

❖ **STANDARD 12: SET OVERALL PRIORITIES FOR CONSERVATION ACTION WITHIN THE ECOREGIONAL VISION AND DEFINE INSTITUTIONAL ROLES AND PRIORITIES.**

Case Study: **Yunnan Great Rivers Project**

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Purpose and region of analysis

The Yunnan Great Rivers Project (YGRP) encompasses 66,000 km² (25,500 mi²) and is made up of parts of 5 ecoregions. Ninety-seven percent of the project area is in three ecoregions, the Nujiang- Lancang Gorge Subalpine Conifer and Mixed forest, the Hengduan Mountains Subalpine Coniferous Forest, and the Yunnan Plateau Subtropical Evergreen Forest ecoregions. In 1997, TNC and the Yunnan Provincial Government set up a joint project to protect the biodiversity and natural and cultural resources of northwestern Yunnan while fostering compatible and sustainable economic development in the project area. The purpose and results of this large project included geographic priorities, recommended pilot projects, broad scale strategies, and buy-in from the Chinese government. An ecoregional biodiversity conservation plan, using TNC's ecoregional assessment methods, was accomplished to fulfill the biodiversity component of the joint project. This case study refers to this ecoregional assessment.

Methods and criteria

The information gathered through the ecoregional assessment was used to identify a subset of high priority geographic areas across the project area (“action sites”), and became the basis for developing many of the strategies for the places where TNC and partners would be deeply engaged and would develop site level actions. Expert knowledge was the primary source of information and decision making.

Identification of Key focal issues

Ecoregional methods (mostly Geography of Hope, 2000) were used for each ecoregion (the total portfolio was made out of an aggregation of parts of 5 ecoregions). Partners were crucial for gathering data and information, and also for effectively engage partners in further strategy implementation.

- **Ecoregional Targets** were identified by groups of academic, government, and local experts.
- **Threats** were compiled based on documentation of expert opinion during the planning process.

Strategy development

- **Geographic priorities:** Most strategies are being developed at the site level at the action sites using the 5-S process.
- **Target priorities:** Strategies focused on conservation targets are being developed within “projects” using an adaptation of the 5-S process. These projects arose primarily through site planning at the actions sites and the realization that planning for individual conservation areas would not sufficiently protect these targets.
- **Threat priorities:** Multi-area strategies focused on threats identified by the ecoregional plan began to arise primarily when, while using the 5-S process at the action sites, there was a realization that planning for individual conservation areas would not sufficiently abate these threats.

Strategies arising from the ecoregional plan used information from the following:

- **Target focused strategies:** such as alpine and monkey projects are generating much of their own data. These projects had some information mainly derived from expert knowledge, such as what people thought were the current ranges of the monkey and initial guesses as to the viability of troops within the project area. The alpine ecosystem project benefited from expert derived information on vegetation communities within the alpine zone, the importance of alpine to local people, and a sense of the overall threats to these systems, but there were no quantitative goals set for alpine systems, nor was any information about viability available. Some data available from on-going site planning process has been available to these projects.
- **Threat focused strategies:** These projects are generating much of their own data, and using data coming out of the site planning process at the sites. For example There are two main strategies to address threats from the use of fuelwood: alternative energy and alternative building materials. The information from each site (site conservation planning process) was used to determine how these strategies would be implemented.
- **Other strategies:** Review of site-level strategies and realization that they are not effective enough and require a broader-scale approach; identification for gaps in strategies; and need of involving local people.

Products/outcomes

The ecoregional assessment led primarily to 5 geographic priorities (action sites), which in turn used the 5-S methodology to develop site-scale strategies. Efforts to conserve the targets at these sites revealed that:

- Site level strategies would not be sufficient to protect all targets (such as wide ranging species, ie, Yunnan Golden Monkey)

- Many sites were facing the same issues with the same targets— indicating a need to examine strategies at a broader scale.

These realizations have led to a third source of conservation strategies—multi-area projects, from which multi-site strategies are beginning to emerge.

Multi- area conservation strategies were developed selected for implementation based on the action sites identified in the ecoregional assessment and in the action plan. There are several categories of multi-area themes that were selected from the ecoregional assessment action sites to develop and implement conservation strategies around. They are:

Geographic priority (action sites)

- Conservation Area Planning and Implementation.
- Most strategies are being developed at the site level at the action sites using the 5-S process.

Target priority

- Alpine ecosystem project/partnership
- Monkey program
- Strategies focused on conservation targets are being developed within “projects” using an adaptation of the 5-S process. These projects arose primarily through site planning at the actions sites and the realization that planning for individual conservation areas would not sufficiently protect these targets.

Threat priority

- Influence grazing to grassland program
- Alternatives building materials: *Now Forest program*
- Sustainable NTP Harvesting (also from individual site plans)

Other strategies

- Multi-area strategies focused on threats identified by the realization that planning for individual conservation areas would not sufficiently abate these threats.
- Strategy resulting from doing the ecoregional assessment and realizing the extent of information gaps: Conservation Information System
- Strategy resulting from the overwhelming need to work more closely with local people: Photovoice

Strengths

Good to work closely with government (at all levels and academic institutions) in China
The China program worked hard to ensure that its partnerships would meet the needs of TNC and also the government (ie, sustainable development), hence the action plan. This got us great buy-in and opportunities to bring a new systematic conservation methodology, based in science, to China.

Feedback and review of results and requirements There was a good strategy review that permitted to figure out that other strategies (multi-site, information, local people involvement) were required in order to fully face the threats and targets.

Weaknesses

Need to have some of the same people thinking about priorities and strategies – as opposed to going through a priority setting exercise and handing the results to the strategy developers and implementers.

Limited documentation of all decisions related to priorities, focal issues, and strategies (eg. how were priorities and focal issues, priority projects, strategies, activities decided upon? Otherwise very difficult to learn about what processes are effective and what should be changed)