



Dear WCPF Supporter,

We are writing to express our concern over the proposed opening of the Naran Sevstei border port and its implications for the wild camel.

*The Wild Camel Protection Foundation (WCPF) is strongly opposed to the opening of the Naran Sevstei Border Port due to the risk that this port poses not just to the Wild Camel, хавмзай, but also to its exceptional Gobi Desert habitat and all the threatened and unique species of flora and fauna that rely upon this rare ecosystem.*

### **Global Value of the GGASPA**

The Great Gobi A Special Protected Area (GGASPA), at 4.6 million hectares, is the largest protected area in Mongolia. The GGASPA is part of the Gobi Desert, a key biodiversity site, with a functioning and healthy ecosystem. It has one of the lowest levels of human influence globally. This protected area is exceptional due to the extraordinary scale of intact and undisturbed desert habitat. The extent of undisturbed habitat allows for maintenance of globally-rare large-scale ecological processes, such as animal migrations. The harshness of this desert environment has led to the evolution of species which are adapted to be able to survive extremes. The desert landscape provides critical habitat for many rare, endangered, and endemic species. Without the GGASPA, many of these unique and threatened species could disappear forever. As shown by its inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage bid, these considerations make the GGASPA a resource of not just national, but global, importance.

### **Naran Sevstei**

The Naran Sevstei Border Port is proposed to be opened as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2025. This port is located on the Mongolian/Chinese border at the South of the GGASPA. It is proposed that this port be connected to wider Mongolia via a road which will run along the Western edge of the border, within the GGASPA- 220 kilometers of which would be within the protected area.

A previous border port opened at the same location in the early 1990s and closed soon after opening. Not only was it not economically viable, it was also impacting severely on the local endangered species populations. Proposals for its reopening do not present viable options to prevent this happening again.

### **Consequences for the GGASPA**

We are in a time of unprecedented Anthropogenic climate change and biodiversity loss. Present rates of species loss confirm that we are living through a 6<sup>th</sup> mass extinction. The Gobi Desert, once a remote and sparsely

populated region, has recently experienced rapid infrastructure development which is putting pressure on this desert environment and its human and wildlife inhabitants. These pressures come on top of climate change impacts resulting in extreme weather events such as droughts and extreme winters referred to as “dzuds”. Life in the extreme desert environment of the GGASPA is particularly harsh, which has led to the evolution of highly adapted species. This includes the specialised large mammals, which require vast areas of undisturbed, functioning desert ecosystem, to access enough of the limited vegetation and water to survive. **Any additional disturbance, displacement, fragmentation or human induced mortality could have significant impacts on species already surviving in such an extreme environment. *Any additional loss of habitat should be minimised and those areas already protected should be safeguarded.***

The consequences of the opening of the Naran Sevstei Port on the biodiversity of the GGASPA could be catastrophic. The building of a major transport route will cause extensive **habitat destruction** and could lead to further development such as mining (legal or illegal) and even more habitat destruction. By increasing access into the GGASPA there will be more people entering the protected area unsupervised thereby causing **increased disturbance**. This increase in people could also increase the risk of access to the GGASPA by livestock, which in turn would cause **competition for limited resources, increased disease risk** and for the wild camel **increased hybridization risk**.

Additionally, a port in this location would risk a change to the GGASPA boundary, which could lead to a reduction in the effective size of the protected area, and so subsequently increase the risk of all of the discussed threats.

The importance of the GGASPA is Global, a fact that is expressed in the ongoing nomination process for inclusion in the list of UNESCO World heritage sites. Opening Naran Sevstei port will most likely stall or end the chance for such a nomination as it would negatively affect the pristine character and undisturbed nature of GGASPA.

### **Importance of the wild camel**

The Wild Camel, хавтгай, is the last remaining wild species of the *Camelus* genus. It is critically endangered, and the Gobi Desert is its only home.

While this species has intrinsic importance, its loss has further implications for the Gobi and the world. Not only is the wild camel evolutionarily distinct; it is also considered an umbrella species. To maintain its migratory behaviour and large range it requires vast areas of undisturbed Gobi Desert habitat. By protecting the habitat for the wild camel, we also protect the habitat for all the other priceless Gobi Desert species.

The flora and fauna of the Gobi survive in a place of extremes. As climate change increases desertification, our need to learn from these extreme survivors increases. The loss of these species may risk the loss of currently unknown information on extreme survival in a rapidly changing world.

### **Consequences for the wild camel**

The Wild Camel is critically endangered; with less than 1000 left, it is one of the most endangered mammals on the planet. It now only survives in Mongolia and China. The GGASPA is the last stronghold for the remnant population of this species in Mongolia. If this habitat is lost, the wild camel has no other home.

The survival of the wild camel is threatened by: habitat loss and degradation, including impacts caused by both legal and illegal mining; increased desertification due to climate change; human encroachment and disturbance; and both competition and hybridisation with the domestic camel (*Camelus bactrianus*). Human infrastructure such as fences, roads and mines are not only threats themselves, but they can also act as barriers to migration, and migration for the wild camel is a necessity to survival. These threats, along with the presumed low population number, mean that the wild camel is already facing extinction.

### **Conclusion**

The GGASPA is a unique ecosystem of global importance and a defining aspect of Mongolia's natural and cultural heritage. It also forms the only home for the critically-endangered wild camel, a charismatic emblem of Mongolia's natural history and the only existing wild species of the genus *camelus*.

The proposed opening of the Naran Sevstei port threatens the wild camel in particular, and the GGASPA as a whole. The planned development through the GGASPA will fundamentally change the defining characteristics of the GGASPA, acting as a threat multiplier for existing Anthropogenic ecological challenges that could result in the extinction of the wild camel and degradation of this globally significant habitat.

*Our major concern is that the Naran Sevstei port will increase the likelihood of the extinction of the wild camel in Mongolia. Therefore, we strongly oppose the opening of this port.*

Please follow our website and social media for updates.

Kind regards,

The Wild Camel Protection Foundation