Snow Leopard Network
Report of Activities
July 2007 through July 2008

The Snow Leopard Network (SLN) was established as a conceptual organization in May 2002 by the participants in the Snow Leopard Survival Strategy (SLSS) summit meeting in Seattle, USA.

2007/2008 Accomplishments

Beijing Conference:

The Range-wide Conservation Planning Conference for Snow Leopards was held in Beijing, China, from March 9-11, with a two-day range-wide mapping session taking place on the 7th and 8th. The conference was very successful; twenty-eight excellent presentations were made over the first two days on the topics of Community-Based Conservation Initiatives, Management Issues, Status of National Snow Leopard Policy, and Research & Monitoring Techniques and Methods. On the afternoon of the second day, participants broke into country groups to discuss national conservation plans, presenting these their findings and resolutions the next day. The three official resolutions were agreed upon at the end of the conference:

In Memoriam

In recognition of the her pivotal role in bringing the plight of the snow leopard into the world's consciousness and in championing broad conservation efforts to save the species across its range, the participants of this conference wish to honor Helen Freeman by dedicating the outcomes and stipulated conservation actions to her memory.

Participants

This conference was attended by representatives from eleven snow leopard range countries including Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Representatives from six non-range countries also participated. The participants agreed upon the following vision and resolutions.

A Vision for Snow Leopards over the next century

A world where snow leopards and their wild prey thrive in healthy mountain ecosystems across all major ecological settings[a] of their entire range[b], and where snow leopards are revered as unique ecological, economic, aesthetic and spiritual assets.

[a] Defined as: Altai-Sayan, Trans-Altai – Alashan Gobi, Tian Shan, Pamir, Hindu-Kush, Karakorum, Himalayas, Hengduan Mountains, and Tibetan Plateau
[b] As defined by the potential range analysis conducted in a workshop during this conference.

Resolutions

1. All range countries should expedite development of a Snow Leopard Action Plan, or implement existing plans to the fullest extent. A draft plan should be developed within 12 months and be based on the aforementioned range-wide vision, and set a framework that addresses the human-snow leopard interface looking at economic, cultural, moral, aesthetic and ethical issues. Plans should also take into account successful models from within and outside range states for designing and implementing conservation, research and monitoring programs for snow leopards while supporting local peoples who are maintaining the natural heritage of snow leopards and their mountain ecosystems.
2. Each country will designate a national snow leopard focal point from a relevant institution to coordinate with the Snow Leopard Network and other focal points for the exchange of information at the national and international level.

3. Range state governments will develop mechanisms (e.g., Memoranda of Understanding) to promote transboundary cooperation on matters such as trade, research and management relevant to snow leopard conservation that include, inter alia, the impacts of climate change on distribution and long-term survival of snow leopards, and where possible incorporate positive actions within conservation programs (e.g ,carbon neutral projects).

Membership:
At the time of its creation there were approximately 65 members of the SLN. Since then, it has grown to nearly 300 members. The Bylaws identified 3 types of membership; Full (professional), Affiliate (non-professional) and Organizational. Currently, there are 231 Full, 32 Affiliate, and 33 Organizational members. Even since 2006, total membership has risen by 74%, with the greatest relative increase in Organizational memberships which is higher than in 2006 83%.

At the Steering Committee meeting in Beijing, the SC amended the structure of the Membership Committee to foster membership recruitment within the range states. There will now be one member of the membership committee from each range state in addition to the committee chair. Each member is responsible for identifying potential SLN members within his or her own range state and inviting them to join the Network. Therefore, the committee member must be involved and respected in snow leopard conservation in his or her country. Additionally, the membership committee members will liaise between the SLN secretariat and SLN members within their country when necessary, and thus must be fluent in English as well as their local language. This will not only expand the number of SLN members, but it will also be the first real step toward effectively involving the numerous snow leopard experts who are not comfortable communicating in English. Over half the range states already have a representative on the membership committee, and the Secretariat expects many of the others to follow suit very soon.

Communications:
The SLN's primary purpose continues to be to foster interchange between specialists in the field of snow leopard research, policy, and conservation. Several avenues are available online for members to communicate, with more being developed.

Listserve
The listserve continues to serve as a discussion forum for SLN members, as well as the most effective avenue to distribute information. Although most members do not actively post as often as would be ideal, many announcements do incite interesting and insightful discussion.

Website
Since its redesign in 2006, the website has provided information on the SLN and SLSS as well as an interactive membership database, snow leopard bibliography, and current news. Although a misunderstanding with the web hosting company led to the loss of our membership data in 2007, all members again have online profiles and are in the process of re-entering their CV information. Therefore, the interactive members list still provides contact information and networking opportunities for our 296 members. A French language version of the website was officially launched in July 2008, with plans for Russian and Chinese to follow.

