



MONGOLIA



MONGOLIAN
PROTECTED
AREAS

WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

LAKES IN THE KHURKH- KHUITEN RIVER VALLEY

2021



CONVENTION ON THE WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE ESPECIALLY AS WATERFOWL HABITAT



What is the RAMSAR Convention?

The Convention on the Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl habitat was first adopted on a meeting held in the Iranian city of Ramsar in February, 1971. Governments and non-governmental organizations from countries around the world negotiated and adopted the global treaty concerned about increasing loss and degradation of the wetland habitat for migratory water birds, one of the most vulnerable and irreparable ecosystems on the planet, due to a number of factors such as global warming, climate change and improper human activities and recognized the wetland ecosystem must be protected. The Convention is so named for the city Ramsar in Iran, where the treaty came into force. As of 2021, there are 171 Contracting Parties (member countries) and a total of 2,418 wetlands covering 254,563,791 hectares of internationally importance in List in the Appendix to the Ramsar Convention.



Purpose of the Ramsar Convention

A purpose of the Convention is to provide a framework for national and international cooperation for conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Its activities are regulated by inter-governmental treaties and agreements.

A primary reason for global signing the international Convention is to recognize that water fowl in their seasonal

migrations do transcend frontiers and so should be regarded as an international resource while considering that the wetlands, their key habitat, must be protected globally through the Convention.



What is the wetland?

Wetlands are basically transition zones between terrestrial and water environments, where a specific ecosystem is created, supported, and interacted by water flows, soil nutrient cycles, and solar energy.

The Ramsar Convention uses a broad definition of the wetlands which include all lakes, rivers, streams, and ponds and their floodplains, wet grasslands, peatland, oasis, estuaries, deltas, mineral water bodies, tidal flats, mangroves, and other coastline areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans. The definition under the Convention encompasses a variety of the wetlands and encourages preservation, protection, and wise (balanced) use of the globally significant biodiversity thereof through enhanced wetland conservation framework.



How are areas designated and listed as the Ramsar sites?

Countries in the world signed the Convention do commit to designate and nominate suitable wetlands within their territories for the List of Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar List") based on the following nine criteria:

A

Sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types:

Criterion 1

Sites contain representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region;

B

Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity:

Criteria based on species and ecological communities:

- Criterion 2** Sites support vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities;
- Criterion 3** Sites support populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region;
- Criterion 4** Sites support plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provide refuge during adverse conditions;

Specific criteria based on water birds:

- Criterion 5** Sites regularly support 20,000 or more individuals of a species or sub-species of water birds;
- Criterion 6** Sites regularly support 1% or more of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of water birds;

Specific criteria based on fish:

- Criterion 7** Sites support a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and /or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity;
- Criterion 8** Sites are an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend;

Specific criteria based on other taxa:

- Criterion 9** Sites regularly support 1% or more of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species;



