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THREE DECADES  
FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE

# Karakoram-Pamir Landscape Initiative



Promoting  
transboundary  
cooperation  
between China  
and Pakistan  
for the  
Karakoram-Pamir  
landscape

The Karakoram-Pamir Landscape (KPL) initiative is a regional programme for enhancing cooperation among countries for biodiversity management and sustainable development in the China-Pakistan border region of the western Hindu Kush Himalayas. The initiative began with an agreement signed in Beijing for bilateral collaboration between the governments of China and Pakistan to ensure the protection of Marco Polo sheep and other endangered species in two adjacent transboundary protected areas – the Khunjerab National Park in Pakistan and the Taxkorgan Nature Reserve in China – and focuses on maintaining the sanctity of the protected areas on both sides of the border. Emphasis is placed on creating sustainable economic opportunities for the people in the border region and improving their quality of life by mobilizing them to protect the environment, which could in turn enhance the local economy.

The initiative aims to address cross-border challenges and increase opportunities through the development of a regional framework for cooperation and understanding. This framework will provide the basis for an integrated and participatory approach to conservation, adaptation, and sustainable development. The process will be based upon the development of an improved regional knowledge base, information and experience sharing, capacity building, and promotion of stakeholder consultation and community participation.

## Protected Areas in the Karakoram-Pamir Landscape

The Karakoram-Pamir landscape (KPL) includes 19 protected areas (see table); the Taxkorgan Nature Reserve in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China and Khunjerab National Park in Gilgit-Baltistan province of Pakistan are contiguous but on different sides of the border.

Taxkorgan Nature Reserve was established in 1984 and covers an area of 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> in the southwest corner of Xinjiang. The reserve is mountainous, including the northern flanks of the Karakoram, the western edge of the Kunlun, and the eastern rim of the Pamir Plateau, and about half of the land lies at or above 4,500 metres. The reserve has important populations of large ungulates and carnivores with some endangered species including the markhor (*Capra falconeri*) and Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*).

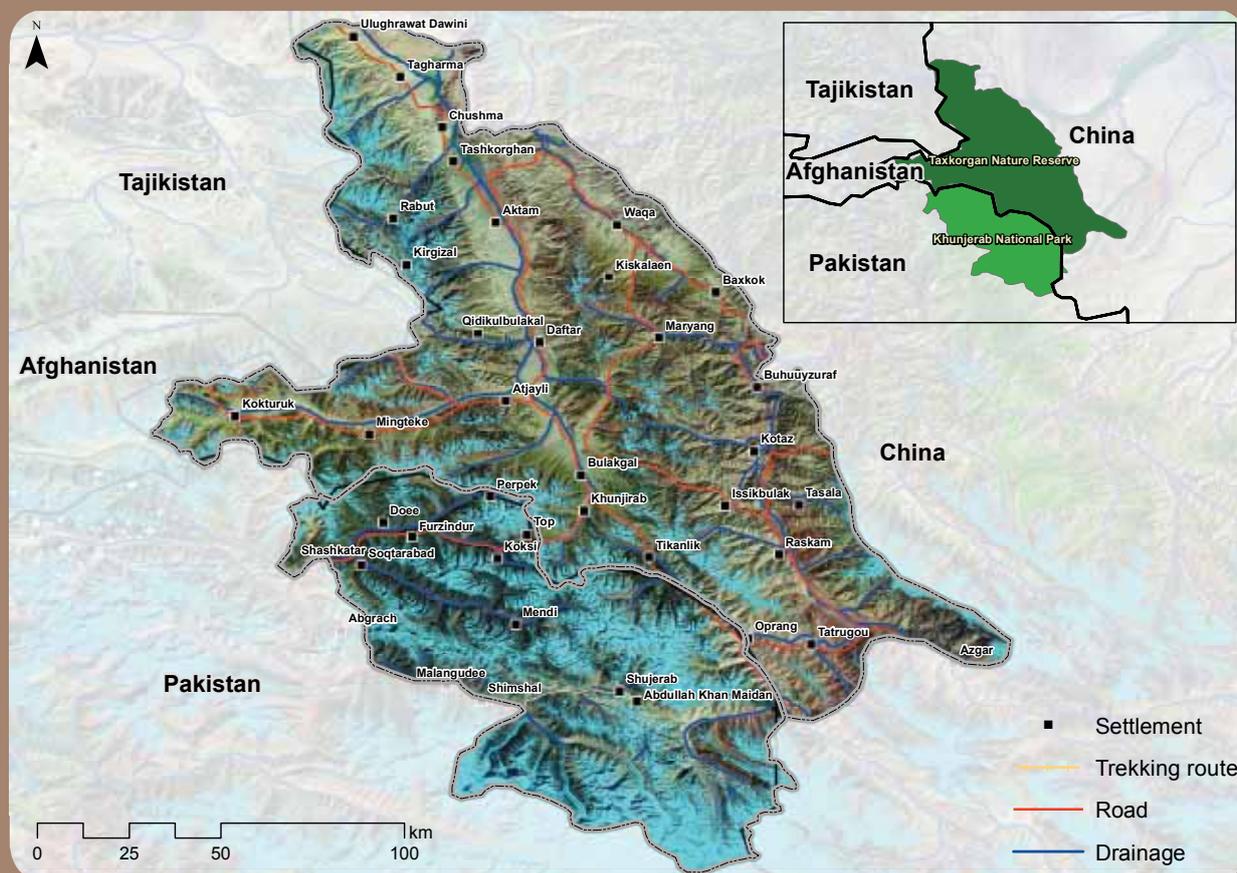
Khunjerab National Park was established in 1975 and is Pakistan's third largest national park. The high-altitude park covers an area of about 4,445 km<sup>2</sup>