News Distribution
The News page was updated again this year, switching from the previous to an up to date blog-style format. The benefit of this is that any member can now post news stories and announcements (although their posts must be approved by an administrator at the SLN secretariat). Therefore, there is greater opportunity for the exchange of ideas between all members. Additionally, posts can be made in any number of languages, and therefore non-English speakers could use this opportunity,

which could be especially beneficial in the Russian and Chinese speaking communities. However, SLN members do not use this resource to its full potential despite encouragement to do so.

In addition to the News Blog, the SLN website is eagerly awaiting the addition of an automated News Feed, which will be generously provided by Guillaume Chapron using the technology he developed for his website, carnivoreconservation.org. This will continually search the web for stories on snow leopards and automatically update in English, Russian, and Chinese. Although it is a great supplement to the manually-updated news blog, it will not serve as a replacement because many announcements circulated within the Network are never picked up by an official online news source and would therefore not find their way into the News Feed.

The SC had previously considered a newsletter as a communication tool to aspire to, but after some consideration it was dismissed as redundant in favor of continuing to improve online dissemination of news through the web site and listserve.

Bibliographic Database:
The Snow Leopard Bibliography has grown to 869 entries, over 300 of which are in Russian and twelve in Chinese.

Snow Leopard Survival Strategy:
In 2007, David Mallon completed the abridged version of the Snow Leopard Survival Strategy, the full version of which was completed in 2003 and edited by Tom McCarthy and Guillaume Chapron. Both the full and abridged versions are available on the SLN website. The abridged version was translated into Russian, Chinese, and Mongolian; hard copies of the English, Russian, and Chinese versions were distributed at the Conference. The Russian and Chinese versions are available online as well.

Snow Leopard Conservation Grants:
Since the SLT Small Grants Program transitioned into the Snow Leopard Conservation Grants Program, funded jointly by the Trust, the Conservancy, and the Network, and administered by the Network, it has enjoyed great success

Committee Status

Policy and Position Statement Committee, Chair - Available
Membership Committee, Chair – Dan Prain
Communications Committee, Chair - Patricia Williams
Action Planning Committee, Chair - David Mallon
Science Committee, Chair - Rodney Jackson

Action Planning:
The mandate of the Action Planning Committee has remained somewhat vague, and at the recent SC meeting it was agreed that David Mallon would reexamine its duties and provide updated Terms of Reference. However, despite this drawback, the abridgement of the SLSS was accomplished by David as a representative of the Action Planning Committee. Additionally, as national Focal Points are defined, this committee may become the liaison between national policymakers and the Network.

Communications:

The Communications Committee remains involved in website development. They worked closely with Heather Hemmingmoore, the Program Coordinator, to redesign the web site in 2006. Since then, they were involved in the French translation of the website, as one member volunteered to translate and another edited. Additionally, Guillaume Chapron has offered to set up the News Feed as a member of the Communications Committee.

Science:
The Science Committee, chaired by Rodney Jackson, has envisioned a "Research Methods" page, which would make documents available detailing SLN-approved research methods, all of which would be reviewed by the Science Committee previous to officially endorsing them.

Policy/Position Statements:
In late 2007, Callum Rankine became too busy and resigned his chair of the Policy and Position Statements Committee. The committee members and the SC have been encouraged to name a new chair, but there is an apparent lack of interest that is stalling the process. However, the SC meeting has identified this issue as urgent, and has not only mandated that a new chair be named in a timely manner, but that a Position Statement is released regarding the CoP14 CITES Resolution regarding Asian Big Cats.

Looking to the Future

The SLN's financial situation has recently been called into question, as WCN is no longer able to provide the generous funding that has maintained the SLN in the past. Therefore, we will be running on a minimal budget until a new sponsor is found. The membership committee will take over the responsibility formerly held by the program coordinator to keep track of new applicants, and the communications committee and executive director will moderate the list serve and post news items. Therefore, the Network will continue to function.

Several projects are in progress and nearing completion, and many can be completed with little or no funding. The sections below give information on accomplishments that are anticipated in the near future.

Communications:
Website
In addition to the progress that has already been noted, the web site is expanding to include an area on national action plans, which will provide information on existing action plans and those in progress, as well as providing contact information for all members of the membership committee to act as points of contact for anyone who wants more information on snow leopards in their country. Action planning guidelines will be added to this site once they are available, to assist governments in formulating policy.

A page that includes information on successful conservation models has been created and will initially include successful projects that were presented at the Range-wide conservation planning conference in Beijing. Both pages are due to launch in August.

Project Database
A project database is currently being created that will be available alongside the members database in the Members Only Area of the website. All SLN members will be encouraged to post information on the projects they are undertaking.

Membership:

Membership committee members are encouraged to recruit all snow leopard experts and relevant policymakers to join the SLN and therefore strengthen our networking capacity.

Snow Leopard Survival Strategy:
Hard copies of the three translations of the Abridged SLSS will be printed and distributed to government offices, NGOs, universities, and other interested parties to raise awareness about the plight of the snow leopards and necessary policy changes.

Steering Committee Elections:
This December, three members of the SC will have their terms expire. Therefore, the Secretariat will begin preparing for elections shortly.

