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LIVE PLANET

NATION VOWS TO PROTECT BIODIVERSITY, AIMS TO RESERVE TREND OF SPECIES LOSS

By LI JING
CHINA DAILY

CHENGDU — China will incorporate the preservation of biodiversity into its national and regional economic development plans, in a bid to curb the trend of species loss by 2020, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) said.

“By 2015, we will stop the biodiversity degradation in key areas, namely our natural protection zones. The goal for 2030 is to ensure biodiversity is well protected around the country,” said Zhuang Guotai, director of the nature and ecological protection department of MEP.

The targets — part of the national strategy and action plan on biodiversity protection — are still waiting approval from the State Council, China’s Cabinet.

Species worldwide continue to disappear at a tremendous rate — up to 1,000 times the natural rate of extinction, according to Ahmed Djoghla, the executive secretary of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

“Faced with this crisis, it is time for the international community to rethink its relationship with life on this planet,” he said.

Listed as one of the 12 most biodiverse countries in the world, China is witnessing some severe problems of eco-degradation, Zhuang said.

For instance, some of the important wetlands and grassland in China are facing degradation, while about 15 to 20 percent of wild higher plants (or

vascular plants) varieties are endangered.

Oceanic ecosystems are also threatened as a result of intensive development projects in coastal areas, according to Zhuang.

“Excessive grazing, mining, logging and fishing are among the major reasons for the biodiversity losses in China,” Zhuang said.

To reverse that trend, China has designated 35 priority areas for biodiversity conservation, which cover about 20 percent of the country’s total territory.

The issue of biodiversity will be included in environmental impact reviews for regional and industry-based economic development plans, Zhuang said.

The country is also working on developing effective policy tools to prevent the loss of biodiversity, such as ecological compensation.

“Considering the pressure and challenges China is facing, it is difficult to reverse the trend of losing biodiversity in a short period of time,” said Li Ganjie, vice-minister of MEP.

Losing biodiversity will result in the decline of important ecosystem services, including drinking and irrigation water, fish production, soil fertility, climate stabilization and the pollination of wild plants and crops, said John MacKinnon, an expert with the EU-China Biodiversity Program.

“We will have to reconcile ecosystem protection with reaching economic growth target,” he said.



WEN ZHENXIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

The snub-nosed monkey is an endangered animal that is unique to Southwest China’s Sichuan province.

Desertification a rising threat to China’s climate fight

By WANG QIAN
CHINA DAILY

BEIJING — Forestry experts warned that degraded grasslands are likely to speed up the processes of soil erosion and desertification, feeding the sandstorms that usually sweep through North China in the spring.

“Overgrazing causes about 90 percent of grassland erosion, extending from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to the arid reaches of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region,” Zhang Xinshi, professor of the Institute of Botany at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said on Nov 19 at the Sino-German

expert consultation on climate change and combating desertification project in Beijing.

Restoring grasslands and controlling desertification have become an important part of China’s fight against climate change, said Liu Tuo, director-general of the State Forestry Administration’s national bureau to combat desertification.

While grasslands cover more than 40 percent of China, comprising about 400 million hectares, growing urbanization and overgrazing are encroaching on and damaging the country’s green areas.

China already suffers from severe desertification, with

about 2.6 million square kilometers of land — or more than 25 percent of the country’s total land area — affected by the process, according to the latest statistics from the forestry administration.

It is estimated that desertification poses a threat to 400 million people who live in arid regions of China, which cover more than 33 percent of the country.

Zhang said sandstorms follow a general route in China from the northwest to the southeast.

Scientists found that sandstorms form above the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau from December to March every year, before

gradually moving to the north, the Shanghai Morning Post reported in November.

The newspaper quoted scientists from the Chinese Academy of Sciences as having said that the plateau is likely to succumb to desertification if no effective measures are taken to halt the process, especially with less rain and rising temperatures in the area.

The average temperature in China has risen 1.1 C over the past five decades, while there has been a corresponding rise of 0.77 C on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau during the same period, according to Yang Weixi, chief engineer of the national bureau to combat desertification.

With the rising temperatures, the glacial area has contracted in western China and is currently 5.5 percent smaller than in the 1960s, Yang said.

Since the 1980s, the country’s glaciers have lost nearly 587 billion cubic meters of water capacity, comparable to 10 times the annual runoff from the Yangtze River, he said.

There is expected to be a water shortage of about 20 billion cubic meters in western China by 2030, said Jiang Youxu, a scientist with the Research Institute of Forest Ecology, Environment and Protection at the Chinese Academy of Forestry.