

Improving the coverage and management efficiency of protected areas in the Steppe Biome of Russia

PIMS 4194, Atlas project number 00072294

Terminal Evaluation, December 2016 Volume I

Russian Federation

GEF BD SO-1, SP-3 (GEF-4), Outcome 1.1 (GEF-5)

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The evaluation is intended to give a summary of what has been achieved in the project as well as glean some of the lessons that can be learned from it in what was a relatively short period. In the report, I have tried to offer constructive criticism where I think it is warranted and I hope that those involved in the project take it as such.

Finally, as ever, it was a privilege to see some of the areas in which the project was working and to be shown around again with such evident pride. I saw the results of the dedication and enthusiasm that people had put into the work of conserving important places in the world. I would like to offer them my thanks and wish them every success in their continuing endeavours.

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Acronyms, Abbreviations and Glossary

APR	Annual Project Review
BPD	Bird Protection Devices (referring to devices that are attached to power lines to reduce bird mortality from electrocution)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer (referring to GEF)
CTA	Chief Technical Adviser
EOP	End of Project (usually in the context of targets for indicators)
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System(s)
ha	Hectares
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
METT	Monitoring Effectiveness Tracking Tool (for protected areas)
MNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MTR	Midterm Review
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIM	Nationally Implemented (referring to a project implementation modality)
NPD	National Project Director
PA	Protected Area
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
PM	Project Manager
PMU	Project Management Unit
PRF	Project Results Framework
ProDoc	Project Document (referring to the UNDP operational project document)
PB/PSC	Project Board/Project Steering Committee
RUB	Russian roubles
SLCP	Steppe Landscape Conservation Plan
SPA	Steppe Protected Area
TE	Terminal Evaluation
TOR	Terms of Reference

UNDP	United National Development Program
UNDP-CO	UNDP Country Office
UNDP-GEF RTC	UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Centre (based in Istanbul)
USD	United States dollars
Zakaznik	A regional level protected area or reserve
Zapovednik	A central protected area or strict nature reserve (equivalent to IUNC PA Category I)

Executive Summary

Project Information Table

Project Title	Improving the Coverage and Management Efficiency of Protected Areas in the Steppe Biome of Russia		
UNDP Project ID	00072294	PIF Approval Date	
GEF Project ID	3745	CEO Endorsement Date	17 November 2009
ATLAS Business Unit Award No.	00058254	ProDoc Signature Date	27 February 2010
Country	Russian Federation	Date PM hired	16 April 2010
Region:	ECA	Inception W/shop date	13 May 2010
GEF Focal Area/Strategic Objective	Biodiversity GEF-4: SO-1, SP-3 GEF-5: SO-1, Outcome 1.1	MTR completion date	13 May 2013
Trust Fund		If revised, proposed op. closing date:	
Implementing partner	Federal Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment		
Other executing partners	Implementing entity (for financial management): Non-commercial Partnership for Zapovedniks (Partnyorstvo dlya Zapovednikov)		
Project Financing	at CEO endorsement (USD)	At TE (USD)	
[1] GEF Financing	US\$5,304,545.00	US\$5,304,545.00	
[2] UNDP Contribution	US\$10,000.00	US\$0.00	
[3] Government	US\$11,400,000.00	US\$11,506,857.53	
[4] Other partners			
Private Sector	US\$390,000.00	US\$537,901.06	
NGO	US\$300,000.00	US\$392,881.87	
Government (in-kind)	US\$2,800,000.00	US\$3,560,361.36	
[5] Total cofinancing	US\$14,900,000.00	US\$15,998,001.82	
PROJECT TOTAL COSTS	US\$20,204,545.00	US\$21,302,546.82	

Project Description

The demand for a conservation project in the steppe biome of Russia dates back to the early 1990s and was driven by a handful of passionate people. This GEF-4 project was designed to last for five years. The PRODOC was signed on 27 February 2010. The project has been extended twice and is now due to close on 31 December 2016 – some 82 months after it started and 22 months after it was originally going to close. The project was designed to counter the threats to the steppe biome, including being ploughed up and transformed into agricultural fields; succession into other vegetation types as use changed (including reduction of domestic livestock since the

collapse of the Soviet Union); the majority of the steppe remains unprotected; grazing and fire. Furthermore, there are specific threats to specific species, for example, powerlines are a specific threat to raptors; poaching is a specific threat to targeted species – perhaps most pronounced for saiga. Finally, climate change represents an overarching threat to the ecosystem.

The project aimed to contribute to the long-term goal of “*conservation and sustainable use of globally significant steppe biodiversity*” as well as to increase the representation of different steppe ecosystems within the protected area system within Russia. The project also sought to increase transboundary cooperation: this will be critical for achieving meaningful scale and connectivity of the steppe ecosystem. The project’s objective is stated to be as follows: “*to develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome*”. The project was organised into three components, each of which is designed to achieve a different outcome: *Component 1: Consolidation and expansion of system of Steppe Protected Areas (SPA) and Specially Managed Steppe Areas (SMSA) in the steppe biome (which equates with the outcome of consolidation and expansion of SPA system); Component 2. Operational management capacities for PA site management (which equates with the outcome of SPA know how for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened); and Component 3: Institutional capacities for managing an expanded system of SPA and SMSA (which equates to the outcome of strengthened SPA system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice).*

The project’s results framework (PRF) lay at the heart of the project’s design and its implementation. However, there were many changes following MTR recommendations and it could have been a case of a coupling of high ambition, wishful thinking and it was rather *scattergun*, trying to do as much as possible with the opportunity of some funding – at last – for steppe conservation in Russia. In addition, the *structure* of the PRF was not ideal: there are a total of 39 parameters to measure.

The involvement of a large number of stakeholders and actors secured strong stakeholder support for the project at the levels at which it operated. The project not only secured “participation” of a large number of stakeholders but also actually *contracted* a large number of stakeholders within project activities. By doing this, the project transferred responsibilities to these stakeholders and, inadvertently, will have deepened knowledge of the issues and ensured a greater impact. In summary, then, the stakeholder participation was highly satisfactory.

The project has been implemented under UNDP’s Nationally Implementation (NIM) modality. UNDP has been responsible for: i) financial management, and ii) the final approval of payments to vendors, the procurement of goods, the approval of Terms of Reference, recruitment of consulting services, and sub-contracting upon request of the National Executing Agency, while the Partnership for Zapovedniks has been responsible for managing the contracting of consultants and companies.

The value of the grant from the GEF Trust Fund for the project was USD 5.3 million. A further USD 14.9 million was pledged in co-finance making the total cost of the project USD 20.2 million. At the point of the TE mission to Russia, a total of USD

4.757 million of the GEF grant had been expended (equating to 90% of the grant). Therefore, at this point, USD 547,967.35 remained unspent with only two months remaining (given that official project closure for expenditure is currently 15 December 2016). It was evident to the TE that this was *not* as a result of under-delivery with respect to the results and carrying out the activities. Rather, this was a result of the painstaking work that the project team carried out in order to maximise cost effectiveness and value for money. Closing a project when not all the funds have been expended – and returning the balance to the GEF – all because of the painstaking work of the project team seems rather obtuse. As such, if there is any possible way – even in the eleventh hour as it is – to provide a small extension to the project to allow the team to spend the remaining funds in an efficient and effective way as possible, then the TE would support this.

The PSC only met infrequently over the life of the project: it met only four times (2010, 2012, 2013 and 2015) – which is much less frequently than originally designed or desired (see Annex V for a list of the PSC members). In part, this can be explained by the vast geographical scope of the project: it would simply be too expensive to bring all the members together.

One of the principal issues that the project faced, at least initially, was the institutional set up within the MNRE. The National Project Director (NPD) was originally the Deputy Director of the MNRE's International Cooperation Department; this changed in February 2011 (thus, exactly one year after the start of the project) and the Deputy Director of the MNRE's State Policy and Regulation for Environment Protection and Safety Department (the department directly responsible for protected areas) became the NPD. This transition heralded smoother and more efficient implementation of the project – thereby supporting the lesson that NPD selection can have an influence over project implementation.

The project team had significant *space* to carry out the work of implementing the project, they were exceptionally *skilled* as project implementers and they were supported by an excellent team within UNDP-CO and there was significant *trust* that existed among the project partners.

In the course of the TE mission, the one recurring comment regarding the implementation of the project was that it was “slow”! This is not without its impacts and some of the outstanding documents and approvals may have been completed if they were handled more efficiently.

Project Results

The full extent of project results is captured in the PRF (see Table 5). Here is a brief summary of some of the project's results:

- The single most significant result of the project is to have successfully brought much needed attention onto the steppe biome
- A second significant result is that the project catalysed increased investment by the state: funding to the target protected areas has increased; new Directors have been appointed; and new equipment has been provided.
- The project has carried out a vast array of activities (see Section 3.3.1 para 104, point 3 for a list).

- The project covered the four principal steppe ecosystems in the country and, as such, it ensured representation of each of the steppe ecosystems within the protected area system of the country.
- The project was implemented in an inclusive manner such that all the relevant stakeholders were fully involved in project processes.
- Some of the populations of targeted species did grow over the project's lifetime. One example is that of the little bustard *Tetrax tetrax* in the Kalmykia area.
- The project has successfully made species (re)introductions – including the steppe marmot in the Central Chemozemny zapovednik and the Pzewalski's horse into the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik.
- The establishment of bird protection devices (BPDs) in a number of the sites has proved to be a great success.
- The project website has proved to be very successful with over 230,000 hits from over 130 countries (at the time of the TE mission in Russia).

The project was not quite perfect and not all of the objectives, outcomes and outputs were achieved, for example:

- Not all species fared well over the project's life. The best illustration of this were the saiga *Saiga tatarica* in Kalmykia and Pallas' cat *Otocolobus manul* (illustrating the issues with selecting biodiversity indicators in a six year project)
- The philosophy of what the project objective describes as "*disturbance based integrated management*" is not completely or widely accepted.
- The ecosystem remains highly fragmented and the protected areas are isolated and at some distance from each other. This issue is especially important in the face of climate change. Further to the issue of connectivity is the issue of *scale*.
- There are quite a number of things that remain unfinished.
- The project did little to sway the perception in some sectors that the steppe areas should be conserved – especially with the Ministry of Agriculture
- Finally, efforts to diversify protected area governance – thus, to have non-state actors managing protected areas – were not successful.

In terms of cost effectiveness, the project was the most efficient and best value for money that many actors had come across.

TE Rating Table

Item	Rating	Comment
Overall project results	HS	While not <i>all</i> outcomes have been fully achieved and there are some documents that have yet to be approved, the project is in many ways an outstanding example of what a UNDP-GEF project should be. The project was complex, covered a vast span of Russia and worked with large numbers of stakeholders. It took steppe protected areas from existing on paper to those that are effectively managed, and, further, it expanded the protected areas by over 9,000km ² . In such circumstances and despite the minor caveats, it would be churlish to rate the project as anything but highly satisfactory.

Item	Rating	Comment
IA & EA Execution		
Overall quality of implementation and execution	S	There were many, many positives to the project's implementation but the fact that i) implementation was quite frequently very slow (which had led to various aspects being incomplete) and ii) it required two extensions means that it would be difficult to rate the implementation and execution as highly satisfactory. That being said, few if any projects across the globe ensure such value-for-money and efficiency; this thriftiness has meant at this stage and even after carrying out a vast array of activities, the project's budget is still not fully expended.
Implementation Agency Execution	HS	The UNDP Project Support Unit is among the most efficient and effective possible.
Executing Agency Execution (MNRE)	S	The MNRE has supported the project adequately and provided substantial co-finance as the project has proceeded. The project and the executing agency were significantly assisted by the "Partnership for Zapovedniks".
M&E		
M&E design at project start-up	S	The M&E was standard UNDP-GEF M&E framework.
Overall quality of M&E	S	The most remarkable thing about the M&E carried out by the project was that it was largely not necessary. While M&E structures like the MTR was valuable, other M&E activities were not carried out diligently – but the project has progressed satisfactorily despite this. For example, the UNDP-CO rarely visited the field sites and representatives from the UNDP-GEF RTC in Istanbul never. But it was not necessary. The team was good and trusted. The UNDP-CO kept a close eye on how the project was being implemented on a weekly basis. It was, in short, sufficient to determine that the project was on course (albeit, at times, a little slow).
M&E plan implementation	S	
Outcomes		
Overall quality of project outcomes	HS	The improvement of the management of existing PAs, the expansion of the PAs and the increase in capacity are the outcomes of the project; these were those that were targeted and, as a result, the outcomes are highly satisfactory.
Relevance (R or NR)	R	The project was and remains relevant. It has turned the "paper parks" of the steppe into functional protected areas; it brought attention to steppe conservation; it catalysed significant funding.

Item	Rating	Comment
Effectiveness	S	The only caveats to effectiveness and efficiency were the slowness of project implementation (which led to two requests for extensions) and the fact that there are some incomplete aspects. In contrast, the project offered the best possible value-for-money and implemented a complex project in an effective way.
Efficiency	HS	
Sustainability		
Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	L	Broadly, the processes and impact that the project has had are likely to be sustainable: the institutions are robust and some level of funding will be sustained. There are a few caveats: the system does not operate in isolation and in the vast landscapes, the protected areas exist in relative isolation and are fragmented. This demands a “next step” – the mainstreaming of biodiversity into these landscapes – and, as such, one can only conclude that this dependency makes the project’s processes and impacts (only!) likely to be sustainable (as opposed to “highly likely”).
Financial sustainability	L	
Socio-economic sustainability	L	
Institutional/governance sustainability	HL	
Environmental sustainability	L	
Catalytic Role		
Production of a public good, Demonstration, Replication and Scaling up	HS	There are no caveats to the project’s catalytic role partly because the project involved to a large degree all of the stakeholders implicated in steppe conservation in Russia. The regions in which the project was working were making requests for project assistance to establish more protected areas. What more could one demand? Perhaps only better cooperation with the productive landscapes outside of the protected areas.
Impact (S, M, N)		
Environmental Status Improvement	S	As indicated above, the project has improved the management effectiveness of 2.5 million ha of protected areas with an expansion of over 9,000km ² . This is the definition of “environmental status improvement” in a protected areas project!
Environmental Stress Reduction	S	The reduction of environmental stress is coupled with the improved management effectiveness of the steppe protected areas. However, there is no room for complacency: there is an arms race that will continue with saiga poachers and the threat of climate change continually looms. The protected area managers will need to continue to work hard to keep environmental stresses at bay.
Progress towards stress/status change	M	While there has been progress, as indicated above, climate change and connectivity, arms races and the lack of integration of biodiversity conservation in the productive landscape within which the protected areas exist as remote, isolated islands remain as sources of

Item	Rating	Comment
		stress. Progress has been made but there is still much to do.

Summary of conclusions, recommendations & lessons learned

In conclusion, first, the project has taken the steppe protected areas in Russia from existing only on paper to ones that are functional and effective (with significant increases in METT scores to demonstrate this). Second, The project has successfully increased the protected area coverage in the steppe biome of Russia by over 9,000km². And another 6,500km² are in process of establishment. Third, significant capacity gains have been made. Fourth, the project has done this in a complex working environment and that the project team – with their partners – have managed to do quite as much as they have is a great testament to their skills and dedication. In summary, then, the project has taken a great first step for steppe conservation – but there is much still to do.

Recommendations and lessons

The TE does wonder whether the outcomes of the project might have been different had the approach had been slightly more focused and targeted. It would probably have meant that the project would have been more efficient (not in the way that it was – considerable value for money but in achieving targets more quickly and more precisely).

There is one very pertinent lesson that emerges from the PRF and monitoring thereof: the biodiversity indicators that were selected were not particularly good measures of project success (or otherwise).

Other recommendations and lessons include:

- It is important to get the rate of implementation balance correct.
- Selecting the correct pilot sites is also important
- Amending federal legislation is difficult.
- With large biomes such as the steppe, transboundary work is necessary
- The project demonstrates best practice with respect to correct use of METT and Capacity Scorecards.
- One critical key for the future is to ensure connectivity among the protected areas and mainstreaming biodiversity within productive landscapes (meaning engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture)
- There is little appetite for changing legislation and, until it is changed, there will be little space for piloting alternative forms of PA governance.
- It is critically important to ensure that the project activities are sequenced appropriately with longer processes starting as early in the project's implementation as possible
- Good people are the key to successful projects
- Involving implementers in the design can work well

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

1. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the UNDP-GEF project “Improving the Coverage and Management Efficiency of Protected Areas in the Steppe Biome of Russia” was carried out according to the UNDP-GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. Thus, it was carried out with the aim of providing a systematic and comprehensive review and evaluation of the performance of the project by assessing its design, processes of implementation, achievement relative to its objectives. Under this overarching aim, its objectives were i) to promote accountability and transparency for the achievement of GEF objectives through the assessment of results, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability and impact of the partners involved in the project, and ii) to promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on the results and lessons learned from the project and its partners as a basis for decision-making on policies, strategies, programme management and projects, and to improve knowledge and performance.

2. As such, this TE was initiated by the UNDP-CO as the project’s National Implementing Partner to determine its success in relation to its stated objectives, to understand the lessons learned through the implementation of the project and to make recommendations for the remaining part of the project.

3. The TE was conducted by one international consultant. The TE consultant was independent of the policy-making process, and the delivery and management of the assistance to the project. The consultant was not involved in the implementation and/or supervision of the project.

4. The TE was carried out over a period starting from 12 September 2016 and with a mission to Russia from 03 – 16 October 2016. Carrying out the TE at this point in the project’s implementation timeline was in line with UNDP/GEF policy for Evaluations (see Section 2.8).

1.2 Scope & Methodology

5. The approach for the TE was determined by the Terms of Reference (TOR, see Annex I) and by the UNDP-GEF Guidance for conducting Terminal Evaluations¹.