Problems and Necessary Improvements

The largest challenge to the SLN over the years has been the limited involvement of many members. However, as the website expands and multiple language options are increasingly available, members will have greater opportunity to be involved. However, even if all members maintain their current levels of involvement, networking opportunities will remain, discussions will still take place via the listserve, and the valuable resources such as the SLSS, Bibliography, and Membership Database will still be utilized by many members.

The change in web hosting companies that led to the loss of membership information has largely been remedied, as previously stated. However, many member profiles are still incomplete and must have information added to them. Ideally, each member should log in and update their profile.

The committees are less active than they could be as well, but with the transferring of responsibilities to the Membership and Communications committees, and the revitalization of the Policy Committee, they could become more active. Additionally, although they are less active than many would consider ideal, the committees do respond when asked top take specific action by the program coordinator.

Priority Actions for the SLN in 2008 – 2010

At the Steering Committee meeting in Beijing in March, fifteen action items were identified, and they have been progressing at varying paces. Below is a full list, as well as a status update on each one. Many have already been discussed in the previous sections, but were left to keep the list complete.

    a. Long-term funding strategy – establish a finance committee with Terms of Reference and targets.

        Who: Tom

        Costs: None

Status: In discussion by the SC.

    b. Add at least one member from each country on the membership committee

        Who: PC

        Costs: Time of Prog Coord, some translation or support costs potentially

Status: Many members already designated and active. Waiting for nominations from remaining countries.

    c. Actively recruit SLN members in range states with targets. Increase of 10% per year in the next 3 years in the Full and Organizational members. 5% in Affiliate members.

        Who: Membership Committee, Prog Coord

        Costs: Time of Prog Coord

Status: Range-wide membership recruitment is a priority, and the membership committee members are actively recruiting or will be in the near future. Additionally, all Snow Leopard Conservation Grant applicants are encouraged to join, and many already have.

The Network has been growing at this rate or higher for the past three years, and shows little signs of slowing.

    d. Continually update SLN website. Have local language options on the web – Chinese, Russian. Use web statistics to gauge success.

        Who: PC, ED, Communication Committee, hired technical expert

        Costs: Approximately $500

Status: Translation into Russian and Chinese in progress.

    e. Distribute summary SLSS in Chinese, Mongolian & Russian.

        Who: Prog Coor in concert with range state contacts.

        Costs: Revise estimate

Status: All translations are complete; Russian and Chinese versions available online. Hard copies will be printed and distributed by the end of August.

    f. Collect and make available all existing action or strategic plans.

        Who: Prog Coord

        Costs: Time of Prog. Coordinator

Status: Action plans compiled and web page is completed and available online at
http://snowleopardnetwork.org/actionplans.html. Web page can be updated as new
action pans are implemented.

g. Place guidelines for action plan/strategy development on the website.
   Who: Prog Coord and David
   Costs: None

Status: Web page prepared; waiting for guidelines to be completed.

h. Add all Chinese papers on snow leopards to the bibliography. English abstracts,
   titles, citation, keywords.
   Who: Dr. Jiang forward papers he has to XCF office. Online search for additional
   by SLN volunteer. Ge Yun coordinates onward.
   Costs: $1,500.

Status: Dr. Jiang provided 18 full text Chinese language papers. Those that already had an
English language abstract attached have been uploaded to the bibliography, while
those that did not have been sent to Ge Yun for a volunteer to provide.

i. Focal Points (discussed at Beijing meeting) to create a list for each country of key
   government people/positions who should receive summary info (senior officials with
   wildlife linkages, CITES, etc.).
   Who: Focal Points, PC
   Costs: $500 per year

Status: Waiting for Role of Focal Points to be defined.

j. Revitalize the Policy Committee and identify a new Chair. Develop a list of the 3 or 4
   most crucial policy issues and develop statements on these. Distribute to people who
   need to have the position statement.
   Who: Policy Committee, SC for review of priority list
   Target Dates: Filled committee by 1 May. One issue dealt with quarterly for
   next year with top 2 completed by end of 2008. 4 more in 2009.
   Costs: None

Status: There has been brief discussion among the SC, but a Policy Committee chair has not
been identified yet.

k. Maintain databases on conservation, research and education projects. Add page one
   Steering Committee reports, annual reports.
   Who: Science Committee, PC and ED
   Costs: $250

Status: Will be completed and available in the Members Only Area of the website by the
end of August.

l. Post expert knowledge map of snow leopard range extent.
   Who: Science Committee, Patricia Williams
   Costs: Possibly $1,000 or more.

Status: Map available on SLSS page of the SLN website. Interactive map from the Beijing conference will go online after formal publication.

m. Place links on SLN website to websites of successful conservation initiatives or models.
   Who: Prog Coord, Sci. Comm
   Target Dates: Continuous
Status: Web page prepared, information being compiled. Will go online in August.

n. Prepare for December SC election.
   Who: PC and ED
Status: Some discussion has taken place among the SC.

o. Prepare budget and annual report for 2007-2008.
Status: Funding source uncertain