

CONSERVATION OUTREACH

In Nam Et-Phou Louey National Protected Area, Lao PDR

This brief outlines the conservation outreach model at the Nam Et – Phou Louey (NEPL) National Protected Area (NPA) in Houaphan Province, Lao PDR (Laos).

Conservation outreach and education is an important component of any protected area (PA) program, especially when communities are located nearby, adjacent, or inside the protected area, as is the case for many protected areas in Laos. These communities are often highly dependent on natural resources for their subsistence and income, and effective PA management will require their participation, cooperation, and management partnership.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been supporting the NEPL Management Unit since 2003, and has conducted conservation outreach activities since late 2004. During this time significant experience has been gained on how to implement conservation outreach in the Laos NPA context.

This brief describes the NEPL -WCS outreach model and the various conservation outreach activities so that the success can be understood and applied in other PAs in Laos and abroad.

In this brief:

1. Introduction to Nam Et – Phou Louey NPA
2. The Role of Outreach in Protected Area Management
3. Process for Developing an Outreach Strategy and Campaign
4. Outreach Activities
5. Conclusions and Lessons Learned



1. Introduction to Nam Et – Phou Louey National Protected Area

The NEPL NPA is located in the north-east of Lao PDR and is the largest protected area in country (410,720 hectares). Spanning nine districts across three provinces (Houaphan, Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces), the protected area is marked by steep mountainous topography, with elevation ranging from 336 to 2257 m. The NEPL NPA is remarkable for its rich wildlife biodiversity with a wide range of species, many endangered, including Tigers, Leopards, Golden Cats, Dholes, Northern White Cheeked Gibbons, Phayres Langur, Sun Bears, Asiatic Sun Bears, Binturongs, Otters, Hornbills, and numerous species of civets, pangolins, and other primates. Altogether there are 19 carnivore species including six species of wild cats, roughly fifty species of mammals and 299 species of birds.



Living inside or immediately adjacent to the NPA are 30,000 villagers from 98 communities, many in some of the poorest districts of the country. There is a long history of human settlement in and around NEPL, with local people relying heavily on natural resources for their subsistence. To balance the protection of biodiversity, and the needs of local communities, the protected area is split into 2 primary zones: the Total Protection Zone (TPZ), where strict conservation is the primary objective, and no activities or access are allowed without permission, and the Controlled Use Zone (CUZ), where many villagers practice agriculture and day to day village activities.

WCS has been providing technical assistance to support the NEPL Management Unit since 2003. During this time WCS and NEPL have gained valuable experience regarding a range of management activities including: law enforcement and ranger patrolling, ecotourism development and promotion, outreach activities for community engagement, and monitoring of wildlife, forest cover, and threats.

Outreach supported by WCS at NEPL initially focused on the conservation of tigers and their prey, as NEPL is the last known habitat for wild breeding tigers in Laos. Over time the PA program objectives broadened, and the outreach program has grown with it. The program now aims to address a range of objectives, including reducing poaching pressure and the use of illegal hunting weapons, reducing wildlife trade and the selling of wildlife for consumption around the NPA, and the cessation of agricultural encroachment into the TPZ of the NPA.



2. The Role of Outreach in Protected Area Management

Effective PA management in Laos involves many stakeholders, from local people living inside and around the PA boundary, through to small and medium business, infrastructure developers, the PA management unit, local district authorities, district governors, as well as provincial and national government authorities.

The role of conservation outreach is to build relationships through a common understanding between these stakeholders regarding the use and conservation of natural resources that is in the best interest of all parties. It is an important part of PA management because it can create a sense of ownership, encouraging citizen participation at all levels in conserving natural resources. Outreach campaigns should be tailored to the target audience and contain approaches, techniques and materials that allow for information sharing and open dialogues with a range of groups, specifically directed at the significance of the biodiversity values of PAs and associated wildlife

Outreach programs must fit within both the broader community engagement framework of the PA program, and support the broader objectives and activities such as law enforcement and ranger patrolling, and wildlife monitoring. For example, the Figure 1 illustrates how outreach is an important underpinning aspect of the overall community engagement at NEPL NPA.