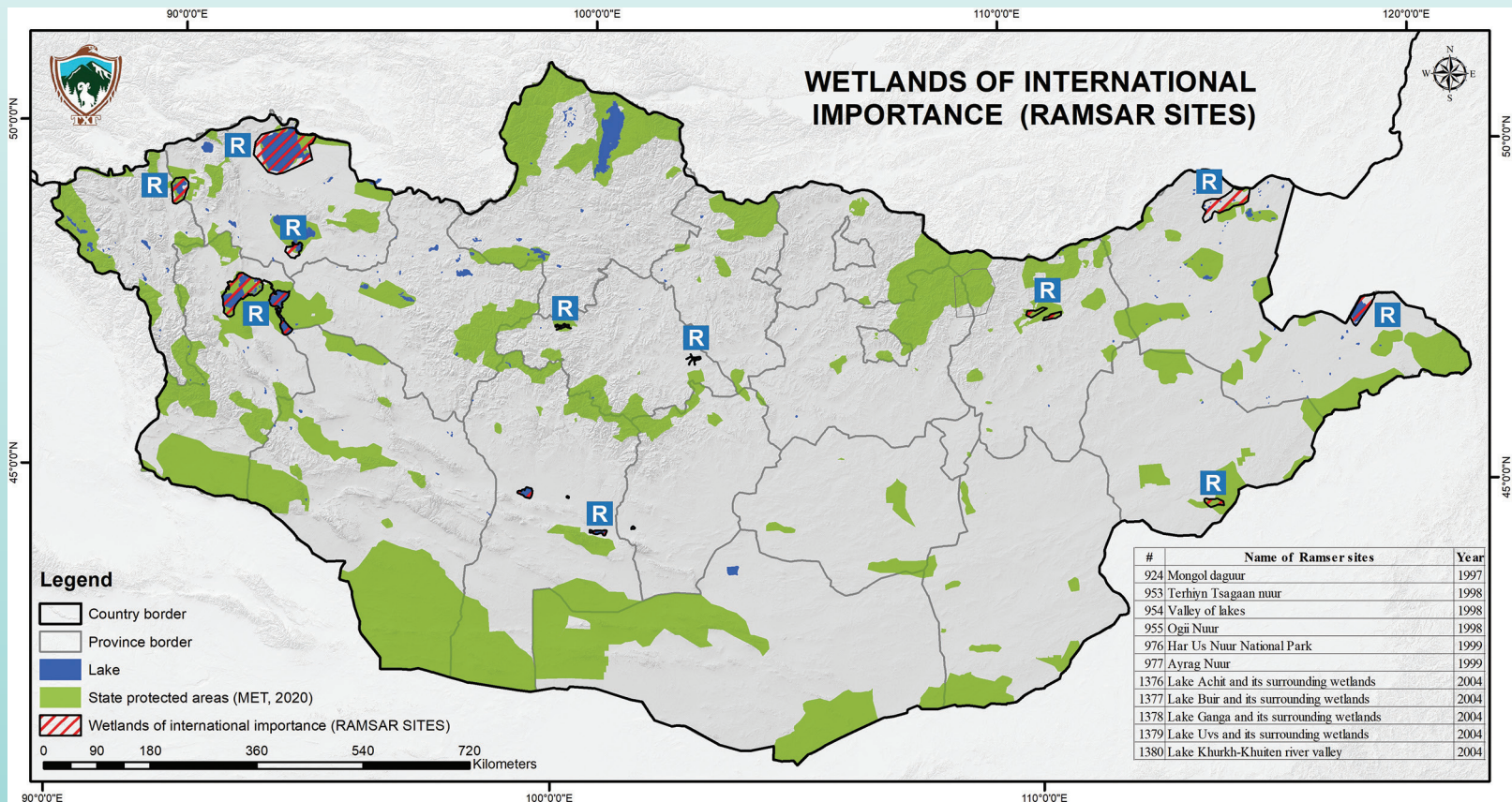
MONGOLIA AND THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

Mongolia officially signed the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl habitat on April 8, 1998 and became the 104th Contracting Party. The Contracting Parties to the Convention act as its policy making unit represented by the Governments of the countries signed. Thus, the officially recognized body representing Mongolia at

the Ramsar Convention is the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

As the Contracting Party to the Convention, Mongolia commits to implement the wetlands conservation management, submit its performance progress reports, and regularly take part in implementation of the Convention activities under its commitment to the Convention.

Map 1. Sites in Mongolia designated in the Ramsar Convention
Appendix List



LAKES IN THE KHURKH-KHUITEN RIVER VALLEY

Name: Lakes in the Khurkh-Khuiten river valley

Ramsar site code: 1380

Area: 42,940 hectares (ha)

Geographic location: Part "A": 48°19' N 110° 22' E

Part "B": 48°16' N 110° 45' E

Altitude: 1000-1100 m a.s.l.



