

IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETION MEMORANDUM (ICM)
Revised Template version 5/18/06

A. BASIC TRUST FUND INFORMATION

TF Name:	Conservation of Pu Luong-Cuc Phuong Limestone Landscape
TF Number:	TF028987
Task Team Leader Name:	Tony Whitten, EASRE
TF Amount: \$749,885	Total financing: US\$1,111,448 (includes Government of Vietnam \$60,000 and Government of Spain \$301,562
Recipient of TF funds:	Fauna and Flora International
Type of TF :	GEF child fund
Single/Multi Donor:	Multi
Donor(s) Name(s):	Global Environment Facility (GEF)
TF Program Source Code:	GEFIA
Purpose of TF:	TA - Technical Assistance
TF Approval Date:	April 5, 2001
TF Activation Date:	July 27, 2001
TF Closing Date(s):	September 28, 2006
Date of ICM Submission to TFO:	
Cost and Financing Table:	
Goods	\$67,724
Works	\$1,234
Services	\$594,894
Workshops/Training	\$50,155
Incremental operating costs	\$33,509
Total expenditure	\$747,516

B. TRUST FUND DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN

1. Original (and Revised) Trust Fund Development Objectives

The project goal was to maintain the ecological integrity and cultural character of the Pu Luong - Cuc Phuong limestone range (Vietnam) at the landscape level by building a foundation for capacity in ecosystem landscape management. This goal was pursued through activities grouped under five objectives: (1) Develop a landscape plan and strengthen inter-provincial co-ordination (2) Enhance management quality of an expanded protected areas network based on improved knowledge of the limestone

landscape; (3) Develop conditions for protection so that threatened habitats and species can recover; (4) Generate support and participation among stakeholders and wider public for conservation of the limestone ecosystem; and (5) Enable community-based natural resource management to support ecosystem conservation.

The Mid-Term Review mission concluded that the project partners did not have the requisite institutional authority to achieve the first objective concerning landscape planning. The highly-decentralized nature of governance in Vietnam poses considerable challenges to inter-provincial planning in general. In the case of the Pu Luong-Cuc Phuong limestone landscape, active engagement of three provinces (Ninh Binh, Thanh Hoa and Hoa Binh) was required, and within and between each province, coordination between provincial departments responsible for planning and investment coordination, tourism planning, cultural issues, as well as broad natural resources management, extends well beyond the institutional remit of the provincial forest protection units. Recognizing these shortcomings of the original project design, the MTR revised the first objective to “*establishing a foundation for landscape planning and management within the limestone range through promotion of inter-sectoral and inter-provincial processes*”. This change was approved by World Bank and endorsed by the implementing partner and host agency.

2. Original (and Revised) Trust Fund Activities/Components

Activities were grouped under five components:

Component 1 Policy and landscape planning

This component originally included the development and distribution of a landscape map and explanatory leaflet as a basis for improved coordination and planning throughout the landscape. However, given the institutional issues noted above, the participatory review following the MTR recommended revising the objective to encourage a more integrated and coordinated approach to managing the landscape as a whole, by refocusing the component on support for an inter-provincial landscape-level planning group.

Component 2 Protected areas development / assessment

This component included baseline studies on the hydro-geology of the Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong landscape and biodiversity at Pu Luong Nature Reserve. Cuc Phuong National Park had already benefited from considerable investments in biodiversity surveys and so this did not feature prominently in the project design. The component also included a package of financial and technical support to develop a feasibility study for the establishment of a nature reserve in the Ngoc Son – Ngo Luong area with a view to establishing a corridor between Pu Luong Nature Reserve and Cuc Phuong National Park. Establishment of a protected area here was seen as a means of conserving forest cover as a critical biodiversity corridor in the landscape. Institutional responsibility for feasibility studies lie with the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI), part of the central Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Support was therefore provided to FIPI for this component of work. The feasibility study concluded that the forests in this area had high biodiversity values, including supporting a small remnant

population of the endangered Delacour's Langur¹, that there was strong provincial and local commitment to nature reserve establishment, and that a nature reserve should be established.

This component also included more general forms of capacity building support for protected areas management authorities in the karst system, including for the management boards of Pu Luong Nature Reserve and Cuc Phuong National Park. Following the mid-term self assessment process, management support was also extended to the management board of Van Long Nature Reserve. The small package of support for Van Long was seen as effective.

Component 3 Enforcement and protection

This component of support aimed to provide support to forest protection units and other groups to strengthen law enforcement and species protection efforts; and the development of strategies for addressing hunting, particularly of key species, in the landscape. This included support work on the establishment of provincial level hunting and wildlife trade ordinances. This component is assessed as being appropriate to the overall management objectives of the landscape and well conceived.

Component 4 Public awareness

This component sought to broaden and deepen public awareness of the conservation values of the limestone landscape at different levels – at site, provincial and national level. At local level, the project sought to develop improved local awareness of protected areas management issues at Cuc Phuong National Park and Pu Luong Nature Reserve. This is assessed as being an appropriate component of design.

