WWF

FACT SHEET

LIVING HIMALAYAS

Conservation Complex Across the Top of the World

Sacred Himalayas for Water, Life and Culture

© WWF Bhutan

Tallest Mountains, Greatest Rivers

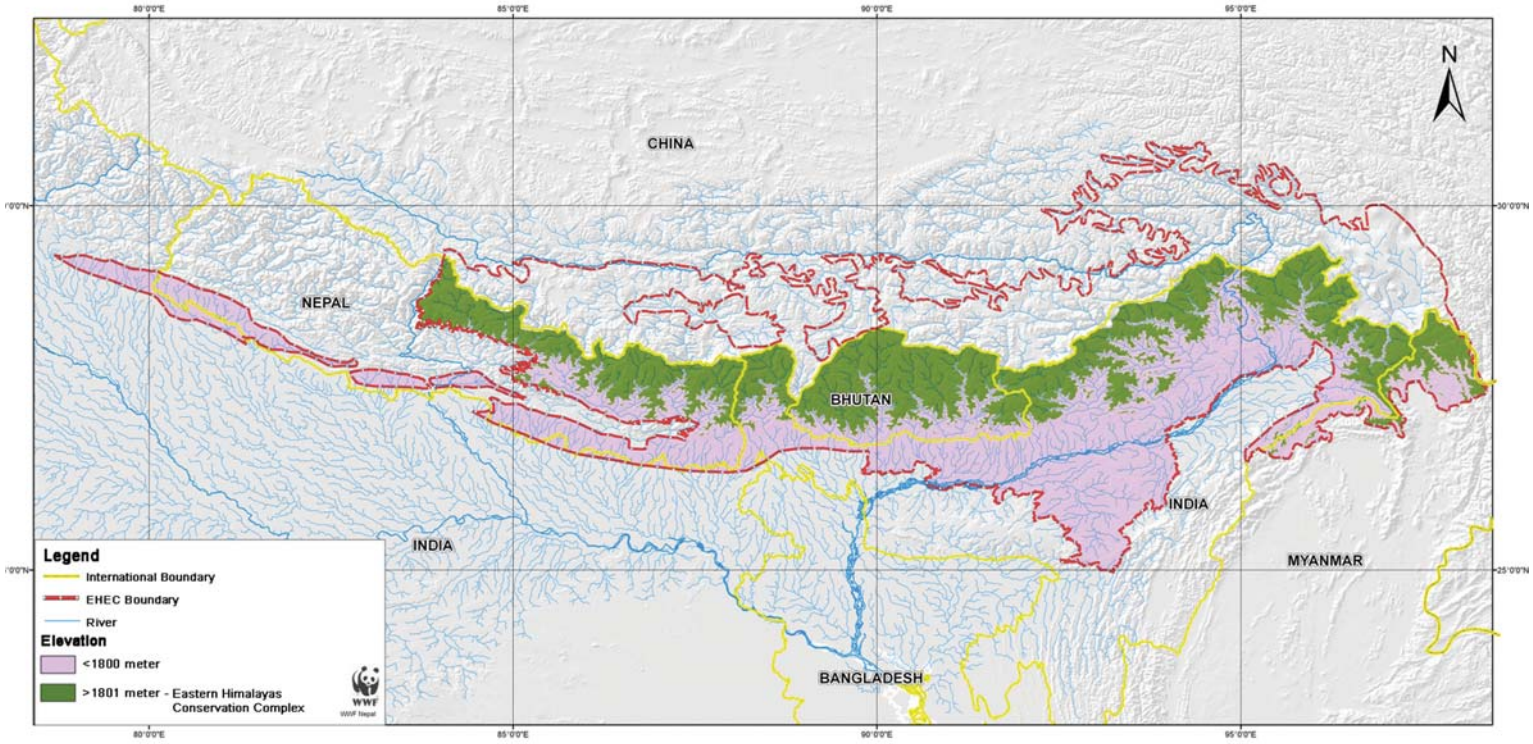
Few places on Earth can match the breathtaking splendour of the Himalayas. Extending over Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, the Eastern Himalayas is home to the world's tallest peaks, including Mt Everest, and houses the largest concentration of glaciers outside the polar caps. The Himalayas feed seven of Asia's great rivers: Brahmaputra, Ganges, Huang Ho, Indus, Mekong, Salween and Yangtze.