6. Thus, it was carried out with the aim of providing a systematic, evidence-based and comprehensive review of the performance of the project by assessing its strategy and design, processes of implementation and

¹ UNDP-GEF (2012) *Project-level Monitoring: Guidance for conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed projects*.

achievements relative to its objectives. As such, the TE determined the progress of the project in relation to its stated objectives (through the assessment of results, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability, impact and efficiency - requiring a review of the fund allocations, budgets and projections, and the financial coordination mechanisms), to promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on the results and lessons (both positive and negative) that can be learned from the implementation of the project. The TE examined whether the implementation arrangements – including the relationships and interactions among the project's partners, including the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, the Regional Governments in the project's pilot sites, UNDP, and other partners – are effective and efficient.

7. The TE included a thorough review of the project documents and other outputs, documents, monitoring reports, the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE), Project Implementation Reviews (PIR), relevant correspondence and other project related material produced by the project staff or their partners (see Annex III for a list of the documents reviewed). The evaluation assessed whether a number of recommendations that had been made following the MTE, and monitoring and support visits from people from the Biodiversity staff of UNDP's Regional Technical Centres were implemented and to ascertain the explanations if they were not.

8. The TE also included a mission to Russia between 03 – 16 October 2016 (see Annex IV for the itinerary of the mission). The evaluation process during the mission followed a participatory approach and included a series of structured and unstructured interviews, both individually and in small groups (see Annex IV for the people met over the course of the mission). Site visits to two of the four pilots regions (Orenburg and Chita) were also scheduled i) to validate the reports and indicators, ii) to examine, in particular, any infrastructure development and equipment procured, iii) to consult with protected area staff, local authorities or government representatives and local communities, and iv) to assess data that was held only locally. The evaluator worked with the Project Staff and particularly with the CTA throughout the evaluation. Particular attention was paid to listening to the stakeholders' views and the confidentiality of all interviews was stressed. Whenever possible, the information was crosschecked among the various sources.

9. The evaluation was carried out according to the UNDP/GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. Therefore, activities and results were evaluated (and rated – see Annex II) for their: i) **Relevance** – thus, the extent to which the results and activities were consistent with local and national development priorities, national and international conservation priorities, and GEF's focal area and operational programme strategies, ii) **Effectiveness** – thus, how the

project's results were related to the original or modified intended outcomes or objectives, and iii) **Efficiency** – thus, whether the activities are being carried out in a cost effect way and whether the results were achieved by the least cost option. The results, outcomes, and actual and potential **impacts** of the project were examined to determine whether they were positive or negative, foreseen or unintended. Finally, the **sustainability** of the interventions and results were examined to determine the likelihood of whether benefits will continue to be accrued after the completion of the project. The sustainability was examined from various perspectives: financial, social, environmental and institutional.

10. In addition, the evaluators took pains to examine the achievements of the project within the realistic political and socio-economic framework of the Russian Federation.

11. The logical framework (with approved amendments in the Inception and following the MTE) with Outcomes, Outputs and indicators towards which the project was working formed the basis of the TE.

12. According to the GEF policy for TEs, the relevant areas of the project were evaluated according to performance criteria.

13. Finally, the TE was carried out with a number of audiences in mind, including: i) the various entities of the Government of the Russian Federation that are involved with the project – primarily the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment but also the four Regional Governments in the areas in which the pilot projects were taking place, ii) the UNDP-CO and UNDP-GEF RTC in Istanbul, and iv) the GEF.

1.3 Structure of the evaluation report

14. The report follows the structure of Project Evaluations recommended in the UNDP Evaluation Guidance for GEF-Financed Projects as given in Annex 5 of the TOR. As such, it first deals with the purpose of the review and the methodology used for the review (Section 2), a description of the project and the development context in Russia (Section 3), it then deals with the Findings (Section 4) of the evaluation within four sections (Project Strategy, Progress Towards Results, Project Implementation and Adaptive Management, and Sustainability). The report then draws together the Conclusions and Recommendations from the project (Section 5).

2 Project description and development context

2.1 Project start and duration

15. The demand for a conservation project in the steppe biome of Russia dates back to the early 1990s and was driven by a handful of passionate people.

16. This GEF-4 project was designed to last for five years. The PRODOC was signed on 27 February 2010 – signifying the start of the project. However, the project has been extended twice and is now due to close on 31 December 2016 – some 82 months after it started and 22 months after it was originally going to close.

17. The start up of the project was efficient and the Project Manager was in place a month and a half after the PRODOC was signed.

18. The other project milestones, including the projected end date for the project, are indicated in Table 1.

19. The project has incurred slippage throughout its implementation and there is one constant comment from stakeholders: implementation has been slow! This has led to two requests for no-cost extension: both have been granted and the project is now due to close on 31 December 2016 (although this does mean that all project finances have to be closed by 15 December 2016 at the latest; see Section 3.2.6 for further discussion).

Table 1. The project milestones including the projected end date for the project.

Milestone	Date
PIF Approval	August 2008
PPG Approval	September 2008
CEO Endorsement	November 2009
UNDP Prodoc signed	27 February 2010
National Project Manager appointed	15 April 2010
Inception Workshop	13 May 2010
MTR mission commences	May 2013
Originally planned EOP	26 February 2015
Actual EOP	31 December 2016

2.2 Problems that the project sought to address

20. One symptom of the threats that is faced by the steppe regions of Russia was seen in two of the regional cities visited over the course of the TE mission in Russia: there is a monument to the plough. This reflects accurately the attitude that has pervaded through the modern history of the steppes. They are viewed as places to be exploited, ploughed up and transformed into agricultural fields (and a guess-estimate is that half of the 500,000km² of the steppe biome was lost to agriculture). This view, which probably dated to the early 19th Century continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early

1990s. At this point, many of the agricultural fields were abandoned – particularly the less productive ones, and have lain “fallow” ever since. Now, 25 years later, those steppe areas have somewhat recovered – although some of them – as in Kursk – are being transformed by woody species. Researchers at the Steppe Institute of Orenburg can still “determine which areas used to be agricultural fields” by carrying out vegetation surveys. But some of the key indicator species such as the feathergrasses have returned and, in some areas, appear to be flourishing.

21. Despite the abandonment of many agricultural fields (e.g., up to 30% of the area of the Orenburg region), the recovering steppe can still be re-transformed at whim. This speaks to the second threat: the majority of the steppe remains unprotected and even after the successes of this project (as discussed through this report) a small proportion (estimated to be between 1-3%) is actually protected.

22. While agricultural transformation of steppe was and remains a key threat to the steppe ecosystem, there are other, more immediate threats including grazing and fire. While both of these are slightly contentious in that different people will argue that both grazing and fire are an integral part of steppe management, all agree that both equally have the potential to disrupt the ecosystem. Somewhat related to this is afforestation: the spread of woody plants can occur because of lack of management, while elsewhere trees are planted.

23. In the more arid steppe areas, grazing by livestock was the predominant use through the Soviet period. For example, an estimated eight million sheep grazed the steppe areas in Kalmykia until the early 1990s. Since then, the sheep populations have collapsed and, when coupled with climate change, there have been significant changes to the vegetation of the steppe.

24. The expansion of oil and gas exploration and production partly mirrors the perception of agriculture: the steppe is to be exploited and should not stand in the way of such development.

25. Furthermore, there are specific threats to specific species. For example, powerlines are a specific threat to raptors (and, for example, there was a ten-fold decline in the number of steppe eagle nests prior to the project). Poaching is a specific threat to targeted species – perhaps most pronounced for saiga.

26. As discussed in various sections below, the project also focuses on four pilot areas across the country (see Annex VI for maps of the four pilot areas). These represent different types of steppe: the European steppe in the Kursk region, the semi-arid to arid steppe of Kalmykia, the central, “typical” steppe of the Orenburg region to the semi-arid, eastern steppe of the Dauria pilot

site. Each of these areas is subjected to its own threats as well as those that are common to all.

27. Finally, climate change represents an overarching threat to the ecosystem and, as shall be discussed in the report, the fragmentation, isolation and size of some of the protected areas offer little protection against climate change.

28. There is one further point that should be emphasized. The steppe ecosystem has been (and remains) profoundly underrepresented within Russia's protected area system.

2.3 Immediate and development objectives of the project

29. The project has a number of immediate and development objectives, as articulated in the PRODOC. It is a very focused project, more so than perhaps many other GEF projects. It comes in the context that the steppe ecosystem, as described above, is perceived to be an area of limitless exploitation, even in the most marginal areas. It was not perceived to be an area of any great conservation interest of concern. The project's underlying objective was to turn this perception around. In doing so, the project also aimed to contribute to its long-term goal of "*conservation and sustainable use of globally significant steppe biodiversity.*" It also aimed to increase the representation of difference steppe ecosystems within the protected area system within Russia – and it does this by working in four sites across the country, each of which has different characteristics.

30. In addition to these overarching biodiversity goals, the project also hoped to explore the potential for support from non-traditional sources, which, the PRODOC estimates will be increasingly important for the protected area system's future effectiveness.

31. Moreover, the project also sought to increase transboundary cooperation. This is critical for achieving meaningful scale and connectivity particularly because many of the areas under consideration fall either on or close to Russia's international boundaries.

32. In terms of its objectives relative to GEF's policies, it is relevant to GEF's first strategic objective to catalyze sustainability of protected area systems, and supports the corresponding strategic priority on strengthening terrestrial protected area systems. The project also aims to significantly contribute to global biodiversity and the PRODOC states that "there is a long list of global environmental benefits" to be generated by the project.

2.4 Baseline indicators established

33. The project's results framework is discussed later in the report and, as will be seen, the project's result framework was significantly amended following the MTR (see Section 3.1.1). Nonetheless, the baseline for the indicators was either established before the project commenced or, for some indicators, soon

after the project began. For the indicators added following the MTR, the baseline was established immediately.

2.5 Main stakeholders

34. The Project Document identified the majority of the project's stakeholders². The table in the Project Document not only identifies the stakeholders but it describes their current mandate. However, unlike many other PRODOC, it does not fully explore the potential role of the organisations in the project. The Section 3.1.4, stakeholder participation is discussed further.

2.6 Expected results

35. The project's objective is stated to be as follows: *"to develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome"*.

36. The project is organised into three components, each of which is designed to achieve a different outcome:

37. *Component 1: Consolidation and expansion of system of Steppe Protected Areas (SPA) and Specially Managed Steppe Areas (SMSA) in the steppe biome (which equates with the outcome of consolidation and expansion of SPA system)*

38. *Component 2. Operational management capacities for PA site management (which equates with the outcome of SPA know how for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened).*

39. *Component 3: Institutional capacities for managing an expanded system of SPA and SMSA (which equates to the outcome of strengthened SPA system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice).*

40. As is usual for UNDP-GEF projects, a number of outputs were designed to contribute to the achievement of the outcomes:

41. *Output 1.1. Steppe Landscape Conservation Plan (SLCP) for Consolidating and Expanding the SPA network.*

42. *Output 1.2. Steppe Protected Area Expansion Strategy and Implementation Plan*

43. *Output 1.3 Steppe Protected Areas establishment and consolidation process completed*

² See the Stakeholder Analysis presented in the Project Document (see Section 1.6 on page 27 of the PRODOC).

44. *Output 1.4* Strengthening the institutional capacities for coordinating and implementing the SLCP.
45. *Output 2.1.* Integrated fire management plans developed for at least 7 expanded/consolidated SPA.
46. *Output 2.2.* Cost effectiveness of different rehabilitation and restoration measures for grassland habitats tested and best practices documented.
47. *Output 2.3.* Species management and conservation plans for key endemic grassland species.
48. *Output 2.4.* PA staff competence levels cover key skills required for the operational management of SPA.
49. *Output 2.5.* The NGO-operation of a new type of SPA is tested and best practices captured.
50. *Output 3.1.* Capacities for co-management of SPA are developed and strengthened through training and the development co-management frameworks.
51. *Output 3.2.* Collaborative, steppe-specific SPA management plans.
52. *Output 3.3.* Collaborative agreements between SPA and other sectoral government agencies.
53. *Output 3.4.* Collaborative steppe conservation agreements developed or improved and implemented in transboundary areas.
54. *Output 3.5.* National SPA knowledge management and development program.

3 Findings

3.1 Project Design

3.1.1 Analysis of the Project's Results Framework

55. The project's results framework (PRF) really lies at the heart of the project's design – and, indeed, its implementation. The aim was to design the PRF with such care and thought that it would not just guide the project's implementation and spending but it would *constrain* implementation and sending to achieving the indicators – and, consequently, the project's outcome and, ultimately, its objective. Thus, overall, the PRF was indeed a sensible and logical sequence that should measure the successes (or otherwise) of the project.

56. However, as can be seen on the PRF analysis (see Table 5 and Table 6), there were many changes following MTR recommendations and it could have been a case of a coupling of high ambition, wishful thinking and, as in the

words of Robert Burns, “*the best laid plans o’ mice an’ men,/Gang aft agley*”³ Therefore, if any criticism could be levelled at the PRF (and, consequently, the design of the project including some of the outputs under each component), it is that it was overambitious; it contained a number of elements that, with the benefit of hindsight (which clearly one does have at the end of a project’s life), were unattainable; and it was rather *scattergun*, trying to do as much as possible with the opportunity of some funding – at last – for steppe conservation in Russia.

57. In addition, the *structure* of the PRF is not ideal: there are a total of 39 parameters to measure. Such a structure would not be accepted by the GEF today.

58. At the end of the project, the PRF has turned from a three-and-a-half page table to a behemoth that fills 44 pages (see Annex VII for the complete PRF). The detailed, line-by-line analysis of the PRF is undertaken in Table 6 in Section 3.3.1).

3.1.2 Assumptions and risks

59. The PRODOC identifies eight risks (relating to operational, strategic and technical aspects of the project) and, as is usual, the assumptions associated with the achievement of each of the indicators is articulated in the project’s results framework. During the inception period, culminating in the Inception Report, nine risks were identified – although there was some overlap with those already identified in the PRODOC.

60. At the MTR stage, no critical risks were identified for project implementation although the MTR report did note a broad weakness of the project design: the overambitious nature of the project both geographically and thematically. The fact that the project has been forced to request two extensions and the fact that a number of the processes are incomplete (as discussed in Section 3.3.1) serves to vindicate the observations made in the MTR report.

61. The MTR went on to focus on one risk: the reintroduction of Przewalski’s horse in the Orenburg zapovednik and whether it would actually be complete by the end of the project. And while there have been complications and challenges, six Przewalski’s horses are now released into the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik with a consignment of a further 15 horses expected within a month of the TE mission in Russia. In other words, the project has managed to mitigate the risk successfully.

³ This is transliterated as “The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry” – a proverbial expression used to signify the futility of making detailed plans when the ability to fully or even partially execute them is uncertain.

62. The MTR also indicated that the continued expansion and establishment of protected areas, and replication in the second half of the project was a priority. The MTR's concern here has been partially vindicated, as there are a number of areas still to be either expanded or established.

3.1.3 Lessons from other projects incorporated into project design

63. The project draws heavily off UNDP's experiences over the past 14 years implementing numerous GEF biodiversity projects in Russia and this was most evident in i) the conception of the project and ii) the use of the Altai area for one study tour (of three) that was carried out over the course of the project. The concept arose from a joint MNRE and UNDP visit to the Lower Volga Wetland project (GEF ID 1068) that passed through Kalmykia (which is one of the four pilot areas for the steppe project). Second, the study in question travelled to the Altai area to learn about the protection area councils that had been successfully established there under the Altai Project (GEF ID 1177). However, the biodiversity portfolio of GEF projects that the UNDP-CO has implemented over the past 14 years has influenced the way in which this project was designed and implemented.

3.1.4 Planned stakeholder participation

64. The TE concurs with the MTR's assessment that the involvement of a large number of stakeholders and actors is securing strong stakeholder support for the project at the levels at which it operated – thus, at the national and regional levels (in those regions in which the project's pilots were implemented). The project not only secured "participation" of a large number of stakeholders but also actually *contracted* a large number of stakeholders within project activities. By doing this, the project transferred responsibilities to these stakeholders and, inadvertently, will have deepened knowledge of the issues and ensured a greater impact.

65. In addition, in three of the four pilot areas, the regional coordinators were the Directors of pilot zapovedniks. As a consequence, the coordinators were not "parachuted" in but rather were an integral part of the project, both as recipients and actors⁴.

66. In summary, then, the stakeholder participation was highly satisfactory.

3.1.5 Replication approach

67. While the project document does contain a replication strategy⁵, the project has been so profoundly involved with implementation that it has not focused on replication. As has been stated above (see Section 3.1.2 and 3.1.3),

⁴ If the objective was *visibility* for either UNDP or GEF, then the result may have been lessened; however, the primary objective was steppe conservation which benefitted significantly from this arrangement.

⁵ See Section II.7 on pp. 59-60 of the project document.

the project was ambitious and thus it was necessarily caught up in trying to achieve its own tasks without having the time or resources to focus on replicating its successes.

68. That being said, first, there are lessons that should be considered hereout and, second, there have been exercises (e.g., conferences and symposia) in which project processes and successes have been disseminated (albeit, arguably, not precisely for replication as an end) and alert participants in those processes will have gleaned important information.

3.1.6 UNDP comparative advantage

69. In the context of Russia, UNDP has had a strong competitive advantage over other Implementation Agencies: in effect, it has the monopoly over the development and implementation of GEF biodiversity projects in the country. The competitive advantage is sealed primarily by UNDP's politically neutral stance coupled with their continued willingness to engage and provide support. Furthermore, unlike the World Bank (which often works with loans that are coupled with GEF grants), UNDP deals only with grants.

70. However, this is changing: the UNDP Project Support Unit (PSU) is working on a suite of current projects until their completion and the PSU will be finally closed in December 2017. In addition, GEF funding to Russia at present appears to be suspended. How this all pans out is the subject of further discussion later in the report (see Section 4.1).

3.1.7 Linkages between project and other interventions

71. The project is working in the steppe ecosystem in Russia and one of the very reasons for the project is that the steppe ecosystem has been historically neglected. While the project has addressed this in a significant way, there has been little catalysis to *increasing* the number of actors and/or interventions in the ecosystem. Instead, the actors who were already interested and carrying out interventions in the steppe ecosystem. Those actors' interest has been further piqued and their determination consolidated primarily because the project worked hard to work with and often *through* those existing actors. This also relates to the relationship that the project had with stakeholders.

