

# GLOBAL WILDLIFE PROGRAM

## PROJECT: Conservation of Snow Leopards and Their Critical Ecosystem in Afghanistan



Image by Ricardo Mangual / Flickr

### OVERVIEW

**Project Sites:** Wakhan Corridor (Pamirs, Karakoram, Himalayas, Altai, Kunlun, and Tien Shans)

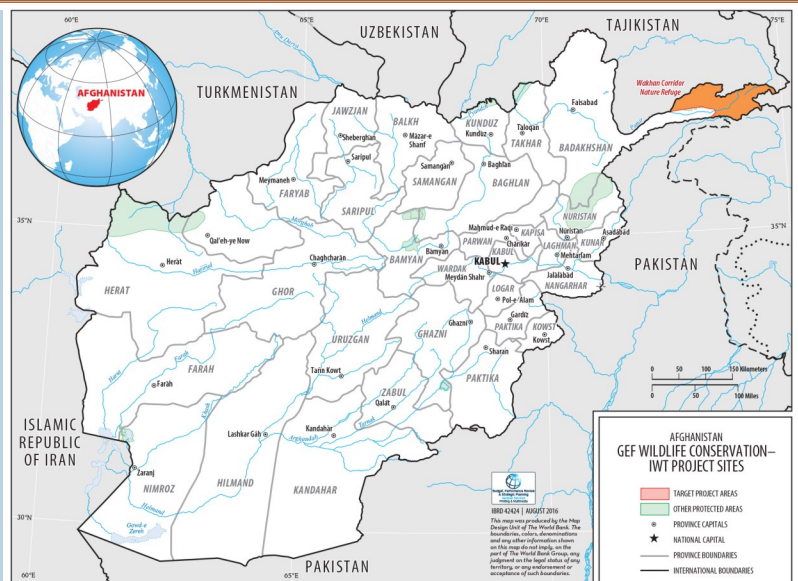
**Species Focus:** Snow leopards and Marco polo sheep

**Total Project Cost:** US\$2.7 million

**Executing Partner:** National Environment Protection Agency; Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; and Wildlife Conservation Society

**GEF Implementing Agency:** UNDP

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### CONTEXT

Afghanistan is a land-locked country of sweeping plains and high mountains with an incredible variety of wildlife and biodiversity. Unfortunately, many species, including the snow leopard, are considered globally or regionally threatened or near threatened. The IUCN estimates that snow leopard populations have declined by at least 20% over the past 16 years, with the wild population currently assumed to be between 4,500 and 7,500 individuals and declining as a result of poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and loss of prey. Additionally, human-wildlife conflict (HWC), overharvest of forests, and climate change are putting severe pressure on Afghanistan's natural resources with a negative impact on the leopard's habitats.

Afghanistan already has various laws and regulations in place to manage and protect wildlife, including a Presidential Decree banning hunting, a Protected Species List making it illegal to hunt specific species, and environmental legislation requiring a permit system for trade. The Wakhan District, where the project will intervene, was identified by the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP) as one of the 20 critical snow leopard landscapes in 2013.

### PROJECT COMPONENTS

The GWP Afghanistan project aims to strengthen conservation of the snow leopard and its critical ecosystem in Afghanistan through a holistic and sustainable landscape approach that addresses existing and emerging threats. The project main components are:

- Illegal take and trade of snow leopards and human-wildlife conflict reduced through greater community involvement
- Landscape approach to conservation of snow leopards and their ecosystem that takes into account drivers of forest loss, degradation and climate change impacts

### PROJECT FOCUS

- Landscape approach for conservation and promotion of conservation-compatible land uses and livelihood improvement
- Analysis of snow leopard ecology including impacts of climate change
- Assessment and mitigation of Human-Snow Leopard conflict
- Improved government capacity to combat illegal wildlife trade
- Knowledge management, education and outreach to promote snow leopard conservation and trade reduction