Component 5 Community-based natural resources management

This component was supported by the Spanish government, through the Spanish Agency for Cooperation and Development (AECI), and included baseline socio-economic studies, promotion of ecotourism, support for community-based natural resources management activities and a small revolving credit scheme, under management of provincial Forest Protection Units and the Pu Luong Nature Reserve Management Board. This component is assessed as being appropriate in most respects, with very positive feedback from local communities on ecotourism and small-scale livelihood investments. However, the credit scheme was under-designed, leading to implementation problems, particularly with respect to funds management and reporting procedures.

3. Outcome Indicators

Indicators, as included in the project logframe were as follows:

Objectively verifiable indicators (OVIs) at project goal level:

- * Water flows and quality
- * Change in forest cover

¹ A long-tailed, black-and-white monkey

- * Integrity of specific conservation features
- * Change in landscape

OVIs at **project purpose level**:

- * Amount and quality of critical baseline data
- * Knowledge levels in management agencies
- * EM principles integrated in regional plans and local decrees

OVIs at **objective level**:

Objective 1: To develop a landscape plan for the entire range and introduce this as a framework for regional policy and planning

- * Conservation guidelines and sensitive sites are included in future regional development policy statements and planning
- * Amount of new development in sensitive areas formally approved by government

Objective 2: Enhance the management quality of an expanded protected area network based on a improved knowledge base of the limestone landscape

- * Designation of Ngoc Son NR
- * Technical ability and knowledge ability of park staff
- * Level of on-the-ground management
- * Quality of bilingual survey reports

Objective 3: Create the conditions of protection that will permit threatened species and habitats to recover

- * Level of enforcement of wildlife laws
- * Level of uncontrolled resource exploitation
- * Area and frequency of coverage by enforcement staff
- * Level of community based wildlife and forest protection
- * Trends in primate population and distribution

Objective 4: Generate support and participation among stakeholders and the wider public for conservation of the limestone ecosystem.

- *The limestone range attains a positive public profile
- * Level of knowledge of selected target groups on special conservation values and management needs of limestone range
- * Attitudes and actions of selected target groups towards conservation

Objective 5: To enable a rural development component that integrates Community based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) with ecosystem conservation

- * A CBNRM component is designed, financed and initiated

With the exception to the changes noted above to the component and sub-activities originally intended to develop a landscape plan, there were no changes to OVI

s.

C. OUTCOME

1. Relevance of TF Objectives, Design and Implementation

The project addressed biodiversity conservation and sustainable use priorities at international, regional and national level, within the broad framework of the ecosystem approach adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity and thus by the Global Environment Facility. The limestone landscape of Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong represents a globally-important example of karst limestone ecosystems and supports the largest remaining area of lowland limestone forest in northern Vietnam. At national level, the project provided support to central and provincial governments to implement forest conservation and management priorities identified in the National Forest Development Strategy – that sought to expand protected areas coverage to include priority sites and to strengthen the management capacity of existing protected areas management authorities. The project was included in World Bank Country Assistance Strategies for Vietnam (2003-2006) as a means of supporting GoVs efforts to strengthen management of forests and protected areas, and to encourage greater public participation in such management.

2. Achievement of TF Development Objective

Assessing project performance against the Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs) at goal and purpose level was constrained because the project was unable to monitor a number of OVIs at the goal level. In part, this was due to the inclusion in project design of OVIs with inherent difficulties for monitoring change during the short lifetime of the project (e.g. changes in landscape using fixed point photography); or because the results of such monitoring would always deliver inconclusive evidence that goals had been attained (e.g. ‘Integrity of specific conservation features’ or ‘water flows and quality’). Assessment of outcomes for this ICM therefore rely heavily on aggregating the objective (= component) level indicators. Based on this, it can be concluded that the project achieved most of its original objectives.

The project succeeded in encouraging closer working relationships between relevant agencies in three provinces – essential for effective management of the landscape karst system. Capacities of forest rangers and law enforcement also increased as a result of project activities and importantly, the project succeeded in helping greatly improve the relationship between forest rangers and local communities. The project also succeeded in completing a wide range of surveys and studies, and these have been used to help focus management activities.

The project made a very significant contribution to improving the knowledge based required for effective management of targeting on conservation investments. Prior to the project, there was rather little known about the biodiversity and geomorphological values and features of the limestone karst landscape. This situation has now been greatly improved. The project supported detailed surveys of vegetation, mammals, fish, butterflies, snails and cave invertebrates. Collectively, these have shown that the landscape supports distinctive biodiversity assemblages and high overall levels of biodiversity. Five major forest subtypes occur as a result of local variations in underlying

substrate and elevation as well as a range of secondary vegetation types. The results of recent botanical work at Pu Luong indicate that the proposed nature reserve supports a diverse flora, with at least 1,109 vascular plant species documented at the site. The globally threatened conifer *Pinus kwangtungensis* forms a conspicuous element of the flora in one forest subtype. A total of 84 mammal species (including 24 bat species) have so far been identified and documented, 162 bird species, 55 fish species, 28 reptile species and 13 amphibian species. Survey data of invertebrates remains incomplete and somewhat rudimentary, but the project helped identify 12 snail species that are possibly endemic to the site. The botanical uniqueness and natural isolation of certain forest formations in the landscape suggests that the proposed nature reserve has strong potential to support high levels of invertebrate endemism and, quite possibly, new taxa to science.