72. The case described above holds true for almost all interventions and actors. However, there was one case that came to the attention of the TE of a relationship that has deteriorated over the course of the project's life and remains uncomfortable. This is the relationship between the Steppe Institute in Orenburg and the Orenburg zapovednik – *specifically regarding the re-introduction of Pzewalski's horses into the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik*⁶.

⁶ As pointed out in a comment made on the draft TE report: "[There was] *no effective cooperation ... between the Steppe Institute and the Orenburg Zapovednik prior to the project launch, ... the relationship has been ... improved over the course of the project's life. The Steppe Institute has*

It is possible that the project – and perhaps specifically the project manager – could have done (and perhaps still could do) more to mediate between these two organisations. In what is a multifactorial and rather complex situation, one of the pivotal points is the Steppe Institute's intervention in the station adjacent to Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik and the Institute's ambition to carry out the introduction of Przewalski's horse themselves.

73. The project did not only look inwards but did also make the effort to look outwards. For example, lessons were being learned from the Pzewalski's horse (re)introduction into the Altyn Emyl National Park in Kzakhstan. In addition, the project conducted a study tour to the prairies in the USA with a particular emphasis on studying the controlled burns that are a central tenant of prairie management.

3.1.8 Management arrangements

74. The project has been implemented under UNDP's Nationally Implementation (NIM) modality (formerly National Execution, NEX) with a senior MNRE official acting as National Project Director (NPD). Because of the complications associated with implementing projects in Russia, practical mechanisms that facilitated the implementation of the project were sought. These included the employment of a number of members of the project staff by the UNDP-CO and the hiring of contractors by the project's partner, and having an NGO, the Partnership for Zapovedniks, as the Responsible Party.

75. As such, UNDP has been responsible for: i) financial management, and ii) the final approval of payments to vendors, the procurement of goods, the approval of Terms of Reference, recruitment of consulting services, and sub-contracting upon request of the National Executing Agency, while the Partnership for Zapovedniks has been responsible for managing the contracting of consultants and companies.

76. The actual situation regarding the project's implementation is discussed in Section 3.2.6.

3.2 Project Implementation and Adaptive Management

3.2.1 Adaptive management

77. The project demonstrated many examples of adaptive management – thus, using M&E processes to make adjustments to the project such that it was improved as it proceeded. A good example is the adaption of the PRF that occurred following the MTR (see Table 5 and Table 6). Other examples include:

been actively engaged [in] many project activities. Thus, the only point of dispute between these two entities lies in the Steppe Institute's claim on the re-introduction of the Przewalski's Horse programme."

- a. A number of the stakeholders stated that the PMU was responsive – allowing for change – which they perceived to be a very positive aspect of the project.
- b. The project did not remain bound by the PRF (despite the comments through the report suggesting that the PRF was one of the principal guiding mechanisms for the project. Thus, the project, when seen to be pertinent, added additional areas – the best example of which was the addition of 11 nature monuments in the European steppe areas in Kursk. This was largely in response to the request from the region.
- c. The ability of the project to respond adaptively is also illustrated by their responses to the differences and complexities among the project pilot sites – which varied in scale, ecology, threats and issues.

3.2.2 Partnership arrangements

78. The project has been implemented in close cooperation and collaboration with the relevant organisations in each of the four pilot regions of the country. Indeed, the project's Regional Coordinators were (in three of four sites) the Directors of the zapovedniks that were the focus of the project's work⁷. In short, the project was carried out in partnership with all the relevant organisations and people. This ran throughout the project. Thus, the project's Responsible Party (or implementation organization) was the NGO "Partnership for Zapovedniks". While this may appear, on the surface, to be a purely administrative role, it had strategic significance as this NGO has very close ties with the Deputy Director of the "State Policy and Regulation for Environment Protection and Safety" of the Ministry Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE); this department within the MNRE is responsible for the federal protected areas in the country.

79. Other key organisations were also brought in as partners for the project. A good example is the Steppe Institute of the Russian Academy of Science – which is based in Orenburg. Indeed, one of the principal strengths of the project, as identified in the MTR was the engagement and involvement of stakeholders. Many of the stakeholders have actually been involved and had responsibilities within the project's implementation.

80. While the project was inclusive, the *relationships* among the partners were not always harmonious (see 3.2.6 for further discussion on this point).

⁷ The Regional Coordinators received a "top-up" over and above the salaries that they receive from the state.

3.2.3 Feedback from M&E activities used in adaptive management

81. As indicated in Section 3.2.1, this was one of the strengths of the project and the best example of this was the changes that were made to the project following the MTR.

3.2.4 Project Finance

82. The value of the grant from the GEF Trust Fund for the project was USD 5.3 million. A further USD 14.9 million was pledged in co-finance making the total cost of the project USD 20.2 million.

83. At the time of the MTR, the project was underspent with only 28.8% of the GEF grant spent at that time.

84. At the point of the TE mission to Russia, a total of USD 4.757 million of the GEF grant had been expended (equating to 90% of the grant). Therefore, at this point, USD 547,967.35 remained unspent with only two months remaining (given that official project closure for expenditure is currently 15 December 2016).

85. In the paragraphs below, how the funds have been expended across the different components and through time will be explored in detail. However, it was evident to the TE that this was *not* as a result of under-delivery with respect to the results and carrying out the activities. Rather, this was a result of the painstaking work that the project team carried out in order to maximise cost effectiveness and value for money. This leads to three conclusions: i) there have been time costs to this painstaking work and it is arguable that it might have been more *time efficient* to be slightly less rigorous and painstaking – or rather than the project might have struck a balance between ensuring value for time and money, ii) the budgeting for the project – both in term of time and financial resources might not have been precisely correct: the project could have done with slightly more time to ensure 100% delivery of the project or the GEF could have made a grant of slightly less money and iii) closing a project when not all the funds have been expended – and returning the balance to the GEF – all because of the painstaking work of the project team seems rather obtuse. Indeed, it seems churlish to complain about this as “lack of delivery” when the project team were striving to make the very best use of the available funds. As such, if there is any possible way – even in the eleventh hour as it is – to provide a small extension to the project to allow the team to spend the remaining funds in an efficient and effective way as possible, then the TE would support this.

86. Analyses of the total expenditure against the (originally) budgeted amount across all years (2010 – 2016) demonstrate a consistent underspend across all components (including project management) – with the exception for Component Two (operational management capacities for PA site management), which was slightly overspent (see Figure 1).

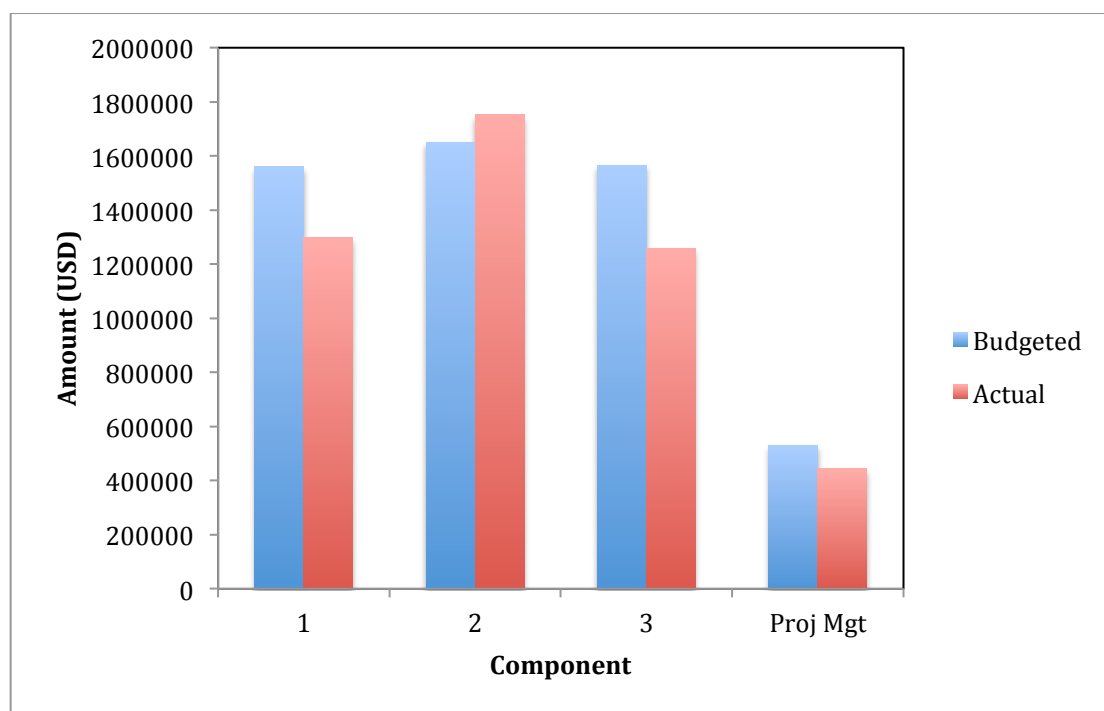


Figure 1. The expenditure compared to the (revised) budgeting across all years by Component

87. As mentioned above, at the stage of the MTR, the project was significantly underspent (a total of 37.4% of the total budget was spent by November 2013 – a point over three years from the Inception Workshop). Given that at the point of the TE (October 2016 – a point three years after the MTR), a total of 90% of the project had been spent, there has been an acceleration in the spending in response to the recommendation by the MTR. This has been primarily in the spending in Component Two and Three (especially in 2015 – see Figure 2 and Table 2) – however, what Figure 2 does demonstrate is that spending across all years was relatively steady and linear.

88. One external factor that affected delivery was the devaluation of the rouble that occurred over the project's lifetime. At the beginning of the project, the exchange rate was RUB 27 = USD 1; at the point of the TE mission (October 2016), the exchange rate was RUB 63 = USD 1. On a number of occasions this affected contractors but not the project: indeed this meant that the total amount of roubles increased thereby extending the funds available for those things originally budgeted in roubles and whose price did not increase significantly following devaluation.

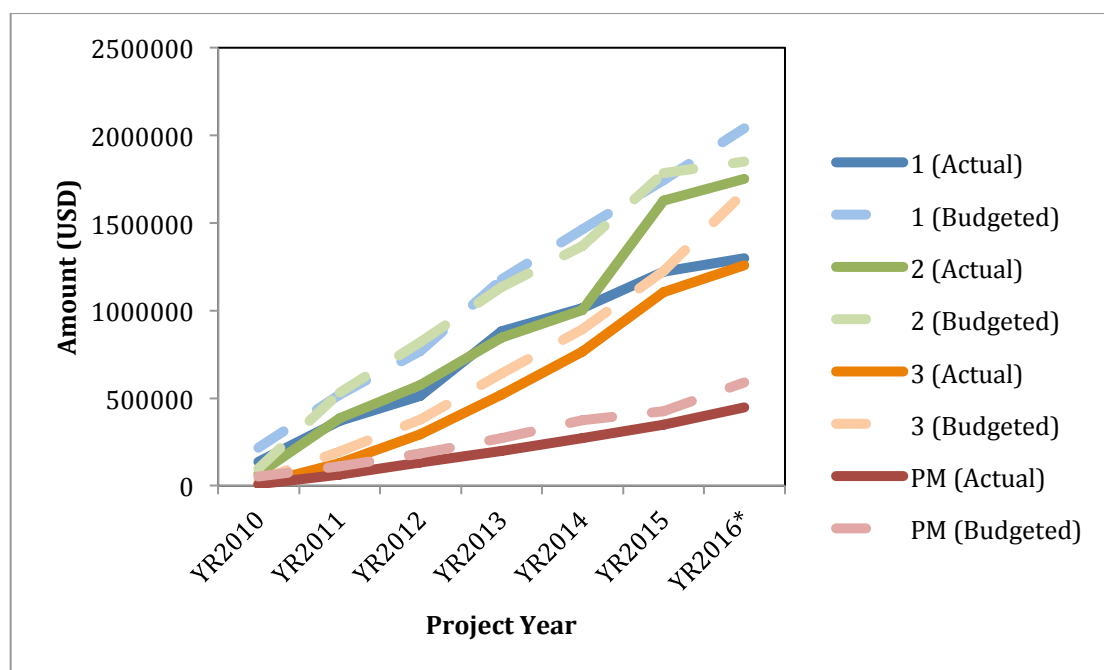


Figure 2. The cumulative expenditure by year for each component compared to the (revised) budgets

Table 2. The total budget (as it appears in the annual, approved workplan) and actual expenditure, by Outcome, for the project to date.

	YR1 – 2010			YR2 – 2011			YR3 – 2012			YR4 – 2013		
	Budgeted	Actual	% spent	Budgeted	Actual	% spent	Budgeted	Actual	% spent	Budgeted	Actual	% spent
PA Consolidation & Expansion	217,000.00	136,152.79	63%	305,027.96	235,105.18	77%	248,000.00	142,253.01	57%	408,172.00	369,361.46	90%
Operational Capacities	98,000.00	67,536.57	69%	431,587.47	316,125.36	73%	292,000.00	191,482.49	66%	310,960.00	270,386.83	87%
Institutional Capacities	32,000.00	10,543.45	33%	162,258.23	120,298.33	74%	185,000.00	163,383.41	88%	261,262.00	225,578.34	86%
Project Management	53,000.00	7,140.68	13%	56,989.04	57,313.83	101%	75,000.00	70,325.88	94%	87,445.00	62,695.23	72%
Total	400,000.00	221,373.49	55%	955,862.70	728,842.70	76%	800,000.00	567,444.79	71%	1,067,839.00	928,021.86	87%

	YR5 – 2014			YR6 – 2015			YR7 – 2016			Total		
	Budgeted	Actual	% spent	Budgeted	Actual	% spent	Budgeted	Actual	% spent	Budgeted	Actual	% spent
PA Consolidation & Expansion	286,312.00	129,977.80	45%	280,700.00	209,002.37	74%	294,706.34	78,560.00	27%	1,560,000.00	1,300,412.61	83%
Operational Capacities	236,452.00	156,581.20	66%	416,865.97	625,664.58	150%	64,356.73	123,986.00	193%	1,650,000.00	1,751,763.03	106%
Institutional Capacities	253,649.00	245,615.39	97%	332,974.70	339,713.00	102%	448,117.77	153,222.00	34%	1,564,545.00	1,258,353.92	80%
Project Management	103,500.00	72,817.78	70%	48,495.10	78,020.69	161%	166,190.50	97,734.00	59%	530,000.00	446,048.09	84%
Total	879,913.00	604,992.17	69%	1,079,035.77	1,252,400.64	116%	973,371.34	453,502.00	47%	5,304,545.00	4,756,577.65	90%

89. In terms of co-financing, the actual amount, as submitted to the TE, corresponded closely to the amount confirmed at the CEO endorsement (see Table 3). It is relatively unlikely that the co-finance calculations are exhaustive. The project did not adopt what is best practice for calculating co-finance expenditure⁸ and there were other instances of co-financing that were mentioned over the course of the TE mission in Russia that have not been mentioned here.

Table 3. The sources and types of co-finance with the originally pledged and actual amounts at the TE

Sources of Cofinance	Name of Cofinancer	Type of Cofinance	Amount confirmed at CEO endorsement (USD)	Actual amount at TE (USD)	Actual % of Expected Amount
Multilateral	UNDP	Direct cash	10,000.00	0.00	0%
Government	Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Federal and Regional budgets)	Direct cash	11,400,000.00	11,506,857.53	101%
Private Sector	Shell Oil & Gas Development, local energy companies	Direct cash, parallel cash and in-kind	390,000.00	537,901.06	138%
NGO	The Whitley Fund for Nature, WWF Russia (Far East), IFAW, Russian Geographic Society, Orenburg Steppes Restoration Fund	Direct, parallel cash and in-kind	300,000.00	392,881.87	131%
Government	Russian Ministry of Agriculture, Central-Chernozemny Reserve (extra-budgetary income), Orenburg Regional Administration	In-kind	2,800,00.00	3,560,361.36	127%
Totals			14,900,000.00	15,998,001.82	107%

3.2.5 Monitoring & Evaluation

90. The project's M&E framework is similar to the majority of all UNDP-GEF projects with USD 365,000 (equivalent to 6.9% of the GEF grant) allocated for project monitoring. This is a relatively high allocation (and is higher than

⁸ Best practice for calculating co-finance was demonstrated in the UNDP-GEF project "Mainstreaming biodiversity into Uzbekistan's oil-and-gas sector policies and operations."

permissible allocations under GEF-6); however, this may be explained by the high travel costs given the vast geographic scope of the project.

91. Despite the allocation, there were relatively few visits of the UNDP-CO to the field sites and there were no visits from the UNDP-RTC. In addition, even the PM visited the field infrequently towards the end of the project. However, this was largely unnecessary: the field teams were led by competent Regional Coordinators and trust was established and high.

3.2.6 UNDP and Implementing Partner implementation, execution, coordination and operational issues

92. The implementation modalities have been described in Section 3.1.8.

93. The PSC only met infrequently over the life of the project: it met only four times (2010, 2012, 2013 and 2015) – which is much less frequently than originally designed or desired. In part, this can be explained by the vast geographical scope of the project: it would simply be too expensive to bring all the members together. This begs the question of whether any aspects of project implementation would have been enhanced had the PSC met more frequently? It is possible that the rate of implementation and the delivery against the budget (two aspects of the project with which a number of the interviewees were concerned) may have both been more efficient.

94. One of the principal issues that the project faced, at least initially, was the institutional set up within the MNRE. The National Project Director (NPD) was originally the Deputy Director of the MNRE's International Cooperation Department; this changed in February 2011 (thus, exactly one year after the start of the project) and the Deputy Director of the MNRE's State Policy and Regulation for Environment Protection and Safety Department (the department directly responsible for protected areas) became the NPD. This transition heralded smoother and more efficient implementation of the project – thereby supporting the lesson that NPD selection can have an influence over project implementation.

