



WWF

LEAFLET

MARCH  
2013

WWF-Greater Mekong

# WILDLIFE, LANDSCAPES AND LIVELIHOODS

# A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER

Few places on Earth are blessed with such natural riches. Home to the world's largest freshwater fish and extensive tiger habitat, the Greater Mekong's forests and rivers, grasslands and wetlands pulse with life. New species are recorded here every other day.

**80 PER CENT**  
**AROUND 80 PER CENT**  
**OF THE GREATER**  
**MEKONG'S 300 MILLION**  
**PEOPLE DEPEND**  
**DIRECTLY ON THE GOODS**  
**AND SERVICES ITS**  
**ECOSYSTEMS PROVIDE**

Few places on Earth demonstrate so dramatically the fundamental link between people and nature. Around 80 per cent of the Greater Mekong's 300 million people depend directly on the goods and services its ecosystems provide, like food, fibre and clean water. The Mekong River supports the world's largest and most productive inland fishery, with an annual commercial value of more than US\$4 billion. Fishing and aquaculture in the Mekong Delta employ over 2.8 million people – 10 per cent of Vietnam's labour force.

But few places on Earth are under such pressure. Rapid economic growth – much of it derived from those same abundant natural resources – combined with short-term thinking, poor land-use planning and weak environmental protection is taking its toll. Poorly situated hydropower dams will reduce access to water and decimate fish populations. Illegal wildlife trade risks driving important species to extinction.

The Great Mekong is at a crossroads. One path leads to further declines in biodiversity and livelihoods, with climate change amplifying the pressures. But if natural resources are managed responsibly, with real commitment and action from leaders, this dynamic region can pursue a course that will secure a healthy and prosperous future for its people.



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Fishing and aquaculture in the Mekong Delta employ more than 2.8 million people.

The Greater Mekong spans Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Yunnan province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southern China. Woven together by the mighty Mekong, Chao Phraya and Irrawaddy rivers, the contrasting landscapes of this vast area support incredible biodiversity and are home to people from nearly 100 ethnic groups.

In spite of impressive economic growth, the Greater Mekong remains relatively poor. Sustainable use of natural resources – and equitable sharing of the gains – will be crucial for maintaining and furthering development.

WWF-Greater Mekong works with government, industry and civil society partners to ensure that, as the region develops, it doesn't squander the natural riches that so many depend on and that drive the region's economic future. We aim to support the countries of the region in realizing their shared vision of a poverty-free and ecologically-rich Greater Mekong.

## HEALTHY LANDSCAPES

To conserve healthy ecosystems that provide the resources and services people depend on, we focus on eight priority landscapes covering an area of 290,000km<sup>2</sup> – slightly larger than New Zealand and representing around 10 per cent of the Greater Mekong. They encompass the most important and distinctive habitats in the region, including rare lowland evergreen forests and freshwater ecosystems.

Working on a landscape scale, we aim to ensure that the most important areas for conservation are protected, that protected areas are linked by corridors where wildlife can move safely, and that agriculture, forestry and infrastructure development are well managed and occur in the right places. It's about ensuring that ecosystems continue to provide the services that society depends on, including raw materials for growing economies, fresh water for communities and industry buffering against more severe floods and droughts, and other climate change hazards.

We promote an integrated approach to development that balances the various demands on these landscapes, by putting the role and importance of natural capital at the heart of decision-making and taking actions to 'green' the economies in the region. We're working with green economy partners to find ways for the countries of the Greater Mekong to enjoy much greater economic benefits from managing their natural resources sustainably, now and in the future, rather than exploiting them for short-term gain.

## SMART HYDROPOWER

Uniquely among the world's great rivers, the lower mainstream of the Mekong remains free-flowing – but for how much longer? With the region's electricity needs growing fast, plans for 12 hydropower projects on the Mekong mainstream are in the works. Constructing just one would have massive consequences. Damming the river could devastate the fisheries that provide 60 million people with their main source of protein, and reduce the flow of sediment that helps make the Mekong Delta one of the world's most productive rice-producing regions.

We're calling for a 10-year moratorium on dam development on the lower Mekong mainstream, so the potential impacts can be properly studied and understood. We're not opposed to all hydropower – we recognize the need for greater production and access to energy in the region. So we're promoting sustainable alternatives on some of the Mekong's tributaries, and advising on how they can be designed and operated to minimize their environmental impact.

