

**ANALYZING GAPS AND OPTIONS FOR ENHANCING
ARGALI CONSERVATION
IN CENTRAL ASIA
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF
THE CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF
MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS**

**Report prepared for The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory
Species of Wild Animals (CMS), Bonn, Germany and
the GIZ Regional Program on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in
Central Asia**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November of 2011, as a result of the proposal submitted by Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, and supported by Kyrgyzstan, argali (*Ovis ammon*) was listed on the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Appendix II at its 10th Conference of the Parties (CoP10). Taking into consideration the broader context in which the decision to list argali under CMS Appendix II has occurred, that is the identification of actions that seek to prioritize the growth of CMS and the CMS Family, this report is prepared to provide support to the parties of CMS and the Secretariat in their decision on the most suitable CMS instrument to effectively foster regional cooperation on conservation and sustainable use of argali. The assessment is financed under the Regional Program on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Central Asia implemented by GIZ on behalf of Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The report provides a brief introduction to the species, international status, its distribution, highlighting the transboundary elements, activities and barriers to its conservation. It then addresses the criteria listed in Resolution 10.16 developed in the framework of the resolution on the future Structure and Strategies of the CMS and CMS family (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 10.09 Annex II), in an attempt to provide guidance as to: why a transboundary approach to the management of the species is needed and a CMS-led instrument is a preferred way forward; and how it should be developed in order to make it successful, taking into consideration the limited capacity of the CMS Secretariat.

Argali are the largest of the world's wild sheep. They are distributed widely throughout Central and Inner Asia and are divided into 9 subspecies. They are classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as Near Threatened. They are critical for identifying ecological networks of conservation importance that in turn benefit a variety of animal and plant species. Moreover, argali are an important prey species for snow leopards (*Panthera uncia*) and wolf (*Canis lupus*). Trophy hunting of the species, where allowed, generates significant financial resources, which can be dedicated to the conservation of the species and improvement of local livelihoods. Many of the populations of argali do not recognize geopolitical boundaries that divide arbitrarily ecosystems that these species move through according to their seasonal migration patterns. A transboundary approach, driven by an ecosystem-based view, that can work through the physical and political barriers, is necessary to effectively conserve the species.

THREATS

The reason for the unsatisfactory status of argali is a set of common threats across their range, including from over-hunting and illegal subsistence and commercial hunting. Other threats include: competition, displacement and disease transmission by domestic livestock; habitat loss and degradation caused by overgrazing, fuel wood collection, mining; and to some degree intolerance to human disturbance. While habitat characteristics change, the threats vary little across the range countries. The complexity of the threats makes it difficult to draw a simple set of interrelations between the different threats and to identify underlying causes of the threats. However, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Poaching is prevalent in situations with weak law enforcement and/or lack of legal use opportunities;
- Trophy hunting schemes have shown success in some countries and situations. It is also true that in other cases trophy hunting has failed to stimulate conservation of argali and its habitats and has by itself caused negative impacts on the population and as well as increased poaching pressure;
- Habitat degradation and in particular competition with livestock are caused by a lack of regulations for the use of argali habitat for livestock breeding and other land use types;
- Decisions about management and use of argali, despite availability of monitoring data, are often rather driven by political and commercial interests than based on sound knowledge;

- While many threats and underlying reasons are similar between the Range States and affect all argali populations to a varying extent, practical lessons learnt from successful management approaches, experiences with legal and regulatory framework, methods and results of applied research, and monitoring data are hardly noticed beyond national borders; and
- Protected areas contribute to the conservation of argali and its habitats. However, more than often protected areas are insufficient to cover the year-round habitat requirements of argali. Inside the protected areas poaching, trophy hunting, livestock grazing and other activities take place. One of the reasons is lack of funding and staffing of protected areas, even in countries where trophy hunting creates significant revenues.

THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSBOUNDARY MANAGEMENT

When argali move across the borders they may encounter impenetrable fences, degraded habitat and unregulated hunting. Communication-, funding-related, and legal and regulatory barriers intervene which affect the ability to implement transboundary initiatives in the region focused on argali. As a result the transboundary nature of most of the argali populations, adds certain additional challenges to their conservation. The barriers to migration (aside border fences, also linear infrastructure, local habitat destruction, occupancy of important migration sites by herders and others) reduce effective population sizes, cause genetic isolation and reduce access to suitable seasonal habitats. Fences can directly cause mortality if argali run into them and get injured. Reportedly poachers use fences and migration corridors for targeted poaching.

CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND REGULATION OF USE

Argali is listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (except for *O. a. hodgsoni* in China and *O. a. nigrimontana* of Kazakhstan, which are listed in Appendix I). The United States Endangered Species Act (ESA) lists argali as endangered, except in Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, where they are listed as threatened. In the European Union (EU) argali are listed under Annex B of the EC Wildlife Trade Regulations, except for *O. a. hodgsonii* and *O. a. nigrimontana*, which are included in Annex A (EC Reg. No 709/2010 (amending EC Reg. No. 338/97)).

Argali is, as a species or in the context of a broader ban on hunting, formally protected from any extractive use in all of its Range States. Permits for trophy hunting on the basis of a quota are issued by the governments of Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In the past this was also practiced in China and Kazakhstan (until 2003). Further, a number of protected areas in all Range States contribute to the legal protection of argali from persecution and direct habitat destruction.

Challenging the success of argali conservation activities is the fact that many Range States: do not have the resources to manage the species and protected areas or to carry out sophisticated research and monitoring activities; have not successfully defined a role for the sustainable use of the species and justified its value in the context of the conservation of the species; communicate in an unsatisfactory way at a local, national level and more so at a transboundary level; and don't have a coherent system of laws that defines what is permitted and where.

Over the past years, there have been several projects and activities in the range countries that have had an argali research and conservation component. Some of them were also developed with a view of creating some level of transboundary cooperation. The impact of such projects on the conservation of argali is difficult to assess as in most cases no evaluation reports are available and project lifetimes are usually too short to assess the impact on such dynamic systems as animal populations and their habitats. Research projects tend to provide scientifically well justified scientific results based on hard data. However, the conclusions are often too vague for practical management decisions and their implementation. Further, scientific research projects are not always directly linked to conservation projects. In complex

programmes, focusing for example on development of protected areas or broader environmental conservation, issues related to the conservation and sustainable use are sometimes not of the highest priority. Another problem is that lessons learnt in successful projects are rarely known in other Range States. Last but not least, project activities of one organization active in different countries are not necessarily connected to each other in a satisfactory way. Conservation issues of transboundary character like poaching, illegal trade, barriers to migration, cooperation in sustainable use and others are not yet addressed in a way and an intensity necessary to achieve results for the long-term conservation of argali.

TRANSBOUNDARY CONSERVATION OF ARGALI UNDER A CMS INSTRUMENT

Argali are of a conservation status which would significantly benefit from the international cooperation that could be achieved through a CMS instrument. There are different CMS options, legally binding and non-legally binding, that could be developed and used for that purpose. Based on the overview of different CMS instruments, the combination of a non-binding MoU and Action Plan appears to be the most suited CMS instrument.

SUBSTANTIATION OF THE CASE FOR A NEW INSTRUMENT

In light of the discussions on the CMS Future Shape process, there are three CMS instrument options that could be considered:

- **OPTION ONE:** To merge existing species-relevant MoUs into a broader Central Asian migrating mammals MoU and action plan. In the framework of this option, parties could also consider three alternatives: a more narrow-focused Central Asian ungulate MoU, an MoU on migratory species in Central Asian mountain ecosystems and an MoU on snow leopards and argali. This option would be in response to the concern that the proliferation of MoU should be controlled, finances secured but at the same time ability maintained to implement activities for the species covered by such MoUs.
- **OPTION TWO:** This option would include developing an action plan and subsequently consider the development of an MoU.
- **OPTION THREE:** This option would entail developing an MoU and action plan for argali together. There are several CMS MoUs that generally serve as good models, including the Saiga Antelope, Bukhara Deer and Siberian Crane MoU. An Argali MoU and Action Plan could be developed under a broader Central Asian Strategy: a slightly modified version of this option would entail developing the Argali MoU and Action Plan under a common framework that outlines the main issues and common problems but allows for focus on individual species. However, as the timeframe for the development of the Central Asian Strategy is still unclear, the possible establishment of an Argali MoU and Action Plan should not be hindered by the absence of such Strategy.

WHAT IS THE BEST INSTRUMENT FOR ARGALI?