The mountain range's towering peaks, secluded valleys and diverse landscapes are also home to 163 threatened species, including Asian elephants, snow leopards, tigers, red pandas and one-horned rhinos. Overall, some 10,000 plant species, 300 mammals and almost 1,000 bird species are found here, and new ones continue to be discovered. In fact, between 1998 and 2008, over 350 new species were found in the Eastern Himalayas.

Despite the conservation success stories, the region, and all who depend on it, faces an uncertain future: climate change is melting mountain glaciers, forests are being over-harvested for timber or cut down for agriculture expansion, and wildlife poaching is rampant.

A Tapestry of Life under Siege

While the Eastern Himalayas are one of the richest environments on the planet, it is home to some of the poorest people who are highly dependent on the region's natural resources and at risk by a number of threats, including unpredictable rainfall and an increasing severity of extreme events, such as floods and droughts. An increase in temperatures and precipitation is also contributing to glacier lakes to burst



their banks. Downstream, water availability for domestic use and agriculture will become increasingly uncertain.

The fate of its rich biodiversity, freshwater ecosystems and the services rendered by these to over a billion people, is under great risk. Its fragile ecosystems face the most prevailing challenges posed by a changing climate. Unpredictable rainfall, changing character of the seasons, and an increasing likelihood or severity of extreme events such as floods and dry spells, is set to throw the lives of millions of people into a self consuming vortex. The impacts of these changes are often aggravated by poverty, water scarcity and food deficiency. These in turn contribute to a vicious cycle with adverse impacts on livelihoods driving people to desperate measures that further decimate natural resources.

WWF's Target: A rampart of conservation complex in the Eastern Himalayas

WWF is working to restore and reconnect natural landscapes across the Eastern Himalayas to ensure that plant and animal species are able to thrive and that the needs of local communities are met without negative impacts on the environment.

WWF is soliciting community participation in management of critical habitats, ecosystems and species into new, evolving conservation measures that not only include biodiversity conservation, but also securing natural freshwater infrastructure as well as sustainable use of natural resources.

The objective is to create a long-term regional vision towards minimizing the impacts of climate change on biodiversity. And with a broad but integrated response that addresses poverty reduction as well as enhances resilience of the ecosystems. This challenge could be met through a process of conservation action with a wider vision of pulling together traditional knowledge, contemporary approaches and new policy innovations at a regional scale.

The creation of a contiguous conservation complex totaling 7 million hectares across the top of the world - stretching from central Nepal across Bhutan to Arunachal in northeastern India - to provide full connectivity across 1,500 km and ensure ecological integrity especially for forest and freshwater ecosystems. This will be achieved by bringing two areas in Nepal (totaling 100,000 hectares), two areas in Sikkim (250,000 hectares) and a large 3.1 million hectares area in Arunachal under conservation management, adding 3.5 million hectares to achieve the 7 million hectares transboundary Himalayan conservation complex.

These large scale landscape level conservation measures sustain natural resource for use by communities; increase resilience of the ecosystem they are in. Securing these ecosystems maximises the adaptive capacity i.e. reduce non-climatic stresses, reverse trends that increase vulnerabilities, and increase social awareness. Impacts of Climate Change would only exacerbate in a scenario of decimated or degraded ecosystems.

For further information please contact:
Name: Savita Malla
Title: Communications Manager-Living Himalayas Initiative
Email: savita.malla@wwfnepal.org
http://wwf.panda.org/livinghimalayas