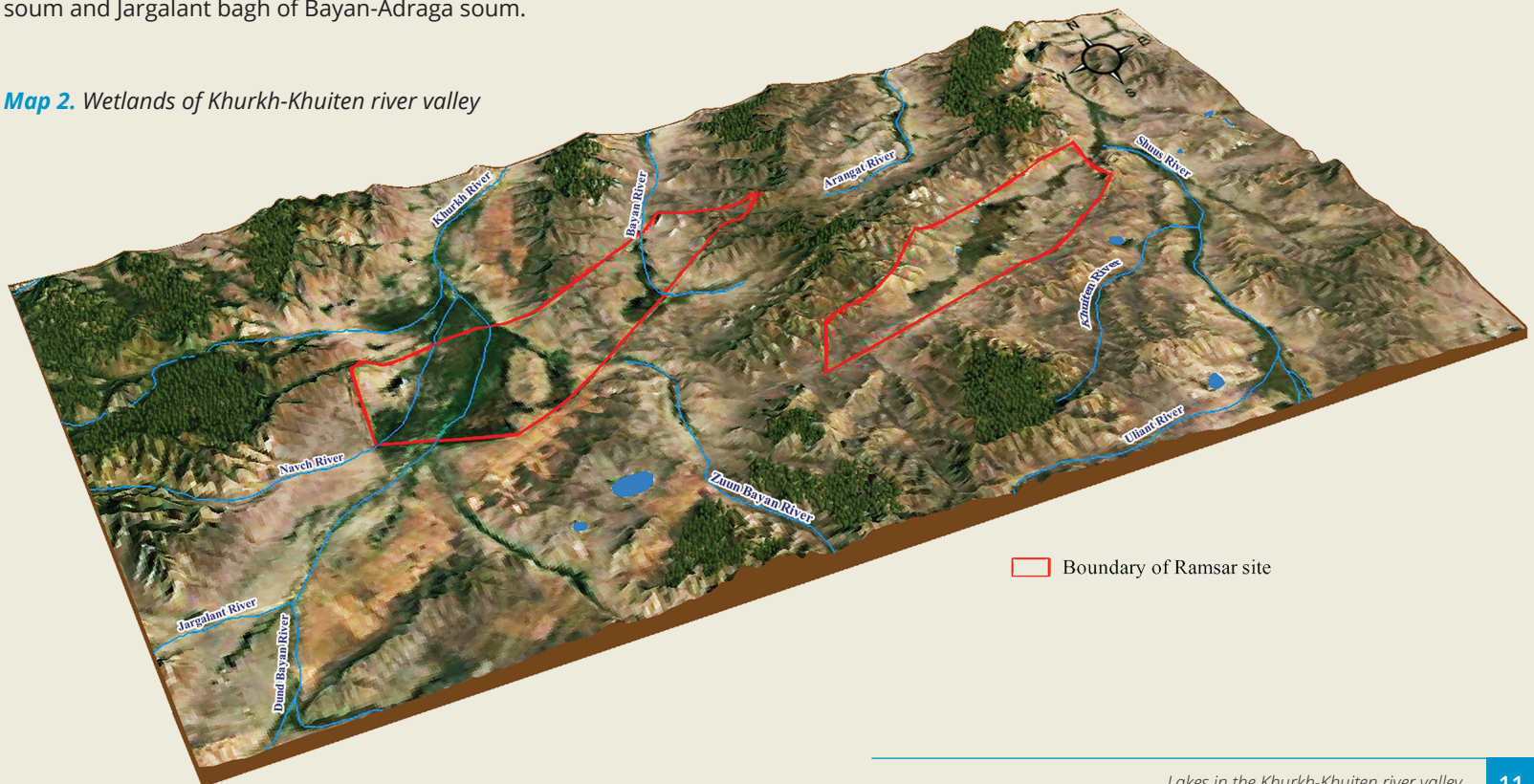
WETLANDS IN EASTERN MONGOLIA AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

One of the primary roles wetlands play is that it acts as an ecological regulator for maintaining water regimes and wildlife (Flora and Fauna) habitats. Eastern Mongolia (steppe ecosystem) is home to 29.4% of the total lakes and wetlands in the country. The lakes and wetlands in the steppe region are more dispersed according to their occurrence and are rich in aquatic organisms. Thus, the lakes and wetlands in the region provide important stopover sites to many species of waterbirds and shorebirds on their migration. The lakes and wetlands in Eastern Mongolia lie along the main route of East Asian-Australian Asian Flyway (EAAF) and become strategically important region for stopover, resting and foraging of thousands of waterbirds and shorebirds migrating from South Asia, Australia to Siberia. As such, the region harbors several internationally recognized important bird areas. One of major wetlands in Eastern Mongolia is wetlands in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley.