The critically-endangered Delacour's Langur is restricted to this limestone to the landscape. Surveys supported by the project, and undertaken jointly with the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre, identified several new groups of this species in the PLCP landscape. The surveys also identified hunting as the principle threat to these populations. A follow-up survey towards the end of the project suggests that, despite the efforts of local authorities and the project, the population of this species continued to decline during the project period.

To some extent, the project has made a contribution to local livelihoods, firstly by helping build a greater level of communication and trust with forest rangers and secondly through a range of small scale development interventions, including a revolving credit scheme managed by forest rangers and by developing what is now a significant and self-sustaining nature based tourism operation in the villages in and around Pu Luong Nature Reserve. Further progress was constrained by highly-restrictive forest management regulations that work against local participation in park planning and management. These regulations have recently been revised and more flexibility now exists for co-management based approaches (although these regulations remain rather restrictive).

In its original formulation, Component 1 of the project sought to strengthen inter-provincial coordination within the limestone landscape, principally by developing and establishing a landscape plan as a framework for regional policy and planning. However, through the early stages of the project, this component proved complex and problematic within the context of existing institutional arrangements for planning in Vietnam. The Mid-Term Review agreed that this design feature, as originally formulated, was over-ambitious and inconsistent with the institutional responsibilities and capabilities of the Forest Protection Department of MARD – the project implementing partner. The MTR requested the project prepare a paper to review institutional options for addressing landscape planning. This paper² reviewed a number of possible options and recommended the establishment of an informal forum – the Pu Luong-Cuc Phuong Mountains Planning Group to bring together senior representatives of the three provinces (and specifically the Departments of Planning and Investment) with interim support from the PLCP project.

² Infield (2004). *Discussion Paper. The Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong Mountains Planning Group. Options for Landscape level Planning for the Pu Luong – Cuc Phuong Landscape*. 9 pages.

The change outlined above proved extremely successful. Two meetings of the inter-provincial planning group have taken place, and the ICM mission encountered strong provincial commitment and support for the group. All three provinces highlighted practical examples of where the inter-provincial group had strengthened inter-provincial planning, for example on forest management, coordination of biodiversity conservation activities (such as sharing experience on impacts of gun control ordinances) and on ecotourism development. All three provinces expressed a commitment to ensuring the work of the group continued. Indeed, all three provinces have committed to formalizing and strengthening the working procedures of the group and elevating the seniority of involvement in group discussions. The provincial governments involved are also exploring Man and Biosphere designation as one option to raise the profile of the importance of the landscape, and as a means of codifying institutional coordination. Efforts are now underway by provinces to secure central government support for implementing these changes. This aspect of the project is therefore considered pioneering and highly satisfactory (since there are few precedents for inter-provincial coordination and cooperation in conservation management). It is too early to assess impacts of this improved ‘enabling environment’ for biodiversity conservation, but there is a strong likelihood that this will lead to improved effectiveness of biodiversity conservation efforts throughout the landscape.

A CD includes all the main reports and presentations from this project, and is included as part of the ICM for information.

A more detailed statement of project progress against each objectively verifiable indicator is included in Annex 1.

Overall ratings for each objective are given in the table below:

Objective (summarized)	Rating	Comment
1. To develop a landscape plan	Highly satisfactory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original objective modified by MTR. • Good institutional analysis undertaken • Improved understanding of the potential value of landscape management approaches • Landscape ‘forum’ established and has met regularly during and since completion of the project • Strong provincial commitment to the Inter-provincial landscape management forum, as a pioneering and innovative institutional mechanism.
2. Enhancing management quality of an expanded PA network	Satisfactory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger management board capacity (as measured by Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool) • Participatory evaluation of PLCP concluded that project interventions were

<p>3. Creating conditions for protection and conservation of species and habitats</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p>	<p>highly successful in raising levels of professionalism and capacity of forest protection units</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ngoc Son Nature Reserve was established for the biodiversity corridor between Cuc Phuong National Park and Pu Luong Nature Reserve. However, this has increased conflicts between local forest users and the newly-established management authority responsible for park management. • Participatory management strategies are now needed within the framework of the revised forest protection and development law and revised forest management regulations. It is hoped that this will be addressed as part of follow-up support from the Government of Spain and a grant from the Japan Social Development Fund. • Introduction of an ordinance for gun control and wildlife trade introduced by Thanh Hoa People’s Committee. This enables forest protection rangers to address gun ownership in collaboration with the police. • A voluntary gun control and wildlife trade ordinance introduced in Hoa Binh province. • Biodiversity, geomorphology and hydrological surveys and various studies relevant to landscape management were undertaken and published • Conservation needs assessments and operational management plans prepared for two sites, and baseline management effectiveness studies undertaken • Despite and improved enabling environment for biodiversity conservation I the landscape, surveys undertaken by PLCP and the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre indicate that the population of Delacour’s langur, continued its decline during the project period (see above).
<p>4 Stakeholder support and participation for conservation</p>	<p>Satisfactory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the whole, improved relationships between forest rangers and local communities, particularly as a result of the use of a micro-credit scheme managed by forest protection units in Hoa Binh Province, and by the Pu Luong Nature Reserve Management Board in Thanh Hoa

