2025 Snow Leopard Training Grant program

Final Report

Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the 2025 Snow Leopard Training Grant Program implemented in Khovd Province, Mongolia. The project aimed to empower herder communities to actively participate in snow leopard conservation through targeted training, awareness campaigns, and leadership programs. The initiative successfully enhanced local capacity, promoted sustainable livestock practices, and fostered inclusive participation, laying the foundation for long-term coexistence between herders and snow leopards.

I. Introduction

The Snow Leopard Conservation Training, supported by the 2025 Snow Leopard Training Grant of the Snow Leopard Network (SLN), was implemented in close collaboration with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Mongolia Program and local herder communities in Khovd Province. This report provides a comprehensive account of the project's activities, achievements, challenges, and recommendations, with a particular focus on empowering community-based organizations (CBOs) and fostering sustainable coexistence between herders and snow leopards.

II. Project Context

Snow leopards are an iconic species of Mongolia's biodiversity, yet they face severe threats from habitat loss, poaching, and human-wildlife conflict. The herder communities living in Chandmani, Darvi, and Tsetseg Soums of Khovd Province in Mongolia are directly impacted by these conflicts, often losing livestock to predation. This project was designed to address these challenges by engaging local communities in conservation efforts, promoting coexistence strategies, and building capacity for monitoring and conflict mitigation. Collaboration with TNC Mongolia was essential in providing technical expertise, research support, and facilitating community engagement throughout the project.

III. Project Objectives

The primary objectives of the project were to raise awareness about the ecological role of snow leopards, promote sustainable livestock management practices, enhance community-based monitoring systems, and empower local voices—particularly women—in conservation decision-making.

IV. Activities and Implementation

The project was implemented in several phases throughout 2025, integrating activities outlined in the application and mid-term report. Below is a detailed narrative of each activity, highlighting TNC's role:

1. Preparation and Community Engagement (April 2025)

During this phase, participants were identified and confirmed, with representatives from 50 families across two CBOs in Sutai Khairkhan Nature Reserve and Bumbat Khiarkhan Local Protected Areas. Special attention was given to gender inclusivity, ensuring half of the participants were women leaders. Trainers with expertise in conservation, ecology, and community engagement—including specialists from TNC Mongolia—were selected. The team developed a detailed training schedule, secured venues, and prepared all necessary equipment for field activities.

2. Wildlife Monitoring Training (May 2025)

In May, herder communities participated in a comprehensive training program on wildlife monitoring, co-facilitated by TNC Mongolia experts. The first day covered theoretical aspects, including the ecological significance of snow leopards and ethical considerations in wildlife research. The second day featured hands-on field practice, where participants learned to set camera traps, collect scat samples, and identify snow leopard and prey signs. TNC Mongolia provided guidance on using GPS devices for habitat mapping

and introduced the SMART software for spatial monitoring and reporting. These sessions equipped local conservationists and community members with essential skills for monitoring snow leopard populations and habitats.

Implementation of SMART Knowledge:
Following the training, the newly acquired skills were put into practice during patrols in the Sutai Khairkhan Nature Reserve. Between July 10 and August 9, 2025, seven active community rangers and local conservation officers from Darvi and Tsetseg soums conducted 17 patrols, covering a total distance of 681.5 km. Using SMART, they systematically recorded observations on pasture conditions, wildlife sightings, animal tracks, carcasses, and pollution incidents.

- **Pasture Monitoring:** Rangers assessed pasture health at multiple locations, recording plant cover, average height, and species diversity. For example, at Bayankhovkhor, the pasture was rated as "moderate" with 60–62% plant cover and up to 13 species per square meter.

- **Wildlife Observations:** The patrols documented sightings of key species such as Altai marmot (*Marmota baibacina*), Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), and Paralaudakia stoliczkana lizard. Detailed records included GPS coordinates, date, and numbers observed.

- **Animal Tracks and Carcasses:** Rangers identified fresh tracks of species like Mongolia rock agama (*Paralaudakia stoliczkana*) and recorded carcasses of animals such as Steppe polecat (*Mustela eversmanni*) for entire specimen, Siberian ibex (*Capra ibex sibirica*) for his horns, and Marmota baibacina (skin), noting their condition and possible causes of death.

- **Pollution Monitoring:** Patrols also reported pollution incidents, such as waste found at Bayannuur, including location and responsible entities.