95. There is a further aspect to consider here: the current NPD is an exceptionally busy man and yet despite this (and the fact that he did not really fulfil his responsibilities described in the project document as “carrying out the directives of the PSC and for ensuring the proper implementation of the project on behalf of the Government. In doing so, the NPD will be responsible for project delivery, reporting, accounting, monitoring and evaluation, and for the proper management and audit of project resources”), there was more efficient implementation following his appointment as NPD. The explanation comes from the *space* that the project team has to carry out the work of implementing the project, their *skills* as project implementers, supported by an excellent team within UNDP-CO and the *trust* that existed among the project partners. In addition, the NPD has a very close

relationship, based on profound trust, with the project's Responsible Party – the Partnership for Zapovedniks – which significantly assisted the project. The degree of trust can be illustrated by the fact that the NPD consulted the Project Manager on changes to the Director of the zapovednik in the Kalmykia region.

96. The *core* of the project team was the Project Manager (PM), the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and the project's Administrative Assistant. Somewhat unusually, the project team was geographically split in that the PM and the Administrative Assistant were based in the UNDP Project Support Unit (UNDP-PSU) offices in Moscow while the CTA was based in Novosibirsk. Many projects would justifiably shy away from such arrangements and indeed such an arrangement in many other projects would have been their undoing. In this project, however, the team used the available technology (emails and Skype) very effectively despite the time differences. This geographic separation is even more astonishing given the distances between the locations in which the project team was based and the locations of the pilot areas. The only explanation that can be given for the effectiveness with which the project was implemented given these circumstances is a dedicated, proficient and professional team with a great deal of trust among them (see Table 4)

Table 4. The people involved in the implementation of the project

Name	Position	Employment dates - From	Employment dates - To
Mr. Evgeny Kuznetsov	Project Manager (full-time)	16.04.2010 (SC)	31.12.2016 (SC)
Mr. Ilya Smelyansky	Chief Technical Advisor (full-time)	16.04.2010 (SC)	31.12.2016 (SC)
Ms. Natalia Belokopytova	Administrative Assistant (full-time)	01.11.2010 (SSA)	30.09.2011 (SSA)
Ms. Elena Bazhenova	Project Associate (part-time)	10.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2015 (IC)	31.12.2014 (SC) 30.04.2016 (IC)
Ms. Galina Zaytseva	Financial & Administrative Officer (part-time)	10.10.2011 (SSA) 10.01.2012 (SC)	09.01.2012 (SSA) 31.12.2016 (SC)
Ms. Natalya Pygay	Project Associate (part-time)	18.04.2016 (SC)	31.12.2016 (SC)
Ms. Rafilya Bakirova	Regional Coordinator (Orenburg – part-time)	01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC)	31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC)
Ms. Emma Gabunshchina	Regional Coordinator for federal stakeholders	15.05.2011 (SSA)	31.12.2012 (SSA)

	(Kalmykia – part-time)	01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC) 01.07.2015 (IO)	31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC) 31.12.2016 (IO)
Mr. Ruslan Medjidov	Regional Coordinator for regional and municipal stakeholders (Kalmykia – part-time)	01.01.2011 (SSA) 01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC) 01.07.2015 (IO)	31.12.2012 (SSA) 31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC) 31.12.2016 (IO)
Mr. Andrey Vlasov	Regional Coordinator (Kursk – part-time)	01.11.2010 (SSA) 01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC) 01.07.2015 (IO)	31.12.2012 (SSA) 31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC) 31.12.2016 (IO)
Mr. Vadim Kirilyuk	Regional Coordinator (Dauria – part-time)	01.06.2010 (SSA) 01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC) 01.07.2015 (IO)	31.12.2012 (SSA) 31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC) 31.12.2016 (IO)
Mr. Sergey Levykin	Regional Scientific Advisor (Orenburg, part-time)	01.06.2010 (SSA) 01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC) 01.07.2015 (IO)	31.12.2012 (SSA) 31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC) 31.12.2016 (IO)
Ms. Anna Barashkova	Website Administrator (part-time)	01.03.2011 (SSA) 01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC) 01.07.2015 (IO)	31.12.2012 (SSA) 31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC) 31.12.2016 (IO)
Ms. Natalia Sudets	Project PR Consultant (part-time)	01.02.2012 (SSA) 01.01.2013 (SC) 01.01.2014 (IC) 01.07.2015 (IO)	31.12.2012 (SSA) 31.12.2013 (SC) 30.06.2015 (IC) 31.12.2016 (IO)

97. At the level of the four pilot areas (Kursk, Kalmykia, Orenburg and Zabaykalsky), the project had Regional Coordinators. The Regional Coordinators were responsible for implementation of the project at a local

level. In all but Kalmykia, the Director of the zapovednik in the area was the Regional Coordinator. In Kalmykia, there was a Regional Coordinator in addition to the Director of the zapovednik.

98. The Regional Coordinators liaised with local stakeholders and, with few exceptions, this appears to have worked well. One notable exception to the good relationships that the Regional Coordinators established (or build upon existing relationships) was that between the Regional Coordinator in Orenburg and one of the key stakeholders in the area – the Director of the Steppe Institute of the Russian Academy of Science⁹. Had the project not be coming to an end, the TE would recommend that the project appoint a neutral mediator to overcome the tensions that exist between the two parties.

99. Much of the actual work of the project was carried out by consultants and contractors, for example, the project contracted the Biodiversity Conservation Centre and two leading experts from Greenpeace Russia to carry out work on developing integrated fire management plans, and fire management trainings. Also, for example, the project contracted the Kursk State University (sub-department of Plant and Animal Biology) to support activities for creation of steppe nature monuments in Kursk oblast.

100. In the course of the TE mission, the one recurring comment regarding the implementation of the project was that it was “slow”! This is not without its impacts and some of the outstanding documents and approvals may have been completed if they were handled more efficiently. There are a number of explanations for this but as far as the TE could ascertain, it was primarily due to what one might term as pedantically considered implementation. For example, the CTA expressed the sentiment that “this was the only opportunity to invest such amounts into steppe conservation” and, as a result, the project team were painstakingly careful about eking out value for money – all of which took time.

101. In addition, project implementation benefitted from having a low turnover of key personnel (although, this being said, the project *did* benefit from a change in the NPD after one year). Indeed, in the words of the MTR, “a project of this size and complexity would likely have had much greater difficulty if there had been turnover in key positions”. In small contrast, there was some turnover in the Regional Coordinators (e.g., in Orenburg) and it could be argued that while results have been achieved, the process has not been quite as smooth.

⁹ As explained to the TE, the tensions were based on a number of factors some of which were associated with the (re)introduction of Pzewalski’s horses into the Orenburg zapovednik and the acknowledgement of the role of the Steppe Institute in seeding the idea to do so.

102. Finally, in terms of reporting implementation, the project adhered to the standard UNDP-GEF reporting protocol as described in the project document (Inception Report, Quarterly Reports, updating risk logs and lessons learned logs, Annual Project Reviews and PIRs).

3.3 Project Results

3.3.1 Overall results

103. As described above, the project's objective is stated to be as follows: *"to develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome"*. While this is a relatively opaque objective with a number of different operational aspects, the results being sought here are i) increased capacity to manage steppe protected areas, ii) a consolidated network of protected areas in the steppe ecosystems of Russia, iii) an expansion of the network (both spatially and numerically), and iv) implementing a management system for the steppe ecosystems based on disturbance (as opposed to strict protection). These functional aspects of the project's objective are partly translated into the three components of the project (Component One = consolidation and expansion; Component Two and Three = site-level and system-level capacity); the fourth functional aspect is implicit in Component Two.

104. The question, then, is whether the project has managed to achieve this objective and associated components (with their associated targeted outcomes)? Because the PRF has been carefully designed (see Section 3.1.1 for a discussion on the design of the PRF), it *does* measure these different functional aspects of the project's objective and, as such, the TE will simply refer the reader to the analysis of the PRF (see Table 6). However, in this narrative section, the TE will present some (but not all) of the project's results – especially those that fall outside of the PRF:

1. Arguably, the single most significant result of the project is to have successfully brought much needed attention onto the steppe biome – that was otherwise (and previously) viewed as an area simply for production – whether for mining or other natural resource exploitation, or agricultural production (both for crops and livestock). As a consequence of this view, the steppe biome was the most neglected and damaged, and least protected within Russia. The project has turned this around.
2. A second significant result (which also mirrors previous GEF projects in Russia and elsewhere) is that projects such as this are catalysts to increased investment by the state. Therefore, as a result of the project, the funding to the target protected areas has

increased; new Directors have been appointed; and new equipment has been provided. In one case (the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik), the state's investment was substantial (involving the construction of the 52km fence around the area – at a cost of RUB 40 million¹⁰).

3. The project has carried out a vast array of activities. These are relatively well documented in the project's reports but they include (but are not limited to): involvement of the project experts in the process to upgrade saiga thereby securing the species federal protection (see below); the expansion of some of the protection areas; the creation of others; carrying out monitoring of targeted species; development of species conservation action plans; (re)introduction of species (see below); the restoration of some of the patches of steppe ecosystem; developing GIS-based management systems for the focal zapovedniks¹¹; carrying out analysis of best practices for fire management in steppe areas – and publishing the results in a manual for steppe fire management (350 copies printed and distributed); developing site-level fire management plans in a participatory way using Orenburg as a pilot for the process of developing such a plan; the provision of fire fighting equipment; fire fighting training for PA staff (through workshops carried out in four zapovedniks – including theoretical, practical and legal aspects); other training for PA staff – including legal aspect of PA management, awarding the trained rangers with certificate and carrying out questionnaires to determine efficacy of training; conducted a study tour to the prairies of the USA to expose participants to fire management practices and to the use of controlled fires as a management tool for prairies; subsidised the website and the biannual publication the *Steppe Bulletin* (see <http://savesteppe.org/en/sb>); publication and distribution of various books; producing 1,000 DVDs (in partnership with Greenpeace) and distributing them; printing and distribution of 500 posters using artwork from children's drawing competitions; dissemination of information among the mass media (TV, radio, magazines and on various websites); supporting public festivals as a mechanism to boost awareness; supporting various publications; installing billboards – for boundary demarcation and for information; assisting with the repair of motorcycles (thereby supporting rangers in their arms race with poachers); provision of water sources

¹⁰ Equivalent to USD 800,000

¹¹ Interestingly, this system appears to be akin to the SMART conservation system that has been developed independently: see <http://www.smartconservationsoftware.org>

(through drilling for water); installation of bird protection devices within and surrounding the protected areas; carried out censuses and trained PA personnel to carry out censuses of various species; catalyse the process of having the police and federal security departments involved in wildlife cases – such that there are now criminal cases being prosecuted for the first time; and the project produced and printed 650 copies of a manual for fighting fires in steppe ecosystems. And so the catalogue of activities that the project carried out goes on. See also Annex IX for a list of publications produced by the project and project partners.

While the TE fully recognises the effort that went into making all these things happen across a vast geographical area, the bigger, looming question is whether these have led (or will lead) to impacts?

4. The project covered the four principal steppe ecosystems in the country: the “European” meadow steppe in the Kursk region; the desert steppe in Kalmykia; “typical” steppe in Orenburg; and Daurian (Central Asian type) steppe in the Zabaykalsky (or Trans-Baikal) region¹². As such, it ensured representation of each of the steppe ecosystems within the protected area system of the country.
5. The project was implemented in an inclusive manner such that all the relevant stakeholders were fully involved in project processes.
6. Some of the populations of targeted species did grow over the project’s lifetime. One example is that of the little bustard *Tetrax tetrax* in the Kalmykia area¹³.
7. Notwithstanding the comments made below regarding “*disturbance based integrated management*,” the project has successfully made species (re)introductions – including the steppe marmot in the Central Chemozemny zapovednik and the Pzewalski’s horse into the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik. The project also attempted to restore areas of “meadow” steppe in the Kursk region.
8. The establishment of bird protection devices (BPDs) in a number of the sites has proved to be a great success in those sites with demonstrable declines in the deaths of birds – especially raptors.

¹² Comment on draft TE report: “*The European-Siberian (Pontic-Kazakhstanian) and Daurian (Central Asian) are two main types of the steppe biome of Eurasia. Both parts include all zonal variants of steppe ecosystems – from meadow steppes to desert steppes. The project was covering three regions of Pontic-Kazakhstanian steppes and only one of Daurian (Central Asian) steppes.*”

¹³ However, even by their own admission, it is difficult – if not impossible – to attribute this growth in population to the project’s activities. What we can say with certainty is that the species is better protected as a result of the project.

9. The project website (<http://savesteppe.org/project/ru/>) has proved to be very successful with over 230,000 hits from over 130 countries (at the time of the TE mission in Russia). Indeed, it is a phenomenal resource and stands the example of best practice for the development of websites for GEF projects or websites for ecosystem conservation.
10. The project developed the concept of co-management. In this context, this means that the protected areas work with other groups (e.g., the local communities) and organisations (e.g., the Ministry of Emergencies – or the equivalent organisation – at a regional or municipality level) to carry out joint fire fighting (or other joint mutually beneficial exercises). This differs from the definition of “co-management” used elsewhere but it is a practical, pragmatic and mutually beneficial solution to jointly faced problems.

105. At this point, the TE will admit that one disadvantage that a good project has is that it opens itself up to debate and challenge. This compares with a poor project in which one focuses only on the administrative, personnel or other management issues that went wrong. It is, therefore, a measure of the quality of this project that there is nothing but praise for the management and implementation of the project. However, it was not quite perfect and not all of the objectives, outcomes and outputs were achieved. Here, the TE discusses some of the shortcomings of the project:

1. The project has been afflicted with a number of issues over its lifetime. Probably most notable is the current recession in Russia.

In addition to this, there was an opinion that the project would have been more successful had it had been regional – i.e., not a national project working within the confines of Russia but working with all countries that harbour areas of the steppe of Asia and Europe (notwithstanding the transboundary work carried out in Orenburg and Dauria).

2. As will be seen in the PRF, not all species fared well over the project's life. The best illustration of this were the saiga *Saiga tatarica* in Kalmykia, but the Pallas' cat *Otocolobus manul* also illustrate the issues with selecting biodiversity indicators in a six year project: the factors that affect the population sizes over such a time frame are probably beyond the control of the project and if there are significant changes in the population sizes, they are almost inevitably reductions.

That being said, the protected areas are, as a result of the project, better equipped now to counter some of the threats (e.g., poaching)

to species such as saiga given that there is now a de facto arms race between the poachers and the rangers. In addition, the saiga is being listed in both the Kalmykia and federal Red Book list and, as such, it will fall under federal protection (cf. previously when it was considered a “hunting species” and therefore fell under the jurisdiction of the regional authorities).

3. The philosophy – or argument based in the theory of ecological succession, and impacts of predation (or grazing) and fire in grassland ecosystems (with the underlying assumptions) – of what the project objective describes as “*disturbance based integrated management*” is not completely or widely accepted. Thus, some of the stakeholders are resolutely opposed (to the point of obstinacy!) to the use of fire, for example, as a management tool or even to carry out experiments to determine its value as a management tool.

Similarly, some stakeholders were what some would describe as “zapovednik purists”: thus, they see zapovedniks being sacrosanct and true to the original, century old vision (that they were for determining what happens in the absolute absence of humans). Such people believe that they should neither be fenced nor should there be (re)introductions of any kind. Therefore, the (re)introduction of Pzewalski’s horses into the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik was touted as a success (in part because they will graze and reduce above surface biomass and moribund material) by many but others chose to differ.

This point touches on a more serious, underlying assumption – which is that the integrity of the steppe ecosystem is dependent on some form of “*disturbance based integrated management*” (whether that management be grazing, fire – or controlled burns – and/or the making of hay). The beliefs of the people described in the previous two paragraphs illustrate that opinions on the subject are quite varied. However, without experimentation, it will not be possible to demonstrate anything. One of the issues that will be faced hereon is that the (re)introduction of Pzewalski’s horses into Orenburg zapovednik will not necessarily “prove” anything.

Finally and as a symptom of the issues discussed above, the project was unable to find a consultant (whether national or international) to assist with the process of developing guidelines for sustainable grazing in steppe ecosystems – despite the many actors who are involved in this across the globe (e.g., practitioners in Australia, many parts of Africa, and in North and South America).

4. There are some fundamental issues that still remain – particularly in some of the pilot areas – most specifically in the Kursk and Orenburg areas. Here, the ecosystem is highly fragmented and the protected areas are isolated and at some distance from each other. This issue is especially important in the face of climate change¹⁴: connectivity is critically important. In the future, planning should be approached at a landscape level such that connectivity becomes an integral part of the ecosystem (and the planning does not have to include protected areas only but should include productive areas as well and mainstreaming biodiversity into policies and legislative frameworks).
5. Further to the issue of connectivity is the issue of *scale*. The steppe biome of Central Asia and Europe is vast and the project has extended the protection from an estimated <1% of the area to approximately ~3% (which is, in itself, a huge achievement). However, the issue of scale is probably best illustrated when considering the BPDs that the project (and now energy companies) installed on power lines. There are tens of thousands of kilometres of power lines¹⁵ across the steppe and while not all present a threat to birds (a figure of 1,000km of priority lines was mentioned to the TE), and particularly raptors, (because it is only those that are easily grounded through a bird's body that present a threat), the project guess-estimate is that <0.5% of the power lines are now equipped with BPDs. (Further to this, the technology is not (yet) perfect¹⁶ - primarily because the steppe biomes are so harsh: materials are exposed to extended periods of sunlight (and thus UV radiation), extremes of temperature and extremely strong winds – and, as a result, the BPDs fail after a period of time.)

As such, the question of *scale* is impact and, in part, linked to the above question of connectivity.

6. Despite the fact that the project has been implemented over an eighty-month period (27 February 2010 – October 2016 when the TE mission took place), there are quite a number of things that remain unfinished. This plays onto the hands of those commentators who

¹⁴ The impact of climate change has already been noted: research has demonstrated that some of the steppe habitats are now overgrown; this has been explained as being the result of climate change.

¹⁵ A figure of 14,000km of power lines was mentioned to the TE – however, it is unclear how accurate this figure is.