5. Effective use of CBNRM to integrate rural development and conservation

Satisfactory

- province. To some extent, this transformed the relationship of forest protection units with local communities from ‘forest police’ to ‘partners’ in forest management
- In the newly-established Ngoc Son Nature Reserve, the introduction of significant conflicts have arisen over restrictive forest management regulations.
 - Nature-based, homestay tourism continues at significant levels, with tour companies marketing tours on basis of natural and conservation values of the park. Revenues contribute to village development funds.
 - Small scale livelihood projects were considered successful in general, albeit at rather limited extent, given the small size of this component.
 - The small credit scheme was considered by forest rangers and local communities to be successful, although management and reporting were weak.

3. Efficiency

Overall, investments in PLCP have been cost-effective. The project strengthened partner capacity and then gradually relinquished its own role in field activities, to the point where project inputs comprised only monitoring of field activities, technical inputs and supervision where required. The project also succeeded in leveraging additional support from DED, the German development cooperation agency. This approach helped build ownership and capacity, and generally increased the cost-effectiveness of support. In the longer-term, the operational management plans prepared for Van Long and Pu Luong Nature Reserves should help GoV use conservation investments more efficiently, by ensuring a focus on priority conservation needs. For details of the situation at Ngoc Son, see below.

The effectiveness and cost efficiency of GEF support was challenged by a 13-month start-up delay caused by new project processing requirements in Vietnam. This resulted in synchronization problems of GEF supported activities with those supported by Spanish co-financing. In response to a request from the grant recipient, the World Bank granted an 18-month extension to the project implementation period to enable the project to reach effective completion (see WB Office Memo, dated September 20, 2004). These delays required the project and GoV partners to engage in time consuming procedures to secure grant extensions for both GEF and co-financed activities, to enable full completion of project activities.

4. Development Impacts, including those that are Unintended/Unrelated to TF Objectives

The project was particularly successful in strengthening inter-provincial cooperation, strengthening the capacity of forest protection units, and facilitating and supporting

innovative wildlife trade control and other ordinances. Improving the overall knowledge base for managing the landscape system and agreeing management plans should also contribute, in the longer term, to improved effectiveness and cost-efficiency of conservation investment by enabling the design of more effective management strategies and by ensuring that limited conservation financing is used more efficiently to address conservation priorities. Investments in tourism development show early indications of delivering sustainable financing for local villages, at least in the Pu Luong National Park, where a number of Hanoi-based tour companies continue to run regular trekking tours through the national park. Payments for homestays contribute to village development initiatives and there is strong support at village, district and provincial level for a continuation and expansion of ecotourism.

Some impacts proved harder to monitor and assess. The level of investment available for community-based natural resource management was insufficient to have a measurable direct impact on local livelihoods, given the geographical scale of the project and the population size of the communes involved. CBNRM funds were therefore used more as a tool to help build improved relations with local forest rangers and with the park authorities in general. This approach seems to have been reasonably successful, although the post-project sustainability of this approach is not clear (see below).

The MTR recognized that there was a need to adjust the project's approach to supporting inter-provincial planning, by shifting the focus away from plan preparation towards piloting a new inter-provincial informal forum for dialogue on landscape management. Making progress on inter-provincial dialogue and planning for landscape management proved extremely challenging - requiring a departure from conventional, vertically-aligned planning and reporting. It is clear that efforts on this issue have not been wasted and that the value of the forum is recognized by all three provincial partners. The forum continues to meet, but attention is now needed to strengthen and formalize operating procedures, ensuring stronger senior level engagement at provincial level, developing an inter-provincial work program and securing a small operating budget to cover meeting costs.

Component 2 on protected areas development had mixed results. Efforts to strengthen management capacity at Pu Luong Nature Reserve were moderately successful, and modest support to the nature reserve at Van Long was highly appreciated and successful, even though the level of project investment at Van Long was very modest. However, the management board for Cuc Phuong National Park showed little real commitment to the project, largely because of the modest financial allocations to this protected area.