and includes the highest pass between Pakistan and China at 4,700 metres. The national park is a biodiversity hotspot and was set up to protect a number of endangered and threatened species of the Pamir and Tibetan Plateau, including snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*), Marco Polo sheep, and Himalayan ibex (*Capra sibirica*).

### Protected Areas in the Karakoram-Pamir Landscape

	Number	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Karakoram</b>	18	
National parks	2	14,455
Khunjerab National Park		4,455
Central Karakoram National Park		10,000
Wildlife sanctuary	1	272
Game reserves	3	853
Community-managed areas	12	4,198
<b>Pamir</b>	1	
Taxkorgan Nature Reserve		15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>34,778</b>

Map of the Karakoram-Pamir Landscape



## Biodiversity in the Karakoram-Pamir Landscape

The Karakoram-Pamir landscape has extreme variations in altitude with a wide variety of vegetation and ecological zones. The landscape supports a striking mosaic of plant communities including different species of medicinal plants. The region also provides ecosystem services that support sustainable agrobiodiversity and a wide range of traditional livestock breeds. The landscape is home to a considerable number of globally threatened species like markhor, Marco Polo sheep, snow leopard, Himalayan lynx (*Lynx lynx*), blue sheep (*Pseudois nayaur*), Ladakh urial (*Ovis vignei*), musk deer (*Moschus leucogaster*), and many species of birds.

## Transboundary Challenges and Opportunities

Each transboundary landscape presents unique challenges. In the KPL, many people live and subsist on the natural resources of the protected areas in the border region. Changes due to population growth, tourism development, weak enforcement of policy due to remoteness and inaccessibility, and poaching and illegal trade of animal parts have marked impacts on both people and nature. The ecological health of habitats on both sides of the border is at risk because of anthropogenic pressures from the local communities and beyond. Sustainable solutions for human-wildlife conflicts, and for issues related to land use practices, infrastructure development, tenure, and resource ownership, can help to minimize the dependence of people on the natural environment for their subsistence.

The KPL transboundary initiative provides a platform for researchers and managers in Pakistan and China to work together and find sensible solutions for issues of mutual concern related to biodiversity conservation and socioeconomic development. The area has a tremendous attraction for tourists; the KPL initiative can help to ensure that this potential is used to contribute to sustainable development of the tourism industry and ensure benefit sharing with the local people.

## Transboundary Landscape Cooperation

The transboundary landscape approach includes both natural and managed components of biodiversity (agrobiodiversity, wildlife, wildlife habitats) and explicitly recognizes the important role of cultural diversity in maintaining biodiversity. In practice, maintaining, creating, and protecting connectivity



in a transboundary setting is challenging because of the complexity of the ecological and human issues. The KPL initiative seeks the support and collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders, including the Governments of China and Pakistan and international development agencies, to formulate a long-term conservation and development plan. The participation and involvement of a variety of stakeholders, including local agro-pastoral communities, is essential for the development of a plan that balances the twin objectives of conserving the fragile ecosystem and fulfilling the needs of the communities that rely on the area's natural resources. The main objectives of the initiative are to

- improve understanding of the region's rich biodiversity and the science of the effects of climate change on key ecosystems within the KPL;
- assess the adaptive capacity and livelihood options for people living in the KPL; and
- promote transboundary cooperation for the
  - conservation and long-term monitoring of vulnerable ecosystems;
  - sustainable use of ecosystem goods and services within the KPL and beyond; and
  - creation of an international protected area connecting the existing national protected areas.



## Implementing Partners

ICIMOD is working with several partners to accomplish the goals of the Karakoram-Pamir Landscape initiative, including scientific institutions and community-based organizations in China and Pakistan.

### China

- Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography, Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS)
- Taxkorgan Nature Reserve
- Universities and government institutions in Xinjiang
- Other CAS institutes

### Pakistan

- Gilgit-Baltistan Forest Wildlife and Parks Department
- WWF-Pakistan
- IUCN-Pakistan
- Karakoram International University (KIU)
- Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP)
- Khunjerab National Park (KNP)
- Central Karakoram National Park (CKNP)



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