Transboundary management of argali alone under option three is complex given the countries involved, issues to be addressed, and the different legal systems and levels of protections accorded to the species. Weighing all the advantages and disadvantages, option three seems the most feasible and promising option for pursuing the conservation of argali.

WHETHER THE PROPOSAL HELPS TO DELIVER A SPECIFIC EXISTING CMS COP MANDATE OR OTHER EXISTING CMS INITIATIVE

When argali was listed under Appendix II, it was also identified as a Cooperative Action species (UNEP/CMS/Resolution 10.23). The Central Eurasian Aridland Mammals Action Plan (ScC17/Doc.13), submitted to the CMS Scientific Council in November 2011, is a first draft, intended to stimulate discussion and identify further action needed to finalize the document in consultation with the Range States and other stakeholders, and to agree on next steps towards its implementation. Developing an MoU, single or multi-species, covering argali can help deliver on the goals of the Cooperative Action.

THE FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL, AND WHAT PLAN FOR FINANCING THE INSTRUMENT IS IN VIEW

Unlike CMS legally-binding agreements, MoUs and Action Plans have no regular secure funding but rely on voluntary contributions. Assuming, as it is currently, that most of the ongoing research conservation activities in the range countries are still carried out and funded by known NGOs and foundations, the added costs to consider for a possible CMS instrument are those related to: the communication activities and MoU/Action Plan coordination. If the assumption is different, i.e., that the expectation is also for the MoU coordinator to raise funding for research and conservation activities, hire as staff or consultants argali experts, then the costs to consider would be significantly higher.

Drawing on the experience of the Saiga antelope and Siberian crane MoUs, some key tasks of the MoU Coordinator would include: maintaining communication with the Range States and CMS Secretariat; facilitating an argali experts' network; supporting the elaboration of documents, such as the MoU and Action Plan and relevant reports; maintaining a website; acting as managing editor of an argali newsletter, which could be published two/three times per year and making arrangements for the translation of the newsletter in at least English, Russian and Chinese; and supporting the preparation of Range States meetings and technical meetings, if agreed upon. Covering the basic day-to-day costs of maintaining argali activities under a CMS instrument would be in the range of US 10,000 to 15,000 per year. This amount would include communication and translation costs and staff's salary, based on the assumption that this would be a part-time position in one of the Range States.

In view of a potential CMS instrument, funding will have to be secured for a meeting of experts and officials from the Range States to adopt a CMS instrument of their choice, which would include the relevant Action Plan. Convening a meeting of Range States of argali could cost somewhere in the range of US 50,000-75,000, if held in the region. This is calculated approximately based on the number of participants (1-3 from each Range State in addition to 5 international experts, and a representative from each of CMS, CITES, the EU and the US). Some of the participation costs could be covered by the Range State themselves. Similarly, the cost for the participation of experts could be covered by the NGO and institutions they represent.

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FINANCING PLAN IS SUSTAINABLE IN THE LONG TERM

The question of the financial sustainability of a possible CMS instrument on argali in the first place concerns the coordination of MoU and Action Plan and financing of Range States meetings and technical workshops. In the second place, it concerns the financing of the implementation of the activities under the Action Plan.

The first goal of a CMS instrument on argali is to ensure communication among Range States and leave the primary responsibility on the Range States and relevant departments, hunting concessionaires and NGOs currently in the Range States working on argali conservation issues to fund their own conservation and research activities. The next question is whether an argali CMS instrument should have a funding mechanism in the form of a trust or fund. Depending on the level of funding generated, some of the resources could go towards covering the costs of communication activities, meetings and workshops and, as available, conservation and research activities.

WHETHER A NEW INSTRUMENT IS THE ONLY OPTION, OR WHETHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS EXIST, SUCH AS EXTENDING AN EXISTING INSTRUMENT

Creating a new instrument is not the only option. One of the alternatives would be on focusing on revising, improving and adopting the Central Eurasian Aridland Mammals Action Plan and work in the priorities for argali conservation and research and transboundary collaboration. This alternative does not

exclude setting up a working group inclusive of experts and managers from the Range States and does not exclude either the decision at a later stage to propose the adoption of an MoU and specific Action Plan.