LOCATION:

Wetlands in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley lie in territories of Umnudelger, Batshireet, Binder, Bayan-Adraga soums of Khentii province in the northeast of Mongolia. Lakes and wetlands are concentrated in Valley of two major rivers and cover a total of 42,940 hectares (ha): including 26,650 ha of part “A” Khurkh River valley and 16,290 ha of part “B” Khuiten River valley. The part “A” contains over 10 small lakes and oasis such as Binder Lake, Bayan Burd, Uvur Burd, Khulst and Duut in the vicinity of Bayankhutag Owoo (mountain pass), confluence of Khurkh and Zuunbayan Rivers and its wetlands in upper reaches of Bayan River that are located in territories of Mandalkhan and Bayan-Under baghs (the smallest administration unit) of Binder soum; Khurkh bagh of Batshireet soum; and Gurvanbayan bagh of Umnudelger soum. The part “B” or wetlands in Khuiten River valley includes itself the wetlands in the north of Ikh Barchgait Mountain located in territories of Bayan-Under bagh of Binder soum and Jargalant bagh of Bayan-Adraga soum.

Map 2. Wetlands of Khurkh-Khuiten river valley



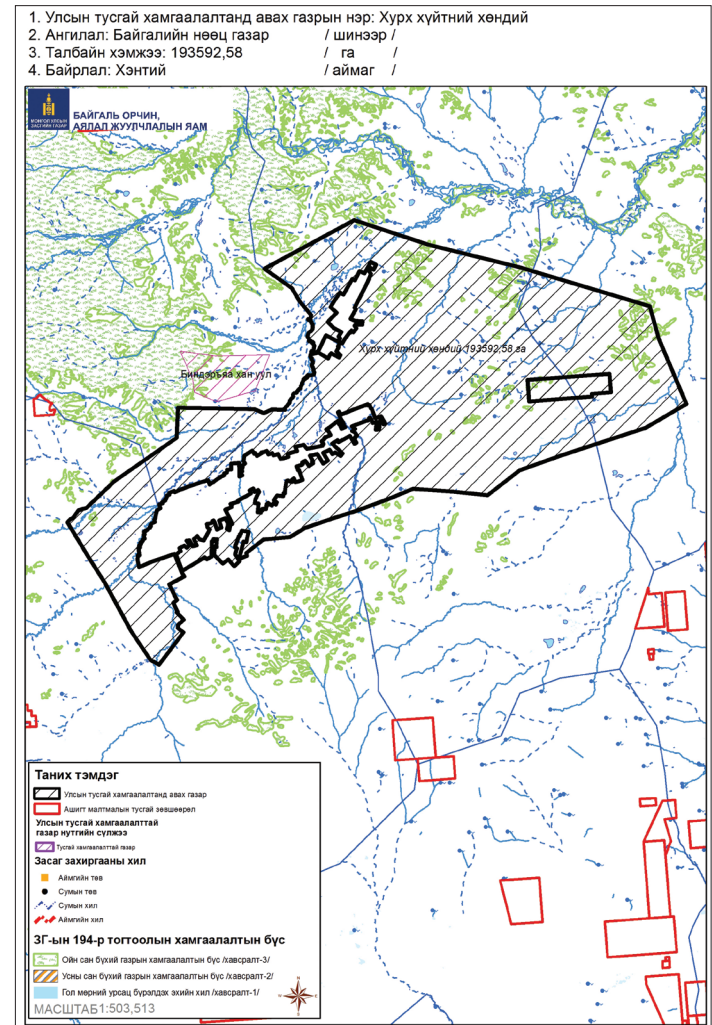
JUSTIFICATION FOR LISTING AS THE RAMSAR CONVENTION SITE:

Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley lie in a transition zone between the southern most Siberian taiga and Central Asian steppe. The large and small lakes and their surrounding wetlands in the region provide favourable distribution ranges to numerous globally threatened and endangered migratory waterbirds. Namely, they are passing through and stopover sites for the migratory birds between Daurian Manchurian Steppe, the southern most Siberian taiga, Central Asia and West Asia. Lakes in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley were officially listed as the Ramsar site on March 22, 2004 as they met three (I, II, and IX) out of nine criteria for designation and inclusion of areas in the Ramsar Convention List.

