



## **Regional Report** on implementation of RRI-CA Plan from July 1 to September 30, 2020

### **Background**

The Central Asia region is characterized by the dynamic condition of the sites of wetlands occurring due to the arid climate conditions, which causes significant changes in water level and the projective surface of water basins. At the same time, changes in the sites of wetlands in one of the countries of the region may have a significant impact on the regional level as a whole. Based on the aforesaid, efforts on protection and management of important wetlands should be made at national policies and national plans level.

Why special actions on protection and management of the wetlands should be taken?

1. Larger wetlands, which have an impact on environmental services and climate formation and are located in a transboundary water basin, bring together the interests of local communities and countries as a whole. With a view to the first step in implementing sustainable management of such wetlands in shared water basins, the steps should be taken to arrange coordinated monitoring, data exchange procedures, and coordination of water management efforts.
2. Due to the growing anthropogenic impact and the potential danger of anthropogenic activity development, it is necessary to work on studying and finding measures to prevent the degradation of Ramsar Sites from such impact.

At the national level, the countries of the region need to expand the network of Ramsar Wetlands and continue lobbying for those sites nominations of which have already been prepared, and measures should be taken to promote such nominations at the level of decision-making bodies.

### **1. Development of coordination of studies and measures to be taken for management and conservation of Ramsar Sites and potential Ramsar Sites located in the transboundary basin.**

With a view of the initial step in implementing sustainable management of wetlands in common water collection basins, programs for coordinated monitoring, data exchange procedures, and coordination of water resources management efforts should be developed. As part of the first phase of the RRI-CA Plan for 2020, environmental performance studies have been conducted, including the study of the legal and regulatory framework for monitoring in each country, existing national monitoring systems, and the development of common lists of migratory bird species that integrate these wetlands.

To coordinate research and implemented measures for the wetlands management located in the common transboundary basin of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the wetlands studies were conducted in the Amudarya zone: Lake Soltandag in Turkmenistan and Lake Dengizkul in Uzbekistan, as well as in two transboundary water basins - Lake Tuyamuyun and Lake Sarykamysh; the following information was collected:

- regulatory framework of conducting monitoring of the fauna in the Republics of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan was presented;
- lists of bird species for long-term monitoring of transboundary water basins within the Amudarya River in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were made;



- a list of parameters for annual monitoring of the environmental condition on lakes Dengizkul (Uzbekistan) and Soltandag (Turkmenistan), and on transboundary wetlands of Tuyamuyun Reservoir and Lake Sarykamysk were made. Information on monitoring conducted by the state bodies was reported, and, in the case of Lake Dengizkul, information on monitoring conducted by Lukoil LLC was also provided;

- the environmental services used by local communities in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on the transboundary wetlands, Tuyamuyun Reservoir and Lake Sarykamysk, as well as on lakes Dengizkul (Uzbekistan) and Soltandag (Turkmenistan) located in the same basin were described.

To coordinate research and management measures on wetlands management located in the common transboundary basin of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, wetlands studies on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea were conducted:

- the role of the Caspian Sea coast as a global Eastern Caspian Flyway was analyzed;

- potential Ramsar Wetlands countries in the transboundary basin were identified, and they should be considered as a whole in the management of wetlands and their resources.

To coordinate research and management measures on wetlands management located in the common transboundary basin of Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan, wetlands studies of the Chu River Valley were conducted:

- Potential Ramsar Wetlands of Kyrgyzstan within the borders of the transboundary with Kazakhstan basins of the Chu and Assa rivers, which should be considered as a whole in managing the wetlands and their resources, were identified based on available literature sources;

- the species composition of birds occurring in Toktogul Reservoir and Chui Valley and the nature of their presence were determined;

- the main parameters to be monitored were defined;

- ecosystem services that are used by local people living in Toktogul Reservoir and the Chu River Valley were identified;

- reasons for the inclusion of the eastern part of Toktogul Reservoir and the left bank of the Chu River (interfluvial area of Alamedin and Ak-Suu rivers) into the Ramsar List of Potential Ramsar Sites were substantiated.

