the range.

“Our countries all share common challenges when it comes to conserving large carnivores like the snow leopard, or the tiger”, says Deepak Bohara, Nepal’s Minister of Supplies, who is also a member of the Global Tiger Initiative Council which builds convergences in efforts made towards tiger and snow leopard conservation. “We need to better understand their status, behavior and needs, and to effectively combat poaching and illegal trafficking. It is best to tackle these challenges together as well. I am confident that we’ll make important steps in this direction at the Kathmandu meeting.”

Further, Dr. Krishna Chandra Paudel, Secretary of Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation said that snow leopard is a keystone species of the mountain ecosystems. “Conservation of snow leopard ultimately conserves the mountain ecosystem and its conservation has become more important in the context of climate change and its impact in the mountain ecosystem" says Dr. Paudel.

The Steering Committee meeting will be preceded by a workshop of technical experts to take stock of the progress in preparing management plans for the 23 landscapes that have been selected under the GSLEP program. Immediately before the Steering Committee meeting, country officials and experts will gather for a workshop at the same venue to exchange experiences and best practices.

The Government of Nepal is hosting this event with the GSLEP Secretariat. The Snow Leopard Trust (SLT), USAID, and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) are key partners in the organization together with the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) who is also the liaison towards all local logistics; WWF Nepal and Zoological Society of London Nepal (ZSLN).



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Contact Information:

Dr. Maheshwar Dhakal: +977-985-1142-405, maheshwar.dhakal@gmail.com

Dr. Koustubh Sharma: + 996-551-128-116, +91-987-1144-991, koustubh@snowleopard.org

Secretariat of the GSLEP in Bishkek: +996-312-56-41-95, secretariat@globalsnowleopard.org

www.globalsnowleopard.org

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