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Nam Xam NPA in Houaphan



Introduction

The Nam Xam National Protected Area (NPA), established in 1993, is one of 25 NPAs across Laos. This natural area, an IUCN Category VI forest, in Laos' northern Houaphan province, still retains much of its rich biodiversity and is home to the white-cheeked gibbon, Asian elephant, bears, langurs, serows, sambar, hornbill, pheasants, and numerous other rare wildlife species.

However, the forests of Nam Xam NPA and its wildlife are quickly being depleted due to shifting agriculture, unplanned logging, and uncontrolled hunting. An estimated 14,000 people directly benefit from the NPA, but a limited budget and no management plan for the Nam Xam NPA has meant that the protected area is vulnerable to encroachment, an issue exacerbated by the poverty of surrounding villages. Nine villages lie within the NPA and another 36 in the surrounding area, all of whom rely on forest resources and wild meat for their household income and consumption.

As a part of the USAID Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests (USAID LEAF) project, SNV in Laos has partnered with local authorities to improve the management of the Nam Xam NPA and raise awareness about the value of the protected area with local communities.

If managed properly, the Nam Xam NPA has potential for the development of:

Biodiversity:

The NPA can be an important refuge for native species, in order to preserve Laos' biodiversity and natural resources for future generations.

Watershed:

The NPA is an important watershed for both livelihoods of surrounding villages and for any potential hydropower developments on the Nam Xam River.

Culture:

The NPA communities are home to several of Laos' diverse ethnic groups.

Tourism:

The NPA has ecotourism potential, particularly for flora and fauna viewing, trekking/camping, and viewing the spectacular early morning 'cloud sea' over the landscape.





In order to develop the potential of the Nam Xam NPA, the USAID LEAF project engaged local government counterparts and communities in a number of activities:

Forest monitoring:

Two new forest inspection outposts were established to support forest monitoring in vulnerable border areas of the park, as a result of improved management planning conducted during the project.

Ecotourism study tour and planning:

Officials visited Nam Et Phou Loey NPA as a successful ecotourism model, and are now establishing ecotourism proposals for the Nam Xam NPA, including kayaking, improved trails and tours, animal observation posts, and restaurants.

Awareness raising:

Six village clusters surrounding and within the NPA learned more about Nam Xam regulations, forest and wildlife laws, climate change, and REDD+.

Conservation zones demarcated:

In a participatory process with villages and authorities, a 9.5km fish conservation area and 'core' protected forest areas were established to provide essential wildlife corridors.

Livelihood improvement:

Activities were conducted to reduce pressure on the forests in surrounding areas and increase village incomes, including Participatory Land Use Planning and livestock trainings.

Revised regulations:

Authorities from three districts, along with provincial representatives, adjusted the Nam Xam regulations to clarify ambiguous terminology and extend its coverage.

Improved law enforcement:

Forestry law enforcement officials were trained to improve knowledge on forest and wildlife laws and effectiveness of patrols and enforcement.

Capacity building:

The NPA management structure was improved and staff received training, including work on financial management and fundraising.

Although these are just beginning to improve the management of the Nam Xam NPA, the USAID LEAF project has enabled initial steps toward realizing Nam Xam NPA's potential and preserving its future. As such, government partners at the NPA have drawn up plans adjusting the organizational structure and management, as well as proposals for funding and financial sustainability.