Project support for the establishment of the nature reserve at Ngoc Son did not result in the intended impacts. The feasibility study was approved by the province, and subsequently an investment plan was also prepared and approved with project support. This had the effect of re-categorizing nearly 17,000 hectares of protection and production forests (in which various forms of forest use were permitted) and over 2000 hectares of

agricultural land, into Special use Forest³ – in which most forms of local use are prohibited (this issue is discussed further below). Inclusion of park establishment as a feature of project design set in train a process that led to the introduction of a restrictive, closed-forest management regime which prevented the project from supporting more inclusive, multiple-use management strategies for the corridor area. This chain of events was recognized as a risk during the MTR, at which time it was anticipated and hoped that a new ‘multiple-use category’ for Special Use Forests would be approved shortly, and that Ngoc Son establishment as a multiple-use SUF would be a useful pilot for this new category.

The formal establishment of the nature reserve was perceived by Hoa Binh as a ‘project success’ and also gained strong initial support from local communities in the new nature reserve, Tan Lac district people’s committee also cited the success of the project in supporting nature reserve establishment, and claimed that since establishment, there are no longer any threats to the forests and biodiversity inside the park.

A strikingly different picture emerged during the field visit to the nature reserve. The new multiple-use category did not materialize, and this has led to environmental impacts and conflicts between local communities and the newly-established park authorities. Since the park establishment involved a transfer of management authority from local households to the state, the province revoked existing land use certificates. Most households accepted this change in the belief that projects would soon follow and that these would bring financial and material benefits in compensation for their agreement to relinquish their formal land titles. However, following park establishment and the introduction of mandatory closed-forest management regimes, local communities soon realized that their access to forest resources, most importantly timber for traditional house-building, coffins and firewood, would be severely curtailed. Shortly after the first efforts of the management board to implement nature reserve regulations, conflicts developed between the management board and local communities, followed by an upsurge in tree felling and firewood collection as local communities tried to build-up stores of timber, coffins and firewood before controls could be effectively implemented. Confiscations and arrests followed, and these aggravated tensions still further. The mission was told that some households (understandably) refuse to relinquish their land use certificates to district authorities.

During the ICM mission in November 2006, the management board and several householders talked openly about this issue and showed the team significant amounts of timber harvested immediately after park establishment. The mission was told that this practice was widespread throughout the new nature reserve but that most timber cutting for house-building has now stopped - perhaps because most households now have sufficient stores of timber for several years to come. The impacts of this period of over-harvesting have not been measured since they took place after completion of the project,

³ Special use forests comprise one of three forest management categories, and approximate to ‘protected areas. The principal purpose of SUFs is biodiversity conservation. The other two forest management categories are protection forests (e.g. for watershed and coastal protection forests) and production forests (including both natural forests and plantations).

but are likely to be substantial. Perhaps more serious for the longer-term will be the transfer of forest management authority from local communities to an under-staffed and under-resourced management board. During the ICM mission visit, the management board noted that local communities were no longer willing to bear the risks and costs of protecting forests from considerable levels of illegal logging by outsiders, since they were no longer ‘their responsibility’. The management board acknowledged they have minimal capacity to effectively manage these threats (comprising only 4 staff with little equipment and no operational budget) and provincial FPD made clear that they are not able to tackle the drivers of these threats – the middlemen that operate unpunished in lowland areas around the reserve.

These considerable problems are exacerbated still further by the zoning arrangements included in the investment plan for the nature reserve - prepared by the central government’s Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (FIPI). Following national guidelines for investment plans, unrevised since the 1960s, these divide the nature reserve into three zones according to forest quality – strict protection zones, restoration zones and service provision zones (the latter for park infrastructure). FIPI undertakes minimal consultation during the zonation planning work, except for a provincial level meeting during which plans are discussed and (usually) approved. Local communities are therefore provided with no opportunity to comment on zoning arrangements, even for land in and around their own villages. Collection of fallen, dead timber is allowed in restoration zones, but not in strict protection zones. Many areas of good quality forest lie close to the 38 villages now zoned into the nature reserve - perhaps because traditional forest stewardship arrangements have served the conservation of these forests well. These areas have now been zoned as ‘strict protection⁴’, and so communities have no immediate access to firewood, timber and other necessary forest resources. To add further confusion, FIPI included valley-bottom agricultural land and villages within the nature reserve boundary, thus including these areas officially as part of the nature reserve.

The mission discussed with provincial FPD and the forest management board possibilities for introducing more appropriate approaches to forest management (for example, through community forestry-based approaches), but there remains a reluctance to proceed with these since these would be inconsistent with existing legal and regulatory frameworks for nature reserve management. There is however consensus between communes, the management board and the provincial FPD that zoning arrangements need to be revised entirely to avoid some of the most obvious and immediate sources of access restrictions.

Nonetheless, work on this issue helped reinforce previous efforts to highlight the shortcomings in the existing GoV procedures for designating new protected areas and planning their management and these lessons can feed into higher level policy discussions on national conservation planning. Following project closure, forest management regulations have been revised and these provide marginally more scope for management boards and provincial authorities to implement more inclusive regimes for

⁴ The zoning map uses the term ‘stringent protection zone’.

nature reserve management. However, until detailed implementation guidelines are made available, the implications of these new regulations for Ngoc Soc remain unclear.

