



# MINING IN MONGOLIA

## Engaging local communities to help reduce the impacts of mining

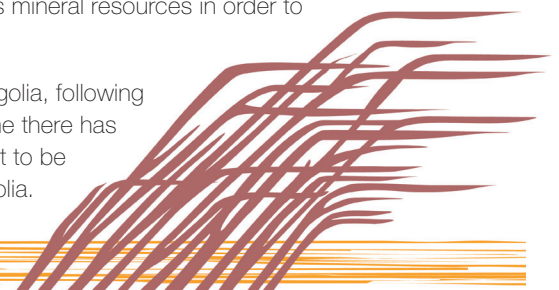


## Mongolia's Mineral Resources

Mongolia remains one of the most environmentally pristine countries in Asia, if not the world. It has vast expanses of grassland steppe with meandering rivers and fluctuating lakes. For centuries, nomadic Mongolians have lived in close harmony with nature, and Mongolian history and literature express the great respect and value that its people have historically placed on the natural environment. Mongolia's rivers, lakes, and pristine natural environment are now facing severe threat as the country undergoes unprecedented economic development.

Mongolia is rich in untapped minerals including copper, uranium, and gold. With much of its population living below the poverty line, Mongolia, like most countries in the world, has taken the opportunity to capitalize on its mineral resources in order to improve the country's economic prosperity.

It is only in the last decade that mining has been undertaken at any large scale in Mongolia, following the launch of the 'Gold' program by the Mongolian Government in 1993. Since this time there has been rapid growth in the number of new mining operations, and the industry is now set to be broadened as exploration for uranium deposits commences in the north east of Mongolia.





Recently, the Mongolian government has taken a significant step to ensuring the protection of the environment from mining operations.

Photo: Photographer unknown  
Development in a Mongolian grassland

## The Challenge and Opportunity to Make a Difference

Unfortunately, adequate environmental regulation has lagged behind the mining industry's expansion resulting in devastating impacts to Mongolia's natural environment. Environmental impacts have been exacerbated by the location of many mining operations at the head waters of Mongolia's river systems. As a result, rivers have been depleted, grassland steppe and wetland ecosystems in river valleys have been degraded, and local herders have been deprived of their most important resource; clean water. A total of 852 rivers, 1181 lakes and 2277 springs have gone dry because of irresponsible use of the land and natural resources. These impacts are likely to be further exacerbated by proposed new water transfer projects that are being built to supply water to mining operations. Given the natural scarcity of water in the Mongolian steppe region, which is already being further intensified by climate change, the effects of inadequately regulated mining projects has been catastrophic to steppe grassland and wetland ecosystems as well as to local communities.

Despite experiencing the flow-on negative effects of mining, local people have, in the past, found themselves powerless to protest these impacts because they lack the appropriate knowledge regarding their civil, environmental and human rights.

In October 2000, the 2<sup>nd</sup> IUCN World Conservation Congress adopted a Resolution on the Protection and Conservation of Biological Diversity of Protected Areas from the Negative Impacts of Mining and Exploration.

There is now an opportunity for the international community to provide strong backing and support to Mongolia, a party to the World Conservation Congress, to implement the principles of the resolution, particularly in consideration of Mongolia's status as a developing country and given the relatively new growth of the mining industry.

Recently, the Mongolian government has taken a significant step to ensuring the protection of the environment from mining operations. In 2009 the '*Law on the Prohibition of Mining Operations at Headwaters of Rivers, Protected Zones of Water Reservoirs and Forested Areas*', was passed by the Mongolian Parliament. This law prohibits mining operations within areas critical for water and biodiversity protection, and also states that all existing mining licenses in areas protected by the new law will be revoked within five months.

With the significant progress Mongolia has made in developing a solid legislative framework for industry regulation, this project will play a key role in ensuring that the new law is implemented and enforced. The project will provide crucial capacity building amongst local people so that there is increased awareness of the law and its ramifications, thereby ensuring a higher level of scrutiny on mining operations and environmental impact monitoring processes. The project will also help to involve local communities in rehabilitation of mining areas in order to improve environmental impacts while at the same time providing communities with an alternative income source.



Photo: Cheryl Zook  
Cranes dredge the headwaters of the Orhon River, in central Mongolia

## Scope of the Project

This project aims to improve understanding of the impacts of mining amongst the local communities of Eastern Mongolia, to raise awareness of the new mining prohibition zone law, and to build the capacity of the local communities to drive the minimization of mining impacts in the Eastern Mongolia region.