INCLUSION OF THE WETLANDS IN THE PROTECTED AREA NETWORK

A total of 202,940,083 ha of Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley in territories of Umnudelger, Batshireet and Bayan-Adraga soums was taken under local protection (with a 15 year-period) by a Decision of Citizen's Representative Khural (CRKh) of Khentii Province held on May 2, 2016. Following the Decision, the Khentii Aimag CRKh made a proposal for upgrading the local protection status to Nature Reserve (NR) on its meeting held on February 2, 2017. The proposal was approved by the State Ikh Khural (the Parliament) Resolution No.46 in 2020. Since then, Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley have been included with a NR status in the State Protected Area network. Boundaries of the newly designated NR have not been officially recognized. As proposed, a total of 35,439 ha or 82.5% of the wetlands in Khurkh- Khuiten River Valley will be included inside the NR boundaries (Map 3).

Map 3. Proposed Boundaries of Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley Nature Reserve



SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE LAKES IN KHURKH-KHUITEN RIVER VALLEY

Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley belong to Onon River Basin and represents a transitional zone between mountainous Khentii and Daurian Steppe botanic-geographical region. The Valley is rich with rivers, streams and lakes feed by ancient permafrost bodies and high mountains, forests, floodplain meadows, herbaceous steppe and mountainous areas. Thus, the Valley is rich in biodiversity. Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley are specific with diverse wetland features including lakes, rivers, streams, natural springs, peatland swamps and thermokarst lakes. There are five major rivers and streams (Zuunbayan, Dund Bayan, Khurkh, Bayangol, and Khuiten), six natural springs (Ukht, Bayanburd (a head of Bayangol River), Ekhen Burd, Dund Burd, Adag Burd, and Ulaan Undur), and seven lakes (Uvur Burd, Khulstai, Duut, Khukh Dov, Tsagaan, Adag Burd's Khursh, and Khulst) in the Valley. Khurkh River valley lies in sporadic permafrost distribution zone in Mongolia. The most favourable distribution ranges for waterbirds include the lakes of permafrost origin, but these lakes are a very sensitive for climate change. Lately, Khuiten River valley has become drier and consequently, wet depressions and swamps have been lost intensively. As swamps in the valley are dried up, the environmental degradation and loss of permafrost under the swampy areas are being threatened. Accordingly, the site conservation has become a priority.



BIODIVERSITY

MAMMALS

There are 54 mammal species of six orders recorded within wetlands in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley. The threatened species occurring at the sites are the Corsac fox (*Vulpes corsac*), Mongolian marmot (*Marmota sibirica*), Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), and Daurian hedgehog (*Erinaceus dauricus*) and a species listed in the Red Book of Mongolia; the Grey wolf (*Canis lupus*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Manul or Pallas' cat (*Otocolobus manul*) listed in the Appendix II to CITES.



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BIRDS

There are 167 bird species of 91 genera of 37 families of 15 orders recorded within the wetlands. According to their occurrence, there are 26 resident species and 141 migratory species. Amongst, there are 92 breeding visitors, 35 passage migrants species, 3 winter visitors, 6 vagrant species and 5 species, whose breeding or nesting in the region has not been identified yet. Moreover, the species recorded at the sites include 4 very rare and 11 rare species recorded in the Mongolian Red Book, 11 species listed in the Asian Red Book and six and 24 species listed in the Appendixes I and II to CITES, respectively; three and 25 species listed in the Appendixes I and II to the Convention of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), respectively.