Ultimately, we're working to realize sound, participatory management of the region's major river basins, to maintain healthy river systems that continue to sustain people and nature.



**FISH SUPPLY FROM THE MEKONG RIVER COULD BE CUT BY CLOSE TO 40% IF ALL PLANNED HYDROPOWER PROJECTS ARE BUILT**



## CarBi: connecting forests, species and livelihoods

Our Carbon and Biodiversity Project (CarBi) is one of the most ambitious we've ever undertaken. We're aiming to protect over 20,000km<sup>2</sup> of one of Asia's largest natural forests in the Greater Annamites mountain range linking Laos and Vietnam. Protecting the forest will save an estimated 1.8 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over five years.

The project will improve forest management and support local people to develop sustainable livelihoods: we're aiming for a 15 per cent increase in the income of 400 households with benefits to 5,000-7,000 people from 100 villages.

We're working with partners, including local communities, to rehabilitate, restore and protect the forest, including four protected areas and two connecting corridors that will allow species to move between them. These protected areas provide unique habitat for many rare and endangered species. Also within the project area, we aim to reduce by 40 per cent the transborder trade in illegally cut timber from Laos into Vietnam within the next five years.

Xe Sap National Protected Area, southern Laos.

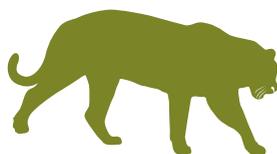
## PROTECTING SPECIES

Protected areas cover 11.5 per cent of land in the Greater Mekong, and are critical for conserving the region's biodiversity and endangered species. But protected areas don't always get the protection they need: in 2010, poachers killed the last Javan rhino in Vietnam inside Cat Tien National Park. The region's forests make up the world's largest tiger habitat, but tiger numbers have plummeted from 1,200 in 1998 to no more than 350 today.

We're working with governments, law enforcement agencies and communities to improve the way protected areas are managed, using robust science to assess and monitor species populations and strengthen protection for endangered wildlife. By supporting communities to manage their own natural resources sustainably and share in the benefits, we're strengthening governance from the bottom up. Beyond our work on the ground, we're tackling the wider issues of illegal wildlife trade and over-exploitation of natural resources.