GEF support was successful in leveraging additional support from other sources. AECI committed co-financing for the community based natural resources management component of the project, and following completion of the GEF grant, the World Bank approved grant support from the Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF) of US\$304,200 for continuing and expanding work with local communities in the buffer zone of Pu Luong National Park and for public awareness activities. In 2006, the Spanish government approved over US\$1 million of grant support to build on the platform provided by the PLCP, and specifically to support community-based management in the core and buffer zones of the newly-established Ngoc Son Nature Reserve. It remains to be seen whether this will be feasible within the context of existing forest management regulations. Detailed design work for this initiative is ongoing. Additional small grant support for all four protected areas in the limestone landscape (Cuc Phuong National Park, Ngoc Son Nature Reserve, Pu Luong Nature Reserve and Van Long Nature Reserve) will also be available from the Vietnam Conservation Fund, once this becomes operational in 2006.

5. Overall TF Outcome

The project overall rating is satisfactory.

Rationale: The project made good progress against its objectives and indicators on most aspects and received strong support from the host agency – the Forest Protection Department of MARD. On some aspects, project performance was excellent (e.g. overall project management and building-up the level of knowledge and understanding of the biodiversity and other values of the limestone landscape, and the threats to these values) or strong (e.g. on increasing professionalism of forest protection units, successful support for the introduction of gun and wildlife trade ordinance, and basic but effective support to guide management planning of the three protected areas included in the original project design plus Van Long Nature Reserve, added following the MTE). Changes introduced following the MTR led to very good progress in strengthening inter-provincial dialogue and this led to the development of an encouraging approach for promoting inter-provincial planning - and one that could be replicated elsewhere in Vietnam.

D. Risk to Development Outcome

1. Follow-On Results and/or Investment Activities

Identify and provide a description of the role played by this TF that led to those follow-up activities or investments checked below. (Check all that are applicable):

Activity/Investment:

Recipient/Other Investment; Grant Project/Program; Bank Project; IFC Financial Project/Activity

During the project grant funds were secured from the JSDF (\$304,200) for continuing and expanding work with local communities in the buffer zone of Pu Luong National Park and for public awareness activities, and from the Spanish government (over US\$1 million) for building on the platform provided by the PLCP, and specifically to support community-based management at the newly-established Ngoc Son Nature Reserve.

2. Replicability

The project generated a number of useful models and approaches that could provide useful guidance for elsewhere in Vietnam:

Landscape management: The difficulties experienced in establishing a formal planning mechanism for the landscape, whilst initially unsuccessful, highlighted amongst the three provinces a need to find ways of working together to coordinate planning and landscape management. This is an institutional challenge within the context of a highly decentralized governance system, and one that faces a number of key landscapes and protected areas. The success so far of the informal provincial working group on the limestone landscape holds important lessons for other areas in Vietnam. This experience also has implications for both the National GEF focal point and the World Bank, in terms of the importance that needs to be placed on ensuring that appropriate institutional arrangements are in place prior to GEF focal point endorsement and approval.

Gun control and wildlife trade ordinances: There is a growing recognition that practical tools with strong local ownership will be required to address the chronic threats to Vietnam's wildlife posed by hunting and wildlife trade. Whilst deemed 'illegal' under national law, hunting is often viewed as a customary use of forest wildlife. Illegal capture and trade of wildlife is also largely illegal, but supplies strong market demand at local, national and international level, and is often driven by strong vested interests and organized crime networks. Diagnostic work supported by the project identified a number of options for strengthening enforcement efforts relating to illegal trade, most notably by improving coordination between forest protection units and the police. Assessment of the impacts of voluntary gun control and wildlife trade ordinances introduced in Thanh Hoa and Hoa Binh provinces are needed if these are to provide useful insights for other provinces and projects, and indeed to policy discussions at the national level.

Participation in protected areas management: The project failed to introduce participatory forms of protected areas planning and management. However, the highly-restrictive forest management regulations in place throughout the project period have been revised recently, and the new regulations enable forest management boards to exercise somewhat greater flexibility for local engagement in implementing protected areas management strategies in future. Lessons from efforts to introduce multi-stakeholder management at Ngoc Son may now provide useful guidance and experience for the design of implementation guidelines for the revised forest management regulations.

Operational management planning good practice: The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tools, Conservation Needs Assessments and Operational Management Plans for Pu Luong and Van Long Nature Reserves are clear, identify and prioritize threats and set-out clear priorities for conservation action. As such, they provide useful examples of these tools for other management boards in Vietnam. The existence of these plans and assessments also enable Van Long and Pu Luong to apply for further support from the VCF – thus increasing prospects for post-project sustainability of conservation achievements at these sites. In the case of Pu Luong Nature Reserve, management effectiveness tracker tools (METTs) were compiled towards the beginning and end of the project. The METT scores improved from 34% to 53% between 2001 and 2004 (scores were 33 and 51 respectively). The changes were attributable to improved equipping of the management board, improved interactions and communications between the management board and local communities and other stakeholders, including greater involvement in park planning and management, and finally to improved economic returns derived from Pu Luong Nature Reserve for some communities – mainly as a result of ecotourism activities.

