

Conservation Management of Livestock Grazing and Wildlife in Mongolian Grassland (Advanced Studies on Sustainable Animal Production: Interrelationships among Human, Animal and Environment, 8th International Symposium of Integrated Field Science)

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2-2. Conservation Management of Livestock Grazing and Wildlife in Mongolian Grassland

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Mongolia's vast grasslands constitute approximately 70 percent of the country's 1.5 million square kilometers and fall into three major ecological zones: mountain-steppe, steppe, and desert-steppe. Mongolia's grasslands, including those in forested areas, high mountain pastures and true desert, these rangelands are the basis of livestock production and support over 40 million head of livestock (camels, cattle, yaks, horses, sheep and goats). The Mongolian part of Altai Sayan Ecoregion is a home of a diverse habitat mosaic of grazing pastures that sustain a number of globally endangered species. The southern part of the Mongolian Altai Sayan Ecoregion is characterized by flat plains, low mountains, rolling hills, and hillocks covered by different types of steppe and a network of lakes and wetlands. This area is the last refuge of the Mongolian Saiga (*Saiga borealis mongolica*), a distinct endemic subspecies of *Saiga borealis* that once roamed from the British Isles through Central Asia and the Bering Strait into Alaska and the Yukon. The status of the Saiga improved significantly during the last 3 years' project; however its long term survival is still threatened by habitat degradation caused by livestock. High numbers of livestock and unsustainable pastureland management continue to lead to habitat degradation, overgrazing and competition between livestock and wild ungulates. Current pastoral land-use is a downward spiral of decreasing herder mobility and increasing out-of-season grazing, leading to unsustainable use of grassland. This trend of heavy competition between wildlife and livestock for open water and grazing areas is ongoing, despite some progress in the Saiga distribution. WWF Mongolia is working with herders to improve rangeland management by linking Saiga conservation to alternative income activities. Herder groups are established and motivated to solve problems on pasture degradation which in return provides benefits for the Saiga and other wildlife. However, it took much more time than expected to establish functioning herder groups. More time is needed to turn this into a long-term success throughout the Saiga range.