The project will ensure that local communities are actively engaged and empowered in the implementation of the new law, including playing a role in delineating mining prohibition zones, assisting in monitoring the rehabilitation of mining sites, and involvement in strategic planning for future mining operations in the Eastern Mongolian area. Through these activities local ownership of mining prohibition zones will be created, an extra level of scrutiny will be placed on the rehabilitation activities of mining companies, and local communities will be able to participate in the processes of planning the future mining activities in Eastern Mongolia that will directly effect their local environment and livelihood.

In addition, local communities will be engaged in a project to plant Seabuckthorn trees along the banks of rivers affected by mining operations. This will have the dual effect of rehabilitating and stabilizing river banks and providing an alternative income source to the local community from the fruit harvested from the trees.

Ultimately, the project activities will help to conserve the grassland and water values of the region while protecting and enhancing the livelihoods of the local people.

## Project Actions

A number of key activities are proposed:

1. **Local Community Capacity Building:** A capacity building program will be targeted towards local communities to focus attention on advocating for reduced mining impacts. Awareness raising and training will be provided regarding the new mining prohibition law, environmental issues, and monitoring of mining processes. This will initially be undertaken through broadcasting of the “Calling of Rivers” program, a TV series featuring the impacts of mining on river systems.

A series of forums will be facilitated between local people, local representatives and government officials to assist in involving local communities in the implementation of the new mining prohibition zone law and to ensure that there is public transparency and scrutiny as the law is put into effect. Local communities will be engaged through ongoing stakeholder meetings with government officials in delineating mining prohibition zones along the Kherlen, Onon, Balj and Ulz rivers in eastern Mongolia. A monitoring program will then be established to allow local communities to monitor the rehabilitation activities of mining companies within mining prohibition zones.

2. **Education Program:** An education program will be implemented in the eastern areas of Mongolia to raise awareness amongst school children of the outstanding ecological values of the region. A collaboration between local people, teachers and scientists, it will ensure that young children learn about their native environment from early childhood. The project will build on the successful ‘Onggi River Ecological Textbook’ project which was previously implemented across three provinces in Mongolia.
3. **Seabuckthorn plantation program:** Five hectares of damaged river banks will be rehabilitated through a revegetation program undertaken by local communities, primarily involving planting of Seabuckthorn tree species. This activity has several positive ecological outcomes including prevention of sand migration and soil erosion and protecting river ecology. In addition, a local commercial activity will be developed around harvesting of the fruit of the Seabuckthorn tree which has a high market value. After three years of managing the rehabilitation project, ownership of each plantation area will be transferred to the local manager of that land.
4. **Stakeholder workshop:** A key stakeholder workshop will be held in the East Mongolia region, bringing together key local stakeholders (law-makers, local community, government agencies, donor organizations), as well as international government representation from Russia and China. This workshop will allow the international arena to understand the issues related to mining that are faced at a local level in Eastern Mongolia and the impacts of international decision-making on local livelihoods and the environment in the Eastern Mongolia area. The workshop will also allow for strategic planning of mining-related activities to be undertaken with consideration of local communities and the conservation of biodiversity and water.

# Implementing Agencies and Partners

The project will be a partnership between the Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative (TGCI) and local implementation agencies.

## Implementing Agencies

- Rivers Without Boundaries
- Pacific Environment
- Dauria International Protected Area

The project will include involvement from national and local governments, civil society organizations and other key stakeholders working in the Eastern regions.

# Funding Requirements and Timetable

The project will be undertaken over three years with a funding requirement of \$435,000 US.

ACTIVITIES	YEARS			TOTAL (US\$)
	2010	2011	2012	
1. Local community capacity building	50,000	50,000	50,000	150,000
2. Education program	20,000	20,000	20,000	60,000
3. Seabuckthorn plantation program	40,000	30,000	10,000	80,000
4. Stakeholder workshop	0	20,000	0	20,000
Project management and IUCN staff time				125,000
<b>TOTAL BUDGET (US\$)</b>	<b>110,000</b>	<b>120,000</b>	<b>80,000</b>	<b>435,000</b>



## Temperate Grasslands Conservation Initiative

[http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/wcpa/wcpa\\_what/wcpa\\_conserving/wcpa\\_grasslandstf/](http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/wcpa/wcpa_what/wcpa_conserving/wcpa_grasslandstf/)

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