The SMART system enabled rangers to collect, organize, and analyze ecological data efficiently, improving the quality and consistency of monitoring efforts. This practical application of training has strengthened community-based conservation, provided valuable data for future research, and demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating technology into local conservation initiatives.

3. Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Workshop (July 2025)

A key milestone was the workshop held in July, where TNC Mongolia presented research findings on the overlap between snow leopard and livestock habitats in Sutai Khairkhan Mountain. Herders shared their experiences, noting an increase in snow leopard numbers and reporting livestock losses due to predation. The training introduced predator-proof corral techniques and the use of guard dogs, which were well received by the community. Group discussions, facilitated by TNC and project staff, led to the development of community agreements and compensation schemes for herders impacted by predation. The workshop also provided a platform for exchanging views on conflict mitigation and future collaborative measures.

4. Women Conservation Leadership Program (Sept–Nov 2025)

From September to November, the project organized leadership training sessions for women, focusing on effective communication, community mobilization, and gender inclusivity in conservation initiatives. Workshops on sustainable livelihoods and conservation education emphasized the critical role of women in promoting snow leopard conservation within their communities. TNC Mongolia contributed expertise in community mobilization and facilitated sessions to empower women participants to take active roles in conservation decision-making.

5. Compilation and Sharing (November 2025)

In November, the project team compiled data, participant feedback, and training outcomes into a comprehensive report. This report was shared with the Snow Leopard Network and other stakeholders to highlight key findings, lessons learned, and recommendations for future conservation efforts. Collaboration with TNC Mongolia ensured that the report reflected the latest research and best practices in snow leopard conservation.

V. Results and Achievements

The project achieved significant milestones: awareness among herders increased, sustainable livestock protection measures were introduced, and community-based monitoring systems were established. Several new snow leopard individuals were identified through monitoring efforts. Women and marginalized groups actively participated in conservation discussions, strengthening community ownership of conservation initiatives.

VI. Challenges

The project faced scheduling conflicts due to the Naadam festival, limiting participant availability. Resource constraints also restricted the scope of some activities. Additionally, herders expressed the need for more detailed, hands-on training in livestock management techniques.

VII. Opportunities

Strong relationships were built with local communities and authorities, paving the way for future collaboration. Media interest in snow leopard conservation increased, offering opportunities for advocacy and fundraising. A joint study on human-leopard conflict is planned for September in partnership with local government.

VIII. Visual Documentation

For detailed visual documentation, please refer to Annex 1.

IX. Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2025 Snow Leopard Training Grant Program has successfully strengthened community engagement in snow leopard conservation in Khovd Province. The project's inclusive approach, capacity-building activities, and focus on sustainable practices—supported by collaboration with TNC Mongolia—have laid a strong foundation for long-term coexistence between herders and snow leopards. Continued support for advanced training, monitoring, and collaboration with local authorities, TNC Mongolia, and media is recommended to scale up conservation impact.

The achievements of this project would not have been possible without the generous support and collaboration of our partners, as recognized in the following acknowledgments.

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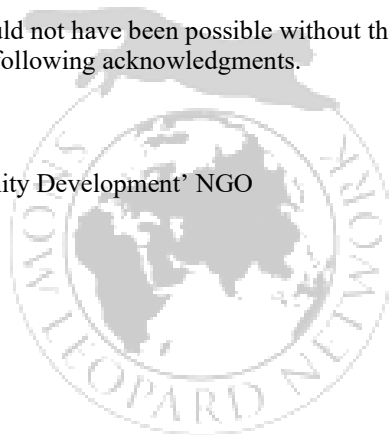
Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Snow Leopard Network (SLN) Grant Program, which made this project possible. Special thanks to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Mongolia Program for their invaluable collaboration, technical expertise, and partnership throughout the implementation of our activities.