¹⁶ “... the technology is not (yet) perfect ...”: if the project was looking to disburse the remaining budget rapidly, to hold a competition among designers and engineers to come up with a “perfect” BPD design may be useful!

accused to the project implementers of being slow! There are, for example, a number of documents requiring approval or endorsement by the relevant authorities. Probably the best examples of this are the three species conservation strategies (for the steppe eagle, dzeren and saiga) that have been submitted for approval. These three strategies have been included in the MNRE's workplan (which has been approved by the Deputy Minister), therefore they will be approved – it is only a matter of when (and this is assumed to be in 2017 with approval of the Russian Red Data Book list).

[In addition, it should also be noted that the conservation strategies and action plans were not always the desired result from the legal work that the project had originally planned; this did not work primarily because people are very reluctant to tackle legislation because of the complexities involved and the time it requires. Indeed, legislation is so interwoven that it is not a simple task of drafting one new law or amending an existing law. The work requires unravelling the web of interconnectedness among all the laws; this would be a massive undertaking. However, see comments made on the “legal” indicator under Component One in the PRF – Table 6]

7. The project did little to sway the perception in some sectors that the steppe areas (and the biodiversity, ecosystem services and ecological processes therein) should be conserved. This applies most specifically to the Ministry of Agriculture – despite the fact that it was and partly still is agricultural transformation that threatens the steppe biome.
8. The efforts of the project to diversify protected area governance – thus, to have non-state actors managing protected areas – was not successful. In this, the legislation remained a barrier and there was no appetite to pilot these alternative governance mechanisms (although this was somewhat complicated by the fact that the area selected for the pilot was previously under the ownership of the federal government (as a former military testing ground) and transferring ownership was either complicated or impossible).

Table 5. The Project Results Framework showing the TE and MTR status relative to the baseline and EOP target. See Table 6 for TE comments and analysis. (See also Annex VII for the complete PRF)

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
Objective: To develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling, tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome	Steppe area under protection expanded:	1,834,161 ha (as in the approved Prodoc) 1,605,529 ha (revised)	2,701,561 ha (as in the approved Prodoc) 2,472,929 ha (revised)	2,827,480 ha (following original logic) 2,068,829 ha (corrected)	2,511,181.73ha (representing an increase of 905,652.73ha above baseline)
	Area of SPA in the process of establishment		(+ 867,400 ha)	(+758,651 ha)	(+649,932 ha)
	(1a) Area of consolidated new SPA	0	496,200 ha.	463,300 ha	463,300 ha
	(1b) Additional area new SPA created	0	305,200 ha (as in the approved Prodoc) 335,200 ha (revised)	295,351 ha	477,816 ha
	(1c) Enabling environment created for new SPA	0	30,000 ha	Indicator dropped and targeted transferred to 1(b) above (in response to MTR recommendation).	-
	(1d) SMSA covering	0	36,000 ha	Indicator dropped (in response to MTR recommendation).	-
	Indirect impact on improved management effectiveness in 1.9 million hectares of SPA through METT Score.	(see below)	+20% (see below)	Belogorye +13.5% Galichya Gora +24.4% Privolzhskaya Lesostep +12.5% Rostovskiy +8.96% Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina +21.57% Pribaikalskiy NP +55.9% Saratovskiy +166.7%	Belogorye +21% Galichya Gora +24.4% Privolzhskaya Lesostep +12.5% Rostovskiy +13.5% Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina +27.5% Pribaikalskiy NP +70.6% Saratovskiy +71.4% Tsimlyanskiy +100%

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
				Tsimlyanskiy +141.7%	
		Zapovedniks - Belogorye - 52 Galichya Gora - 45 Privolzhskaya Lesostep - 56 Rostovskiy - 67 Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 51	Zapovedniks - Belogorye - 62 Galichya Gora - 54 Privolzhskaya Lesostep - 67 Rostovskiy - 80 Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 61	Zapovedniks: Belogorye - 59 Galichya Gora - 56 Privolzhskaya Lesostep - 63 Rostovskiy - 73 Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 62	Zapovedniks: Belogorye - 63 Galichya Gora - 56 Privolzhskaya Lesostep - 63 Rostovskiy - 76 Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 65
		National Parks Pribaikalskiy - 34	National Parks: Pribaikalskiy - 40	National Parks: Pribaikalskiy - 53	National Parks: Pribaikalskiy - 58
		Federal Zakazniks Kharbinskiy - 11 Mekletinskiy - 18 Sarpinskiy - 11 Saratovskiy - 9 Tsimlyanskiy - 12	Federal Zakazniks Kharbinskiy - 51 Mekletinskiy - 55 Sarpinskiy - 51 Saratovskiy - 17 Tsimlyanskiy -15	Federal Zakazniks Saratovskiy - 24 Tsimlyanskiy -29	Federal Zakazniks Saratovskiy - 24 Tsimlyanskiy -29
	a) Number of SPA in Kursk pilot where feathergrass dominates. b) Coverage of feathergrass on sampling sites	a) 1 Federal PA (Central-Chernozem Reserve) consisting of 6 plots in 4 of which feathergrass dominates. No regional PAs. b) Baseline on 4 sampling sites: Streletskaaya steppe - 5% Kazatskaya steppe fallow land - 7% Bukreevy Barmy - 15%	a) Same or increased number of SPAs. b) Same or greater level of coverage in sampling sites.	a) No change from baseline (although two steppe nature monuments in process of establishment) b) No change	a) Same number of Federal PAs Five regional PAs b) Streletskaaya steppe: No change Kazatskaya steppe fallow land: Significant increase (5-25%) Bukreevy Barmy: increased (25%) Barkalovka: increased (5-25%)

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
		Barkalovka – 9%.			
	<p>a) The number of sites where Spring <i>Adonis</i> occurs (Kursk)</p> <p>b) Density of <i>Adonis</i> on sampling sites (Kursk) (sampling areas are 100 m² taking as 100 m * 0,2 m * 5 repeats)</p>	<p>a) 4 sites within Central-Chernozem Reserve; also sporadically occurs outside the PAs</p> <p>b) Optimal average density registered at 'Streletskaia steppe' plot (in areas used as pastures): 0.52 (vs 3-4 of the original baseline value)/m²;</p> <p>For other areas does not exceed 0.28/m²</p>	Stable pop or within +/- 20% of Long-Term Mean (LTM).	<p>Stable: 4 sites within Central-Chernozem Reserve; also sporadically occurs outside the PAs</p> <p>Maximum density registered at Streletsky cluster (in areas used as pastures): 3-4/m². Same stable trend recorded for other areas.</p>	<p>a) 4 sites within Central-Chernozem Reserve; and five new Nature Monuments</p> <p>b) Optimal average density registered at 'Streletskaia steppe' plot (in areas used as pastures): 4.55/m². Data for 2010-2015 varied from 3.7 to 5.6 with average at 4.36, thus the figure is actually stable fluctuating +/- 30%.</p> <p>In other areas (under other regimes) the figure was significantly lower, 0.535-2.115/m² on average, and still stable fluctuating +/- 30% year to year</p>
	<p>Population # of little bustard during nesting season (Orenburg) and migration (Kalmykia)</p> <p>Density/km² during nesting season (Orenburg and Kalmykia)</p>	<p>Data from YR1¹⁷: Orenburg: 14,000-17,000; Kalmykia: approx 60,000 migrating¹⁸]</p> <p>Density during nesting in YR1: Orenburg 0.1975/km²; Kalmykia 0.134/km² (for appropriate habitats only)</p>	Stable or increasing population relative to YR1, as assessed over a minimum three year period (three last years of the project)	<p>Data from 2013 (YR3): Orenburg: no change (estimate 14000-17000, assessment of 2011 was confirmed in 2013),</p> <p>Kalmykia (migration): increase minimum 10% (68,000-78,000, data of spring 2013)</p>	Results from surveys not available at time of TE
	Steppe Eagle - # and density/km ² during nesting season (Kalmykia / Orenburg / Dauria) and in migration (Kalmykia).	<p>Kalmykia 500 pairs</p> <p>Orenburg 250</p> <p>Dauria 125</p> <p>Density to be determined in YR1.</p>	<p>Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM (original PRODOC target)</p> <p>Stable or increasing population relative to year 1, as assessed over a minimum 3 year period--last three years of the project (revised)</p>	<p>Based on data from 2011</p> <p>Kalmykia – 400 pairs; density: 12/1,000km²</p> <p>Dauria: 144 pairs, density: 3-6/1000 km² Orenburg – 289 pairs (233-345); density – 5.06/1000km² during nesting</p>	<p>Based on data from 2015:</p> <p>Kalmykia: 527 pairs; mean density 17nesting pairs/1,000km²</p> <p>Orenburg: 267 pairs; mean density 7.3-18 nesting paris/1,000 km²</p> <p>Dauria: 219 pairs; mean density 8.8 nesting paris/1,000 km²</p>

¹⁷ The original baseline data were: Orenburg 2,000; Kalmykia 4,000. The data were reassessed during YR1 and these were then taken as baseline data

¹⁸ Assessment based on the data of 2007-10

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
				in Orenburg Data revisited: Kalmykia – 683 pairs; Dauria: 152 pairs; 8.8 nesting pairs/1,000 km ² (2010 data) Orenburg – 321 pairs (2010 data)	
	Mongolian antelope in Daursky Zapovednik - population # and proportion of young in population (as determined in YR1).	2,500 animals 35% young	5,000 Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM	Data from Autumn 2012 4,550 animals 32% of young in population	6,400 animals (based on data from Spring 2016) 27.5% of young in population (based on the survey on 08 Sept 2016)
	Saiga antelope in CZZ / Kalmykia – population # and share of males in population	15,000 animals 6% males	Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM. 15-20% males	7,500 animals (data from early 2013) 7.2% males (data from summer 2012)	5,000 adults (data from autumn 2015) 6% males (data from summer 2015)
	Manul in Zabaikalsky Krai	2500 animals in all the region 200 animals in the Daursky reserve	Stable or increasing long-term population trend (over at least 3 years), and/or +/- 50% of the LTM at project completion	10,000 animals (data from previous year) 80 animals in Dauria Reserve (data from early 2013)	4000-5000 animals in the region. An estimated 64 animals in the Daursky reserve (including zapovednik and buffer zone; data from March 2016)
	Threat Reduction Assessment (TRA), % for the region (and the pilot SPA)	Kalmykia – 0 (0) Kursk – 0 (0) Orenburg – 0 (0) Dauria – 0 (0)	Positive trends towards the end of the project	Kalmykia – 6.2 (ChZ – 30.7) Kursk – 3.3 (CChZ – 32.9) Orenburg – 6.4 (OZ – 32.9) Dauria – 7.2 (DZ – 36.8)	Kalmykia – 12.6 (+6.4) ChZ – 34.9 (+4.2) Kursk – 2.5 (-0.8) CChZ – 33.6 (+0.7) Orenburg – 7.1 (+0.7) OZ – 36.35 (+3.45) Dauria – 7.5 (+0.3) DZ – 42.1 (+5.3)

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
	Number of avoided bird death resulting from installation of bird protection equipment on power lines	Death rate on powerlines (number of dead birds/km of powerline): Orenburg: > 0.7 dead eagles/km; Kalmykia – >1.13/km (eagles) and >0.78/km (buzzards) Dauria - >0.24/km (buzzards + sakers)	Death rate reduction 90%	Baseline data established following MTR	Orenburg – no dead eagles, 100% reduction (on equipped lines) Kalmykia – no data Dauria – no dead eagles, 100% reduction (on equipped lines).
	Direct impact on improved effectiveness in pilot sites = improved management in 489,782 ha through METT Score.	Centralno-Cherno -53 Chernye Zemli - 42 Orenburgskiy - 52 Dauriskiy - 49	Centralno-Cherno - 79 Chernye Zemli - 67 Orenburgskiy - 75 Dauriskiy – 75 Federal Zakazniks in Kalmykia: Kharbinskiy – 43 (+138.8%) Mekletinskiy – 43 (+138.8%) Sarpinskiy – 43 (+290%) new Zakazniks and Nature Monuments: Dolina Dzerena – 56 Semenovsky – 39 Akzharskaya steppe – 9 Kuvayskaya steppe – 9 Nikolsky site – 9 Urochische Kreidyanka - 9	Centralno-Chernozem - 67 (+26.4%) Chernye Zemli – 56 (+33.3%) Orenburgskiy – 65 (+25%) Dauriskiy – 78 (+59.2%) <u>Federal Zakazniks in Kalmykia:</u> Kharbinskiy – 43 (+138.8%) Mekletinskiy – 43 (+138.8%) Sarpinskiy – 43 (+290%) <u>New Zakazniks and Nature Monuments:</u> Dolina Dzerena – 56 Semenovsky – 39 Akzharskaya steppe – 9 Kuvayskaya steppe – 9 Nikolsky site – 9	Centralno-Chernozem – 76 (+43.4%) Chernye Zemli – 75 (+78.6%) Orenburgskiy – 82 (+38.5%) Dauriskiy – 87 (+77.5%) <u>Federal Zakazniks in Kalmykia:</u> Kharbinskiy – 55 (+138.8%) Mekletinskiy – 55 (+138.8%) Sarpinskiy – 55 (+290%) <u>New Zapovedniks:</u> Shaitan-Tau - 32 New Zakazniks and Nature Monuments: Dolina Dzerena – 64 Semenovsky – 39 Akzharskaya steppe – 9 Kuvayskaya steppe – 10 Nikolsky site – 9 Urochische Kreidyanka - 9

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
					Petrova balka – 9 Rose Valley – 9 Surchiny – 9 Parset – 9 Beketovskie Hills - 9 Tulpanovaya Steppe – 10 Tatal-Barunsky - 10
Consolidation and expansion of SPA system.	Area of SPA in the process of establishment.	0	867,400ha (original target) 50,400ha (revised)	ca. 830,137 ha	649,932 ha
	Area/share (# ha) of regional level PA correctly documented per the Land Code (surveyed, PA regime entered in the Property Registered; State Register of Immovable Property Rights and Transactions).	Kursk: 0 ha	Kursk: at least 3,000 ha	Kursk: 200 ha (nature monument under formation but already cadastered)	Kursk: 433.8 ha
		Kalmykia: 0	Kalmykia: at least 200,000 ha (not regional PAs)	Kalmykia: 463,300 (3 federal refuges properly cadastered)	Kalmykia: 463,300 (3 federal refuges) and 2,170 ha (a new regional PA) are properly cadastered
		Orenburg: 0	Orenburg: at least 20,000 ha	Orenburg: 32,794 ha	Orenburg: 32,794 ha
		Dauria: 0	Dauria: at least 500,000 ha	Dauria: 263,838 ha (1 federal and 1 regional refuges properly cadastered)	Dauria: 263,838 ha (1 federal and 1 regional refuges properly cadastered, 47,615 ha in the regional one) + 23,558 ha (new area of the zapovednik)
	# of ha of steppe ecosystems conserved under contractual conditions or other obligations, without direct government	0	36000	0 (dropped at MTR stage)	dropped

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
	involvement.				
	# of possessors of land ownership rights (farmers and/or subsurface users) that have undertaken voluntary obligations to conserve steppe	0	At least 5 by EoP	0 (dropped at MTR stage)	dropped
	# of draft regulatory acts submitted to a legislative branch and # of standard-setting initiatives formally entered on govt agenda.	0	4	0	0
SPA knowhow for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened.	Direct impact on improved effectiveness in pilot sites = improved management in 489,782 ha through METT Score: moved to Objective level (following MTR recommendation)				
	a) IFM demonstration through full implementation b) Number of steppe PA management authorities that have formally discussed the potential use and development of an IFM	a) 0 b) 0	a) 1 IFM b) 3 pilots plus 3 other SPA = 6.	1 in progress (IFM plan for Orenburg reserve to be adopted in 2013)	a) 1 IFM plan for Orenburg reserve is adopted and implemented b) IFM best practices shared with 3 pilot PAs and 5 other PAs (4 zapovedniks and 1 Museum-Zapovednik)
	% reduction in area swept by ecologically & economically destructive grassland fires within pilot PA during hazardous seasons April/May–Sept/Oct.	Centralno-Cherno – 100 ha/yr (2,1%) Chernye Zemli – 17500 ha/yr (15%) Orenburgskiy – 3200 ha/yr (15%) Daurskiy – 2300 ha/yr (15%)	50% reduction by EoP	Centralno-Cherno – <10 ha/yr (0.2% of the reserve area) Chernye Zemli – 340 ha/yr (0.2%) Orenburgskiy – 3500 ha/yr (15%) Daurskiy – 2500 ha/yr (2012,	Centralno-Chernozemny – 0 ha/yr - 100% reduction Chernye Zemli – 1800 ha/yr (1.5% of the reserve area) – 90% reduction Orenburgskiy – 0 ha/yr – 100% reduction Daurskiy – 0 ha/yr – 100% reduction [+ 9 ha in buffer zone and 40,692 ha in

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
		of terrestrial area)		15% of terrestrial area)	subordinate Zakaznik; in the total steppe fire in the buffer zone and subordinate Zakazniks covered ca. 9.3% of their total area]
	# of SPA incorporating sustainable grazing best practice into their management regime for steppe areas.	1	At least three pilots.	No change from baseline	2 (Centralno-Chernozem had it as baseline, Chernye Zemli is currently incorporating sustainable grazing into the management practice)
	# of hectares involved in rehabilitation and restoration activities i-round SPA	0	At least 10,000 ha of grassland habitat under rehabilitation in selected sites	7 ha in Kursk. Additionally, rehabilitation is planned in Orenburg: up to 3000 ha	Dropped
Outcome 3. Strengthened SPA system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice.	[Original indicator]: The share of SPA area with management regime updated to include steppe ecosystem conservation priorities	1	7 of 15 SPA [Original target value] 4 or more documents [Revised target value as per MTR recommendation]	8 SPAs ? 4 pilot reserves and 4 refuges managed by them	4 documents: 2 SPA statutes that include steppe-specific context approved (Kharbinskii and Sarpinskii refuges in Kalmykia) and 2 SPA statute adopted (Orenburgskiy Zapovednik and Akjarskaya Steppe Nature Monument in Orenburg)
	MNRE SPA Capacity Scorecard	See categories and scores below			
	Policy formulation	Policy Formulation	Policy Formulation	-	Policy Formulation
	Systemic	3 / 6	5 / 6		4 / 6
	Institutional	2 / 3	2 / 3		2 / 3
	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation	-	Implementation
	Systemic	3 / 9	7 / 9		5 / 9
	Institutional	10 / 27	20 / 27		18 / 27
	Individual	6 / 12	8 / 12		8 / 12
	Engagement & consensus	Engagement & consensus	Engagement & consensus	-	Engagement & consensus
		3 / 6	5 / 6		4 / 6