## **2. Information collection from all available sources on current anthropogenic threats to Ramsar Sites and potential Ramsar Sites, especially concerning the Coronavirus COVID19 pandemic.**

Due to the increase of existing and the emergence of new potential anthropogenic threats to Ramsar Sites, data on current and potential threats was collected.

In Kazakhstan: in connection with the emergence of a potential anthropogenic threat to the Ramsar Sites of "Lakes of lower Turgai and Irgiz" and "Kulykol-Taldykol Lake System", materials on existing and potential threats and measures to prevent degradation of these wetlands has started to be collected. In addition, the urban wetland system of Maly Taldykol Lake in the city of Nur-Sultan was threatened with destruction (draining and covering with soil for the purpose of construction of urban facilities), thus the actions were taken to provide information support to local residents to protect the wetland.

The anthropogenic threat to the Ramsar Site of "Lakes of lower Turgai and Irgiz" may arise with the beginning of construction of the highway of "Center-West", possible routes of which cross the territory of the wetland. The road project of "Center-West" is part of the program "Nurly Zhol" to modernize the road network of Kazakhstan, and it connects the cities of Nur-Sultan and Aktau



(about 2000 km). The project is being implemented by the order of the Road Committee of the The Ministry of Industry and Infrastructural Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Media raises the problem in terms of the appearance of the future highway on the saiga migration route and its impact on them, while the possible impact on the Ramsar Wetlands is practically ignored. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) did not take into account that the planned highway will cross the territory of Turgai Wildlife Sanctuary which covers a part of the Ramsar Site.

At present, the Ramsar Site of "Kulykol-Taldykol Lake System" along with the Zharsor-Urkash and the Koibagar-Tyutyugur lake systems are practically not protected by the current national legislation of Kazakhstan. Of the ten wetlands of Kazakhstan included in the Ramsar List, these three sites do not have the status of a specially protected natural areas. Due to the fact that these wetlands are located in Kostanai Region, it is advisable to initiate the regional administration to form a network of specially protected natural reservations of local importance on the basis of these sites.

The Maly Taldykol wetland is located within the city of Nur-Sultan and has recreational and aesthetic value for the residents of nearby residential complexes. However, since July of this year, the draining and backfilling works on this wetland has started to prepare construction sites for the building of residential houses and social facilities. Therefore, an appeal was filed to the Prosecutor of Nur-Sultan and the Chairman of the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife Protection on the necessity of protecting the city wetland from anthropogenic impact.

In Turkmenistan, due to the increasing urban load on the potential Ramsar Site of "Altyn Kyol", materials from all available sources about existing and potential threats and measures to protect this wetland were collected. A project has been developed to accredit Lake Altynkyol as the first urban wetland in Central Asia.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan: anthropogenic threats affecting Lake Dengizkul were updated. Among the identified threats is: increased recreational load, especially due to the reduction of foreign tourism and poaching. Due to the strengthening of existing and potential human threats to Lake Zhylytyras, which is planned to be included in the Ramsar List, available materials on existing and potential threats and measures to prevent degradation of this wetland were collected.

In Kyrgyzstan: information on threats to the Ramsar Site of "Lake Issyk-Kul" was updated, especially concerning the situation with the coronavirus COVID19 pandemic.

### **3. Continued expansion of the list of nominated wetlands in Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan and lobbying for a potential Ramsar Site nomination in Kazakhstan.**

In Kyrgyzstan, nominations have been prepared for "The Left Bank of the Chu River" (interfluvium of Alamedin and Ak-Suu) and "Toktogul Reservoir", based on available information and collection of missing information.

In the course of preparation of the nomination, the following studies were conducted:

- field expedition during which factual materials on vertebrate animals of the wetland were collected, and the dynamics of the species diversity was analyzed in comparison with the available data in all open sources;

- assessment of the current state of the fauna of terrestrial vertebrate animals of the wetland including endemic, rare, and unique endangered species;



- corresponding off-line RIS forms (nomination dossiers) for the inclusion of "Left bank of the Chu River" (Alamedin and Ak-Suu interfluve) and "Toktogul Reservoir" in accordance with the requirements of the Ramsar Convention were filled in;

- meeting with the local governmental bodies, the local Kenesh, and the community was held to discuss biodiversity monitoring and conservation issues and to include Toktogul into the Ramsar List as well as to involve local communities in the conservation of Toktogul.