3. Overall Risk to Development Outcome

Rating Scale would: Negligible to Low (L), Moderate (M), Significant (S) and High (H)

Outcome	Rating	Assessment
Stronger coordination and dialogue	M	Strong provincial support, but sustaining progress requires agreement and support of central MARD line ministries (deemed likely), an operational budget (deemed moderate risk as provinces are not able to allocate budget explicitly for inter-provincial cooperation). There is a risk that provincial support at senior level will diminish unless inter-provincial dialogue and cooperation deliver tangible results.
Better-managed protected areas in landscape	L	There is now improved capacity at PA and provincial level on protected areas management and this is likely to grow, encouraged by greater support from central level. Management of the new protected area at Ngoc Son must improve, given the poor start.
Improved conditions for biodiversity conservation based on better understanding and awareness of landscape values	L	There is greater awareness and understanding of landscape values, and this is translating into improved dialogue on landscape planning, proposals to build on landscape values for ecotourism values, reduce impacts of productive sectors <i>etc.</i> Surveys and studies published by the project will also have enduring value, and there are now a greater range of organizations interested in working on conservation and sustainable development in the landscape.
Stronger community support for protected areas and	S	Substantial risks associated with conflicts over resource access within the new Ngoc Son Nature

landscape management approaches		Reserve. This could be lowered significantly if provinces agree in future to adopt alternative approaches. Elsewhere, improved relations with PA management boards, and increased revenue streams and development benefits from livelihood support, credit schemes and ecotourism has promoted support from local communities.
More sustainable livelihoods	M	<p>The project made a good start in supporting livelihoods in areas where few if any donors were delivering support. Livelihood has been very small scale and will need to be scaled-up if this is to sustain tangible impacts. Improved management of the revolving credit scheme will be required if the benefits of this scheme are to be sustained.</p> <p>The key risks to livelihoods are associated with restricted access to the Ngoc Son Nature Reserve (see above) for which solutions are needed.</p>

E. PERFORMANCE

1. Bank

Bank performance was rated as satisfactory. The recipient's Implementation Completion Report considered the Bank's performance as 'very positive', drawing attention to the role of the Bank in securing improved working relations between the project and its partners. The Bank was also credited with support in helping to simplify project objectives and for a constructive approach in securing GEF-support for a no-cost extension. Post completion, the Bank has provided assistance by securing further support to continue community development and public awareness activities in the buffer zone. Better appraisal of the original project design should have identified shortcomings in the institutional design for the project.

2. Recipient

The recipient's performance is rated as highly satisfactory. Project management was rated as excellent by the MTR, a view shared also by the ICM mission. Partners at local, district, provincial and central level all expressed strong appreciation of the recipient's role in management.

F. LESSONS LEARNED / RECOMMENDATIONS

Donor/Bank/Recipient lessons: Two key lessons emerge Firstly, the project has demonstrated that innovative approaches to planning and project implementation can be successful, providing there is a willingness to adapt approaches as needed. Secondly, review at the design stage needs to take greater account of the institutional 'realities' that innovative projects of this nature require. In this case, initial design features for landscape

planning and the establishment of a pilot multiple-use nature reserve proved entirely unrealistic. These issues should have been identified at design and project review stage. The project also serves as a reminder to ensure that support for protected areas management and establishment should include clear safeguards for stakeholder engagement and ensure that future support addresses systemic issues relating to local engagement in PA establishment, planning and management.

GoV and provincial authorities: to these agencies, the project had real value as a learning exercise, particularly concerning the benefits that arise from innovations in planning (e.g. coordinated planning and management between provinces), enforcement measures (e.g. voluntary gun control and wildlife trade control ordinances) and nature reserve establishment (multiple lessons can be drawn from experience at Ngoc Son, including lessons for national and provincial authorities and management boards).

G. ICM PROCESSING AND COMMENTS

1. Preparation

TTL at Approval: Tony Whitten

TTL at Closing: Tony Whitten

Comment of TTL at Closing: Much of what had been hoped for from this project has been achieved. The problems of Ngoc Son need attention and will be raised and monitored during the implementation of the JSDF grant. It would in fact be a better outcome if the nature reserve status were revoked and the area returned to more traditional forest management until some appropriate 'multiple-use' status could be conferred.

FFI has been a solid partner throughout the project, being informed, committed, intent on fostering a partnership with the relevant institutions, and developing their national staff.