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
	Systemic	2 / 6	4 / 6		4 / 6
	Institutional	1 / 3	2 / 3		2 / 3
	Individual				
	Information & knowledge	Information & knowledge	Information & knowledge	-	Information & knowledge
	Systemic	2 / 3	3 / 3		2 / 3
	Institutional	2 / 3	3 / 3		2 / 3
	Individual	1 / 3	2 / 3		2 / 3
	Monitoring	Monitoring	Monitoring	-	Monitoring
	Systemic	3 / 6	4 / 6		5 / 6
	Institutional	2 / 6	4 / 6		5 / 6
	Individual	1 / 3	2 / 3		2 / 3
	% improvement of SPA staff understanding of key steppe issues (grazing, fire, species conservation, agricultural context) before/after training.	TBD at beginning of each training workshop	At least + 25% in scoring at end of each training workshop	At least + 50% in scoring at end of each training workshop	>50%
	# of scientific/methodological publications (incl. Internet-based) based on/related to the project activities	0	At least 50	Over 50 (incl. conference publications)	Over 125 (incl. conference publications)
	Size of circulation for key steppe conservation such as Steppe Bulletin.	Current circulation - 1500 printed and 1300 circulated through mail.	2000 printed and 1700 through mail	1750 printed in 2011-2012, 1550 – starting from autumn 2012, 1400 circulated through mail	1,550 copies, 1,450 circulated through mail, free online access - 1396 downloaded in full (pdf)

Strategy	Indicator	Baseline	Target	MTR level	TE level
	# of visits of the steppe conservation website.	Current level of monthly site visitation 0	# of visits up to 15,000 a month	5,086 visits a month	8,872 visits per month in average (July 2015 to June 2016)

Table 6. The TE comments on the indicators

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
Objective: To develop the capacity and ecologically based enabling, tools and mechanisms for the consolidation, expansion and disturbance based integrated management of a system of protected natural areas at the landscape level within the steppe biome				
Steppe area under protection expanded:	1,834,161 ha (2,701,561 ha) (as in the approved Prodoc 1,605,529 ha (2,472,929 ha) (revised)	2,511,181.73ha (representing an increase of 905,652.73ha above baseline)	Various legal acts and documents (see Annex VIII)	The baseline and targets were revised during the MTR (and measurements were consistent thereafter). The (revised) target has been achieved.
Area of SPA in the process of establishment	(+ 867,400 ha)	(+649,932 ha)	Project reports and analyses carried out by CTA	<p>This is a slightly odd indicator as, in principle, the entire area of steppe is in the process of being established as an SPA (although it may not know it yet). It is not entirely clear how one defines the <i>beginning</i> of the process. Nonetheless, through the project's life, one would expect this number to fluctuate as the process for some areas are started while others fall out once their establishment is complete.</p> <p>That the number is so large at the end of the project can be seen in a number of different ways – but it certainly begs the question of whether these areas will ever be fully established without the assistance of the project?</p> <p>The target was revised following the MTR. See Annex VIII for list of those PAs currently “in the process of establishment”.</p>
(1a) Area of consolidated new SPA	0 (496,200 ha)	463,300 ha	Various legal acts and documents (see Annex VIII)	In principle, the target appears not to have been achieved; however, this indicator refers only to the three federal refuges that were transferred under the management authority of Chernye Zemli zapovednik.

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
				Thus, the area of “consolidated” SPAs is larger than just these areas ¹⁹ (e.g., in Orenburg and Dauria; see below).
(1b) Additional area new SPA created	0 (305,200 ha - as in the approved Prodoc; 335,200 ha - revised)	477,816 ha	Various legal acts and documents (see Annex VIII)	The target was revised following the MTR recommended that 30,000ha of the target value under the “Enabling environment” category be transferred here. The target was easily surpassed and is mainly comprised of nature monuments and refuges, but does include one new zapovednik and an additional area for inclusion into the Orenburg zapovednik (the Pre-Ural steppe area).
(1c) Enabling environment created for new SPA	0 (30,000 ha)	-		This indicator was dropped following the MTR and the 30,000ha transferred to Indicator 1(b) above primarily because at that stage it was unclear what could be included here.
(1d) SMSA covering	0 (36,000 ha)	-		This indicator was dropped following the MTR.
a) Number of SPA in Kursk pilot where feathergrass dominates. b) Coverage of feathergrass on sampling sites	a) 1 Federal PA (Central-Chernozem Reserve) consisting of 6 plots in 4 of which feathergrass dominates. (Same or increased number of SPAs) No regional PAs. b) Baseline on 4 sampling sites: Streletskaia steppe – 5% Kazatskaya steppe fallow land – 7% Bukreevy Barmy – 15% Barkalovka – 9%. (Target: Same or greater level of coverage in sampling sites)	a) Same number of Federal PAs Five regional PAs b) Streletskaia steppe: No change Kazatskaya steppe fallow land: Significant increase (5-25%) Bukreevy Barmy: increased (25%) Barkalovka: increased (5-25%)	Project reports; PA reports	The indicator focused only on PAs in Kursk (cf. the reference in the original indicator which was deleted following the MTR). The indicator is to demonstrate the health of the steppe ecosystem in the PAs. The increases in number of PAs is simply because more feathergrass PAs were established over the course of the project. Increases in cover of feathergrasses were probably stochastic variations and no significant increases were expected. Rather, the objective here was to avoid declines in feathergrass coverage. As such, the target for feathergrass coverage could have been better worded as “no less than baseline levels”.

¹⁹ In this context, “consolidated” means adjacent PAs (often of a different, lower category) are incorporated into the bigger (and often different, higher category) PAs.

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
<p>a) The number of sites where Spring <i>Adonis</i> occurs (Kursk)</p> <p>b) Density of <i>Adonis</i> on sampling sites (Kursk) (sampling areas are 100 m² taking as 100 m * 0,2 m * 5 repeats)</p>	<p>a) 4 sites within Central-Chernozem Reserve; also sporadically occurs outside the PAs</p> <p>b) Optimal average density registered at 'Streletskaia steppe' plot (in areas used as pastures): 0.52 (vs 3-4 of the original baseline value)/m²;</p> <p>For other areas does not exceed 0.28/m²</p> <p>Stable pop or within +/- 20% of Long-Term Mean (LTM).</p>	<p>a) 4 sites within Central-Chernozem Reserve; and five new Nature Monuments</p> <p>b) Optimal average density registered at 'Streletskaia steppe' plot (in areas used as pastures): 4.55/m². Data for 2010-2015 varied from 3.7 to 5.6 with average at 4.36, thus the figure is actually stable fluctuating +/- 30%.</p> <p>In other areas (under other regimes) the figure was significantly lower, 0.535-2.115/m² on average, and still stable fluctuating +/- 30% year to year</p>		<p>As with the above indicator, this indicator was to determine the health of the ecosystem – and hence the degree to which steppe management was being effective.</p> <p>The baseline figures were revised during the MTR.</p> <p>The increased number of PAs reflected the establishment of new PAs. There were increases in <i>Adonis</i> densities although these were within the desired range. In shot, then, this represents an attained target.</p>
<p>Population # of little bustard during nesting season (Orenburg) and migration (Kalmykia)</p> <p>Density/km² during nesting season (Orenburg and Kalmykia)</p>	<p>Data from YR1²⁰: Orenburg: 14,000-17,000; Kalmykia: approx 60,000 migrating²¹]</p> <p>Density during nesting in YR1: Orenburg 0.1975/km²; Kalmykia 0.134/km² (for appropriate habitats only)</p> <p>Stable or increasing population relative to YR1, as assessed over a minimum three year period (three last years of the project)</p>	<p>Results from surveys not available at time of TE</p>		<p>By the TE mission, the results from the surveys were not available and, therefore, it is not possible to determine or comment on whether the target was attained. The previous survey for which data were available (2013) showed no changes from the previous survey (2011).</p> <p>The data reflects the populations within <i>and</i> surrounding the PAs.</p>
<p>Steppe Eagle - # and density/km² during nesting season (Kalmykia / Orenburg / Dauria) and in migration (Kalmykia).</p>	<p>Kalmykia 500 pairs</p> <p>Orenburg 250</p> <p>Dauria 125</p> <p>Density to be determined in YR1.</p> <p>Stable pop or within +/- 20% of</p>	<p>Based on data from 2015:</p> <p>Kalmykia: 527 pairs; mean density 17 nesting pairs/1,000km²</p> <p>Orenburg: 267 pairs; mean density 7.3-18 nesting paris/1,000 km²</p> <p>Dauria: 219 pairs; mean density 8.8</p>		<p>The target appears to have been achieved in all three areas. There was some fluctuation in the numbers in all the sites with only Dauria showing consistent growth in the populations. However, there were also some changes to the methodology (although in the later years, methodology appears to be more consistent). In summary, the populations appear to be relatively stable (or marginally increasing) as compared to the baseline.</p>

²⁰ The original baseline data were: Orenburg 2,000; Kalmykia 4,000. The data were reassessed during YR1 and these were then taken as baseline data

²¹ Assessment based on the data of 2007-10

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
	LTM (original PRODOC target) Stable or increasing population relative to year 1, as assessed over a minimum 3 year period--last three years of the project (revised)	nesting pairs/1,000 km ²		The question does emerge as to the degree to which this can be attributed to the project (but at least management effectiveness in project sites improved so no crashes occurred).
Mongolian antelope in Daursky Zapovednik - population # and proportion of young in population (as determined in YR1).	2,500 animals 35% young 5,000 Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM	6,400 animals (based on data from Spring 2016) 27.5% of young in population (based on the survey on 08 Sept 2016)		The young were included as an indicator to demonstrate that the population is recovering. The data include increases in the population both through immigration and recruitment (indeed, it would be impossible to separate the data between the two).
Saiga antelope in CZZ / Kalmykia – population # and share of males in population	15,000 animals (Stable pop or within +/- 20% of LTM) 6% males ²² (15-20% males)	5,000 adults (data from autumn 2015) 6% males (data from summer 2015)		The target has not been achieved. There has been a continual decline in population since the beginning of the project (and, indeed, it appears to be part of a longer term decline over the past decade) and the proportion of males remains the same (despite increasing slightly in 2012). This begs the question of whether this was because of failures of the project or simply the changes were beyond the control of the project. The declines are happening for various reasons (poaching, predation and climate change leading to habitat changes). In addition, it is possible that the population structure is such that recovery is not possible. In summary, then, some of these factors <i>were</i> under the control of the project (especially poaching) but others were not.
Manul in Zabaikalsky Krai	2500 animals in all the region 200 animals in the Daursky reserve Stable or increasing long-term population trend (over at least 3 years), and/or + / - 50% of the LTM	4000-5000 animals in the region. An estimated 64 animals in the Daursky reserve (including zapovednik and buffer zone; data from March 2016)		As with the above indicator, the target in the Dauria zapovednik has not been achieved. As above, the question is whether this was because of failures of the project? It appears that the variation (which manifests itself as a decline) recorded over the project's lifetime may have been closely associated with a decline in the species' main prey species (Brandt's Vole <i>Lasiopodomys brandtii</i> and the pika <i>Ochotona pallasi</i>) and that this may

²² The proportion of males was measured because males are specifically targeted by poachers – to harvest the horns for the Chinese markets.

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
	at project completion			be associated with a long-term cycle. In addition, the 2015/16 winter was especially severe. Nonetheless, as discussed in Section 4, this perfectly illustrates the issues associated with selection of biodiversity indicators in (relatively) short project such as this.
Threat Reduction Assessment (TRA), % for the region (and the pilot SPA)	Kalmykia – 0 (0) Kursk – 0 (0) Orenburg – 0 (0) Dauria – 0 (0) Positive trends towards the end of the project	Kalmykia – 12.6 (+6.4) ChZ – 34.9 (+4.2) Kursk – 2.5 (-0.8) CChZ – 33.6 (+0.7) Orenburg – 7.1 (+0.7) OZ – 36.35 (+3.45) Dauria – 7.5 (+0.3) DZ – 42.1 (+5.3)		The indicator was added following the MTR. The results were generally positive although there was not a uniform increase across the different PAs. Each PA/area has explanations of why the changes were occurring (e.g., Kalmykia – <i>changes attributed to increasing livestock numbers resulting in increasing grazing press across the whole province</i> ; ChZ – <i>improved fire control and increased effectiveness of anti-poaching efforts</i> ; Kursk – <i>only slow increase because there has been an increase in fallow land being converted to agriculture</i> ; CChZ – <i>improving fire control</i> ; Orenburg – <i>reducing threats to birds using BPDs</i> ; OZ – <i>reduced fragmentation</i> ; Dauria – <i>reduced urgency and reduce threats to birds with use of BPDs</i> ; DZ – <i>Improved fire control and reduced threats to birds</i>)
Number of avoided bird death resulting from installation of bird protection equipment on power lines	Death rate on powerlines (number of dead birds/km of powerline): Orenburg: > 0.7 dead eagles/km; Kalmykia – >1.13/km (eagles) and >0.78/km (buzzards) Dauria - >0.24/km (buzzards + sakers) Death rate reduction 90%	Orenburg – no dead eagles, 100% reduction (on equipped lines) Kalmykia – no data Dauria – no dead eagles, 100% reduction (on equipped lines).		This indicator was also added following the MTR. There <i>was</i> a strong emphasis on bird conservation and there are a large number of power lines that cross these landscapes. The success here reflects how these simple measures can effectively protect the birds. However, the data come only from those lines that had BPDs attached. Many lines still remain un protected. In Kalmykia, the BPDs had been installed just prior to the TE mission to Russia and therefore it was too soon to measure the effectiveness of the devices.
Direct impact on improved effectiveness in pilot sites = improved management in 489,782 ha	Centralno-Cherno -53 (79) Chernye Zemli - 42 (67) Orenburgskiy - 52 (75)	Centralno-Chernozem – 76 (+43.4%) Chernye Zemli – 75 (+78.6%) Orenburgskiy – 82 (+38.5%)		This indicator was moved here on recommendation of the MTR ²³ . The scores for three federal zakazniks in Kalmykia as well as newly established regional PAs also appear here (having previously been in the

²³ Despite the recommendation – and subsequence acceptance and conformity to the recommendation, in the PIR and other reporting, the indicator appeared in *both* places in the PRF. The TE believes that “move” means move and this PRF has been edited such that the indicator only appears in one place – here.

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
through METT Score.	<p>Daurskiy - 49 (75)</p> <p>Federal Zakazniks in Kalmykia:</p> <p>Kharbinskiy – 43 (+138.8%)</p> <p>Mekletinskiy – 43 (+138.8%)</p> <p>Sarpinskiy – 43 (+290%)</p> <p>new Zakazniks and Nature Monuments:</p> <p>Dolina Dzerena – 56</p> <p>Semenovsky – 39</p> <p>Akzharskaya steppe – 9</p> <p>Kuvayskaya steppe – 9</p> <p>Nikolsky site – 9</p> <p>Urochische Kreidyanka - 9</p>	<p>Daurskiy – 87 (+77.5%)</p> <p>Federal Zakazniks in Kalmykia:</p> <p>Kharbinskiy – 55 (+138.8%)</p> <p>Mekletinskiy – 55 (+138.8%)</p> <p>Sarpinskiy – 55 (+290%)</p> <p>New Zapovedniks:</p> <p>Shaitan-Tau - 32</p> <p>New Zakazniks and Nature Monuments:</p> <p>Dolina Dzerena – 64</p> <p>Semenovsky – 39</p> <p>Akzharskaya steppe – 9</p> <p>Kuvayskaya steppe – 10</p> <p>Nikolsky site – 9</p> <p>Urochische Kreidyanka - 9</p> <p>Petrova balka – 9</p> <p>Rose Valley – 9</p> <p>Surchiny – 9</p> <p>Parset – 9</p> <p>Beketovskie Hills - 9</p> <p>Tulpanovaya Steppe – 10</p> <p>Tatal-Barunsky - 10</p>		<p>“indirect” impact indicator).</p> <p>In addition, the targets were also revised following the MTR – based on rationalisation of what could and what could not be achieved. In other words, the METT was being used properly (i.e., it is <i>both</i> a management tool as well as a tool for measuring the effectiveness of PA management but hardly any projects or PA systems use it as such!). The majority of the targets were satisfactorily attained by the TE stage (probably as a result).</p>
Outcome 1: Consolidation and expansion of SPA system.				
Area of SPA in the process of establishment.	<p>0</p> <p>867,400ha (original target)</p> <p>50,400ha (revised)</p>	649,932 ha		<p>This is a repetition of an indicator above (the second indicator under the Objective level); see comments made there.</p>