References

Application: 2025 Snow Leopard Training Grant program - Gandush Chantuu.docx
Mid-term Report: 2025 Snow Leopard Training Grant program_Reports_Gandush Chantuu_July2025.docx

Annex 1: Visual Documentation

Figure 1. Border line of the Sutai Khairkhan Mountain Nature Reserve of Mongolia.
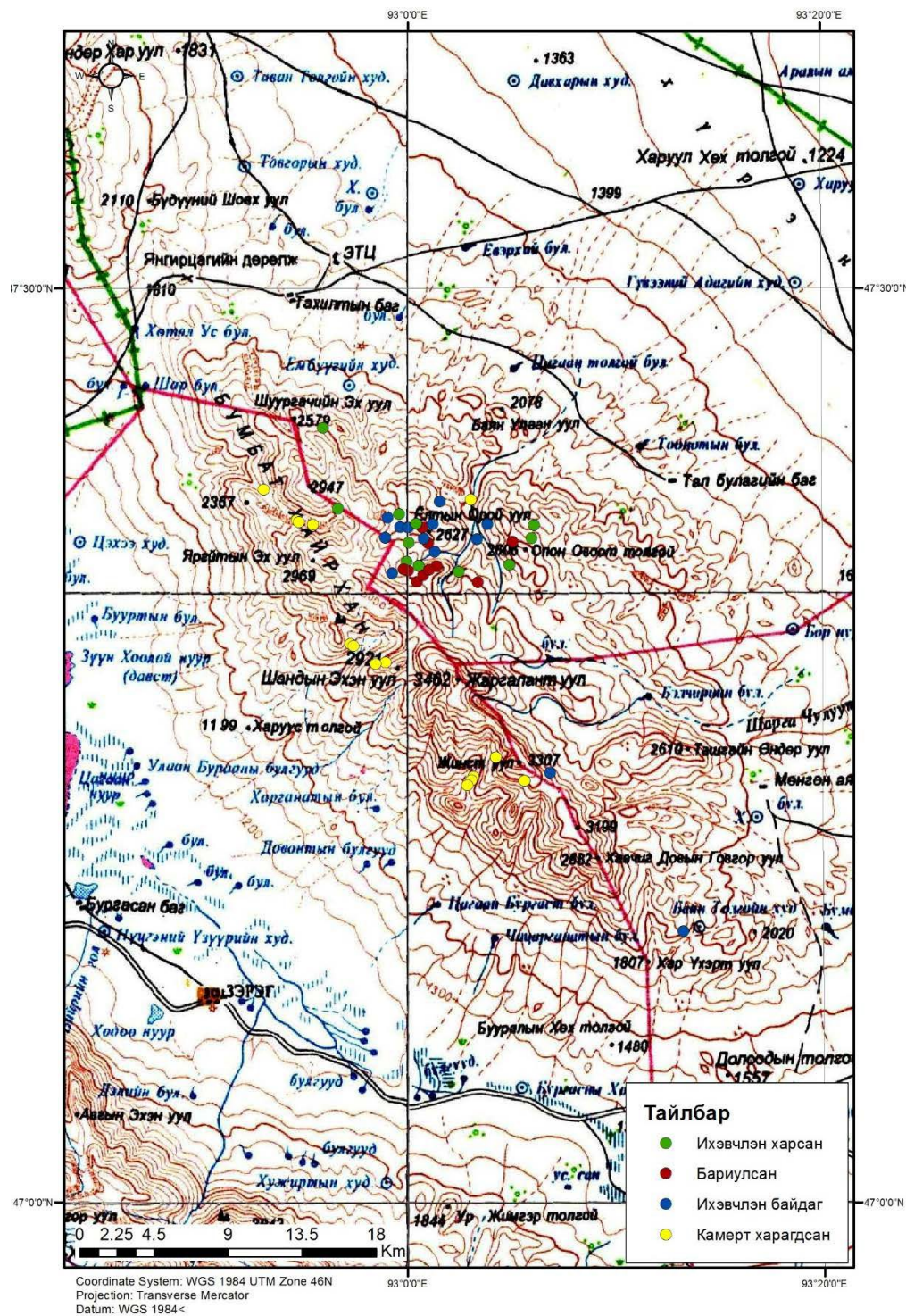
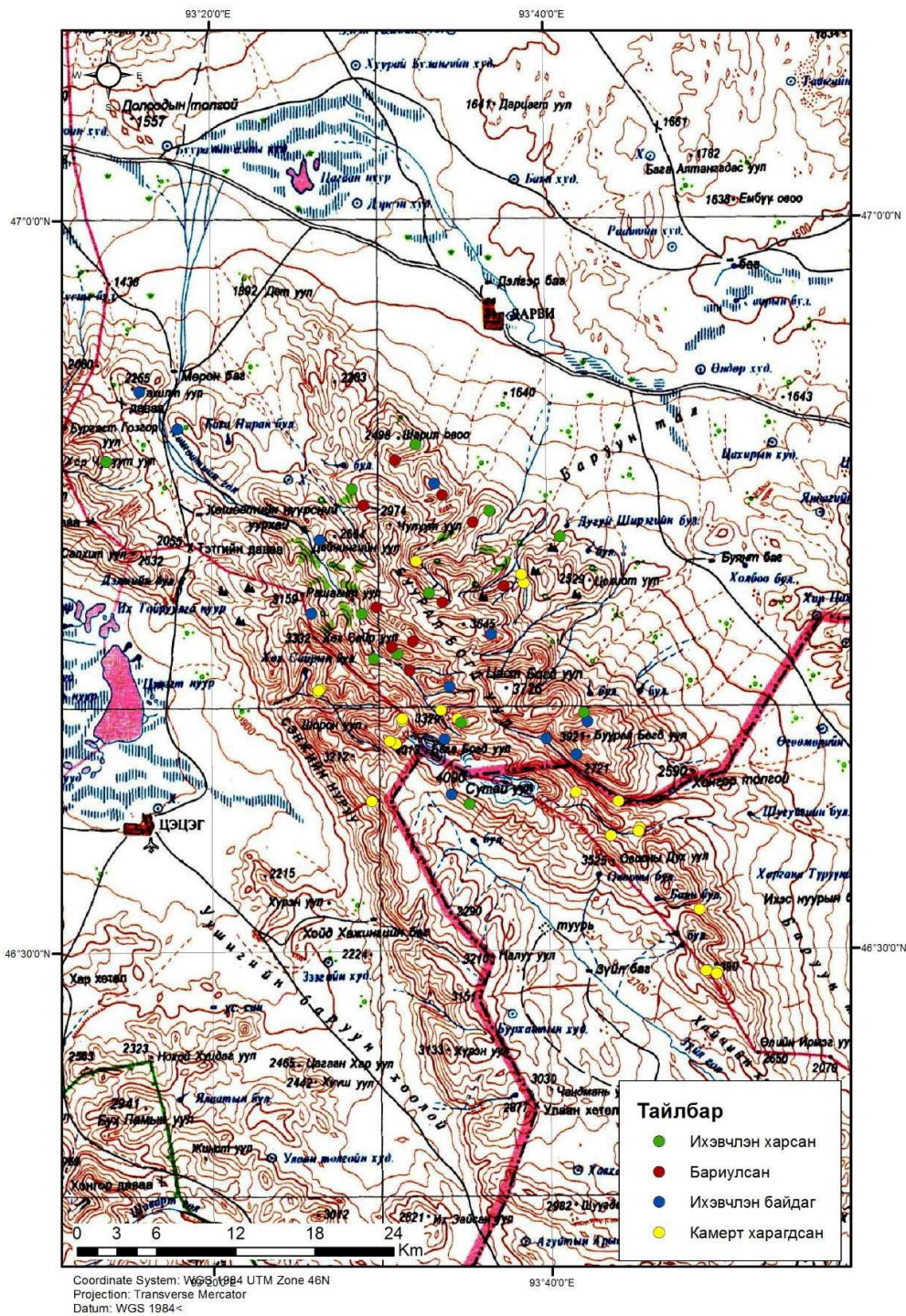*Figure 2: Presence of Snow leopard in Bumbat Khairkhan mountain range*