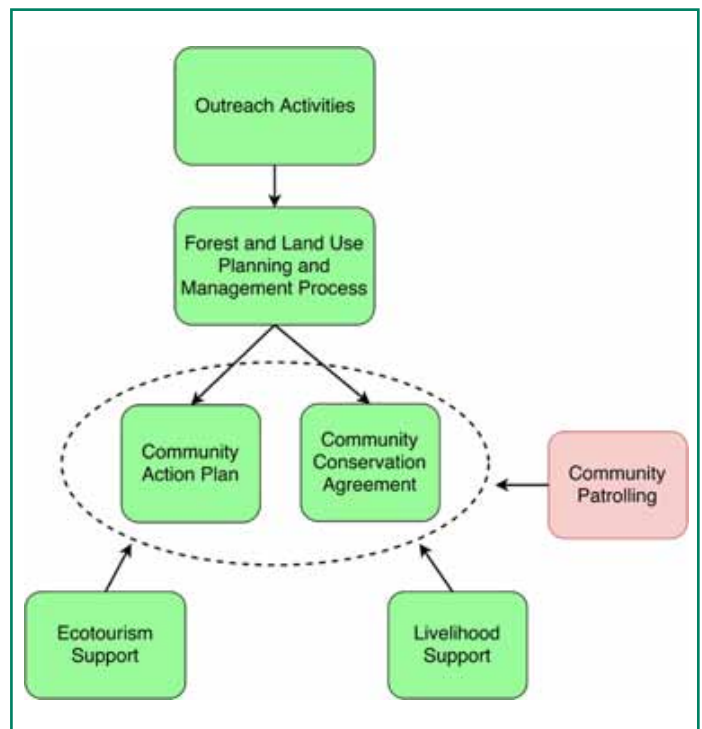


Figure 1: Outreach as part of the Community Engagement Framework at NEPL NPA



3. Process for Developing an Outreach Strategy and Campaign

Developing an outreach strategy and campaign requires careful planning to ensure that the campaign meets the PAs conservation objectives, and uses the most effective means to deliver the key messages. An example process may include the following steps:



1. Developing a conceptual model with PA management and district authorities that identifies and describes the aims of the outreach campaign within the broader PA management objectives. This activity also helps those implementing the campaign understand how these aims link with the planned activities and messages. See the next page for more information on the importance of this outreach program activity

2. Identifying target audiences and set goals for each group, for example:

- Rural communities
- Government agencies
- Businesses, traders, and restaurants
- Army personnel living in nearby camps
- Village militia and policemen
- The general public
- Poachers



EXAMPLE OF OUTREACH CAMPAIGN LOGO AND SLOGAN CREATION

To develop a slogan and logo for a sustainable hunting outreach campaign a number of options were created. A logo with the image of the Muntjac with the final slogan “Hunt for eating – Not extirpation”, was selected by members of the campaign target audience. This slogan/logo combination was designed to support the legal hunters to continue adhering to legal practices, while targeting the illegal hunters to shift from illegally practices to legal hunting.



3. Develop an activity work plan and a monitoring plan. The development of the activity plan will require an assessment of resources required, appropriate scheduling for the target audience, and communications with the key partners including district teams when they will be required for training activities, and for the implementation of the campaign. A monitoring program should be integrated from the start of the campaign.

4. Conduct the outreach campaign. The timing of an outreach campaign must be given careful consideration, to ensure that maximum participation is achieved, and to ensure that the key messages are delivered at the right time. For example, activities may need to be planned for the evening during the busy rice planting and harvesting periods, and key messages might be best delivered at certain times of the year – an example is delivering outreach regarding illegal forest clearing and burning prior to the swidden clearance season in January to March.

5. Conduct monitoring to assess the impacts of the campaign. The success of outreach activities in changing people's attitudes, knowledge, and behavior can be assessed through a number of methods, including 'pre' and 'post' surveys of audience members. Biodiversity monitoring in target areas over time can also assess the impact of outreach activities.



SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Outreach activities in NEPL have developed a greater sense of ownership and stewardship of the natural resources by all stakeholders, and improved understanding of the link between wildlife resources and food security. As a result of outreach campaigns, there is better awareness of hunting regulations and benefits of sustainable use, as well as consequences of breaking the regulations.



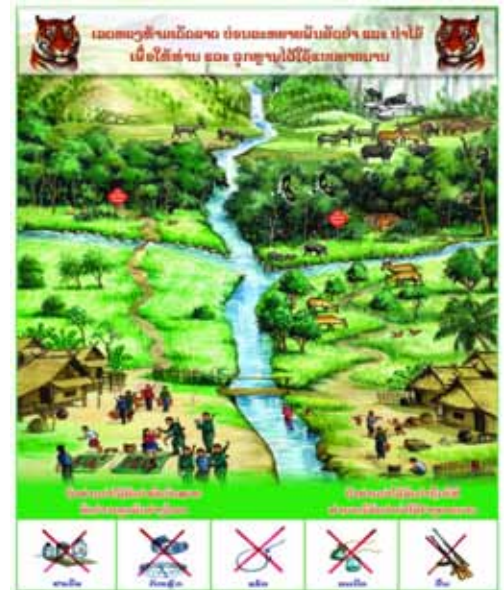
4. Outreach Activities

Effective conservation outreach programs use a number of tools and activities to engage with and communicate to target audiences. Outreach activities and methods used at NEPL NPA include:

1. Conceptual modelling with key stakeholders: an important participatory tool which assists with the identification of key threats to a PA, possible actions to address these threats, and the outreach activities and messaging to support addressing these threats. Conceptual models are developed through discussions and small group work which allow for the inclusion of knowledge and experience of the different stakeholders - government forestry officials, PA staff, village chiefs and senior village committee members, and biologists and conservationists. It is also an effective means of ensuring ownership and understanding of the campaign and proposed actions.

