

**Thematic event within the framework of the 28th UN Conference of the Parties on
Climate Change**

***Climate benefits of large-scale conservation and restoration of steppe grassland
ecosystems***

Date: December 9, 2023

Organizers: MENR

Location: Central Asian Pavilion, COP28.

Grasslands are the most threatened terrestrial ecosystem on Earth: globally, around 50% have been lost to conversion to arable agriculture; Vast areas are degraded by unsustainable grazing, almost all grassland ecosystems are now highly fragmented; only 5% of intact grasslands are protected. Their role in storing carbon and mitigating climate change has been mostly ignored.

Kazakhstan holds the world's largest expanses of steppe ecosystems. The Kazakh government is working on preserving key steppe species and their habitats, incorporating sustainable livestock grazing mechanisms into domestic policies.

The longstanding Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative has been recognized by the UN as one of the flagship programs for ecosystem restoration. The Altyn Dala Partnership was established in 2006 with the support of the Government of Kazakhstan, the Kazakhstan Association for Biodiversity Conservation, and international partners. During this period, the Kazakh government, with the assistance of its partners, improved legislation, expanded and created state-protected areas in the steppe zone covering 5 million hectares, and restored the population of the critically endangered saiga antelope to nearly 2 million individuals by 2023.

The extensive efforts to restore and preserve steppe ecosystems under such initiatives demonstrate climate benefits, including a reduction in the number of summer wildfires, restoration of nutrient cycling, conservation of globally important carbon stocks in the soil, and an increase in the amount of carbon in the saiga antelope biomass, currently estimated at 100,000 tons.

Speaker 1: Representative of the Government of Kazakhstan

Legislative policy in the field of conservation, restoration, and management of steppe ecosystems to obtain measurable benefits for nature, climate and people.

Speaker 2: Representative of the Kazakhstan Association for Biodiversity Conservation

Altyn Dala Conservation Initiative - Employing novel research methods to enable the conservation of steppe grasslands and recovery of saiga antelope as keystone grazer species.

Speaker 3: Representative of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK)

Understanding the extent of soil carbon storage in temperate steppe grasslands, and the complex biodiversity mechanisms responsible for fixing and securing carbon in soil.

Speaker 4: Representative from Verra (US)

Developing the Voluntary Carbon Standard Methodology (VM0026) for Sustainable Grassland Management and its potential for application in temperate steppe grasslands