The species, whose populations occurring at the Lakes and their surrounding wetlands are estimated at 1% and above in the geographical region, are Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) at least 250 individuals (1%), Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoides*) at least 600 individuals (1%), Whooper Swan (*Cygnus Cygnus*) at least 300 individuals (1.5%), Bean Goose (*Anser fabalis*), 1934 individuals (3.5%) Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) 1570 individuals (3%), White-naped Crane (*Antigone vipio*) 465 individuals (11.6%), Common Crane (*Grus Grus*), Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) 1000 individuals (1.1%) and Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) 15 individuals (15%).



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There are six very rare and rare species such as White-naped Crane, Common Crane, Siberian Crane, Demoiselle Crane, Hooded Crane and Red-crowned Crane recorded in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley. The White-naped Crane and Common Cranes breeding annually and Red-crowned Crane was recorded once. The threatened Siberian and Hooded cranes are seen in summers during their migration seasons. The White-naped crane is only distributed in East Asia with 3,500 individuals in its global population. Unfortunately, in recent years these numbers are rapidly declined. A core breeding

population of the species is estimated at about 70 pairs of individuals recorded at Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley in Eastern Mongolia. These records show that the White-naped Crane breeds at the sites with the highest density in the region. Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley are one of the fewest areas, where five species of crane are seen at the same time, in the world. According to the recent studies, numbers of the cranes in the region are increased, the researchers call Mongolia as the "Capital City for Cranes".





FLORA

Wetlands in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley support flora species from the major botanical regions: mountainous Khentii and Daurian steppe regions co-existing. Thus, the sites are rich in plant species. There are over 230 flora species recorded. Amongst, there are some threatened species including the xerophytic plant communities that are naturally grown and well preserved on the permafrost bearing and peatland soils within Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley. These specific natural features of the sites provide a basis for in-situ conservation.

The sites are distributed by Siberian larch (*Larix sibirica*), Siberian silver birch (*Betula platyphylla*), a sedge (*Carex lanceolata*), *Vicia venosa*, *Vicia unijuga*, *Rhododendron dauricum*, *Pteridium aquilinum*, *Fragaria orientalis*, *Poa attenuata*, *Festuca lenensis*, *Festuca sibirica*, *Helictotrichon schellianum*, *Carex pediformis*, *Filifolium sibiricum*, *Scabiosa comosa*, *Salix ledebouriana*, *Geranium pratense*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*, and *Agropyron repens* accounted for significant proportions in their distribution ranges. There are also the threatened wetland species such as *Saxifraga hirculus*, *Paeonia anomala*, *Paeonia lactiflora* and *Valeriana officinalis* listed in the Red Book of Mongolia found at the sites.



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CULTURE AND TRADITION

Lakes in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley are abundant by ancient historic and cultural sites and monuments in Mongolia. For instance, there are many historical sites, in particular the sites related to Chinggis Khan and his descendants in the 13th century. One of them is Onon River valley, where the Great Mongol State was officially declared. There is a hill "Ulziit" where the troops led by Chinggis and Jamuha fought against each other, in Khuiten River Valley. There are some enlightened statues built in the valley. Also, there are some historical sites such as Rashaant Khad in locatd in Khurkh River valley.



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Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley are home to the ethnic groups: the Khalkhs and Buriads lived and engaged in nomadic traditional herding for the centuries. In recent time, the region is a part of the croplands in the country. A village "Khurkh" was established for single-crop farming purpose only. At present, crops are planted in 7,345 ha, potato is planted in 36.1 ha, vegetables are planted in 3.5 ha, and fodders are planted in 200 ha in the village.

DESIGNATION FOR OTHER INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

2009

Important Bird Areas in Mongolia (MN058)

Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley is home to bird species such as the Swan Goose, Lesser-fronted Goose, Imperial Eagle, Siberian Crane, White-naped Crane, Hooded Crane, Red-crowned Crane and Great Bustard listed in the International Red List. From the migratory bird species, the species such as the Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoide*), Bean Goose (*Anser fabalis*), Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*), Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*), White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*), Common Crane (*Grus grus*), Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) and Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) occur at 1% and above their global populations at the sites. Upon consideration of these values, the wetlands in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley are a part of the IBAs in Mongolia.

