

TITLE: China - Min Shan landscape

LOCATION/Geography:



While the forests of central China's provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Shaanxi once covered approximately 300,000 square miles, only 83,000 square miles remain today. The area of particular focus is the Min Shan conservation landscape which covers 33,000km² of high mountains and temperate forests in Sichuan province in western China.

BACKGROUND

The forests of the Upper Yangtze, contain over 60 mammal species including about 50% of the world's wild Giant Panda population in addition to other threatened species such as the golden monkey, takim, red panda and clouded leopard. The area is also home to over one million people, including Tibetan, Qiang and Baima ethnic groups. There are an estimated 1,000 species of trees, more than 2,100 species of ornamental flowering plants, and many medicinal plants.

PROBLEM/THREAT:

In Sichuan alone, panda habitat has shrunk by half from nearly 8,000 square miles in 1974 to less than 4,000 square miles in 1989. The species is restricted to approximately 24 fragmented populations, many fewer than 50 individuals, in the mountainous forest terrain at the edge of the Tibetan plateau.

Rural poverty, soil erosion, over-logging and declining wildlife all pose major problems, while a rapid increase in tourism and road and dam-building projects are bringing fundamental changes to the region

Vast areas of natural forest have been cleared for agriculture and timber. Almost all the natural habitats, including nature reserves, face pressure from people in surrounding communities, who

hunt and collect both plants and animals for medicinal purposes.

Demand for fuelwood has in some places stripped the forests of their vegetative cover. Poorly planned development projects have, among other things, created barriers for panda migration along the animals' traditional routes.

Government policies, such as the recent "Grain for Green" which encourages farmers to plant trees, appears to have focused much of the restoration work to date on the planting of orchards on steep slopes, which are creating a glut in some fruit and nut products and doing little to stop soil loss or contributing to biodiversity. Conservation efforts have also not come without social costs and for example job losses in the logging industry have hit many of the poorest members of society.

WWF's ACTION:

Because of the high level of fragmentation and the strong threats presented to the region, Forest Landscape Restoration appears to be a good approach to improve connectivity, increase panda habitat and work with local communities to restore some key benefits. These include water, traditional medicines and sustainable sources of timber.

WWF will support a study to assess the costs and benefits of different forest restoration activities within the Minshan landscape – including natural regeneration, improvement planting, reforestation and creation of orchards on steep slopes – with respect to soil and water quality, vegetation recovery, biodiversity, and economic and social impacts.

Conclusions from this study will support the development of guidelines for how current *Grain for Green* policies can be implemented to optimise environmental and social benefits. The guidelines will be promoted and policies implemented in a range of sites within the Minshan.



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