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
Area/share (# ha) of regional level PA correctly documented per the Land Code (surveyed, PA regime entered in the Property Registered; State Register of Immovable Property Rights and Transactions).	Kursk: 0 ha (at least 3,000 ha)	Kursk: 433.8 ha		<p>The use of hectares as a measure for the “share” of regional level PAs that have been correctly documented is not appropriate and could be meaningless. It would have been better to use a proportion or percentage.</p> <p>Despite this, according to the figures, the target has not been achieved for Kursk and Dauria but well surpassed in Orenburg. However, it would have been better to know the proportion that remains improperly documented.</p>
	Kalmykia: 0 (at least 200,000 ha, not regional PAs)	Kalmykia: 463,300 (3 federal refuges) and 2,170 ha (a new regional PA) are properly cadastered		
	Orenburg: 0 (at least 20,000 ha)	Orenburg: 32,794 ha		
	Dauria: 0 (at least 500,000 ha)	Dauria: 263,838 ha (1 federal and 1 regional refuges properly cadastered, 47,615 ha in the regional one) + 23,558 ha (new area of the zapovednik)		
# of ha of steppe ecosystems conserved under contractual conditions or other obligations, without direct government involvement.	0 (36000)	dropped		<p>This indicator relates to PA(s) for which management was transferred to non-state actors. The MTR recommended that this indicator be dropped because it was unlikely that the project was going to achieve the target.</p> <p>The TE may not have made the same recommendation as failing to achieve a target for an indicator sends a more powerful message than dropping it.</p> <p>There were a number of reasons why the project failed to achieve the target here (see discussion in Section 3.3.1).</p>
# of possessors of land ownership rights (farmers and/or subsurface users) that have undertaken voluntary obligations to conserve steppe	0 (5)	dropped		<p>This indicator was also dropped as it too was unlikely to be achieved.</p> <p>The <i>mainstreaming</i> of biodiversity conservation in productive landscape is the <i>next</i> step to steppe conservation (see discussion in Section 4.4).</p>
# of draft regulatory acts submitted to a legislative branch and # of standard-setting initiatives formally	0 (4)	0 (see comments)		<p>There was some contradiction in the perceptions of interviewed stakeholders, the reported position of the project and the PIR.</p> <p>Various amendments to and drafts of legislation were</p>

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
entered on govt agenda.				<p>proposed for adoption ($n = 8$ proposals at a federal level to amend three pieces of legislation and $n = 4$ at a regional level). In addition, two pieces of legislation were actually adopted, one in Kalmykia and the other in Orenburg (legislation for the Regional “Steppe Day” events).</p> <p>In addition, national conservation strategies for saiga, steppe eagles and Mongolian gazelles (<i>dzeren</i>) are expected to be formally approved by the Federal Government towards the end of 2016.</p>
Outcome 2: SPA knowhow for critical ecologically-based site management is strengthened				
Direct impact on improved effectiveness in pilot sites = improved management in 489,782 ha through METT Score				Moved to the Objective level.
Indirect impact on improved management effectiveness in 1.9 million hectares of SPA through METT Score.	+20% from baseline	<p>Belogorye +21%</p> <p>Galichya Gora +24.4%</p> <p>Privolzhskaya Lesostep +12.5%</p> <p>Rostovskiy +13.5%</p> <p>Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina +27.5%</p> <p>Pribaikalskiy NP +70.6%</p> <p>Saratovskiy +71.4%</p> <p>Tsimlyanskiy +100%</p>		Move here <i>from</i> the Objective level following recommendation by the MTR. Unlike the Direct impact indicator (previously the indicator above but moved to the Objective level), this indicator targets a simple percentage – which is when the METT is being used incorrectly (i.e., it is being used as a tool for measuring changes in the management effectiveness of PAs with little consideration of what may be actually achieved). Despite this, targets have generally been achieved.
	<p>Zapovedniks -</p> <p>Belogorye – 52 (62)</p> <p>Galichya Gora - 45 (54)</p> <p>Privolzhskaya Lesostep – 56 (67)</p> <p>Rostovskiy – 67 (80)</p>	<p>Zapovedniks:</p> <p>Belogorye - 63</p> <p>Galichya Gora - 56</p> <p>Privolzhskaya Lesostep - 63</p> <p>Rostovskiy – 76</p>		

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
	Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina – 51 (61)	Ubsunurskaya Kotlovina - 65		
	National Parks Pribaikalskiy – 34 (40)	National Parks: Pribaikalskiy – 58		
	Federal Zakazniks Kharbinskiy – 11 (51) Mekletinskiy – 18 (55) Sarpinskiy – 11 (51) Saratovskiy – 9 (17) Tsimlyanskiy – 12 (15)	Federal Zakazniks Saratovskiy – 24 Tsimlyanskiy -29		
a) IFM demonstration through full implementation b) Number of steppe PA management authorities that have formally discussed the potential use and development of an IFM	a) 0 (1 IFM) b) 0 (3 pilots plus 3 other SPA = 6)	a) 1 IFM plan for Orenburg reserve is adopted and implemented b) IFM best practices shared with 3 pilot PAs and 5 other PAs (4 zapovedniks and 1 Museum-Zapovednik; IFM workshop in Nov 2015); Chernye Zemli Reserve has, as a consequence, signed an agreement with the Regional Ministry of Emergency Situation on IFM-related cooperation and the Daurian Reserve's management authorities have been actively engaging local population for joint IFM activities		This indicator was reformulated following the MTR (to urge and measure the degree of replication). It should also be understood that what is being done here is not the same as what might be described as Integrated Fire Management in other countries. Here we are talking about fire fighting (often in collaboration with local communities and/or the Emergency authorities) as opposed to using fire as a tool for managing the steppe (or other grasslands).
% reduction in area swept by ecologically & economically destructive grassland fires within pilot PA during hazardous seasons April/May– Sept/Oct.	Centralno-Cherno – 100 ha/yr (2,1%) Chernye Zemli – 17500 ha/yr (15%) Orenburgskiy – 3200 ha/yr (15%) Dauriskiy – 2300 ha/yr (15% of terrestrial area) 50% reduction by EoP	Centralno-Chernozemny – 0 ha/yr - 100% reduction Chernye Zemli – 1800 ha/yr (1.5% of the reserve area) – 90% reduction Orenburgskiy – 0 ha/yr – 100% reduction Dauriskiy – 0 ha/yr – 100% reduction [+ 9 ha in buffer zone and 40,692 ha in subordinate Zakaznik; in the total steppe		The target was amended following the MTR and the target has been achieved. While the project appears to have significantly contributed to the controlling of fires (which is corroborated by the people met over the course of the TE mission), achieving this indicator is not completely at the control of the project (or the PA managers) thus it would be difficult to attribute success fully to the project (or vice versa). For example, the fire season in 2012 in Orenburg and Dauria was extremely challenging. Nonetheless, what can be said is that the capacity to fight fires <i>has</i> increased and the project and

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
		fire in the buffer zone and subordinate Zakazniks covered ca. 9.3% of their total area]		PA managers have probably contributed to reducing the impact of the fires.
# of SPA incorporating sustainable grazing best practice into their management regime for steppe areas.	1 (>3)	2 (Centralno-Chernozem had it as baseline, Chernye Zemli is currently incorporating sustainable grazing into the management practice)		The target has not been attained and, as discussed in Section 3.3.1, there is no consensus about the practice of "disturbance based integrated management" including grazing. Interestingly, the project does <i>not</i> report the (re)introduction of Pzewalski's horses into the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik as a success here despite the fact that it could be perceived to be the start of the process towards achieving sustainable grazing (acknowledging that at current densities, the horses will have almost no impact on the grass within the area.
# of hectares involved in rehabilitation and restoration activities i-round SPA	0 (>10,000 ha of grassland habitat under rehabilitation in selected sites)	Dropped		This indicator was dropped following the MTR on the basis that following restoration tests, the target was far too ambitious as restoring 10,000ha would be much too costly – and that there are more cost effective ways of securing steppe ecosystems.
Outcome 3. Strengthened SPA system effectively captures knowledge and enables replication of best practice.				
[Original indicator]: The share of SPA area with management regime updated to include steppe ecosystem conservation priorities [Revised] Steppe PA management by-laws and regulations (including SPA statutes) revised to include steppe-specific context, and eliminate non-steppe relevant regulations	1 (7 of 15 SPA - original target; 4 - revised target)	4 documents: 2 SPA statutes that include steppe-specific context approved (Kharbinskii and Sarpinskii refuges in Kalmykia) and 2 SPA statute adopted (Orenburgskiy Zapovednik and Akjarskaya Steppe Nature Monument in Orenburg)		The indicator and target were revised following the MTR and, as a consequence, the target was achieved. In addition to the reported achievement, statutes for a further 100 nature monuments are in the process of being revised for adoption by the regional governments.
MNRE SPA Capacity Scorecard	See categories and scores below			The project demonstrated a good reflection on where gains have been made and where the gains were less

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
Policy formulation	Policy Formulation	Policy Formulation		adequate – although across the majority of categories, there have been improvements and gains. As examples: i) By putting steppe ecosystems on the agenda, both institutional and systemic capacity has been improved as the organisations involved have taken responsibility and steppe PAs are being championed at all levels ii) There is a still a shortfall in terms of filling the gaps to ensure representativeness across the steppe ecosystems The TE urges reference to the project’s analysis in the PIR (with the PRF therein) on this indicator as best practice on reflection and use of the Capacity Scorecard.
Systemic	3 / 6 (5 / 6)	4 / 6		
Institutional	2 / 3 (2 / 3)	2 / 3		
Implementation	Implementation	Implementation		
Systemic	3 / 9 (7 / 9)	5 / 9		
Institutional	10 / 27 (20 / 27)	18 / 27		
Individual	6 / 12 (8 / 12)	8 / 12		
Engagement & consensus	Engagement & consensus	Engagement & consensus		
Systemic	3 / 6 (5 / 6)	4 / 6		
Institutional	2 / 6 (4 / 6)	4 / 6		
Individual	1 / 3 (2 / 3)	2 / 3		
Information & knowledge	Information & knowledge	Information & knowledge		
Systemic	2 / 3 (3 / 3)	2 / 3		
Institutional	2 / 3 (3 / 3)	2 / 3		
Individual	1 / 3 (2 / 3)	2 / 3		
Monitoring	Monitoring	Monitoring		
Systemic	3 / 6 (4 / 6)	5 / 6		
Institutional	2 / 6 (4 / 6)	5 / 6		
Individual	1 / 3 (2 / 3)	2 / 3		
% improvement of SPA staff understanding of key steppe issues (grazing, fire, species conservation, agricultural context) before/after training.	TBD at beginning of each training workshop At least + 25% in scoring at end of each training workshop	>50%		What the indicator does not make explicit is that questionnaires were applied at the beginning and end of each training workshop. These all, without exception, demonstrate that >50% improvement at the end of each workshop. However, it is <i>putting this knowledge into practice</i> that is ultimately desired and the project could have found mechanisms to measure this better.
# of	0 (>50)	Over 125 (incl. conference publications)		The project has significantly surpassed the target.

Indicator	Baseline (Target)	TE level	Means of verification	TE comments
scientific/methodological publications (incl. Internet-based) based on/related to the project activities				
Size of circulation for key steppe conservation such as Steppe Bulletin.	Current circulation - 1500 (2000) printed and 1300 (1700) circulated through mail.	1,550 copies, 1,450 circulated through mail, free online access - 1396 downloaded in full (pdf)		The target was not achieved but it is possible (if not even likely) that the circulation is saturated and, as such, the Steppe Bulletin is proving to be a highly successful publication. This implies that the targets were over-ambitious.
# of visits of the steppe conservation website.	Current level of monthly site visitation 0 (up to 15,000 a month)	8,872 visits per month in average (July 2015 to June 2016)		<p>The project set out to measure the use of the website as measured by the number of “hits” or visits that it had. However, it found that this is more complicated than it first appears. This has been a useful learning process not only for this project but also for other projects that wish to do the same thing.</p> <p>That being said, the target appears to be over-ambitious and, as with the above indicator, the “market” for visits appears to be saturated.</p>

3.3.2 Relevance

106. The relevance of the project at various levels is well explored and explained in the MTR. The following levels are discussed within the MTR: national and regional levels; the relevance to Russia's commitments to various international environmental agreements; and to GEF strategies, priorities and principles. Moreover, the project and its outcomes are relevant to national policies and priorities "related to Russia's protected area system, including the national strategic plan of development of the protected area system for 2010 – 2020".

107. The TE would like to reiterate one aspect of relevance: this is that the steppe ecosystem of Central Asia and eastern Europe was, for the majority of its history, perceived as an area simply for exploitation. In the more mesic areas, this was for agricultural production while in the more arid areas this was for livestock production (unless there was the possibility of irrigation in which case it was also for agricultural production). The steppe areas were wholly under-represented within the protected area of the country. The project, therefore, has brought attention to this neglected biome and expended the protected area coverage within the biome. In this alone, it is extremely relevant irrespective of whether or not the importance of this biome had been recognised within the policies, agreements and commitments that Russia had made.

108. Furthermore, the project has brought to light some critical conservation issues – including (but not limited to) the plight of the saiga (particularly in the context of Russia), the impact of power lines on birds and especially on raptors and the biodiversity of areas such as the meadow steppes of Kursk.

3.3.3 Effectiveness & Efficiency

109. *Effectiveness.* The list of successes articulated in Section 3.3.1 is indicative of the effectiveness of the project. As also described in various sections above, there were a small number of shortcomings – however, the achievements of the project far surpass the shortcomings. Having an extremely competent team to implement the project has aided effectiveness significantly.

110. One other factor that appears to have contributed to effectiveness is having a detailed (but complicated!) project results framework. The PRF was carefully planned and thought out, and the project retained a close focus on it to guide the direction in which the project went – thereby aiding effectiveness (notwithstanding the issues with the design of the PRF and the need for adaptive management – see discussions in Sections 3.2.1).

111. There were, however, some aspects that were marginally less effective: some of the contractors were poorly chosen. Initially, they appeared to be

well qualified for the work and they satisfied all the selection criteria but they failed to deliver the outputs for which they were responsible. This may say more about the *procurement* processes than anything else: using the specified criteria to make selections of contractors evidently failed the project and it may be interesting for the project team to reflect how procurement could be improved to reduce the risks of hiring contractors that might not deliver.

112. *Efficiency.* In the words of the number of the people interviewed over the course of the TE mission in Russia, the project was the most efficient and best value for money that they had come across. Indeed, so thrifty were the team that on a number of occasions (e.g., in PB meetings and during the MTR, they had to be coerced into increasing the volume of cash that they were spending (so called “delivery”). In the words of one of the project team, they were so careful and pedantic because they appreciated that securing the GEF grant for the steppe biome was an extremely rare event – indeed, it was the first major conservation grant for the biome – and they were determined to ensure that every last cent of the grant was well spent!

113. There are various counterpoints to this observation. First, the pedantic implementation did mean that implementation was, on occasion, painfully slow and that certain time-consuming aspects of the project should have been started earlier to give them a chance to be completed in good time. [It should, however, be noted that, on some occasions, the project underestimated the time that it would take to complete some of the tasks. Good examples include i) the creation of the biosphere polygon as part of the expansion of Central Chernozem zapovednik and ii) the expansion of the Dauria zapovednik – because of processes such as the State Environmental Expert Review and the environmental-economic justifications. Indeed, there are a number of things that remain outstanding and incomplete (not least the number of PAs “in process” of establishment – see PRF in Table 5).

114. While the TE would not chastise the project team for seeking the best possible value for money, there *probably* is a balance somewhere between efficiency of implementation and ensuring value for money and eking out every penny. Ultimately, delays will cost money or, perhaps worse, lead to questions about sustainability or completeness.

115. Finally, there is a further, difficult and challenging question regarding efficiency and value for money: given that over USD 1.5 million²⁴ was spent

²⁴ **Comment on TE report in which an initial figure of USD 3 million was cited:** “Where does this figure come from? The USD 650k investment from GEF stimulated at least equal cash co-financing [from the government] which will grow as the project is supported at the highest possible govt level.” **TE response:** The figure was a “back-of-the-envelope” calculation using figures that had been provided to the TE during the mission in Orenburg – including the GEF funds and government funds – particularly to construct the fence around the site. In addition, as

on the (re)introduction of Pzewalski's horses into the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik, does this represent the best *use* of limited conservation funding for the steppe biome in Russia? There is no real way of getting an objective, quantified answer to this question and, as a result, when this was put to stakeholders interviewed over the course of the TE mission in Russia it was the respondents' *opinion* that was given. That being said, of those people who were asked this question, almost all of them stated that if they had USD 1.5 million to invest in steppe conservation, they would not invest it in Pzewalski horse (re)introduction²⁵!

3.3.4 Country Ownership

116. Country ownership can be perceived in a number of different ways and is so in different UNDP-GEF projects across the globe. While the environment (or *space*) for developing a network of protected areas within the steppe biome in Russia was present, the project has really been taken forward from conception to execution by a relatively small group of *steppe enthusiasts* or *passionate aficionados* who are fully supported by a tight, nationwide circle of other steppe enthusiasts.

117. As with other UNDP-GEF projects in Russia, the involvement of a small number of key people is as ever important (if not critical). This includes the presence and support of Deputy Director of the "State Policy and Regulation for Environment Protection and Safety" of the Ministry Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and the contract with the "Partnership for Zapovedniks". As discussed earlier, on paper this is a purely administrative contract but it has strategic significance.

118. Furthermore, a number of the people involved with the design and development of the project have been involved in its implementation – including, for example, the project's CTA. As a consequence, these people took responsibility for the project, including ensuring that the design was well thought out and that implementation ensured value-for-money.

119. Finally, project processes have been fully participatory (including, for example, the PSC) and, as such, ownership and responsibility have been assumed by these people.

pointed out the leverage that the process has provided arguably justifies the investment. The figure has been adjusted on further clarification provided by the project team.

²⁵ **Further comment on draft TE report:** "*i) the reintroduction turned to be a prerequisite for fast gazettelement of the new site of the Zapovednik: no reintroduction – no new site, ii) the reintroduction became a brilliant cause for a massive PR campaign attracting public attention to steppe and steppe conservation at the national level. As such, it probably partly justifies such expenses*" **TE response:** This is the reason why there is no objective, quantifiable answer to the question posed here. The comment does provide ample justification – especially as without the re-introduction, there would be no inclusion of the area within the zapovednik.

120. In summary, then, while the ownership of the project might not have been “classic” with the government leading enthusiastically but the people who took responsibility for the project – both from conception to its conclusion – were those who were and remain centrally involved in steppe conservation in the country.

3.3.5 Mainstreaming

121. While mainstreaming was not a central pillar to the project’s design or implementation, there have been aspects of mainstreaming that have emerged as outcomes from the project. Probably the best example of this is the willingness of some of the electrical and other companies/organisations with ownership and responsibility for power lines. A number of companies have not only been cooperative with the project in terms of putting bird protection devices (BDPs) in place but they co-financed the process and, moreover, some are adopting the practice of putting BPDs in place as standard company practice. Other companies are also implementing the regulations as they currently exist (despite the fact that they are difficult to regulate) by either placing all new lines underground or ensuring that the new lines, if placed above ground, are insulated.