WHETHER A CMS INSTRUMENT IS THE ONLY OPTION, OR WHETHER THE SAME OUTCOMES COULD BE ACHIEVED BY DELIVERY THROUGH ONE OR MORE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS, OR BY OTHER MEANS

A CMS instrument is not the only option, but based on preliminary discussions with experts, international and local, as well as a survey that the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Transboundary Conservation Specialist Group has carried out looking at the effectiveness of transboundary conservation initiatives, a CMS instrument is likely to generate greater political engagement and be a catalyst for funding and action on the ground.

WHAT OTHER SYNERGIES AND EFFICIENT WAYS OF WORKING CAN BE FORESEEN

One of the recommendations under the Future Shape process, was to develop regional hubs to strengthen MEA implementation, possibly through cooperation with UNEP and other UN agencies and office. Having a Central Asia hub would be critical given the Central Eurasian Aridland Concerted Action and Cooperative Action, the Saiga antelope and Bukhara deer MoUs and the possible consideration of a CMS instrument on argali or extension of an existing one. Currently the UNEP/CMS Regional Officer for Central Asia has been seconded to the UNEP office in Moscow. This is a Junior Professional Officer (JPO) position paid by the German government, which will end in October 2013. Based on feedback from Range States during CoP10 (personal communication 2011) and the CMS Secretariat (personal communication 2012), this position is considered very important for the successful implementation of CMS Central Asian instruments.

As discussed earlier, for some of the MoUs, like the Siberian Crane and Saiga Antelope, the communication as well as technical coordination activities are outsourced to partner NGOs. A CMS instrument on argali could benefit from the same approach. In that context, there are two possible approaches that could be followed: one to establish an NGO dedicated exclusively to the conservation of argali and register it as a charity (in the UK and the US or both because of easier access to funding opportunities); the other to rely on existing NGOs for providing a coordination role.

Finally, it is important to involve from the outset representatives of MEAs, international organizations and initiatives whose work affects the conservation of argali or that can potentially dedicate activities and resources for its benefit. They include CITES, FAO and possibly the Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management (CACILM). Similarly, it is also advisable, given the sustainable use component and the importance of the species for trophy hunting, to involve the US Fish and Wildlife Services.

POSSIBLE ROADMAP TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CMS INSTRUMENT ON ARGALI

There are several steps that can be foreseen leading up to the development of an Argali MoU and Action Plan and a functioning framework for carrying out tasks to ensure communication and exchange on the transboundary conservation of argali.

First of all, the current Argali network could be expanded to other experts, scientists, managers, conservationists and institutional members that could significantly contribute to discussions, knowledge exchange and activities on argali. While at this stage the network has a purely informal nature and serves the purpose of information-sharing, in view of a development of a CMS instrument on argali it could develop into a formal network, with a mandate to serve specific MoU/Action Plan development-related purposes, including potentially the role of the MoU coordinator.

The second step would be to establish an argali working group composed of Range State representatives and selected experts, supported by the IUCN Caprinae Specialist Group and the IUCN WCPA

Transboundary Conservation Specialist Group, given the transboundary nature of the species, issues and the expertise that this Group could provide especially on legal, institutional, and policy matters.

Once the MoU/Action Plan are adopted and the working group and argali network formalized, if Range States agree, it would be important given the number of Range States involved and the number of potential transboundary issues at hand, to set task forces under the working group.

Finally, “informal” focal points could be designated from the argali network in each Range State. Such focal points could work in close cooperation with the MoU Coordinator on gathering on a regular basis information on argali in their country.

*WHETHER AN ORGANIZATION OR (PREFERABLY) A COUNTRY HAS COMMITTED TO LEADING
THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS*

As of June 2012, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan expressed language of commitment. Mongolia could be willing to co-lead this effort. Developing a CMS instrument on argali could lead to involving China and Afghanistan, two countries that are not party to CMS.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A CMS instrument or extension of an existing one can have important positive ramifications for the conservation of argali across its range, in the form of endorsing legal reforms in some of the range countries that are beneficial for the species; and stimulating joint monitoring activities and responses to common threats. It is also an opportunity to bridge the divide between conservation and sustainable use, and within that realm promote and endorse trophy hunting programs designed to ensure the conservation of the species. Finally, the CMS Secretariat should consider, with interested States and States Parties, funding options for extending the Regional Officer for Central Asia beyond its current term as well as explore options for basing that position in the region.