In Turkmenistan, two nominations were prepared: "Kattashor-Yeraji" and "Zeyit-Kelif" as well as accreditation of Lake Altynkol as an urban wetland park.

During the preparation of the nomination the following works were carried out:

- field expedition to Lebapsky Region to collect missing information;  
- nominations were made, corresponding off-line RIS forms (nomination dossiers) for the inclusion of "Kattashor-Yeraji" and "Zeyit-Kelif" in the List of Ramsar Sites were filled in.

In Uzbekistan, the promotion of the nomination of Tudakul and Kuymazar water reservoirs has been continued. This Wetland has been designated as the third Uzbekistan Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site no. 2433) on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September, 2020.

In Kazakhstan: to lobby for the nomination of Lake Karakol into the Ramsar List as a wetland of International Importance and to continue activities on monitoring and conservation of the ecosystem of this wetland, several monitoring activities on the lake were organized and conducted with the involvement of the public, media, and local communities. In particular:

- negotiations, correspondence, and consultation were conducted on the nomination of the "Lake Karakol" wetland into the Ramsar List as the wetland of International Importance of responsible representatives of 1) Forestry and Wildlife Committee under the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2) Department of Natural Resources and Regulation of Nature Use in Mangistau region, 3) Western Kazakhstan Branch of the Republican Association of "Eco-Ger", and 4) the Regional Association of NGOs in Western Kazakhstan "Tabigi Orta";

- five on-line meetings were held with university and high school students of Aktau city on problems of Karakol Lake as a bird habitat listed in the Red List of Kazakhstan with the participation of representatives of the Regional Association of NGOs of Western Kazakhstan "Tabigi Orta" (association "Tabigi Orta"), public association (PA) "Mangistau Tabigaty" and nature protection bodies;

- as a result of meetings at the PA "Mangystau Tabigaty", a volunteer team of ecopatrol named "Keepers of Lake Karakol" from among university and high school students of Aktau was formed. The volunteers of "Keepers of Lake Karakol" together with nature protection bodies of the Mangistau Region conducted 5 raids which coincided with the national volunteer initiative "Birgemiz: Taza Aliem" ("We are together: the clean world");

- to adopt experience in the initial stages of the creation of the urban park being implemented by ACBK, training on the territory of the "Taldykol" Urban Nature Park (Nur-Sultan) was held. The training was conducted by Ruslan Urazaliyev, a scholar. Based on the experience gained, the concept of the project on the creation of "Lake Karakol" Educational Center in Aktau will be developed.

**At the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage (November-December) of implementation of the RRI-CA Plan for 2020, the following works are planned.**

On the regional level:



In the light of the fact that during the first phase, the primary data on the environmental performance of the wetlands located in the transboundary basins of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, for which coordinated management should be carried out, were collected, the second phase will need to analyze the results obtained and propose procedures for developing harmonized approaches for their monitoring and management.

The second stage will include analysis of collected materials on threats to "Lakes of lower Turgai and Irgiz" and "Kulykol-Taldykol Lake System" in Kazakhstan, to Dengizkul and Zhylytyrbas lakes in Uzbekistan, to Lake Issyk-Kol in Kyrgyzstan and Altyn Asyr and Altyn Kol lakes in Turkmenistan, especially in light of increasing and emerging anthropogenic threats due to the consequences of the Coronavirus COVID19 pandemic. Based on the analysis, mitigation measures will be proposed and discussed with all the parties involved.

PR materials will be prepared to mark the celebration of Wetlands Day on February 2, 2021, and the 50th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention, and the 5th anniversary of the establishment of the RRI-CA.

On the national level:

It is planned to prepare a nomination dossier for wetlands in Uzbekistan and three new nominations in Turkmenistan.

Activities on monitoring and practical conservation of the Lake Karakol ecosystem (Kazakhstan) will be continued by involving youth organizations. A project concept will be developed to create the "Lake Karakol" Educational Center in Aktau.

In Kyrgyzstan, activities to involve the local population and expand opportunities and participation of local communities in the sustainable use of the Lake Karakol wetlands will be continued.

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