2. Community education programs, such as village visits, theatre, and workshops: Village visits are the primary interface with communities and method to deliver conservation messages and disseminate legal information (for example hunting regulations) through group discussions, meetings, and workshops with focus groups and target audiences, such as illegal hunters, village headmen, women, youth, and local government officials.

3. Information and signage such as billboards and posters, videos, newsletters and brochures: Key conservation messages can be delivered to different stakeholders via a range of media as part of a social marketing campaign. Noticeable materials such as billboards and posters that are positioned in high-visibility areas in communities can have a positive effect on raising community members' awareness of conservation issues (e.g. hunting wildlife for consumption vs. trade).



OUTREACH IN THE VILLAGES

Between 2010 and 2016, outreach activities in NEPL NPA have involved 144 villages in 7 districts and 3 provinces (Houaphanh, Louang Prabang, and Xiengkhouang). Activities included village visits, workshops and trainings, drama performances, strategic and conceptual modeling meetings, and study tours. In addition, communication materials distributed to villagers included: 150 water jars, more than 1500 t-shirts and jackets, more than 2000 tote bags, 2000 calendars, 3300 'smart hunter' posters, 1600 'hunt for food, not for sale' stickers, 1500 notebooks, 225 'wildlife and forest conservation song' CDs, and 1000 NEPL newsletters.



4. School and youth-focused learning, including internships: Youth and school-aged children are an important audience for outreach activities, because they are the generation of the future and because they also can influence their parents' thinking through their learning. Outreach activities which are targeted at schools include school visits, dramas and puppet shows, campaign songs, and story books. Internships for university students and high school graduates are also an excellent way to engage local youth in project activities.

5. Study tours, participation in special events such as national importance days, volunteer programs: These allow for information exchange and networking with community members and encourages community participation. Participation in days of national importance are particularly important in Laos, as these events bring together government and community, and are great opportunities to communicate key messages.

6. Meetings with other key stakeholder, such as local business, markets and market traders, army personnel, and local restaurants. Direct talks with key stakeholders regarding their rights and responsibilities related to PA management and the protection of wildlife can be an effective means to ensuring everyone understands their role in PA management, and any prohibitions that may apply to their activities.



7. Radio programs and TV spots for broad reach: Radio programs and TV spots deliver key conservation messages to communities and reach a broad audience and are useful for disseminating legal information, seasonal notices, campaign songs and educational dramas. To reach the target audience the programs have been conducted in various local languages, including Lao, Hmong, and Khmu.

OUTREACH EXAMPLE – STUDENT EDUCATION

In 2016 the NEPL NPA ecotourism project Nam Nern Night Safari hosted a group of 12 students from three schools; Vientiane High School, Sop Lao High School (Houaphanh Province) and Muang Hiem (Houaphanh Province). The trip was sponsored by the Embassy of the USA and awarded to students, mostly from the two local schools, who participated in an art competition about wildlife conservation. The young nature enthusiasts tested their wildlife spotting skills and learnt from the local guides about biodiversity, medicinal plants and the history of the area over the course of the 2 day trip inside the NEPL NPA.



5. Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Conservation outreach has played an important role in the development of the PA program at NEPL NPA by building relationships with local communities based on a common understanding about natural resources, and by working towards creating a sense of ownership that encourages conservation and sustainable use.

Key Lessons Learned and Recommendations:

1. In multi-language countries such as Laos, it is essential to deliver outreach messages in local language
2. Outreach messaging needs to be relevant for and tailored to the target audience
3. The participation of district government is vital and district staff should be trained and engaged to deliver outreach campaigns in the villages
4. Outreach campaigns can be highly effective when they are integrated with other PA activities, such as ecotourism, and community participation in patrolling of natural resources
5. Long term planning for outreach activities is essential so key messages can be delivered at the right time, and so that activities can be conducted at times when villagers are less busy
6. Recognize that some outreach messaging may also create controversy and disagreement among stakeholders – the resulting discussions should be framed constructively
7. Developing locally relevant and effective mechanisms for community members to communicate with PA staff can improve public participation, for example, regular meetings in villages and a wildlife hotline for reporting incidents can provide invaluable information for PA management.

DEVELOPED BY:



NAM ET-PHOU LOUEY NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY LAOS

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