Drafted by (if other than TTL): Ross Hughes (Consultant)

Date Submitted to Approving Manager: 1/30/2007

2. Approval

Manager: Rahul Raturi

Date Approved by Manager: 3/12/2007

Manager's Comment:

3. TFO Evaluation of ICM Quality

TFO Reviewer:

TFO Rating on the Quality of ICM (*Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory*):

Comment and Justification for Rating Given by TFO:

Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Period	Progress during project	Source
Intervention Logic / OVIs			
<p>Goal: Ecological integrity and cultural character of the PL-CP range are maintained</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water flows and quality • Change in forest cover • Integrity of specific conservation features • Change in landscape 	2002-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water flows and water quality data baseline information collected, but no further assessment during project. • Specific conservation features assessed only for Delacour's Langur populations at Pu Luong NR, which are thought to have declined between 1999-2004. • Landscape baseline data produced, but repeat monitoring within an insufficient period to discern significant landscape changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hydro-geological survey report in 2003 • Field survey reports in 1999 & 2004. • Landscape survey report in 2005
<p>Purpose: Build a foundation for capacity in ecosystem management in the PL-CP limestone range /</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount and quality of critical baseline data • Knowledge levels in management agencies • EM principles integrated in regional plans and local decrees 	2002-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of critical baseline data collected and shared for several key sites within the landscape • Knowledge levels raised in management agencies • EM principles incorporated in several provincial ordinances and local level plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey reports in 2003, 2004 & 2005. • Project evaluation report (Nguyen Van San, 2005) • Project biannual progress reports: 2003-2006. • Thanh Hoa and Hoa Binh Provincial gun ordinances • Approved wildlife trade and gun control ordinances, adoption of cave management plans adopted into local regulations
Project Objectives / OVIs			
<p>1. To develop a landscape plan for the entire range and introduce this as a framework for regional policy and planning</p> <p><i>Revised by the mid-term self assessment and strategic planning exercise to:</i></p> <p>“Establishment of an informal landscape-level planning group within the project landscape”</p>	2002-2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape-level planning group established by ministerial approval in 2005 and has met twice since • Study tour for provincial partners to Cat Tien landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project biannual progress report: July-Dec, 2005.
<p>2. To enhance the management quality of an expanded protected area network based on an improved knowledge of the limestone landscape</p>	2002-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ngoc Son – Ngo Luong NR designated • Professionalism and capacity of forest protection units raised within the landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official decision to establish Ngoc Son Nature Reserve. • Project evaluation report

Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Period	Progress during project	Source
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designation of Ngoc Son NR • Technical ability and knowledge ability of park staff • Level of on-the ground management • Quality of bilingual survey reports 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site management effectiveness improved at Pu Luong Nature Reserve • Range of bilingual survey reports produced for sites in Thanh Hoa and Hoa Binh provinces 	<p>(Nguyen Van San, 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management Effective Tracking Tool: Pu Luong Nature Reserve, 2001-2004. • PL-CP Project Reports & Publications CD-ROM: 2002-2005.
<p>3. To create the conditions of protection that will permit threatened species and habitats to recover</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of enforcement of wildlife laws • Level of uncontrolled resource exploitation • Area and frequency of coverage by enforcement staff • Level of community based wildlife and forest protection • Trends in primate population and distribution 	2002-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial ordinances on gun control and wildlife trade issued in Thanh Hoa and Hoa Binh; • Site-level law enforcement plans produced for the Cuc Phuong and Pu Luong protected areas. • Area and frequency of coverage by enforcement staff was not assessed – the project prepared a feasibility study to improve forest protection systems at Pu Luong NR completed, and subsequent implementation plan agreed but not undertaken due to later veto by Pu Luong management board. • Levels of community-based wildlife and forest protection was not assessed • Declines in primate population were suggested strongly by trends in survey data of Delacour’s Langur collected in 1999 & 2004 at Pu Luong NR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanh Hoa PC Decision No. 3297/2005/QD-UBND 2/11/2005; Hoa Binh voluntary arrangement in place by close of project. Consultant reports in 2005. • Field survey reports in 1999 & 2004.
<p>4. Generate support and participation among stakeholders and the wider public for conservation of the limestone ecosystem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limestone range attains a positive public profile • Level of knowledge of selected target groups on special conservation values and management needs of the limestone range • Attitudes and actions of selected target groups towards conservation 	2002-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of national awareness campaign, including multi-media exhibitions, documentary films and a large range of items in mainstream media – positive results indicated by inclusion of landscape in tourism portfolios. • Various tour agencies continue to promote nature-based, homestay tourism, post-project, marketing on basis of natural and conservation values of the Pu Luong Nature Reserve. • Levels of awareness of civil society in target areas in Thanh Hoa and Hoa Binh raised • Attitudes and actions towards conservation were note assessed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project biannual progress reports: 2003-2006; Project ICR. • Project evaluation report (Nguyen Van San, 2005)
5. To enable a rural development component that		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBNRM component designed, financed and completed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project biannual progress

Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Period	Progress during project	Source
integrates Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) with ecosystem conservation / <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A CBNRM component is designed, financed and initiated 			reports: 2003-2006; Project ICR.
6. Monitor the impact of project activities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project monitoring and evaluation undertaken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project biannual progress reports: 2003-2006; Project ICR.