1997

North East Asian Crane Network Site

The wetlands are distributed by the very rare and rare species (six) of crane: White-naped, Common, Siberian, Demoiselle, Hooded, and Red-crowned cranes. The White-naped, Common and Demoiselle cranes breeding annually at the site Japanese crane was recorded once. The threatened species such as

the Siberian and Hooded cranes are summer visitors that seen in during their migration seasons.

According to the recent studies, the numbers of the species are increased and the wetlands are defined as the sites with the highest density of nesting White-naped Crane in the region. The White-naped crane is only distributed in East Asia with about 3,500 individuals in its global population. A core breeding population of the species is estimated at about 70 pairs of individuals recorded at Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley in Eastern Mongolia. These facts show that the sites are the only area, where the White-naped Crane nest with the highest density in the region.

2016

East Asian-Australian Flyway Network (EAAF074)

Lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley provide important stopping over, resting, nesting, and summering grounds to many globally threatened bird species such as Siberian, White-naped and Hooded cranes, Swan Goose, Great Bustard and Asian Dowitcher on their migration flyways. Moreover, hundreds of individuals of other species of cranes, geese, and ducks do occur and stopover in hundreds on the cropland in the River Valley during their migrations seasons. шувуудын үржих, зусах, нүүдлийн үедээ бууж амрах чухал нутаг болдог. Түүнчлэн, бусад зүйлийн тогоруу, галуу, нугасны зүйлүүд нүүдлийн үедээ голын хөндий болон тариан талбай орчимд хэдэн зуугаараа бөөгнөрөн амардаг байна.

THREATS

Key major threats to the lakes and wetlands in Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley are climate change impacts (the highest) and human induced impacts, namely overgrazing. Dominant types of the pastureland in the region are river Valley, lake shores and edges, and pastures in depressed areas, steppe, grassland, and dry steppe. All these types are suitable for grazing of any kinds of livestock. However, the most affected pastures are the river Valley or the areas around water sources, where large livestock are often concentrated. In addition, areas of wetlands are getting lost and replaced by croplands. In the meantime, the areas of the cropland abandoned and left fallow are getting increased in the region from year to year. Lately, some parts of untouched river Valley and floodplains are likely to be used for cropping as dryness is increasing in the basin. These actions have become one of the current threats to the wetlands to reduce and destroy areas of the wetlands in the region.



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CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT AND COOPERATION

The sites were taken under state protection with a category of Nature Reserve (NR) in 2019. As legally stated, NR's daily conservation management is laid with the local government.

Researchers, environmental non-governmental organizations, and local communities do carry out joint research, monitoring, and public awareness activities within the sites.

Wildlife Science and Conservation Centre of Mongolia (WSCC-Mongolia) has started ringing of small migratory birds since 2015. A bird ringing station is in Khurkh River valley at 20 km in the east from Khurkh village in a territory of Khentii province. It is the station, where the bird ringing programme was first put in Mongolia. The station aims to carry out long-term monitoring and studies on small birds migrations.

WSCC-Mongolia has been running a Crane study station since 2013. The station is at 14 km in the northeast from the bird ringing station in the valley. At the station, national researchers and biologists do carry out research and monitoring on crane nesting, ecological studies and inventories of crane and water bird populations in autumns and springs.





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To raise public awareness on the globally and nationally threatened white-naped crane and wetlands and mobilize local communities into conservation of Khurkh-Khuiten River Valley, a home to threatened bird species, the event “Crane Festival” is annually organized on shore of Tsagaan Lake in Khurkh River valley in June. Since 2013, this public event has been successfully organized with support of International Crane Fund, WSCC-Mongolia, WWF-Mongolia Programme Office, Administrations of Khan Khentii SPA and Onon-Balj NP, and Governor’s Office of Binder soum. It has become one of the major public events annually organized by Khentii Aimag’s Environment and Tourism Department together with eco-clubs at local schools. Key messages and calls for crane conservation are delivered to local communities through artistic performances and drawing contests and exhibits.



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