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No Mountain Too High: Saving the Snow Leopards, Ecosystems and Communities of High Asia

Posted by [Carey N. Gordon](#), USAID Representative in the Kyrgyz Republic on Tuesday, December 4th 2012

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Today is [Wildlife Conservation Day](#), and USAID's missions around the world are [raising awareness](#) of the interconnectedness between human and wildlife welfare in developing countries.

Here in [Kyrgyzstan](#), we announced on Saturday the launch of a new four-year project focused on preserving the ecosystems of Asia's mountainous regions, benefiting its people and environment. Entitled "Conservation and Adaptation in Asia's High Mountain Landscapes and Communities," the project will be implemented in close partnership with our partners: the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Snow Leopard Trust. It will operate not only in Kyrgyzstan but also in Bhutan, [India](#), [Mongolia](#), [Nepal](#) and [Pakistan](#), and build alliances across all countries with snow leopards.

The snow leopard is a focus of this project for three major reasons. First, these endangered animals face significant threats to their habitats in the context of a changing climate and increased human activities. Second, animals like the snow leopard have great popular appeal, drawing attention to the challenge of conservation and providing a rallying point to benefit entire ecosystems, including the humans who depend on these ecosystems for their livelihoods. Finally, snow leopards are indicative of the health and vitality of entire ecosystems across their range. They are an integral part of the ecosystems in which they live, and the well-being of countless other species and human communities depends on the health of those ecosystems.

The primary goal of the new USAID project is to stimulate greater understanding and action on the environment, by helping conserve this iconic and endangered species, as well as by connecting snow leopard conservation to a broader set of environmental, economic and social issues with consequences for Asia's future sustainability, including local livelihoods, water and food security, and climate change adaptation. In Kyrgyzstan, the project will include a snow leopard population survey considering recent and predicted changes in key habitats, support to anti-poaching teams, and engagement in species conservation activities through conservation education and training with local communities.



Officials from 12 countries attended a three-day conference on the snow leopard in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on December 1-3, 2012. Photo Credit: USAID

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It was not a coincidence that the project was announced in Kyrgyzstan. The President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Almaz Atambayev, and other senior Kyrgyz officials have shown great initiative in bringing this important topic to the international level, as demonstrated by the three-day conference on the snow leopard which ended on December 3, attended by representatives from 12 countries and NGOs from across the world. We hope this is just the beginning of our joint work with local and international partners on this challenging task to bring positive impact on both wildlife and the mountain communities of Asia.

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