Figure 3: Presence of Snow leopard in Sutai Khairkhan mountain range

Figure 4. A group of trainees learning about overlapping Snow Leopard and livestock, highlighting the hands-on training provided to the participants.

Figure 5. Community members participating in a conservation awareness workshop, illustrating the engagement and involvement of the local community in the conservation efforts.

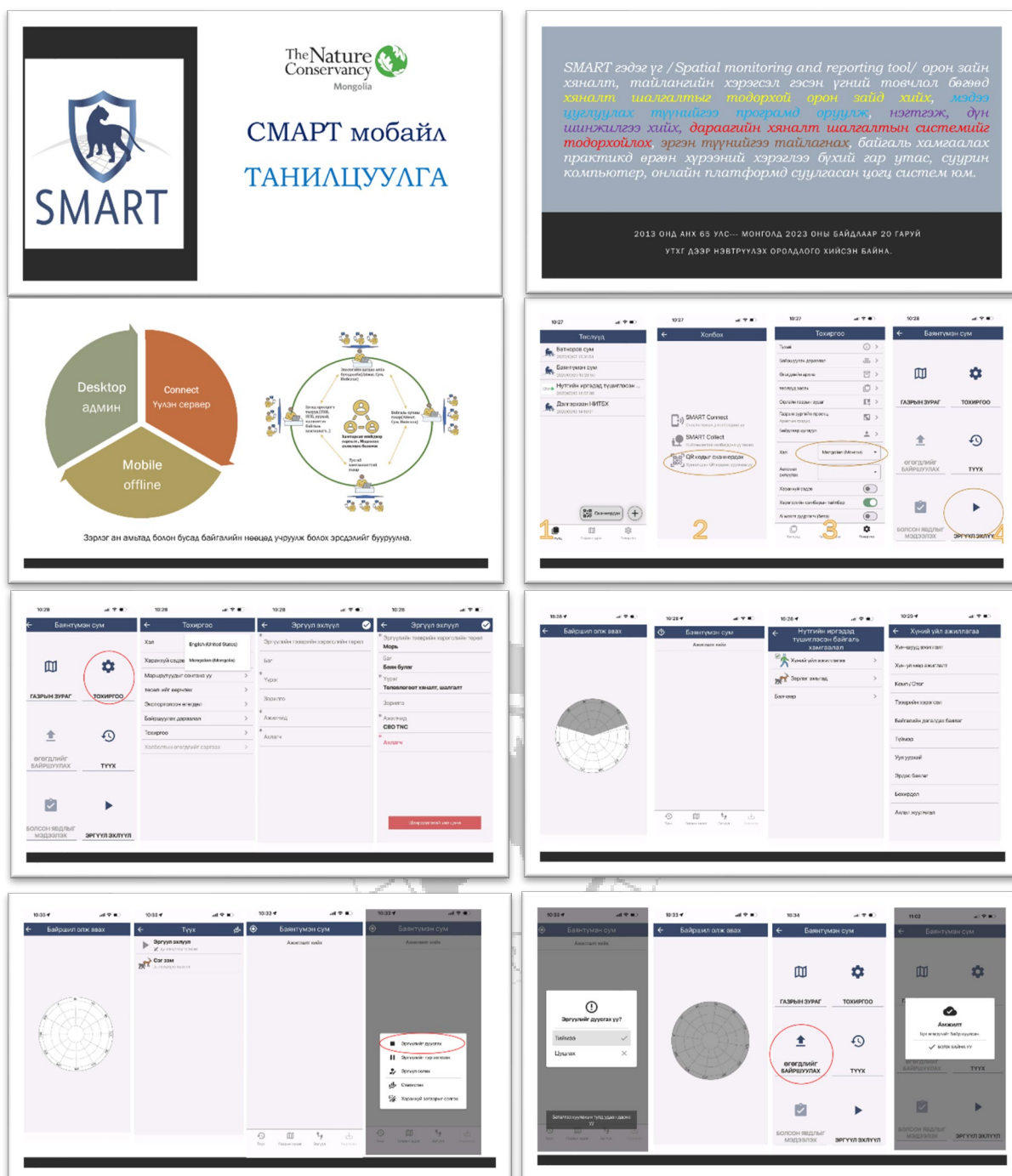*Figure 6. Photos of the SMART training and practical exercise.*

