Why Important?

Laos is a country replete with incredible biodiversity. From the banks of the Mekong River to the forests of the misted Annamite Range, a living palette of natural wonder runs the length and breadth of this landlocked nation.

Around 49 ethnic groups speaking four different languages live in Laos. 80 per cent of the country’s 6.5 million people, over half of which is under 20 years of age, are located in rural areas making a living from natural resources mainly in the form of fisheries, agriculture, wildlife hunting and the harvest of non-timber forest products, such as honey or rattan.

Unprecedented economic development is underway in Laos and across the Greater Mekong region. The building of major roads, other construction projects and growing natural resource extraction are just some of the activities that need to be planned and managed in a sustainable way if biodiversity and socio-economic development are to exist in a balanced manner.
Our Laos programme officially began in 2001 and since then our work has focused on research, advocacy and building partnerships aimed at protecting Laos’ most precious habitats and species, enhancing local and national capacity to conserve them, and improving the livelihoods of the communities who depend on them most.

Current activities include:
- Implementing the Green Schools Programme to educate and inspire the next generation
- Facilitating the Chain of Custody (CoC) process for timber trade
- Restoring and protecting forest in four protected areas with two connecting corridors that will allow biodiversity to flow between them
- Conserving rare and threatened species such as saola and duoc through camera trap research and patrol activities
- Promoting alternative livelihood practices such as the creation of rice banks, fish aquaculture and dry season crop cultivation
- Facilitating the Chain of Custody (CoC) process for timber trade
- Establishing community-managed Fish Conservation Zones to protect fish stocks and improve the overall health of river ecosystems
- Improving the participation of women in the decision-making process related to aquatic resources management
- Working with communities and the private sector to sustainably harvest rattan
- Promoting Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) projects, which also runs in Central Laos.

Current activities include:

**SAVANNAKHET PRIORITY SITE**
The Lower Mekong Dry Forests, spanning eastern Thailand, southern Laos, northern Cambodia and western Vietnam, form the largest continuous tract of dry forest remaining in mainland Southeast Asia. The only known population of Eld’s deer in Laos occurs within the dry forest of Savannakhet Eld’s deer sanctuary, founded in 2005 in a partnership with the provincial government and NGOs.

**MEKONG FLOODED FORESTS LANDSCAPE**
Siphandone (Four Thousand Islands) in southern Laos represents a largely important ecological area of the Mekong River. The braided channel languidly winds its way through a region that provides the highest number of fish consumed in the country and is home to the globally vulnerable Irrawaddy river dolphin, Mekong giant catfish and giant stingray.

**NAM POUY PRIORITY SITE**
Nam Pouy National Protected Area (NPA) is located in Xayabouly Province in northwest Laos. This 1,520 km² site was identified as a top priority for elephant conservation by the government at a national elephant conservation meeting in 2008. In 2010, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed the MoU with WWF for the project, with the overall goal of integrating elephant issues into provincial planning.

**CENTRAL LAOS PRIORITY SITE**
Our Central Laos Priority Site includes Bolikhamxay, Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces. Here is a concentration on partnering with district and provincial authorities, as well as villages, to sustainably manage natural resources in a manner that brings benefits for the environment and the people that depend on it most. Active in the area are the Community Fisheries and Sustainable Rattan projects.

**OTHER STRATEGIES**
- Protect landscape integrity through the promotion of integrated spatial planning and the diversification of people’s livelihoods.
- Combat illegal wildlife and timber trade, as well as poaching.
- Influence policy, consumption and commodities’ production to switch to sustainable use of land and water resources.

**ABOUT WWF-LAOS**
WWF-Laos is the local office of the WWF Network, the world’s largest and most experienced independent conservation organisation. It has more than 5 million supporters and offices active in over 100 countries.

WWF’s mission is to stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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