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LANDSCAPE PROFILE: MEKONG FLOODED FOREST

UNVEILING THE WONDERS OF THE MEKONG: DISCOVER A RIVER TEEMING WITH LIFE IN CAMBODIA'S KRATIE AND STUNG TRENG PROVINCES

WWF's mission is to halt the degradation of the planet's natural environment and build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature. To fulfil this mission in Cambodia, we safeguard biological diversity and promote sustainable use of natural resources for the benefit of all.

The Mekong Flooded Forest (MFF) landscape contains a magnificently diverse array of freshwater ecosystems. The river and its expansive floodplains are a vital lifeline for the Cambodian people, providing fish for sustenance, waterways for transportation, irrigation for rice cultivation and a natural buffer against flooding. However, the significance of the MFF landscape goes beyond our daily needs for survival. The area is also a sanctuary for many globally significant fauna, including iconic mammals like the revered Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*) and remarkable giants like the Mekong giant catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*), giant carp (*Catlocarpio siamensis*) and giant freshwater stingray (*Urogyrnus polylepis*). MFF is also home to the elusive hog deer (*Axis porcinus*), whose rediscovery by WWF-Cambodia in 2006 marked a pivotal moment in conservation efforts.

EXPECTED IMPACTS

We aim to achieve positive changes in MFF communities by securing land tenures, establishing sustainable financing mechanisms, diversifying livelihood sources and enhancing conservation awareness. In addition, we are advancing wildlife protection in key areas like the Mekong dolphin conservation zone and combating wildlife crime through improved law enforcement. Other focus areas include enhancing documentation for informed decision-making processes, implementing sustainable management plans and adopting non-hydro renewable energy sources. These collective efforts will contribute to sustainable development and biodiversity conservation in Cambodia.

LANDSCAPE FOCUS

The Mekong Flooded Forest (MFF) spans an impressive 27,450km² and encompasses wetlands as well as sandy and rocky riverine habitats, situated in northern-central Cambodia and bordering Laos.

THEMATIC APPROACHES



**Community
engagement**



**Protected areas and
law enforcement**



**Biodiversity research
and monitoring**

WWF-Cambodia is particularly active along a 121km stretch of the Mekong River between Kratie and Stung Treng provinces, an area renowned for rich biodiversity harboured in deep river pools. Within this portion of the river, we have identified approximately 411 inland fish species, 37 mammal species, 281 bird species, 52 reptile and amphibian species and 674 vascular plants. WWF-Cambodia also works in two key protected areas in the MFF landscape: Sambo and Prek Prasob Wildlife Sanctuaries.

Sambo Wildlife Sanctuary: 82,506 hectares

Prek Prasob Wildlife Sanctuary: 14,221 hectares

Habitat Diversity: These sanctuaries support the a wealth of intact forests and riverine habitats, hosting a total of at least 11 large mammal species, 56 amphibian and reptile species, 683 plant species, at least 15 bird species and 223 native fish species according to our surveys conducted in 2006 and 2007.

THREATS

Overfishing in the Mekong River and Tonle Sap Lake, combined with the operation of hydropower dams like the Lower Sesan II, are causing extensive damage to fish populations and habitat in our landscape. Land conversion activities and illegal logging are exacerbating habitat loss and displacing communities reliant on traditional lands. These issues contribute to the overexploitation of natural resources and hinder self-governed sustainable resource management efforts. Finally, the illegal wildlife trade poses a significant threat to numerous endangered species, causing further ecological challenges in the region.

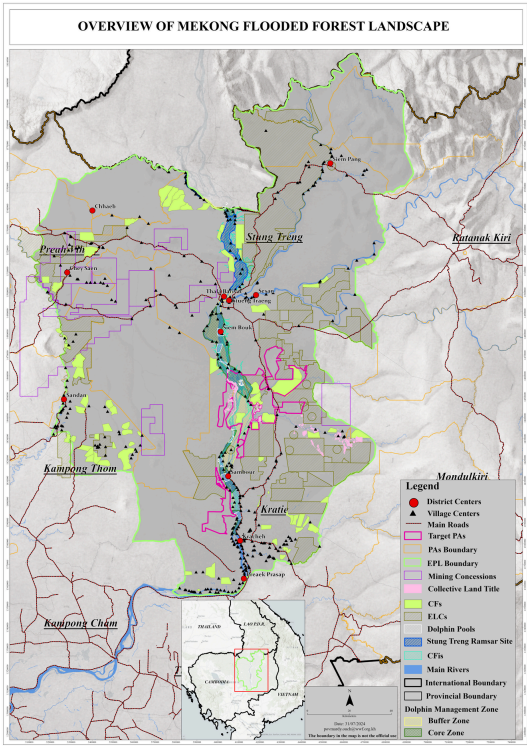


“ Ecotourism linked to the conservation of dolphins, forests and fishing grounds benefits our community by generating employment opportunities. By protecting these areas, we not only ensure the safety of our environment but also sustainably enhance our livelihoods. Responsible ecotourism enables us to showcase our picturesque surroundings while prioritizing the well-being of our community and environment. ”

- Kim Vannak,
Member of Koh Promcharey's community-based
ecotourism (CBET) site

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

The Irrawaddy dolphin, characterized by its shy nature and small size, has a dark grey body with a light underside, a small rounded dorsal fin and a bluntly rounded head. Growing up to 2.75m long and 150kg in size, they typically live in groups of up to six. Remarkably, they are one of only three whale and dolphin species found in both fresh and marine waters. During the dry season (January to May), these dolphins reside in the Mekong's deep water pools, where they are exposed to fishing threats. Gillnets, an illegal fishing tool, pose a significant danger to these critically endangered dolphins. Recognized as Cambodia's “national living treasure,” Mekong Irrawaddy dolphins hold cultural significance, symbolizing abundant fish populations to the Cambodian people.



EMBLEMATIC SPECIES AT RISK



IRRAWADDY DOLPHIN



GIANT IBIS



WHITE-SHOULDERED IBIS



LESSER ADJUTANT



RIVER TERN



ELD'S DEER



HOG DEER



VULTURE

Red-headed, slender-billed and white-rumped