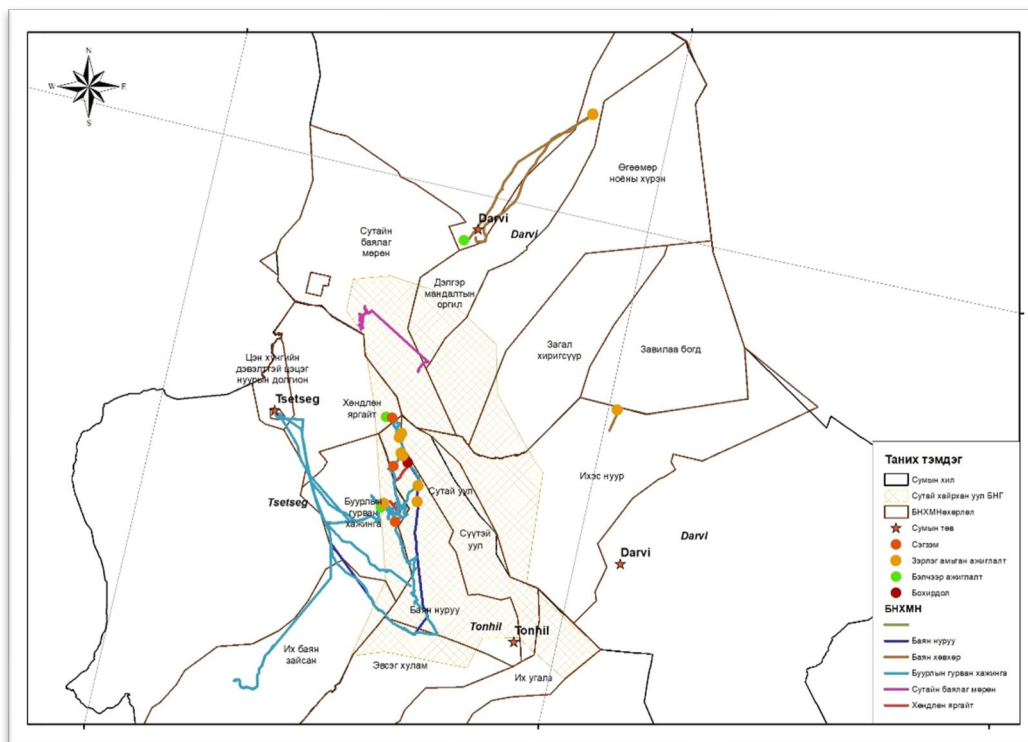Figure 7. Part of the SMART training materials.

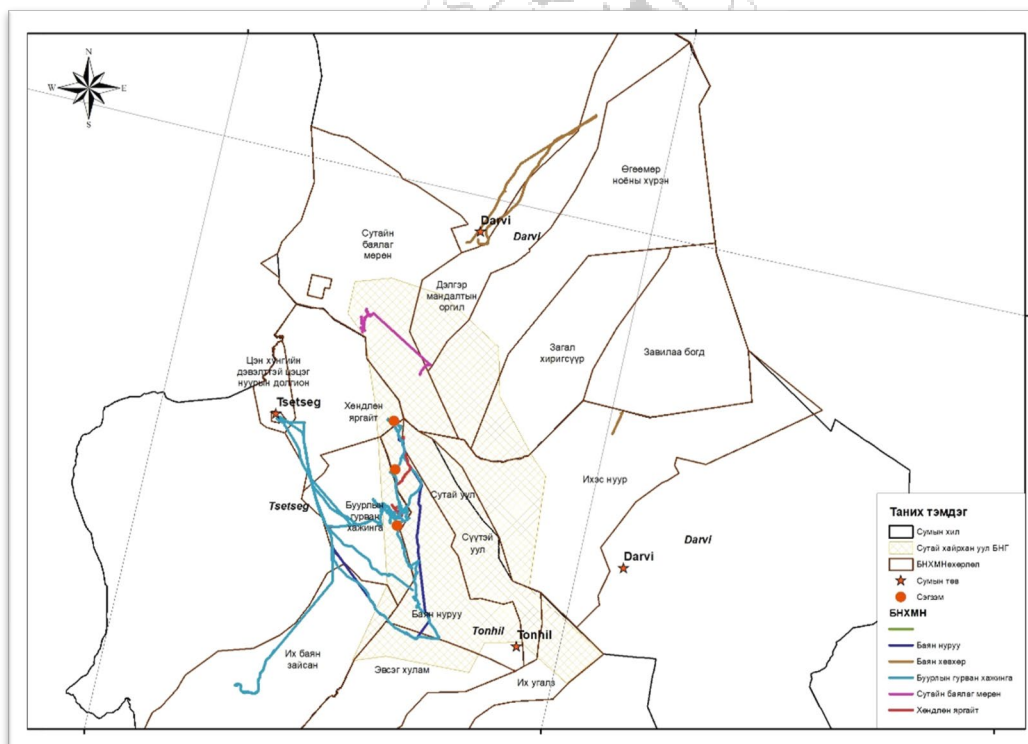*Figure 7. Map of patrol routes in Sutai Khairkhan mountain range.*

Figure 8. Information on the location where wild animal sightings were observed in Sutai Khairkhan mountain range.