### PRIORITY SPECIES:

- ASIAN ELEPHANT
- CRESTED GIBBON
- INDOCHINESE TIGER
- MEKONG IRRAWADDY DOLPHIN
- MEKONG GIANT CATFISH
- SAOLA

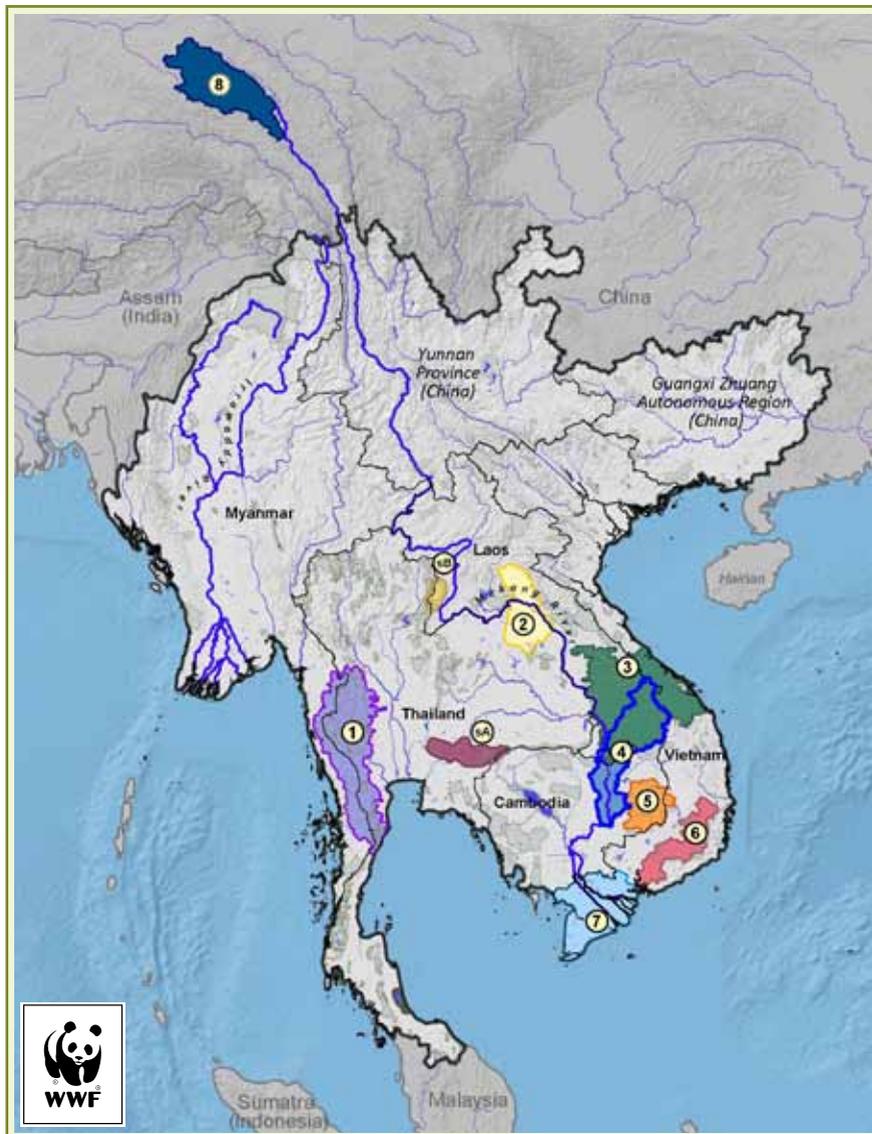


## SUSTAINABLE FINANCING

Conservation and green development on the scale we need to see in the Greater Mekong requires significant, long-term investment. WWF can't raise these sort of finances alone – but we can use our influence to help secure it. We were instrumental in winning a commitment of US\$150 million from the Global Environment Facility and other partners toward a programme to conserve forests and biodiversity in the region.

We're also exploring new forms of sustainable funding that capture the value of natural capital. These include payments for environmental services – where, for example, a hydropower company that benefits from steady water and reduced sediment flows pays communities to conserve forests upstream that help regulate flood waters and erosion. We're also developing sustainable financing schemes with the private sector, facilitating public-private partnerships, and supporting national and regional discussions on green economy activities.

## WWF-GREATER MEKONG: PRIORITY LANDSCAPES



### Priority landscapes

- 1 Dawna Tenasserim Landscape: Thailand / Myanmar
- 2 Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Bolikhamsay, Khammeun: Thailand / Laos
- 3 Southern Laos / Central Vietnam Landscape: Laos / Vietnam
- 4 Siphandone, Stung Treng, Kratie section: Cambodia / Laos
- 5 Eastern Plains Landscape: Cambodia / Vietnam
- 6 Southern Annamites Landscape: Vietnam
- 7 Mekong River Delta: Vietnam
- 8 Mekong Source Area: China

### Species conservation / recovery landscapes

- SA Dong Phrayayen / Khao Yai (Tiger): Thailand
- SB Nam Pouy (Elephant): Laos

**WWF has a long history of engagement in the Greater Mekong. We helped establish conservation programmes in Thailand in the early 1980s, and have been active in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam since 1990.**

**To find out more, visit [panda.org/greatermekong](http://panda.org/greatermekong)**

### Myanmar: the last frontier

With three of the most pristine large rivers and some of the most extensive intact forest in the region, Myanmar is Asia's last frontier for conservation. Its natural environments remain mostly unspoiled. They support some of the region's poorest people, and possibly the largest populations of wild elephants in Southeast Asia.

But as Myanmar opens up politically and economically, it's feeling many of the same pressures faced by the rest of the Greater Mekong, from deforestation to illegal wildlife trade

to energy demand. WWF is working with the government and other partners to help set priorities for conservation, coordinate land-use planning, and promote sustainable development. By engaging now, we have a great opportunity to pursue green development through sound management of the country's natural capital.



# WWF-Greater Mekong in numbers

**850+**

The Mekong has at least 850 species of freshwater fish

**60 MILLION**

The Lower Mekong River provides food and livelihoods for 60 million people

**1,700+**

Since 1997, an incredible 1,710 new species were newly described by science in the Greater Mekong

**290,000**

WWF aims to conserve 8 priority areas covering 290,000km<sup>2</sup>

The Greater Mekong region is one of the biologically richest places on the planet; its varied natural resources support the livelihoods and well-being of millions of people in mainland Southeast Asia. WWF-Greater Mekong – on the ground in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam – is working to conserve the region's biodiversity and build a secure and sustainable future for people and wildlife.



**Why we are here**

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

[panda.org](http://panda.org)

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