122. However, there were aspects of mainstreaming that could have been developed further and, in an ideal world, would have been. As has been mentioned in a number of places in this report, one of the key long-term environmental sustainability issues will be that of connectivity. The protected areas – especially in Kursk – exist as remote, isolated islands in productive landscapes whether this be for agriculture or livestock production. The project’s engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture was less successful and it is in the productive landscapes that biodiversity conservation in the steppe biomes of Russia that the next steps need to be taken. The first step to doing this would be to mainstream biodiversity conservation into agricultural policies.

3.3.6 Sustainability

123. A number of risks were identified when the project was being developed (see Section II.3 of the Project Document) and these were given a variety of ratings.

124. Some of the risks, with the benefit of hindsight that comes with the Terminal Evaluation, were well justified. For example, the second identified risk: “Environmental perturbations could affect conservation results”. As has already been discussed in the PRF (see Table 6), the population of Pallas’ cat (or *manul*) were affected by an especially hard winter in 2015/16.

3.3.6.1 *Financial Risks to Sustainability*

125. Over the course of the project, financial sustainability has been assured in various ways.

126. First, as with many UNDP-GEF projects in Russia, the very presence of the project has acted as a catalyst to increased financing from the government. Indeed, the actual process of establishing the protected areas led to them being included in the budget, which, while maybe not reaching ideal levels of funding, are sufficient. In addition, the project has been able to leverage significant additional funding from the government – and the fencing of the Pre-Ural site of the Orenburg zapovednik is a good example of this.

127. Furthermore, the additional (and potentially sustainable) funding is not restricted to the federal government alone. Indeed, regional governments have made contributions to aspects of the project during its lifetime but, in some instances, in passing some of the project processes into regional legislation (e.g., the festival days that were started by the project) assures funding for them for the foreseeable future. Similarly, the regional Education Ministries have taken on the art contests that were an integral part of these festivals days. The sustainability of such events is further assured as there is the potential for the fund-raising at such events, which can, therefore, contribute to covering the costs of holding them.

128. Other aspects have also been legislated; this will also contribute to sustainable funding. Again, the best example of this lies with the saiga. Prior to the project's intervention, saiga were considered a "hunting species" and as such received no attention. However, through the species strategy, they will (once that policy has been approved) be considered as a protected species and, as a result, will be the target for funding and actions.

129. In the section on Mainstreaming (see Section 3.3.5, above), mention has been made of the involvement of the companies that have the responsibility for the power lines – both those already in place but also for those that may be constructed in the future. While uptake and mainstreaming has not been universal, the fact that even some companies are incorporating bird conservation into their policies and budgets is quite remarkable.

130. Finally, the Steppe Bulletin and the "*Conservation of Steppes in Russia*" website have both been subsidised by the project. Obviously, the funding will stop at the end of the project – indeed, in the coming days. This begs the question of how these useful sources of information can be sustained beyond the life of the project. When questioned on how this might be done, the dedication of the people involved is (re)confirmed. They are simply determined for it to continue. Of course, it will not have as much funding as it did during the project's life, but in a leaner form, the publications will persist.

131. In summary, then, the financial sustainability of the processes started by the project and the impacts that the project has had can be rated as being likely based to some large degree of the dedication and determination of the people involved.

3.3.6.2 Socio-economic Risks to Sustainability

132. The degree of participation and involvement of stakeholders – including at the regional and local levels – in project processes enhances the likelihood of socio-economic sustainability. Indeed, many of the stakeholders actually had responsibilities for different aspects of the project's implementation.

133. One good example of the involvement of local communities in project processes was through the fire-fighting training and organisation. There was joint training and the organisation of fire-fighting in some places brought the local communities and the protected area authorities close enough that they consider this as “co-management”.

134. In summary, there are no substantial risks to socio-economic sustainability.

3.3.6.3 Institutional Framework and Governance Risks to Sustainability

135. Institutions in Russia are relatively robust and, as a consequence, sustainable. The project has operated within this framework in a way that speaks of the project team's knowledge and awareness of this operating environment. The protected areas themselves are equally robust and sustainable. Indeed, this may be one of the reasons why it is relatively difficult to establish protected areas: once established: i) there is a system in which they exist that ensure that some level of funding is committed to them, and ii) once the protected areas are established, they are even more difficult and expensive to close down.

136. As described above, the financial sustainability is likely; indeed, financial and institutional sustainability are relatively closely inter-twined (which, in itself, is a statement of the governance of protected areas in Russia). Had the experiment to establish a protected area managed by a non-state actor been successful, then this would have raised interesting sustainability questions – both from an institutional as well as a financial perspective.

3.3.6.4 Environmental Risks to Sustainability

137. While overall environmental sustainability also seems likely, there are a number of concerns. First, there are a number of plans and strategies that remain to be approved (in other words, the process has started towards their approval but approval remains pending). Because this project falls under the Biodiversity strategic objective of the GEF and the project has been designed and implemented to achieve environmental objectives, it follows that any

incomplete activities will mean that the environmental results that could have been achieved are not fully so.

138. Second, despite the gains made with establishment of protected areas and, for example, the regulations that exist to protect birds along power lines, such regulations and the enforcement of protected area legislation is difficult to implement. A further example is that the protected area authorities are involved in an arms race with saiga poachers (in Kalmykia, with the poachers resorting to the use of powerful motocross motorbikes). With the relatively limited budgets available to the protected area authorities, it is challenging for them to keep up in this arms race (although the project did contribute to their ability to do so). In short, then, simply putting the structures and regulations in place does not complete the picture and the challenges are multifaceted. In order to achieve environmental sustainability, projects and the partners will have to address each of those facets, something that is complex and takes many years to achieve.

139. Third and as has been mentioned previously in this report, climate change presents a significant, long-term threat to environmental sustainability. The connectivity that will be necessary as the principal mechanism to adapt to the impacts of climate change will be ensuring connectivity: this will allow species to migrate as the climate shifts. As has also been discussed in the report, the engagement with actors that work in the productive landscape surrounding the protected areas was less effective and it is something that people will have to address in the coming years.

140. Fourth, obviously the steppe biome in Russia does not exist in isolation of the outside world. Indeed, much of Russia's steppe lies on her southern boundaries and there will be influences from her southern neighbours. This includes, for example, impacts on water systems, transhumance, fire management and poaching/hunting policies. All this, in turn, stresses the need for transboundary cooperation and collaboration. Of course, the project has catalysed some transboundary collaborative efforts but there remains much to do.

141. Fifth, there were a number of factors that were beyond the control of the project and, on the surface, commentators might accuse the project of being less of a success than it is. For example, the saiga populations continue to decline and the Pallas' cat population has been fluctuating – despite the presence of the project. As such, these fluctuations demonstrate that despite the best efforts of the project, complete environmental sustainability is not guaranteed.

142. Finally, it is apparent that there is no consensus regarding “*disturbance based integrated management*” – thus, the active use of fire and grazing as management tools in the steppe biome of Russia. It is apparent, however, that

active management is necessary. For example, in the Kursk region, without management, ecological succession leads to an increase in the coverage of woody species. The scientific research that would otherwise inform management regarding the use of tools such as fire and/or grazing has not been done and, as such, people resort to giving their opinions. As previously mentioned, there are some fairly obstinate people involved in steppe conservation and this presents difficulty when trying to move forward with steppe management and conservation. [If it is any reassurance to the actors in Russia, this is not uncommon among conservationists: if one is to generalise, they are passionate, opinionated and stubborn people!] Nonetheless, having the attitude that experimentation while retaining open minds (about the possibility of some failures among the successes) would be a relatively good thing and might allow steppe conservation move forward.

143. In summary, then, there are some challenges to achieving environmental sustainability fully; perhaps most concerning of these is the long-term challenge of climate change and ensuring connectivity among the “islands” that the protected areas represent.

3.3.7 Impact

144. While measuring actual biodiversity impacts over the course of a project that is limited in time (even though the project, at over six years, is longer than the majority of GEF projects), the project has done two things that should, ultimately, result in significant impact. First, the project has increased the area under protection by just over 9,056km². The steppe was profoundly under-represented in the protected area system of Russia; indeed, it still is but this is a first – and significant – step to increase the representation of the biome. Second and somewhat related to the first point, the project has brought attention to the steppe biome for the first time. But it is not simply *coverage* but it is also starting a process to shift in the mentality and attitudes to the steppe. These things alone should lead to profound biodiversity impacts.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

145. The MTR set a challenge for the project: *“perhaps the most significant question for the Russia Steppe project for the second half of implementation is: will the project manage to really go above and beyond in delivering results, and exceed expectations? Or will it just barely manage to achieve the minimum planned results before completion?”* The “operational parts of the challenge (“ ... go above and beyond in delivering results, and exceed expectations ... ” and “ ... achieve the minimum planned results ... ”) are barely quantifiable but the TE can make some

comments in response to this challenge. Many of these points have already been made in the report but they are reiterated here in conclusion and in response to the MTR.

146. First, the project has taken the steppe protected areas in Russia from existing only on paper to ones that are functional and effective (with significant increases in METT scores to demonstrate this).

147. Second, The project has successfully increased the protected area coverage in the steppe biome of Russia by over 9,000km². And another 6,500km² are in process of establishment (although, as discussed earlier, it is not clear in the absence of the project if and when these will be formally established).

148. Third, significant capacity gains have been made.

149. Fourth, the project has done this in a complex working environment: the distances between the pilot areas were huge: the project sites spanned six time zones (from Dauria in Transbaikalia to Kursk). The core team were located in different places. The ecology in each of the pilot sites was significantly different. The spatial scales in which the protected areas in each of the pilot sites operated were significantly different. Such parameters would have challenged the majority of GEF projects (and their implementers) and that the project team – with their partners – have managed to do quite as much as they have is a great testament to their skills and dedication.

150. These are really the headline news from the project. Whether these “*exceed expectations*” depends on what expectations one started with. What can be said is that the project started out hugely ambitious with a sensibly crafted direction and it has made significant gains. There have been a small number of knock-backs along the way and some things have not worked out quite as expected.

151. Nonetheless and in summary, then, the project has taken a great first step for steppe conservation – but there is much still to do.

152. The end of this project – as well as one other projects that will be ending simultaneously and a further five that will be ending in a year’s time – mark the end of an era. All that currently remains of the UNDP office in Moscow is the Project Support Unit. This office will be phased out and, ultimately, it will be closed at the end of 2017²⁶. Much has been achieved over this time. And it does beg the question of which organisation, using which sources of funding, will play the catalytic role that UNDP with GEF funding has played over the past 14 years (since the approval of the first UNDP-GEF

²⁶ In addition to this, the question of further GEF funding to Russia remains; there are a number of concepts (PIFs) that have been approved but further development and subsequent implementation of these projects appears to have been arrested.

Biodiversity – and protected areas – project “*Demonstrating Sustainable Conservation of Biological Diversity in Four Protected Areas in Russia’s Kamchatka Oblast, Phase I*”.

4.2 Corrective actions for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project

153. The fact that the UNDP-GEF projects are closing down and the fact that Russia is currently not receiving GEF grants makes writing recommendations and lessons learned an interesting exercise. One may ask who is going to read this and take note?

154. The project was ambitious, complex and adopted a scattergun approach. It took the opportunity – presumably a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – to make significant changes for steppe conservation. Parts of the project design were exquisite: for all its complexity and numerous indicators at the objective level (to which the MTR even added by suggesting that one of the outcome level indicators be shifted to the objective level), the project result framework was the most carefully thought out that the TE has come across. The PRF did also incorporate the scattergun approach and some would say that given the number of indicators and targets that needed to be adjusted following the MTR that it might have been badly designed. The TE would argue against such criticism. Nonetheless, the TE does wonder whether the outcomes of the project might have been different had the approach had been slightly more focused and targeted. It would probably have meant that the project would have been more efficient (not in the way that it was – considerable value for money but in achieving targets more quickly and more precisely. There is one thing that is clear: such a PRF would not have passed muster in today’s (or rather GEF-6’s) world. And there would have been demands to hone it down. This would mean paring the 29 indicators (with a further ten indicators nested within those – making a total of 39 parameters to measure) down to a maximum of 16 indicators. The designers purposefully selected the number of indicators that they did because it would restrict the ability of the project to shift away from achieving the indicators. In other words, the PRF was carefully constructed not just to guide the project towards its destination but to focus it and keep its focus closely. The M&E burden imposed by such a complex PRF was substantial and it required additional effort to keep on top of it all. Finally, while this discussion is somewhat academic at this point, in the hands of a lesser team the PRF would have been overwhelming.

155. There is one very pertinent lesson that emerges from the PRF and monitoring thereof: the biodiversity indicators that were selected were not particularly good measures of project success (or otherwise). Indeed, if one

was to judge the project on the populations of saiga and Pallas' cat, it does not appear to be very good.

156. This is an issue that pervades GEF projects since the 2002 review of GEF biodiversity projects²⁷. The result of this study was to encourage the use of biodiversity indicators to measure the success of projects. This has been done but quite unsuccessfully because the majority of projects choose inappropriate species as indicators: they tend to choose large, charismatic mammals as indicators. This is done in part because they are relatively easy to survey or census; it is done because there is a cultural bias towards these species among conservation workers. And yet, those are the very species that are either less affected by project outcomes at least in the short-term – i.e., over the project's life, and/or their ecology is such that any significant changes to their population sizes over the course of a project would almost always be a decline that was beyond the control of the project (as in the cases of the Pallas' cat and saiga). In other words, the indicator species are not well selected. Instead, projects (or rather, their designers working with ecologists) need to think very carefully about biodiversity indicators that i) operate on a scale (both spatially and temporally), ii) are minimally affected by external factors but will respond most directly to project activities. These, then, would be species (or other aspects of biodiversity) that would most appropriate to measure project successes (or otherwise). Few projects do this.

157. There were a number of different aspects that warrant a brief mention here – brief because they have already been discussed although they do warrant being reiterated as part of the lessons learned aspects that are mentioned in this section:

158. *Getting the rate of implementation balance correct.* Project implementation is a balance between pedantic ensuring value-for-money and pragmatism. Projects need to strive for a balance between the two to ensure timely delivery of both expenditure as well as results.

159. *Getting the site selection right.* One of the things that the project did well is site selection. It chose carefully, looking for partners (or catalysing change with those partners) to end up with partners who were enthusiastic and dedicated.

160. *Amending federal legislation is difficult.* Because of the degree of cross-referencing within the federal legislation, amendments are exceedingly difficult. An amendment to one piece of legislation lead to a cascading effect with multiple other pieces of legislation needing to be amended as a result. The consequence is that bodies such as the MNRE are very reluctant to even

²⁷ Dublin, H., C. Volonte & J. Brann (2004) Biodiversity Study Program. GEF Office of Monitoring & Evaluation.

attempt to change legislation. They would prefer to work within the framework of the existing legislation and urge partners to work at the regional and/or municipal levels if legislative aspects need to be addressed. Conversely, however, there is a willingness to write strategy or policy documents (e.g., the three species strategies that have been developed under the auspices of the project) although approval does take some time!

161. *Transboundary work.* The project successfully catalysed transboundary work in Orenburg and Dauria but were less successful in Kalmykia (working with Kazakhstan). The TE has already discussed the nature of the steppe biome in Russia and the influences that the neighbouring countries may have and the need for transboundary cooperation and collaboration.

162. *Correct use of METT and Capacity Scorecard.* The project represents best practice in terms of use of the METT and Capacity Scorecard. Proper use of these tools is very rare in projects: the majority of projects treat them as an unpleasant demand made by the GEF and UNDP and do not spend time and energy thinking and analysing what they mean or how to best use them to target activities and actions in order to ensure gains. This is in contrast to this project and it is to be congratulated for doing so.

4.3 Actions to follow up or reinforce initial benefits from the project

163. *Plans, strategies and PA establishment.* The project is coming to its logical conclusion and with the exception of the recommendation to extend the project, if at all possible, to allow the project team to spend the remaining budget (see Section 3.2.4 for a full discussion of this point), it is ready for closure. However, there *are* quite a number of processes that have not come to some conclusion (e.g., species strategies, PA establishment) and the responsibility to see these through lies in the hands of the project partners. In addition, because the project team (particularly the PM and CTA) remain professionally involved in the sector and have a vested interest in seeing these things through, the TE is confident that they will be followed through.

4.4 Proposals for future directions underlining main objectives

164. *Connectivity.* One critical key for the future is to ensure connectivity among the protected areas and mainstreaming biodiversity within productive landscapes. This will mean engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture but also with the relevant authorities in adjacent countries as well.

165. *Alternative forms of PA governance.* As discussed above, there is little appetite for changing legislation and until it is changed, there will be little space for piloting alternative forms of PA governance. However, if regional authorities or municipalities could be persuaded to pilot such work at their level and, thereafter demonstrate successes, it would be worthwhile as this might catalyse change through the system including at a federal/national

level. The principal issue here is that GEF – which in the past has been a catalyse for such pilots – is not currently giving grants to Russia and UNDP is closing down its Project Support Unit.

4.5 Best and worst practices in addressing issues related to relevance, performance and success

166. Finally, in addition to the lessons that are written into the sections immediately above this one and elsewhere throughout the report, some of the final key lessons are mentioned here.

167. *Sequencing.* It is critically important to ensure that the project activities are *sequenced* appropriately. In the project, there were activities that should have been initiated earlier because of the time that they have taken to complete: indeed, some of them remain incomplete. Of course, the problem does come when activities take much longer than anticipated: it was expected that the establishment of the biosphere area would take only one year. Four years later and it still remains incomplete.

168. *Good people are the key to successful projects.* This point has been made in various places in the document and has been illustrated by a number of examples. It is reiterated here but also to point out that such a complex project would have been impossible with any less a team than the one that it had.

169. *Involving implementers in the design can work well.* The majority of the designers of the project were involved in its implementation. There are many reasons why this can be a good idea, not least because as designers they have a vested interest in making it work.
